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RAYAH LEVY: I am Rayah Levy here with Winston Alozie to talk with him for an oral history project titled "Voices from the African Diaspora: The Black Experience of Bethlehem, PA" as part of the Lehigh Engaged Humanities Consortium. We are at the Bethlehem Area Public Library on Wednesday, May 22, 2019. Winston Alozie, thank you for your willingness to speak with me.

WINSTON ALOZIE: You're welcome.

RL: Can you please spell and state your full name.

WA: Winston [Chewkwemaka?] Alozie. A-l-o-z-i-e.

RL: And your first name?

WA: W-i-n-s-t-o-n.

RL: And what year were you born?

WA: 1987.

RL: OK. And Winston, where were you born?

WA: I was born in Shreveport, Louisiana.

RL: OK. And what year [00:01:00] did your family move here to Bethlehem?

WA: We moved to Bethlehem January of 2001.

RL: OK. And your family names? What is your parents' name?

WA: So, we moved -- there are five, six. There are seven of us. My Dad Bertram. My mother Lucy. Myself. My sister Christine. My brother Chisam. My brother Justin. His first name's [Okazy?], but we grew up calling him Justin.

RL: Oh, OK.

WA: And my baby sister Angeline.

RL: OK. And why do you think your family moved here to Bethlehem as opposed to a bigger city?

WA: So, my father's family lives in New York and New Jersey. My parents are from Nigeria. My Dad's family, my dad came here to the states in the late '70s, and then as his other siblings came they migrated to New York. They stayed in New York, found work, got really deep-rooted there and since more of them were there, we would go up there to visit and go [00:02:00] up and travel. And when we would go and travel there, we would often pass through Pennsylvania, particularly in this area, and my Dad was just enamored by the beauty of the area and how it was on the outskirts of where his people were. So we moved here to be closer to them, but by the time we moved all of our cousins who are somewhat older than us -- not drastically but like three, four, five years older than us -- they were all kind of like grown up and we were so far away that we

never really were with them all the time anyway. So, we said to move closer to them but we really weren't, so.

(laughs)

RL: OK. And so, what do your parents do here in Bethlehem? What kind of jobs do they have?

WA: So, my father's always been an entrepreneur. He's always owned his own business. So he has an ice cream parlor concession business that he does. My mother for years was involved with that, but she decided to go back into the workforce and she works [00:03:00] part-time with H&R Block. She's their receptionist at the downtown office. And then she just picked up a job at Lehigh working for dining services.

RL: OK. OK. And where exactly in Bethlehem do you guys live?

WA: So, my parents when we moved here we moved to South Bethlehem and where I currently live now with my family is South Bethlehem. We initially were living off Fifth Street, at 802 East Fifth Street above the store that my parents got. That venture did not go very well, so we were there from like February to November. And then November of 2001 we moved to 422 Pierce Street, and my parents were there until 2014, maybe '15, when the house that they were renting was sold to a developer without them knowing, and

then they had to move out in a certain amount of time. But they had saved up some money and my younger brother was able to help them buy a house. And they bought a house two [00:04:00] doors up.

RL: OK. And so you've always lived on the South Side?

WA: Always lived on the South Side. Love the South Side.

RL: The South Side.

WA: Proud to be South Side.

RL: Have you seen the change over the years?

WA: Oh yes.

RL: How has it changed?

WA: So now we talk about gentrification, which there is definitely -- the writings on the wall for that, and a lot of people talk about how great that is for the economy. And yes, money is lining pockets, but not the people who need the money, and not the people of the community in my opinion. But one of the things that change is that, when we first moved here, and for a lot of the early 2000s, you could get a three-bedroom home in South Bethlehem for around \$800 bucks. And that's why a lot of folks were coming here. And then, as Lehigh University got more students -- and not just Lehigh but the Penn State campus started to get bigger, DeSales started to get more students

-- the houses in South Bethlehem started to become student housing. And they would rent houses to students, and so if you couldn't afford to pay [00:05:00] what the students were paying, you're not getting that house. So rents started to go up to \$1,100, \$1,200. Which is what people are paying now. Which is not what we were used to paying before.

RL: What schools did you go to?

WA: When we moved here, my sister and I we went to Broughal. We moved here in the second part of my eighth grade year. So I'd done the majority of my schooling in Louisiana. But we went to Broughal and my two brothers, they were at Donegan Elementary.

RL: Roughly, I'm sorry, could you tell me what year about?

WA: That was 2001.

RL: 2001, OK.

WA: And it was interesting, when we moved here, what got us acquainted to the differentiation of Bethlehem was that Donegan, which is one of the South Side elementary schools, was being rebuilt. So those students were being bussed from South Bethlehem to West Bethlehem to the old Rosemont school building. So that's what we knew as Donegan Elementary when we moved. We never saw the old school.

And we never knew that climate. So our kids, our family,
[00:06:00] the younger kids went there for school. So that
was an older building. We were at Broughal which was an
older building. So my sister and I, we walked to school.
So we got that experience, walking with the neighborhood
kids. My brothers did not get that experience. They got
the experience of riding the bus with kids whom were
already not used to riding the bus and whom were going to
school outside of their neighborhood. We didn't know how
big a deal that was at the time because there was a lot of
fights at the bus stop. There was a lot of, you know,
nonsense going on. And then it was just a long ride, so
there were a lot of issues there.

RL: So tell me something. So, kids from your neighborhood were
being bussed to another school?

WA: Yes.

RL: Is there a reason why they were being bussed as opposed to
going to the neighborhood school?

WA: Their school was being rebuilt.

RL: Oh, their school was being rebuilt.

WA: Yes.

RL: OK. OK. And they stayed there throughout?

WA: Throughout [00:07:00] that year and I think maybe that following school year. Then they returned to their building.

RL: OK. So you said you were a Broughal in 2001. Do you remember the Columbine shooting or any -- where were you? You used to go to Broughal when the Columbine shooting occurred?

WA: So I was not in Broughal when Columbine happened. I was still in Louisiana. And it's funny. My Sunday school teacher, she was the grandparents of one of the kids who was shot. She was the grandmother of one of the kids who was shot. And they had just moved out to Colorado maybe like four or five years before then. But when we came here, while Columbine had not happened, those wounds were still fresh. I remember like we couldn't have bookbags in school because we didn't want people carrying things inside. I remember, you know, if you did it had to be like a clear, like cellophane or whatever it's called. But a clear, translucent bookbag that you could see through. And I thought that was just a silly looking thing. I had never seen a clear bookbag before. [00:08:00] People were still talking about we don't want people bringing weapons in school. We don't want anything like what happened at the

school shooting and we all knew that that was referencing Columbine. And one of the things that I remember is that we used to have to leave when somebody would scribble a note in the bathroom or write on a piece of paper and leave it intentionally for a bomb threat or a shooting threat and we'd all have to evacuate Broughal Middle School.

Everybody'd have to walk down to Zoellner Arts Center. And we'd have to wait there until we were clear to go back to school. So I remember that those wounds were fresh. But I wasn't here.

RL: Oh, OK. And tell me about Liberty. You went to Liberty High School.

WA: No, my wife went to Liberty. I went to Freedom High School.

RL: Oh, you went to Freedom High School.

WA: Yes.

RL: OK. OK. So tell me about your Freedom experience.

WA: It was interesting.

RL: OK.

WA: So, I understood at the end of my eighth-grade year that our school, Broughal, which still to this day the same thing happened, we split. So, if you live on the eastern side of the South Side, you go to Freedom. If you live on

[00:09:00] the western side, you go to Liberty. It was interesting because at that time, I'm not sure where the line was, but it was very close to my house because I had friends who lived closer to Holy Infant. So, I lived on Pierce Street. I had friends who lived by Taylor Street. So that's a two-block difference. They went to Liberty. You know, I had friends who lived by Touchstone Theatre. They went to Liberty. So I don't know what that line was, but that's what it was. There was a split there. So I lost most of my friends from middle school.

RL: OK.

WA: Not all but most of them. They went to Liberty and for some of them I never really talked to again. Especially those who I was close with, but a lot of the kids whom I had, like, certain classes with, we went to Freedom together. And one of the things that I remember, I had a math teacher, Mr. [Evancho?]. Like maybe two months in, he was like, "Listen, I need to talk to you." So he pulled me up to his desk and that time at Freedom it was before it was remodeled. I'm pretty sure that it was an old science class so he had [00:10:00] like a chemistry... Like, his front desk was like a chemistry lab station. And I stood up and went up to him. It was after class. He's like,

"I'm going to take you out of this class. If you don't get out this year, next year, you're going to be upgraded to the 'Applied.'" At that time, the sections were "Applied," "Academic," and "Honors." He said you're going to go to the academic section and I encourage you to try out for honors math. So I said, "OK." He said, "You shouldn't be in this class. I think I know why they put you here, but I don't know why they put you here." And I believe without a doubt, because of what I've seen from other students who came from Broughal, and I don't know if it's because of how we're tested, or you know... I don't know what those parameters are, but my math class was everybody that I knew that was at Freedom from Broughal, and the other kids whom I didn't know. And we were all in the lowest math section before you would go to [00:11:00] special ed. So I remember that. But I had a great high school experience, don't get me wrong. I enjoyed school. I was a leader in school. But there were certain things that happened, like I was a student council representative, and I remember there were only two of us that lived in South Bethlehem. And I lived towards the center of South Side on Pierce Street. The other kid, Jose, he lived up in the eastern portion off of Williams Street. So I would have to walk to

his house early in the morning to get a ride to school cause my parents, they wouldn't take me. Because my Dad had to go to work. He's like, I'm not waking up. I can't wake up that early. And I was like, OK, whatever. So I walked over to Jose's house, and I would have to walk, mind you, up the mountain, up the hill, eastern-bound, I'd say maybe seven blocks to be conservative. And then get up to his place, and if they didn't leave me I'd get a ride with them. But if they'd leave me, there was times I'd walk to school. Or I'd just [00:12:00] miss out. But I remember those kind of discrepancies there.

RL: So there wasn't a bus you could take to go to...

WA: Not for student council meetings, you had to leave early because those were before school. But then we all used to catch the bus. And back then we all used to catch the bus at Fourth and Hayes. So you're talking about three buses, at that time it was three buses of kids, all congregating on this lawn so early in the morning and then getting off at the end of the day. So there were fights. There was anything that you would imagine where you have a gaggle of kids unattended. So I remember that.

RL: So I just want to go back to that experience where the teacher, you know, the reason why they put you in that

class. Looking back, as you look back, why do you think that happened and does that make you upset because they thought that way about you.

WA: I think it happened so... I think it's one of those de facto things. I don't think it was because I'm black. I think it's because of the school that I was at. And, you know, I understand how the -- I work at a school, so [00:13:00] I understand how that works like there's testing and all that stuff that's involved. But I also understand that, you know, kids are grouped together. And at that time Bethlehem was still doing tracking which is like, you perform one way, all of the kids who perform this level are here. Kids who do better, they're all classed together. Kids who do well, they're all classed tog-- so, you didn't interact with other students who could challenge you. And so I was grouped with people who wouldn't challenge me, and they didn't know that I was capable of more. And I think that that's something that did set me back and I think, it wasn't because I was black, but I went to the school that was predominantly minority. Was it the kids that they were used to? Was it... The other school that went to Freedom is East Hills Middle School and at that time was predominantly white. So, I won't say it was because I'm

black. I'm not accusing [00:14:00] anyone of racism, but I do think that those elements of being in the highly concentrated poverty, racially, you know, full of racial minority, those things affected. There were a couple things. Again, at that time when I was at Freedom, it was still a majority white school and majority white from the township. That was at the time where living in the... Like, you were from the township.

RL: OK.

WA: You know, you went to Miller Heights. You were from those areas. And South Side kids, I remember I had a friend's Mom, she's deceased now, brought me home one day from school. We had practice after school. And we rode the whole bridge together. She locked her car when we got off the Fahy Bridge. And I just thought that was weird, I was like, "Why would you wait till now?" You know?

RL: (laughs)

WA: But I remember things like that. I remember it wasn't often, but there was times I was the only black student in my class. I remember too those black kids who did not come from Broughal, we didn't really associate [00:15:00] with each other unless they were cousins. And me not being from here, I didn't know who was related and who wasn't. So it

was different. Like, I remember there were times I was the only black person doing things.

RL: OK. So you went to Freedom. You know one thing struck me that you said about Freedom being the majority were minorities at Freedom. No, that's not the case, OK.

WA: Yeah. Freedom at that time was majority white and majority, they were living in Bethlehem Township. The suburbs I guess. You know, we had students who were of Indian and Pakistani descent. So, it was, talking about diversity, I feel like it was more diverse than Liberty.

RL: I see.

WA: But in the levels of how that was, I don't think it was like an equal pie.

RL: OK.

WA: You know, there was definitely more people who had than people who didn't, you know. I remember going to some, not often cause I didn't really go to friends' houses, but I was like involved in, like, music and [00:16:00] theater and stuff. After shows or something we would go to friends' houses and I remember, you know, being in people's homes which were bigger than three row houses on the block put together, you know? And whose yards were as large as Yosko Park. I remember thinking like, hmmm. And we're all

together. And yet, you know, they couldn't live the way I lived. You know? I remember even then as a teenager noticing some of the discrepancies. And then, from those discrepancies noticing, you know, certain people, you know, were with each other and certain people were with each other. You know, it was never like you couldn't be, like you can't come over here, you can't come over there. But it was kind of like, you know, if you didn't go, you know, to those schools. And if you didn't go to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the Catholic church on that sound of town, like you really weren't in the in crowd. You know, if you didn't do the Monocacy? [00:16:57] or whatever program at East Hills, like you're not... You didn't get to be part of things. [00:17:00] They already had inside jokes. And like if you were a kid of color from the South Side, you were just like, "OK, I'll just sit over here and wait then."

RL: That's my next question. So, talking about sit-in.

Because there's a book title, "Why are all the black kids sitting like this"

WA: Yes.

RL: And so I was wondering, did you experience that? Was that your experience?

WA: So, so so. In a way, yes. So, it's interesting because, the way I grew up, my parents are from Africa, and to be very honest my parents raised us to not really be engrained in black culture in the United States. For a long time, we weren't allowed to listen to rap music. For a long time, we only watched BT if Mom and Dad weren't home. And we kept it low so we could hear them come in.

RL: (laughs)

WA: You know what I'm saying? So, like there were just certain things that we didn't do. And so, I didn't have the connectivity, you know, that other folks did. It wasn't until I started going to an after school program [00:18:00] through the Spanish council where like, after we did our homework we watched "106 and Park." And so then we start... I could connect somewhat with folks. But so during lunch, I would try to sit with some of my white friends, and it would just be awkward because like they're sitting and they're talking about stuff from the neighborhood because after school, they all hang out together and they're all cool together.

RL: Right. Right.

WA: And I'm in classes with all of them, mind you. But I'm not with them in a social connection. We don't hang out after

school. So, I would end up sitting with the kids of color. Which were mostly Hispanic students because there wasn't a great deal of black students. So, yeah, that's how that worked. We were separated along those lines.

RL: So when you left Liberty, where did you go?

WA: When I left-

RL: No when, I'm sorry. Freedom. Forgive me.

WA: Yes. Yes.

RL: When you left...

WA: Two different schools.

RL: Yes. Yeah, when you left Freedom, where did you go to?

WA: I can feel my wife looking at me. (laughter) (sings) Hail alma mater freedom how you nourish. (laughter) After I left Freedom, I went to [00:19:00] Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. And I loved it. I loved it. It was interesting because, in the South, I went from being in an area that was like 50/50 black and white and then smatterings of other racial ethnicities. So basically you saw people who looked like you, but then even amongst the people that looked like you, there was diversity amongst them like there were people whom grew up how I grew up. There were people whom did not grow up how I grew up. There were white people who grew up like I grew up or were

from my neighborhood or at least I knew them from areas and we were able to connect, you know. I didn't have that here in Bethlehem so. People knew me. I'll say I was very popular, but I often did feel very alone because I didn't know people on that level. When I went to college, I got that. I met students of color whom reminded me of the folks that I knew in my youth. A lot of them from Pittsburgh, from Ohio. Even folks from Philadelphia, but those black students were so warm and so welcoming. Cause one of the things that I felt about black students here, and this sounds bad because people used to say this about me as I [00:20:00] was a kid, but in a totally different context. They were trying, the black kids seemed to be trying to be white or fit in or, in my opinion. But I can't really say that because they were just doing what is normal here. And it seems to me in my opinion what was normal here is to do what the majority white population does.

RL: Right.

WA: You know, and to me I was just like, OK, cause it's not a bad thing but it's different.

RL: Right. Right.

WA: So when I went to college, it wasn't like that. You know, it was funny. In school, I think the... Our population Edinboro at that time was like only 20 percent of students of color, but I was happy because like this is more than I was used to in high school. We had a gospel choir. I remember we brought that up one time. Sharon Gavin-Levy at Northampton, her daughter and I were in high school together.

RL: OK.

WA: She said we should start a gospel choir. We brought it up and they were like, "No. No, we're not doing that. We do gospel music already in the [00:21:00] choir. Just sing that."

RL: OK.

WA: Yeah. So, it was just little things like that. And our music teachers were great. Amazing. And they could do, like our one music teacher, Miss Hubbard, woman could do gospel. You know. This is a white, red-headed white woman and she could tear a piano up.

RL: OK. OK.

WA: But it's just different.

RL: But, you know, what struck me a few minutes ago that you said, you know, the kids, the black kids were, you know,

assimilated into the white culture, but weren't they involved in the church? Because a church, I feel, with most of the interviews that I've done, even though, you know, the majority that they associate with in school are white, the church I feel, and correct me if I'm wrong, will bring them back to keep them centered and so forth.

WA: So I think there's a level of truth to that, especially for the older generations and those in my parent's generations and others of those who were born in the '50s. Maybe even up to the '70s. I don't know if that's the same for my generation, because I think a lot of them fell off. Cause I, you know, being that I played for churches now I meet parents of some of my classmates of friends, I'm like, "You grew up in [00:22:00] church? Like I've never seen, never heard, never seen you discuss." When I started coming and playing churches, I've never seen them there, so that was news to me. I think, and I think that's just youth culture, you know. Even at 30. But still, like, you know, we'll eventually get to church. But I think it's different too because I'm not from here. And, for example, the church, when we moved to Bethlehem, the church that we were involved in was made up of people who were all not from here.

RL: What church is that?

WA: That was Fourth United Church of God.

RL: OK.

WA: And we met in the former First United Church of Christ building. Thirteen through 15 West Fourth Street.

RL: OK.

WA: And...

RL: Is it still there?

WA: No. The church that owned the building disbanded. The church that was meeting there disbanded. And the building's still standing there, but it's derelict.

[00:23:00] Some developer bought it and it's not been used for a while now.

RL: OK. OK.

WA: But we all said the same things. Like, people here weren't warm. And so you didn't feel part of it. And so I didn't know people on that level when I was involved in church when I was younger.

RL: OK.

WA: To, to speak from that aspect from student to student, I didn't know, I didn't know student to student through church except for the kids that I went.

RL: OK.

WA: And, you know, us being, our church full of kids that were not from here, it worked for us. But we knew each other from church. But then again, we also didn't all go to school together.

RL: I see.

WA: Versus now. As an adult, you know, I do see that. And I do see that connection, but then even then it's different. You know, a lot of folks my age that are from here, you know, don't really go to black churches if they do go to church. So, that's different.

RL: What did you major in in college?

WA: Psychology.

RL: Psychology. And do you apply that to... What kind of work do you do now?

WA: So I work in [00:24:00] youth development from 2012 until 2018. I work for the Boys & Girls Club of Bethlehem.

RL: OK.

WA: I was a program director there. I was a program director. I coordinated the Fourth Street site. And then I coordinated the after school program site that we run at Broughal Middle School. And I'm still at Broughal now, but through a different agency.

RL: I see.

WA: So, but I applied my... The reason why I majored in psychology was because of my interactions with kids of color in South Bethlehem working at the Boys & Girls Club. You know, I wanted to see what I could do to help kids who were struggling and who were struggling behaviorally. And learning how to relate to them. You know, there's something to be able to relate to kids. It's not so much about color to color-

RL: Right.

WA: -- but life experience and respecting your life experience and respecting my life experience, you know. And I think a lot of that happened. And then being able to relate, even if I, you know, did not live a certain life. You know, I may not have grown [00:25:00] up listening to, you know, hip hop. I know that that is part of the culture.

RL: Right.

WA: You know what I'm saying? I know that that's something that, you know, is something to be respected. And so that empowered me to do the work that I do now. So, that's why I got into it.

RL: There's a young man here by the name of Jake and he said he remembers you from Boys & Girls and he totally loves you. He thinks that you're the greatest.

WA: Yeah.

RL: And he said you were so young at that point. You know, at that time. And you know, he was a kid.

WA: Yeah.

RL: So.

WA: Jakey... So, one of the things that the kids loved is that, like, I would celebrate the things that they would do. So they would do, like, you know, little tournaments and games or like Connect Four. And I'd make little trophies and little certificates for them. And he was a whizz in the games room. But I did that for a lot of the kids, and it was because of those interactions that I had through my job that I did that. And it was interesting because most of the students that we worked with, that I worked with throughout my time at the Boys & Girls Club, were students of color. Which is interesting because that was [00:26:00] not always the case for the Bethlehem Boys & Girls Club.

RL: On the South -- I'm sorry, on the South Side it wasn't the case?

WA: Yes. That is correct. Cause at that time... When the Bethlehem club was first started, it was only on Fourth Street.

RL: OK.

WA: And the students that were served there, a lot of them were children of the steel mill workers and stuff.

RL: I see. OK.

WA: Yeah. So, for a lot of the kids, how they became acclimated to Bethlehem and how they became acclimated to society was being through the Boys Club so there was a lot of assimilation. When I talk to older people, they learned how to be American through the club. Which, you know, I won't say is a bad thing. But, you know, there definitely was a lot of whitewashing. Not intentionally, but, you know, you learned that [hilukey?] was better than rice and beans, you know. And everything is OK with everything. You know? Enjoy a little bit of everything. And so, you know, I would meet people that would come back, you know, all these older white guys that, "Ah, I grew up in the club. I love the club." They don't send their kids to the club and I wonder if it's, you know... I used to often wonder if it was because their kids, you know, it looks different now. [00:27:00] You know? Not necessarily because of color, but you know. Is it too rough and tumble now? Is it because there are too many kids of color in the club? I don't know.

RL: Is it rough and tumble?

WA: I would say that for, you know, I wouldn't... Yes and no. You know, it's a playground inside.

RL: OK.

WA: You know, so you have all aspects of life coming where you have. And whenever you have a group of kids, you know, any moment that they're not structured, they will find something to do. But it was interesting at certain elements, not elements, certain kids came to the club. More people started taking their kids out and you know. It's like in the school district. When you have smart students in you remove smart students from a school that's struggling, the school begins to struggle because there's no level competition.

RL: Right.

WA: You know, when you have a program where you have, you know, students of varying levels of behavior needs, you know, when you pull out all the kids who [00:28:00] behave, you're left with kids who have behavior issues. That's all you see. Those get magnified.

RL: Right.

WA: And then, plus, you know, people love to talk about the bad. They don't talk about the good.

RL: Right.

WA: People don't talk about, you know, how many kids are served through the Boys & Girls Club. How many kids get fed. How many kids that were in programming. They just talk about there was a fight on a Thursday night and it was three kids out in the street. No one talks about the 75 kids that were in there doing what they were supposed to be doing.

RL: Right.

WA: You know. And I think that's indicative of the black, of black culture in the United States. Of minority culture in the United States. And here in Bethlehem.

RL: Have you ever experienced like a success story where someone came back and say that, you know, "I grew up in the Boys & Girls Club and..."

WA: All the time.

RL: Good.

WA: All the time. So many people come from all ages and walks of life. And I think, you know, not to taut the Boys & Girls Club so much, but I think that is a testament, just like how we were talking about the church. Community organizations, they give and support and do a lot, you know. My brother, he works [00:29:00] at Goldman Sachs now. He grew up in the Boys Club. Y'all hear about,

what's the boy's name? We called him Money. Darrun Hilliard. He's a basketball player now for the NBA. He grew up in the Boys Club when I was working at the Boys Club.

RL: Oh yeah?

WA: I know him, his cousins, the Holmes boys, yes. Devon, Dante, [Dominique?] Those are my dudes. We live up the street from their parents.

RL: And I'm sorry, what's their last name?

WA: They're the Holmeses.

RL: OK.

WA: And then they have a cousin by the name of Hilliard who's a basketball player. But we have plenty of success stories and not even, you know, that are off doing that big famous stuff. But we have people who are teachers. We have people who are great parents. And, you know, a lot of them are people of color and they're doing amazing things. And they're doing well because of having constant caring adults. Having programming that was there for them. And having a community that surrounded them. And I think that's something that we're good at.

RL: OK. So, Winston, are you married?

WA: Yes. Yes I am.

RL: And what's your wife's name?

WA: Her name is Robin.

RL: OK, [00:30:00] and do you guys have kids?

WA: Yes, we do. We have four.

RL: Four kids. And what are their names?

WA: Alvaro, Xavier, Elliot, and Elizabeth.

RL: And what is it like raising a black family in Bethlehem?

WA: It is interesting. It is interesting, you know. Part of me is that I don't want them to grow up thinking that growing up being black kids in a black family in black Bethlehem or from black Bethlehem. But at the same time, I want them to know that they are black kids from a black family and we are proud to be black in Bethlehem. But yeah. So it's nice. I have a son who's 14. We've talked about, you know, just a whole bunch of things. We've talked about how to be [00:31:00] appropriate around the police. We've talked about, you know, how to be appropriate when you're in different neighborhoods. We've talked about, you know, how to be appropriate around, you know, young white women. You know, how to talk cause you have a low voice now. How not to come across as the angry black man. We've had these conversations.

RL: And so are you involved in any political... In Bethlehem?
Or do you belong to an organization?

WA: I'm a proud card-carrying member of the Bethlehem NAACP.

RL: Oh, great. How long have you been a member?

WA: I would say as far back as 2012.

RL: OK.

WA: Maybe a little before then.

RL: And are you involved in... Were you ever involved in any other organizations and anything that stands out that, you know, you probably protested against being a part of the NAACP?

WA: I know I did a couple panel discussions with them. And I go to... Anytime that the NAACP, or many times if the NAACP is talking about injustice, like when I believe I was there for the Trayvon Martin hoodie rally. [00:32:00]

RL: OK.

WA: I believe I was there for the last police shooting incident when we were out here at the rotunda. I try to go to those things being one who works with young people.

RL: OK.

WA: I'm an avid supporter of police. Especially the Bethlehem Police Department. They do a great job, but I'm also an avid supporter of checking power. And I think that there

is an issue in this country and I'm passionate about it because I work with kids whom, at any moment, could be a Trayvon Martin. Whom at any moment could be, what's the man's name that was down in Louisiana that got shot? I can't remember his name right now. Philando Castile, who could, any moment, could be, you know, a person who seemed to be resisting or a person whom, well he shouldn't have been there. Person who was... Who got shot. You know, because, you know it seemed that they didn't comply. You know.

RL: So, let's go back to the Trayvon Martin case. Where were you when [00:33:00] in your life I should say? Were you an adult working when the situation of Trayvon Martin?

WA: Yes. Trayvon Martin I think was early 2012. I was dating my wife. I had just started as the Senate Director of the Boys & Girls Club in South Side. And that I was conflicted about the Trayvon Martin case because they did, like they often, like the media often does when you have someone who is, you know, shot by the police. They bring up all the bad that they have done. And I initially went with that, well if he had been a good boy, he would have been all right. But then I thought about it, but he wasn't being bad. He was in his own neighborhood. And that was a

catalyst for me to really think about, you know, the things that came from that "Black Lives Matters." You know, and those conversations that started happening. Because I worked with so many young men. And I'm not even talking about being defiant. But who could have been in that same situation. [00:34:00] And so, it brought it home to me, it really did. Because I think in 2012, my brother right under me was like 21 at the time. He was still in college. And my baby brother I think was the same age as Trayvon, if not just a tad older. I think that was his senior year of high school. And I just remember that could have been him. That was my brother. My brother, one time he and his friend were on West Morton Street, over by Broughal Middle School. They weren't doing anything and a cop cussed him and his friend out from up to down for no reason. Just cause they looked like somebody who did something else. You know. And situations like that happen.

RL: Right. And how did you speak to the boys and girls, the kids that were at the Boys & Girls? How did you speak to them about this incident?

WA: We had a couple discussions. I remember like that week that it happened, I pulled everybody into the gym. I used to do meetings where we would... All programming would

stop. Everyone would come in the gym. It'd be an assembly or just like a touch base, like here's what you need to know. And I just had an open forum. They sat in the bleachers. I started out front and I just let them [00:35:00] talk and they really talked about it. You know. Some of them didn't know what it was, but I really talked especially with the older teens. They really talked about what happened. For a lot of them, like it sank in. A lot of them weren't familiar with the story. And a lot of them said what they heard from their parents, you know. "Oh, the police protect us." "Oh, the police are pigs." You know, they heard both.

RL: Right.

WA: And so, they conveyed both. But we got to talk about the issue. And that was something that I really enjoyed and I enjoy about that work. To be able to have those type of conversation with kids about things that affect them, whether they know it or not.

RL: Right. Right. You know, so I had asked you about political life here and I jumped to 2012, but in 2009 Barack Obama took the oath. How did you... What was going through your mind when you saw something like that? And he, I'm sorry, he's African. African American.

WA: Yes. [00:36:00] So, that hit home for me immensely because I resonated with that part. Being the child of an African immigrant. Now, you know, he didn't grow up with his father, but still. You know, he grew up kind of I did like, being black, being of black skin tone, but not being around necessarily black people. And like there were lot of things that they had there, and I'll be honest, when Barack Obama first announced his candidacy, I did not support him because I felt that, you know, I'm not going to be the black guy that votes for him just cause he's black, you know. You know, I want whoever's most qualified.

RL: Right.

WA: And, don't get me wrong, but then when I started to do my research, saw that he is qualified. And I saw that, you know, constitutional law professor. Well, you know, you got to be able to interpret that, so, OK, I'll give you a chance. But then, yes. To see after all of these years, and while I was in college, so when he became president, I wasn't in Bethlehem, I was in school.

RL: OK.

WA: But I was involved at a historic black church there. And involved in some black multicultural things on campus and I was, I was an [00:37:00] RA for a floor for kids who were

from the inner city and majority of them were black. Not all of them. But inner city and first generation college student. So, because of that, like it really flipped the script for me. And that's why I ended up voting for him. Then, but I just remember how -- this sounds really cheesy, but like -- it was almost like time stood still. I was like, this really happened. But I, yeah. I remember because it is different when you are an African in the United States, and if you're a first generation African. You look black, but you're not always black.

RL: OK. We're going to stay on Barack Obama for a second because, OK, so he took the oath in 2009. [00:38:00] You're still in college.

WA: Correct.

RL: However, in 2012, you were here in Bethlehem.

WA: Yes.

RL: Did you get involved?

WA: I did. I did, because at that time I was heavily involved in my church. At that time, one of our church members, Miss Brady was alive. And she was very, very big in paying attention to politics.

RL: Could you tell me who is Mrs. Brady?

WA: Miss Brady, she's like one of my mentors. I call her my Aunt Ada. She was very dear to me. She was the organist at our church. She was not the first one. She was one of the first blacks hired as a teacher in the Bethlehem Area School District. She was a secretary for an NAACP. Very civic minded. She was with the South Bethlehem Neighborhood Center. Very civic minded and so, it just. I didn't learn my civic-mindedness from her, but I gleaned a lot from her. But I just remember her, you know, just talking about it and her being excited. I believe she had passed before the second. She [00:39:00] died in April of 2012. So I believe she died before the second inauguration. Or the second election. But I remember, I was with her and I often had to drive her. So like, we would go to NAACP forums. We would go to the breakfasts. So I was getting really involved in the black Bethlehem scene because I was taking her to all of these places. And you know, seeing her being -- this is a 90-year-old woman. You know. She's engaged and being with Esther Lee engaged. And it just, like, it lit a fire under me. And, well I shouldn't say it lit a fire under me. It validated my fire. And my sister Christine, she's involved in a lot of the same things I am. So like she would go, like. It was

just, we... It was great. It was great. But I think there was a... I felt like there was a cohesiveness amongst the older black population [00:40:00] and those who were involved. Those who were involved, go to be involved, and those who did not want to be involved, they kind of just stayed away.

RL: You see, that's the thing. It's the older generation that was involved. And I've been noticing that. What about, you know, your generation? Were they involved? Was there a substantial amount of people?

WA: I'm sure that there were, but, you know, most of us were still in college or, you know, working first jobs at that time. And doing different levels of work. I don't remember or recall seeing many folks my age there. At some of these events. Not to say that they weren't involved wherever they were at. But I think too, first off, I'm weird. I'm weird. I accept that. You know, most people at the ti-- well 2012 I was what? Like 25 or so. Around there. You know, most 25-year-olds aren't like, "Oh, 90-year-old lady. Let's go to this rally. Listen to this 80-year-old woman tell us what we need [00:41:00] to do to be black." Most people are like, you know, most people my age are not interested in doing that.

RL: Right.

WA: However, I enjoyed that. I don't want to disparage the youth or the people of my generation. But I do feel like there's like a lack of interest. But I think too, you know, everybody, you know, late twenties, early thirties, you're getting career-situated. You're getting family situated. You're not necessarily, you know, cause not everybody's civic-minded to begin with.

RL: Right.

WA: But you know, they're like, "I got other stuff." You know. This was just a priority for me.

RL: Right. But, how do we get them excited about being involved? Why should we always wait for something drastic to happen like Trayvon Martin?

WA: We shouldn't. And it's funny because some folks do it and then they forget about it. I think, you know, things aren't important till it's gone. I just, I really feel that. Lot of folks my age may disagree with me. A lot of folks will not agree that I'm saying this on camera now. But I think now that is a major issue of folks my age. You know, we don't care about grandma until [00:42:00] she's gone. We don't care about the church until it's closed. You know. I was talking with a friend who didn't, you

know... They grew up in St. Paul Baptist Church here in Bethlehem. They've had the... They just lost a minister. But prior to this minister being passed, passing away, the minister who had been there over 30 years had passed away. They didn't realize that the church had, you know, gone through a whole new admini-- they knew there was a new pastor, but they didn't realize that the church was different than the church they grew up in. You know, if you haven't been to church since vacation bible school in 1998, what did you think was going to happen. And I think that, for my generation, that is a consistent issue. And not just with church, but with a lot of things that have to do with what happens in Black America. You know, we'll get on the Facebook campaign. You know, we'll talk about stuff. But we're not really living the life, and I think it's because people are busy trying to do what... You know, when this stuff was happening, my age group, we were still trying to be in the club. You know, we were still trying to pick somebody up on a Saturday night.

LR: Right.

WA: So, you know, like, "Oh, yeah. I'm with it. But I'm also trying to get with this, so..."

LR: Right. Right.

WA: You know. You know. Go [00:43:00] somewhere with that.

LR: Right.

WA: So, I think, you know, if those things had happened at this point, now, while we're in our thirties, things might've looked different. But I think, it's just, people just, they don't care till it's gone or we're in the thicket of it. And I think that's always been youth culture. But I think it's just magnified now due to how Internet social we are. Due to social media. I think a lot of that has to do with how we can be retreative to our enclaves and we don't have to be involved. And, you know, some of the good of integration and assimilation and inclusion, you know, most of my friends of color are married into or engaged with or have children with white people or Hispanic people whom don't really want to hear about all that black chat. They don't want to hear all that. And it's not racial. We're not trying to make things racial. You know, so. It's different.

LR: Speaking about social life, what's social life like here in Bethlehem for your age group? [00:44:00] Or even when you were in your twenties.

WA: I was about to say, when we were in our twenties, we had stuff. There was Starters. There was 40 Below. When my

wife and I were dating, we did a lot of Starters. We would go to...

LR: Starters. Tell us about Starters.

WA: So, Starters, there was the Starters Pub on Second Street in South Side of Bethlehem. And so, everybody, all the young people used to go there and they'd hang out and stuff like that. And it was a big place, like everybody used to hang out, you know. And, you know, if you could drink, you'd go up to the bar, and you know, you would dance or whatever. And that's what we had here in Bethlehem. But really if you wanted to go out, you know, you'd go out to Allentown. And I, so I wasn't one who really went out. My wife and I, we really didn't, like, when we were dating we went out. Prior to me dating her, like, I would try to tally-ho, I would go here and there, but I wasn't... I wasn't hitting the club like all the other people my age. Just because I grew up more conservative, more reserved. So, I wasn't doing all of that. But nowadays, I'm kind of out of the loop, you know. We have kids. [00:45:00]

LR: Right.

WA: Church is Sunday morning, so I'm trying to be in bed by 11. You know.

LR: Right. (laughs) So Starters, is that a black club? Or is-

WA: No, Starters was just, it was just a youthful environment.

LR: OK.

WA: There was nothing-

LR: What kind of-

WA: -- nothing to my knowledge... I hear a lot of older people talk about the Paradise Club. I didn't know that was a thing, and I guess it's still open. I don't even know what that is. But, you know, there was nothing. And there are things like the Elks whom like, a couple of my age mates, their relatives are, you know, heavily involved like the Egelstons, the Williamses, you know, and I see some of them every now and again, they'll go help out their grandparents or their parents down there. And some of them are starting to get involved, but a lot of folks... That's how old people think. That's how my parents think, so I'm not involved in that.

LR: Right. So that was the social life. The Elks, going to the... They had functions --

WA: Yeah, they had functions, but that was for your parents. You didn't go. And if you went, like, you went to help them. You know, you weren't involved. It's hard to ask me those type of question, [00:46:00] cause I grew up in a

very religious house. So we didn't. We didn't, you know, socializing and dancing was the devil, so.

LR: OK, so. Speaking about religion, what church do you and your family go to?

WA: We attend St. John's AME Zion Church.

LR: How long have you guys been attending there?

WA: My wife came with me. She was a member of St. Paul's. She grew up in St. Paul.

LR: OK.

WA: But she came with me a little after we got married. I was the first person in my family to... I've been a member there since 2006. And I've been attending there since 2005. And I've enjoyed it there. Methodist church. Traditional. It has, for me, a nice assimilation of different styles of worship that are, you know, respect the Christian faith, have the Protestant hymns of the church, but still have things that are related to the church [00:47:00] of old. You know, some of the ancient canticles that were sung by churches 300 years. We still do those. And then we, you know, we do black stuff. And then we also have a great contingent of Africans, Liberians, Nigerians, and folks from all throughout the diaspora.

LR: Oh, OK.

WA: So, for me I like it cause it's diverse.

LR: OK.

WA: So, I like it. It's a small church, but it's nice. We have fun.

LR: How old is that church?

WA: This year we are celebrating 125.

LR: One hundred twenty-fifth anniversary.

WA: Yes. St. John's is the first and oldest African American church in Bethlehem.

LR: And what's the population as far as how many congregants do you guys have there?

WA: About 40, 45.

LR: Was it 45, for the oldest, was it once a vibrant church?

WA: During the Civil Rights Era, it was a very large church. There was over 150 folks that were involved in the congregation. A lady just passed away, Miss Gladys Brown, [00:48:00] whom she was a member during that time. And she just would talk about how civic-minded the administer at that time, Rev. Roberts, whom his ex-wife was the first black teacher hired in the district, how civic-minded they were. You know, they pushed for blacks to be involved in politics. They pushed, there was a civic action committee so you had Booker Francis and Ruth Franz. These are, you

know, black people of yesteryear here that were like breaking barriers and stuff. And that's kind of why I joined the church too. To me, it was inspiring to be part of a heritage of folks who were a lot of firsts. First black teachers came out of that church. First black social groups came out of the church. It was the first black social group for a long time. You know, it just, first black dentist was in that church. A lot of black entrepreneurs like Mr. Calloway [00:49:00] and Mr. Robinson, who was the first black funeral director. They were members of that church and, you know, while they may not have any, you know, living relatives still involved, their legacy's still living on. And I think that's something, that's something important to keep. That's something important to talk about and to be part of that communion.

LR: Right. And so, you know, the firsts, the people who were the first to do these different things, their families still live here in Bethlehem?

WA: Some of them do, some of them, their families died out. Many of them, their families are no longer here. You know. You know, people often talk about integration and for a lot of integration, people were able to move into white

enclaves and were able to go places. But then also, here in Bethlehem, if you didn't work for the steel, you know, you could either hit your mark or you had nothing. And for a lot of those businessmen and other things, they had to go elsewhere. So, I'm the church historian. When I started to research people, I found that a lot of people left the area. And [00:50:00] those who were still in the area that had children that were around, they belonged to white churches because they either married into white families or they lived and worked in white communities so they just went to church with their neighbors and that was more convenient than being where they grew up.

LR: And so that's why it dwindled so much, from being such a large...

WA: I think that's part of it, but I think too, you know, when you talk about black religion, you know, people think black church they think Sister Act, you know, and not all black churches are like that. St. John is a black Methodist church, and so if you don't have a black Episcopalian church, your black Methodist church tends to be your next thing. So it's a more stayed type of worship. More traditional. More liturgic. You know, and a lot of folks, you know, when they want church, they don't want to hear

[00:51:00] bunch of reading, they want clapping and singing. You know, so, or some folks, they find that boring. To be honest, I don't. I love it. But whatever.

LR: Right. But I visited your church, and someone was telling me there each Sunday you have different themes. And so there's an African theme. There's a gospel theme. So with the gos-- you know, isn't there clapping and music... And I, you play the piano. Tell us about, yeah.

WA: Yeah. So you have that. You have that. I mean, we do that, and it's like that. But like, again, the church that my wife grew up in, St. Paul's. And they do the same thing too cause my mother-in-law, she was the Administrator of Music there. And they have a very storied music tradition there as well. But, it's just, you know, if you want that, you know, you want that. And then if you want that every Sunday, you go for that every Sunday. You know, we have a church that, you know, not everybody wants to hear gospel every Sunday, so we do different things.

LR: Right.

WA: But it just, [00:52:00] it seems as though folks who are keen on that type of differentiation, you know, they typically, they go to white churches. So, that's kind of a struggle that we have. But, it is what it is.

LR: Right. Tell me, again you play the instrument. We've visited quite a few churches.

WA: Yes.

LR: Tell me about your playing and (inaudible) of the churches.

WA: (laughs) So, I am a humble pianist and organist. I am certainly not amongst the ranks of many who play their instruments so beautifully. But I have a certain style that people do notice, energetic. And so, people tend to like to sing along with me. So, we have fun with that. So, I play at my church. I also play at the Cathedral Church of the Nativity, which is interesting cause our church is shared. A shared history. [00:53:00] And I play at a lot of the local black churches. Second Baptist. St. Paul. Grace Deliverance. St. James in Allentown. Union in Easton. Even some of the newer churches. Restoration Temple. And, you know, wherever there's folks that are singing, I want to have fun. I mean, again, when I was talking about black religion, you know, we do things that are really integral to our, the diaspora. You know, so, you know music. We sing, we accent two and four, so. (claps a beat) We're on that, that clap is on the off-beat. So you know, like, if we're singing "The Church's One Foundation." (sings) The church's one foundation is Jesus

Christ our Lord. The sa-- you know, a black... I mean, most black churches don't sing that. But that's how we would sing it. Whereas, you know, if you go to an Episcopal or Presbyterian (sings) Our church's one foundation is...

LR: Two. [00:54:00]

WA: You understand what I'm saying?

LR: Yes, I do. I do.

WA: And so, I'm able to bridge those gaps. I'm able to do a little bit of both.

LR: OK. Yes.

WA: You know, and, so I enjoy that. You know. And in relating it to our overall conversation, you know, for, in this area, a lot of black families are still, you know, of Christian faith. But, it seems as though not as many are going to church. Here in Bethlehem, what we don't talk about is that we have a lot of folks that are not from here, but they live close enough which you and your family would be able to understand they go back home to church. Because they have that sense of community. And it helps them keep ties with home. You know, so a lot of folks who come here from Jersey, they go to church every weekend in Jersey. They go back every weekend. They get to see Aunt

Sarah and, you know Cousin Deedee and Brother So-and-so.

You know.

LR: Right. Right.

WA: And that's, that's a nice, you know not everyone has the means to do that.

LR: Right. [00:55:00]

WA: And especially it's how mobile we are today, that gets to help. So, you know, people also talk about the black population is so segmented. And especially in the black churches we hear that a lot. You know, why aren't we growing? Black people don't want to come out and do nothing. No, they just don't want to do nothing with us here. They go home. They go where they come from. And, you know, that's something that we need to recognize. And we need to not really be as disrespectful too.

LR: Right.

WA: I think, you know, a little bit we've been a little disrespectful to that here.

LR: Right. But there, are there ways that we can get involved even though we may not be a part of the church?

WA: Right. And there are others but, and again too, I'm going to get in trouble for saying this too. The black community here in Bethlehem needs to stop being so closed. You know,

if you didn't grow up, if your great-grandmother wasn't working up in one of them mansions on Third Street, it's OK. I can still be involved. You know, if you didn't come from Maryland or Virginia or for Elizabeth City, North Carolina, you can still be involved. You still get to be black [00:56:00] in Bethlehem and not be from one of those places. It's OK.

LR: Right.

WA: And I think that sometimes and I don't mean that as a dig to the folks from Elizabeth City. I don't mean that as a dig.

LR: No, I understand.

WA: But, what I'm saying is that, you know, when folks came here, especially the great migration folks, they had to be communal. They had to be together. And, you know, when you're communal and together like that, sometimes whether knowingly or unknowingly, you become exclusive to others. So when other folks come, they're like, "It's hard to..." And those folks who came in the '50s found that from the folks who were here before. When I would talk with older people about, you know, members of my church before, they were like, they were nice but you couldn't talk to them. They thought that they were better than us. You know, if

you were from, you know, the folks from Elizabeth City, a lot of them couldn't take it at St. John because, you know, St. John people, they were from Maryland. They were from Virginia. Or they were from Bethlehem. So, you know, you couldn't come down here with all that country stuff. But I think a lot of that has to do with, you know, unfortunately, with any ethnic group. [00:57:00] You know, as you try to build yourself knowingly or unknowingly you leave those others out. But I think we, as a diaspora, we need to be a little more cognizant of that. Because here the population is so small. And here we're seeing so many folks that want to be involved.

LR: Right.

WA: Or that should be involved.

LR: Right.

WA: We shouldn't shut them out cause they're not from here.

LR: Tell me about, you know, you're talking about the people who were here and, you know, feeling a sense of shut out. Who are some of the black leaders here in Bethlehem that you might look up to or are very active I might say that are concerned about the black community.

WA: So there are some. There are several. There are several. I mean you have Mrs. Lee. Esther Lee. [00:58:00] The

person of the NAACP. She is, she has been at the forefront for years. You have some folks who are involved in education. And it's funny, a lot of the educators while they're involved in education they seem to stay very quiet. But they're there. They're present. Like Ed Williams. Evelyn Sumter. Thomas E. Nickens. You know, people who've worked in the district and in the education field. They're present at functions. They're present when conversations are happening. They may not be the loudest voice in the room if they talk at all, but they're there.

LR: But do they get involved if there is an issue.

WA: I would say so. I would say for the most part. There are, you will see that there are some folks who aren't involved. But I would say for the most part you do see folks that are involved. I have noticed, though, for the past ten years or so since I've been more involved on the scene, a lot of the folks who are involved are folks who are not from here. And, you know, the younger folks who are involved, who are getting involved especially, they're not from here. Jamal Peterson, who was at Lehigh. We kind of don't talk about him anymore due to his issues and such.

LR: Who is Jamal [00:59:00] Peterson?

WA: He was a professor at Lehigh University.

LR: OK. You mean, oh you're talking about James Peterson.

WA: James Peterson. Thank you.

LR: OK.

WA: I mixed him and another person who worked with Jamal or, worked at Lehigh together. James Peterson, thank you. But, you know, when he was in the community, he was very involved. He was at functions. At, you know, discussions talking about those things. And he wasn't from here.

LR: Right.

WA: The principals that we've had. We've had a couple principals. Dr. McGriff. He's no longer in our district, but you know he wasn't from here. But he came and he was getting involved. Harrison Bailey at Liberty High School. He's African American. He's involved, but I don't think he's originally from the Lehigh Valley. Although he's been here quite some time. So I think that there is something to be said about that. It's not necessarily a bad thing, but there's something to be said for that.

LR: Has anyone take up with the mantle [01:00:00] with you think where James Peterson left off? From Lehigh University?

WA: In regards to Lehigh?

LR: Yeah.

WA: Yes and no. I think with James it was different because, you know, he was involved with CNN. He kind of had a persona. I don't want to say persona, but he kind of like, there was more to that than just being like a Lehigh rep. He was James, who worked at Lehigh. But you have people Adrian McNeil, who's at Lehigh who's very involved. There's a plethora of folks that are up there. The new gentleman, Donald, I can't remember his name right now. But he's come to a couple things and he's a very nice gentleman.

LR: Is Donald the guy with the British accent. I think he's from Domenica. Is that the one?

WA: I'm not sure. I want to say his name might be Watson. I'm not sure. I don't believe so, but he's a very nice man. So you, there's folks that are getting involved. At Lehigh, I won't say they haven't had, it's not, you know, a [01:01:00] huge population of blacks that are working at the university. But they're around. But, I think it's different. So I don't know. To answer your question, I guess not. But I think, you know, I think I don't know if that's a fair question to ask of anyone because I think what Mr. Peterson did while he was at Lehigh was different. You know.

LR: OK. OK. So...

WA: Sharon Brown. She's involved. She was at Lehigh. She was at Moravian. And she's still involved.

LR: Sharon. She's at Moravian now?

WA: I don't believe she's there now, but that's where she was last.

LR: Oh, OK. So tell me, as a black man living here in Bethlehem, have you faced any challenges, like really deep challenges that made you want to step back and think about the culture here in Bethlehem? [01:02:00]

WA: Yes. Yes. Some very small things. Couple big issues. Some very small things. I have noticed until people have met me, and even how I've learned and conditioned myself to interact with folks, is because I don't want to be seen as the angry black dude. You know, when I felt like as though I've been wronged, or when I felt as though as I was, something I said was misconstrued, I've intentionally said I'm going to handle it a certain way because I don't want this to make it seem like, oh I'm pulling the race card, or...

LR: Right.

WA: Oh, I'm the angry black guy. Or, oh, he's an uppity little negro. I don't --

LR: (laughs)

WA: -- I do things so I don't, I'm not seen as that way, but there have been times where I felt wronged. I remember one time I tried to go out for a run at like four in the morning, which in some neighborhoods is totally, you know, normal, and it is not unheard of, and I tried to do it, and I was detained by the police [01:03:00] because I fit the description of someone whom they thought robbed a house.

LR: Oh my.

WA: They said a black guy with facial hair. Which about almost every black guy over the age of 25. So, like, I was handcuffed and everything and I will not say... They were not disrespectful, but like it was a swarm. And it was... I was on Pierce Street. I was on my street. And the lady who was robbed came around the corner and she was distraught. She said, "Take that man. That's the man from the Boys Club. Let him go!" And I said, "It's OK." She said, "No, it's not OK. They didn't need to cuff you and all of this." And I knew that, but I just didn't want to make it a thing. And again, nothing disparaging against the police. I'm sure that's their protocol or whatever. But I just remember, you know, and when I heard over the radio the description, a black man with facial hair I'm

like, "That's it." You handcuffed me for that? Like, you could have just asked me the question, let me walk, and then fine me or something. That's what you got to do.

LR: Right.

WA: So I remember that. And, you know, couple things here or there that I've observed if not has happened to me, to friends. [01:04:00] Loved ones. I'm just like, I don't know that if we had not lived here or if they had not been black, would that have gone down the way that it did.

LR: So, how would, you know, you spoke about the police officers and so forth. Have you ever felt that you were treated unfairly, perhaps at a bank or a restaurant or anything? Have you ever felt that you were treated in any other type of...?

WA: I can't say that, no. I cannot say that I faced any discrimination.

LR: OK.

WA: Because of the color of my skin from people who were not black. Or not of color.

LR: OK. OK. So, this is a really great [01:05:00] interview, and as we, you know, as I look back, you know, so you... I would say you grew up in 2000 be coming of age and so forth. How...

WA: I'm a millennial.

LR: Right. And leading up to 2019, what are some of the positive changes or negative changes you have seen here in Bethlehem.

WA: In general or from the black perspective?

LR: From the black perspective.

WA: I will say that the black population is becoming diverse. I love that. I love that people are bringing their blackness from where they come from and bringing it in and coming here with it. I think that that is great. I think that that is amazing. I think being black from Harlem, being black from Newark, being black from North Carolina, being black from California, wherever you're coming from, and coming here in Bethlehem and sharing that opens the eyes of others who have not experienced black. Cause there are still people here in Bethlehem who have not had to have many interactions with black people. There are some students in our school district [01:06:00] who can go through a great deal of their schooling without having a black teacher or interacting with a black professional. And that's just due to the nature of the population. Not due to segregation or to, you know, infrastructure per se. But just due to how few of us are involved in systems here

because of our numbers. I do love to see how folks are coming. The other side of that though is that, like I said before, I would hope that folks were coming here feel welcome to be involved and know how to be involved. Some folks, you know, I met people who said, "Oh, you have an NAACP here. Oh, there are black churches here?" Yeah, they've been around for a while. You know, how are we bridging that gap. How are we making people feel welcome. You know, throughout the whole, the great migration period from the turn of the century to the 1950s, when people came up here. Like, there are still places in some churches in New York and then Washington, DC, where [01:07:00] you have the Florida club. And you have the Mississippi club. And it's the people who came from those places. And these clubs help them acclimate to life in the north. Do we necessarily need that today? No, but you know it would be nice if we did things that, you know, your black from Newark is just as equal, just as valued, and just as celebrated as my black from Bethlehem. So, that's what I'd like to see.

LR: OK. Thank you. Thank you so much Winston.

WA: No problem. Thank you.

LR: I appreciate you spending the time with us today.

WA: Thank you. Same here.

LR: OK.

END OF AUDIO FILE