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RAYAH LEVY: I am Rayah Levy here with Mrs. Esther M. Lee to talk with her for an oral history project titled *Voices from the African Diaspora: The Black Experience of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania* as part of the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium. We are here at the home of [Shaloma?] and Rayah Levy on Wednesday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Mrs. Esther Lee, thank you for your willingness to speak with me. Please spell and state your full name.

ESTHER LEE: Esther, E-S-T-H-E-R, middle initial M, last name Lee, L-E-E.

RL: And what is your birth date?

EL: My birth date, which is -- well, I don't know -- tell everyone -- November 14, 1933. (laughs) [00:01:00]

M: (inaudible)

RL: Okay, Mrs. Lee, could you tell me -- where were you born?

EL: In Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

RL: And exactly where -- in the hospital -- were you born in a hospital?

EL: I was born in St. Luke's Hospital.

RL: Okay. And what year did your family move to Bethlehem?

EL: My parents came to Bethlehem in 1925. Both came from different parts of North Carolina -- but coming to Bethlehem to visit their relatives who had come here prior.

RL: And what were your parents' names?

EL: My father was Jesse, Jesse Goliath Grimes. And my mother was Viola Florence Ellis [00:02:00] [Grinedig? Grandon?].

RL: And do you have siblings?

EL: Not anymore. I'm the last of our family.

RL: And what were their names? I'm sorry.

EL: Okay, I had a brother, Paul, who's deceased. My older sister, Ida Mae, deceased. And the next sister is Ophelia

Rebecca, deceased. And a younger sister, younger than me, is Beulah. Now, we had some other siblings who never made it through life. I had three brothers who were deceased prior -- they never made it to life. So, there are eight of us all together.

RL: And why do you think your parents moved from the [00:03:00] South (inaudible)

EL: Oh, my God. You know, just from conversations -- because I was a person, little girl that was nosey, and I'd listen to the conversations. And because of the way they had to live, the opportunities were nil. I heard my father say that he wasn't -- because of circumstance, he was not going to take another beating from that white man. But he left, he was running, but he came to his elder sister here in Bethlehem. And my mother, her father worked for a sharecropper down there and they raised tobacco. And her eldest sister was here in Bethlehem who I look back and I call the first woman that had a house where they rented rooms to other inhabitants [00:04:00] who were here. Because in those days, Black men, Black people couldn't rent rooms as others -- as the white folks could. So, I called her, and her name was Molly Walker, and she had the first home where she rented rooms to men. But that's why my mother came to her.

RL: And where did they live?

EL: And Molly lived on Columbia Street, which is one block off of East Third Street. Right now, you know -- I'm trying to think of the store that's on this corner. One block -- don't ask me north or east, but it's going north. But it's Columbia. That's where she lives.

RL: And what did your parents do for a living? [00:05:00]

EL: My father was a young, handsome dude and he did labor work. You know, that's all they could do. He did some waitering, if that is a word, and he did the hard carrying. That's primarily what he did.

RL: I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

EL: Hard. Hard carrying.

RL: And what is --

EL: Hard carrying. When they build, did construction, and Black men carried the cement. That's what it is, you know? That was their job. But that's what he did. They don't know much of it today, you know, because I think they probably have other methods and other people doing it.

RL: (inaudible)

EL: Yes, yes, because he -- see, you've got to remember, he came to Bethlehem, he was unskilled and unlearned. His mother died when he was five. So, you know, [00:06:00] he had no life. He remembers standing -- as he told me, that he stood on the hill and watched them bury his mother. So, he had a glum, I'd say, a glum life.

RL: So, where in Bethlehem did your family live? Where in the town?

EL: In the slums like all the other Black families, you know? There are pockets of where the city allowed Blacks to live. It was not like now where if you can afford it, you can live -- much discrimination. And so, there were pockets -- and we lived on a street -- and I noticed the other day they took the sign down -- [Shawnee?] Street. That is the street I was raised on. I graduated from high school -- that's the street that's listed in my yearbook. But there were just various pockets that -- Mechanic Street. There were just various areas where -- you know, I used to go around and -- was just [00:07:00] something I felt I had to do, looking around to see where most Black people lived and why we were in those situations. I did that early on in my life. I was just -- it intrigues me why we, as Blacks, and colored people as they called us in those days, why we had to live as we did. You know, no facilities as such, you know? Bathrooms, you know, Saturday night bath in the tub, you know? That (inaudible) kind of thing but kept us clean.

RL: And your mother, what did she do?

EL: My mother didn't work outside of the home all the time. I think I knew of one job that she had. And other than that, you know, she took care of us.

RL: Tell me a little bit about your childhood and growing up in Bethlehem. Let's start with [00:08:00] elementary school. What elementary school did you go to?

EL: Central. Central Elementary School on Vine Street in Bethlehem, now torn down. But it was -- I had an exciting childhood, even as a little colored girl. I was conscious of the pigtails that I had to wear because it made me look different than everybody else. I was just conscious -- nobody said anything. It's just that I was conscious of that. But otherwise, you know, learning abilities were all, you know, at hand. I can't say I was treated any differently. But I had a good childhood, at that school. The teachers treated us fairly and they treated us fairly because my mother -- I told you, she didn't work. She was always there. So, we always enjoyed the comforts of Mom speaking up on our behalf.

RL: And how about elementary school?

EL: That was elementary -- [00:09:00]

RL: That was elementary? Okay.

EL: Elementary. And then, junior high school was right where it is now. Broughal Middle School was our junior high school. And she was there, as well. But I did well in school, so I, you know, I didn't have problems. It was exciting to me. I got along with my classmates. I was always kind of fortunate, you know? I was active in sports, believe it or not.

RL: What sport did you play?

EL: (inaudible) you know, they had intramural, then, softball, you know? I just enjoyed -- whatever they offered, you know, I participated.

RL: Did you have friends over to your house and would you visit them?

EL: Are you kidding? (laughs) What house? (laughs) You know, we lived in a -- Jessica and I, we laugh [00:10:00] about it now because they, the kids, kids grew up and there, of course, some pictures of like, the shacks that we lived in. To us, it was home and they looked at them and they said, "How could you live there?" I said, "Well, how could you not," you know? Where else would you go? But it was covered. I can remember -- I was a tomboy and my father -- and I imagine a lot of Black folks did what they could to maintain their places. But buy some -- for leakage --

house would leak and I would help him cover the roof because, you know, you just put a ladder up and it was he and I out there. I'd hold the ladder while he roofed the building. But the places were horrible. But it was comfort, you know, in -- to us, looking back, you know, people made fun, maybe, of where we lived. Was [00:11:00] a little embarrassing when you'd go to school and, you know, in those days, the teacher might talk about, "Did anybody see a robin in the yard?" Oh, what yard, you know? Yard that we have is dirt. No robins come there. But, you know, my thoughts were always moving on questions that were asked in a classroom that -- today, I think a teacher would be mindful not to say that because, you know, most children, black and white, had no yards and moreover had no grass, or trees where birds would land, so -- but I kept note -- you know, I took a lot of notice to maybe some small things that other kids didn't care about. But that was just me. It was me then and it's still me today.

RL: So, tell me about -- what high school did you go to?

EL: Liberty. Liberty High School.

RL: And how was that [00:12:00] experience?

EL: Just as gracious. I got along well with everyone and continued in my sports. You know the sports increased because there are more things to do. Soccer, I loved soccer. I could keep my weight down because, you know, you run up and down the field. I enjoyed that. Softball. Was on the first varsity basketball team for the high school. I did well. I got along well with the students, my fellow students, and --

RL: Did you have a favorite teacher?

EL: No. You know, it's ironic that -- teachers then, they predicted -- in fact, I laughed about it the other day. There was a teacher that had me scheduled -- she scheduled me to go to East Stroudsburg [00:13:00] because I was so athletic. She decided that I was going to, after graduation, I would be going up to East Stroudsburg. I said, "Oh, yeah? (laughs) Nice for you. I'm not going anywhere." (laughs) But, you know, it was because of how I excelled in sports at the -- I did well. And I was tall.

RL: So, when you graduated from high school, you didn't go on to college?]

EL: I did not go on to college.

RL: And is there a reason for that?

EL: I think I wanted to stay with my mother. (laughs) I was actually shy. Now, you can believe this or not: I was an introvert. And it took me 18 years to come out of myself. I was like a shell. Even as outgoing as I was in life, I was not ready to leave home. You know there's a difference. But after 18, I don't know. [00:14:00] I don't know what I did but that was the end of that introvertedness.

RL: So, what did you do after you graduated?

EL: Well, you know, you know that we as African Americans -- there was no job, there was no office that was going to hire a little Black girl. Not a little one. Any Black girl. So, I took the newspaper, looked at it -- I had decided, because I saw what circumstances were, I was going to go and work at the local factory. And my mother said, "Oh, no, you're not." I said, "But Mom, everybody else is going there." She said, "But you're not."

RL: What local factory?

EL: It was a penny factory. They made -- in Fountain Hill. And a lot of the colored folks worked there. Yeah, we have a tendency, wherever we were accepted, that's where people, you know, worked. We flocked there to work. So, I could not -- she would not allow me to go there to work. So, I thought I'd better open up that paper and look and see, and I looked for a [00:15:00] job. And I found a place on [Broad?] Street. There's an ad in there for a clerk at a dry cleaner. And I walked myself over there. And I looked behind the counter and I would say that (inaudible) wasn't my -- the girl behind the counter was a classmate. And I said to myself if she could get this job, I know I can, because I knew what her grades were. (laughter) But anyway, this was a nice Jewish man and he said, you know, of course, the job was taken. She was sitting in the seat but he hired me as a clerk, somewhat, for taking in clothes and ticketing them, you know, so I identified people's dirty laundry. Well, it wasn't laundry. It was clothing, like

outside pieces. [00:16:00] Good enough for me. I said, well, went back , I said to Mom, "This is what's offered." So, she said, "Okay."

RL: So, all this took place on the south side. Everything was on --

EL: No, no, no.

RL: -- okay.

EL: This was on the north side.

RL: North side.

EL: This is at 5<sup>th</sup> and [Broad?], 5<sup>th</sup> and West Broad. And that's where my work started. Prior to that, Rayah, I worked as a domestic. My older sister -- because that's the only thing Black girls could do, from high school. She had a job with two elderly ladies. One was a crippled woman. And she worked there. And for some reason, my older sister left and she went on to something else and my mom made me take that job. So, I did it. What it was was cleaning silver and cooking their supper. Can you imagine? I was 17. I hadn't cooked a day before in my life. [00:17:00] But in school, I took a food course. So, it kind of triggered things. But that was my first job because after graduation, I went there and I betcha I stayed one month. And they paid you four dollars a week. Can you imagine? And I said to them, "I'm sorry, I can't stay," because, you know (inaudible) I spoke up. I've never been silent about anything. So, they were sorrowful. Said, "Well, I am, too, but I can't live on that." So, that's when I went out searching for this other job.

RL: I see. Your parents were really strict?

EL: Oh, (laughs) are you kidding me? (laughs) My mother was born strict.

RL: So, were you allowed to go out on dates --

EL: No!

RL: -- or anything like that?

EL: No!

RL: [How would?] (inaudible)

EL: She scrutinized every boy that wanted to take me out. She scrutinized the mail! [00:18:00] (laughs) Mail I never saw! (laughs) It's unbelievable. Guy would say, "I wrote you" and I'd ask her. She'd say, "Yeah, it came. I burned it after I read it." (laughs) The only -- today, I understand it. Today I understand it because the old people knew the backgrounds of the families, you know, which -- we don't have communities anymore. But they knew each other and I understand clearly why she didn't allow them to date me. Not that I'm a princess or anything. I thought she was beside herself.

RL: How about church? Were you allowed to go out --

EL: Oh, yeah.

RL: -- and have social functions at the church [and was that the?] --

EL: Whatever, yeah, yeah, because my sister -- I had two other sisters. The older sister had married by that time. So, Rebecca -- we call her Ophelia. [00:19:00] Was Rebecca. [So?], Rebecca and Beulah [inaudible]. We kinda stuck together. We'd go to church, we'd sing at the socials and, you know, we did all those kind of things together. And she allowed that, you know? She felt that was -- yeah, Mom was very strict, yeah. Like, for instance, you know, when -- in dresswear, we could not wear shorts. I had to cut off a pair of jeans -- when pedal pushers, you know, when they came into play -- to show Mom how much leg, how much flesh I was gonna show. That's how strict she was.

RL: What church did your family go to?

EL: Well, we, as children, went to Second Baptist. My mother went to St. Paul. So that's why I go there now.

RL: And your father?

EL: Second Baptist.

RL: Yeah.

EL: Yes. You know, there was a -- and you know this. There was a clear distinction between the slave and the, you know, field person and the [00:20:00] house -- yeah. My father came from the house crew. My mother was the field. And so, they went different ways. And besides we could walk to

church and, you know, with five children, we could walk there. You know, because if we got on a bus, that cost something and money we didn't have.

RL: So, was that ever an issue where -- as they both went to different churches?

EL: No, no, no, because a clash [class?] you know, it was to the point where they'd tolerate it. My father's people tolerated my mother because my mother had color in her skin, more color than they did. You know, that that carried its worth with people so, I even observed when holiday time came [00:21:00] that my one aunt would send a Christmas card to my father (inaudible) [this is just?] (inaudible) and my mother and father were married, so they were really slighting her. But, you know, things like that went on in life and I observed all of it.

RL: So, how did that make you feel?

EL: I didn't feel so good and yet, you know, I was too young to say anything because, you know, it's your mother. You don't want your mother hurt. But she must have taken a lot because there were a lot of times -- you know, I told you my father was handsome and she endured a lot, you know? So, I observed all that and, you know, and I -- things that she'd say to them, she said, "Oh the very children that you don't have time for now," she said, "you'll need them before you die." [00:22:00] And she died before him and she was right so -- but, you know, life goes that way. For us as Blacks, anyway. I don't know how white folks do it. (laughs)

RL: So, let's move on. What year did you get married, do you recall?

EL: Yeah, 1956.

RL: And who did you get married to?

EL: Mr. William Lee. The only one she'd let through. (laughs) But his family was, you know, rooted here in Bethlehem. And Mom knew them, too. She knew everybody.

RL: How far back did they go?

EL: Oh, my grandfather -- Bill's grandfather went back to the late 1860s, '70s. Yeah, so the difference in my -- you

know, Bill's folks were Northerners, I called them. His mother was a Northerner. She was born in Bethlehem. My mother was not. [00:23:00] So, it went into the fact that we ate differently. You know, my husband didn't eat like I ate. I ate anything, you know, so to speak but he was -- his side of the family ate things of a Dutch nature. They kind of boiled everything, yeah, and we fried it.

RL: So, I just want to stay on your husband for a second.

EL: Sure, sure.

RL: So, his family moved here in the 1870s.

EL: Yeah, yeah. His father.

RL: His father.

EL: because that's a story in itself.

RL: Okay.

EL: Yeah, that's a separate story because, you know, he was here early on. I think he would have been calculated as the second Black man -- inhabit -- that he worked for a family. But he would have been the second Black man to be here in Bethlehem.

RL: Oh, okay. And so, they didn't [00:24:00] move from the South but they moved from the -- where did they move from? His parents?

EL: No, he came from the South.

RL: Oh, he came from the South.

EL: He came from the South.

RL: Okay.

EL: Yeah, yeah he did.

RL: Okay.

EL: Yeah. But Mom -- you know I called her. Bill's mother was actually born herein 1902, yeah. So, you know, her mother was, you know, they've said she was African American but she wasn't. She was raised by a Black family and -- adopted -- she was actually adopted by a Black family. So, that's a story of its own.

RL: So, what do you think she was if she wasn't African American?

EL: A little Indian.

RL: Oh, I see.

EL: And German, yeah.

RL: So, could it be because she was of mixed race -- that's why she was raised -- a Black family?

EL: It could've been. Could have been. [00:25:00] You know, she was very quiet, though. Petite woman. Very petite. And my husband's -- the height came from the other side, his father's side, and they were from the Poconos. They were inhabited from the Poconos, in Bushkill, Pennsylvania. That's where his father was from. So, quite a mixture there, you know?

RL: And how did you guys meet?

EL: Bill had gone off to Lincoln. You know, they got -- these guys, I think there were three or four, these -- we called them colored guys -- got state senatorial scholarships. And they went off to Lincoln. They went to Lincoln University, specifically. Because my husband had planned to go to Moravian. In fact, he tells me he was scheduled to go into the ministry. Went to Lincoln. You know, it was a Presbyterian [00:26:00] school. And all of them are off track because nobody had any subject down there that they wanted to take, you know? But that's how they got there. And then, when he came home, you know, for one of the holidays and we were all at a party or something -- so, we all just kind of got together. We used to have a lot of fun, you know? Yeah.

RL: Where did you guys --

EL: That's how I met him.

RL: -- have a party? Where did you guys have a party?

EL: You know, in those days, there were just buildings, certain buildings that we could rent because the locals would have to rent it. And the Elks, you know, would sponsor -- I remember that. They'd sponsor the holiday parties, you know, and we'd go there, yeah. But it was nice. We had a lot of fun.

RL: And how many children did you have?

EL: Two.

RL: And what are their names?

EL: Jessica and William Jr. Jessica went to -- you know, I [00:27:00] kind of watched their education clearly as they, you know, life progressed. And I could see early on in their education careers that teachers weren't treating them as they should have. So, it meant that I did a replica of what my mother did. So, I began to live almost at the school and just began to speak out and stuck with them. And principals and teachers and kids that fared well. So, consequently, you know, Billy never wanted to go to college and wasn't college material, really, so got him into the voc-tech program, which was very common in those days. And since I was -- by then, I had won an election on the Bethlehem school board -- I used a little clout [00:28:00] because there was a problem at the time that the guidance counselors were not allowing students to play in the band, become band members and go to voc-tech. So, then I had a session with school personnel, right, as -- because it affected more than just my son. And I asked them why did they think that they couldn't be a -- play in band and become a member at voc-tech, a student at voc-tech. They had no real answer to that. So, that's when -- you know, it opened the door for lots of students. But that's where Billy went and he took electives -- and when he graduated, the PPL picked him up.

RL: Did he get to play an instrument eventually?

EL: Played in the band, yes he did. Yes, played the drums.

RL: Before I go on further, I just want to go back for a second. [00:29:00] Where did you get married in Bethlehem?

EL: Where did -- in Second Baptist Church.

RL: Yes.

EL: But because my husband's Episcopal.

RL: There was a story that you told me about downtown Bethlehem, where the waterworks...

EL: Yes, where I lived.

RL: Could you tell me a little bit about that?

EL: Sure, that was interesting. When we moved from, yeah, I told you about Shawnee Street, where I grew up (inaudible) and we moved to Main Street, 407 Main Street. That's the address for that waterworks. And people don't want to believe that we I lived there. I don't know why. I don't understand why but in fact we did. And I was married from there. Not married from there. I was married in church. But I don't know why it's such a place in the white folks' eyes in Bethlehem that they couldn't believe that we lived in that [00:30:00] building. It was no longer the waterworks. It was a home. But there's where I worked -- you know, when I went to work at 5<sup>th</sup> and Broad, I'd walk up Main Street and sometimes I'd walk out [inaudible], it was --

RL: So, that's where you and your husband lived and raised your kids --

EL: No. No, no, no, no. No, no, no, no, no. No, we -- (laughs) you know, I've always been adventuresome. I probably dragged Bill, you know, all over the place. But we lived with his mother, because, you know, she was in a house by herself. And then, I felt like, you know, I was -- became a cook. And, you know, I said to him, "Well, I'm not cooking two meals for these people." And I began to look for an apartment. Then I found how much discrimination there was in Bethlehem. I called [four?] apartments --

RL: So, let's pick up again on housing discrimination.

EL: Yeah, yeah. Yep. After we were married, certainly everybody wants to have a house where they can fix up and do whatever they want there. And I called for an apartment, talked to a nice lady, and we had a nice conversation. And then, I brought up the subject. I said, "Do you rent to coloreds?" (laughs) And she said, "Oh, are you colored?" (laughs) I said, "Indeed, I am." She said, "But you don't sound it." I said, "Well, that happens." (laughs) So, she says, [00:32:00] "I'd certainly rent to you," she said, "but the neighbors, you know." I said, "Okay, all right, let's not go further. Let's forget it because, you know, I don't travel around wasting time. That's what this is about." But I've always been that way, that I ask the questions. And we had a nice conversation but I didn't get that apartment, so -- huh? (laughs) [He said?] (inaudible)

RL: Yes, go ahead.

EL: Yeah, and then, from there, I just sought around -- and, then, you know, there were certain homes, Rayah, that you kinda knew where you'd be welcome. So, I saw another house that was down in the next block. We live in the 600 block, Cherokee. This was in the 500 block. And I went and I saw the lady that owned it, I spoke with her, and she said, "Oh, yes." So, she rented us that place. Those homes have two rooms on street level and the kitchen is [00:33:00] down in the basement. Lovely. I enjoyed that. We moved in and I enjoyed that tremendously. And then, I can't stand noise, and so those houses were all connected. And I decided that I never wanted to live in a house again. I said I'll live in a tent as long as it stands alone. (laughs) And so, I found a house that was affordable. It, you know, it needed wallpapering and had cracks in the wall. I said, "I'll take it, I'll take it." (laughs) But then, we moved to 431 Pawnee Street and my adventures began because I actually had -- that allowed me to build a house inside the house, you know, the walls -- engaged a contractor. Yeah, you know, my husband was an economic major and, [00:34:00] you know, he was a man -- came home, took off his shoes, put on his slippers, and sat in a chair and read the paper. He forgot what we were -- but anyway, outside contractors we had all the time. But we redid that house from top to bottom and I just enjoyed it for 40 years.

RL: What did your husband do for a living?

EL: Well, at first he worked at the automotive place down on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and now we got -- when the Civil Rights Act was passed, then we got jobs -- he was able to go to Bethlehem Steel. But that's where he worked. But he worked as a -- analyst, cost analyst.

RL: You said we. Now, did you --

EL: I went -- eventually, I went, too. I told you, I was an adventurer, you know? I went from one job to another.

RL: Did you work there after the kids left school or before?

EL: I kept working. I worked [00:35:00] all my life. I worked till I was 70, you know, because I started to work and, you know, there were various jobs that would open up and needed

a Black woman to either be a receptionist or secretary, a clerk that -- you know, and I would take those jobs. I learned to drive to take my children to wherever they needed to be. The only reason I drove. And I worked in Allentown, you know, I drove there every morning, got up, went. So, you know, I was just out there. But I did what I had to do. And I opened many doors for people. That was the adventuresome part of me.

RL: How long did your husband work at Bethlehem Steel?

EL: Well, he went there in the '60s. It was '64 when that act was passed. And then, 1984, the -- Steel started laying off people. So, that was his length of time with [it?].

RL: And so, [00:36:00] he was there from the time the Civil Rights Act was passed ( to the time --

EL: He was actually the measuring stick, yeah.

RL: Okay, and how long were you there?

EL: I went there in 1969 and I stayed till '85, till they got rid of me, you know?

RL: Why did they get rid of you?

EL: They laid everybody off.

RL: Oh, okay.

EL: because, you know, they were laying people off all the time, so --

RL: All right, okay.

EL: (inaudible) they got rid of me, I -- yeah, (laughs) what did I care? We went home and talked about it and decided that, you know, it's like starting from the bottom again. And I remember us doing that. Went to the library and got, you know, documents that could allow us to find out what today's work was, where we could reenter the workforce. You know, we did that independently and went and took tests for -- (laughs) what the heck did they call the centers that --

RL: (inaudible) [resource is?] --

EL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I remember one -- this test I took [00:37:00] for housing. I wanted to be a housing

administrator, you know, in these development-- they didn't give it to me. I passed. They didn't give it to me because it was whitesville. And I argued about it but I didn't get it anyway, you know? But anyway, you know -- and Bill had tried. He had more pride than I had. I'm a fighter and he had pride. And because he was a man -- I never -- you know, my husband would not collect unemployment. That's just the way he was. I said, "Bill, that money belongs to you." And, "Hmm." But it was beneath him. Can you imagine? I said, "I'll go collect it."

RL: So, when the -- after Steel, where did he go? What did he do?

EL: Well, he went to the bank.

RL: Oh.

EL: The bank. Actually, he was working over at another facility and worked for Manpower Services, you know, [00:38:00] and then somebody bought his time out and then he went to work for the bank [here?]. They needed people to work as drivers. I said -- for lack of better word. But those guys carried the money from one bank [to another?]. But they drove. They were drivers.

RL: What did you do at that point at the Steel?

EL: I didn't work directly for the Steel. I worked for the coal unit, Bethlehem Mines. It was a subsidiary of Bethlehem Steel. So, in essence, Bill and I didn't work for the same company.

RL: Oh, okay.

EL: You know, it did only because that company came from [Johnstown?] and I filled the -- initially replace for the Black man that had -- young man that went off to war and I took his place.

RL: What exactly was?

EL: I was a clerk. They wanted me to stay. [There was?] - told me [00:39:00] to say I was an administrator because by that time, I had won a seat on the school board. So, they wanted me -- to appear in the community that I had a job greater than I had. And I said, "I don't, though." So, when

somebody asked me what I did, I said, "I'm a clerk at the Bethlehem Mine."

RL: So, tell me about how did you get involved on the school board?

EL: Well --

RL: And why?

EL: -- I'll tell you how. At the elementary school, which was Madison School -- is where the children went to elementary school, on Ontario Street. All the children -- we were all poor, you know. White ones, Black ones. There weren't that many Blacks in the school. But we sat down and we had PTA -- [00:40:00] PTAs were popular. And we had meetings and because of my actions, I think people were watching. But they elected me president of that PTA, the local one. We also had a citywide PTA, that they came to elect me president of the citywide PTA. And it was that group -- I can't imagine what I did but they elected me and they decided that I was going to be their representative to school board. So, they put -- they decided that I should run for school board. And they supported me. Now, the city of Bethlehem never -- I did not win in the city of Bethlehem. Fountain Hill, you know, brought me over the line to win. Because, you see, Bethlehem is still racist and it still is. [00:41:00] That same standard applies.

RL: So, you won because of Fountain Hill.

EL: Yeah. Yeah, because you can see now, you can tell the scores that come in from every section. So, I knew it was Fountain Hill.

RL: Okay, tell us, what was that experience like being a part of that

EL: Well, you know what, I remember, you know, it was so exciting. I remember our Black community and how excited it was and how numb I was. I thought what is wrong with these people? Why is everybody so excited? The pastor from up at Rev. Wingfield Roberts, you know, the poor guy, I think -- you know, he had run for city council and he lost and he -- I remember going -- there was an NAACP dinner in the fall and I went. And, my God, everybody was just elated because I had won the election. Everybody except me.

[00:42:00] I couldn't understand what the excitement was because for me, it was just, like, [inaudible], you know, because I'm a fighter and I knew what I was out to do. We had this education piece that we had to stick with in order for kids that were poor, from the south side of Bethlehem, to make it through. It wasn't just my two kids. It was all the kids on the south side of Bethlehem. I was out there and I fought for all the kids and the parents saw that. You know, I'd just stand up and speak. That's why this Callahan guy, you know, [he's me?]. I just -- I would stand up and say what had to be said.

RL: What were some of the issues that you (inaudible)

EL: Well, kids were being treated exactly like they're being treated now: sub-servient. You know, I called the district the other day because -- you know, now they give it another name. [00:43:00] They give kids IEPs. And teachers are inept to teach them because they don't even have their certificates. And I sent word to the district that I want to know how many Black kids and Latino kids we have that have IEPs. I want to know that. And I suspect back in the late '60s and '70s, I was doing the very same thing. But we would sit down in the PTA and we'd talk about these subjects. And I was outgoing and I'm almost sure that that's what caused the parents in the city of Bethlehem to move me along.

RL: Have you ever marched for issues pertaining to --

EL: Oh, absolutely.

RL: Could you tell us about that?

EL: Oh, you know, there was one that we started on the south side, Save the Children. I'll always remember: "Save the Children! [00:44:00] Save the Children!" And we marched from 4<sup>th</sup> and New on the south side, right there -- there are a different building's there now, where -- the Sub Shack is there, at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and New. I don't know if you know, yeah, but I think that everybody came together there at that corner and we just marched across the bridge, yeah. Marching is not new for me.

RL: Tell me about --

EL: I march anywhere. (laughs)

RL: Tell me about the incident between you and police officer Vivian Williams Butts --

EL: Well, you know, Vivian was a quiet sort of woman, you know? And she was a member of the NAACP prior to me becoming active within it. You know, NAACP locally really never had much fervor, [00:45:00] you know? It was just a name. The only thing I ever saw them do was to have an annual banquet. I never saw them stand for very much. So, I was about doing what I thought needed to be done. So, gradually, Vivian appeared to come along, you know? I just got used to her, you know? She was almost like my protector, which I didn't reject, because who wants to stop someone from keeping the bullets from going in your back? But, you know, we became associates and, you know --

RL: There was a school incident, could you share that with us? There was a school incident with students and there was a fight and -- you both had to go up to the school?

EL: Which incident was that? There were so many, you know?

RL: Right, okay, so one of them was --

EL: See, it was common, you know, [00:46:00] during a certain period that parents, after I got involved with the NAACP and I was a member of the school board, and it may have been after I was off, the parents would call me and I had business at the school -- I'd call a meeting. So, that's why I don't know which issue it is, you know? So, I don't know which issue, specific-- I'm trying to think.

RL: Right, no, it's okay. We'll get back to that. Since you were talking a lot about NAACP --

EL: Yeah?

RL: Yeah, when did you get involved with the NAACP?

EL: I'm just trying to think when I got involved directly because I always took a back view because I -- and I think it was because I was on the school board. So, I became the third vice president and I stayed there.

RL: With the NAACP?

EL: I stayed with the NAACP but as the third vice president because I didn't want to appear to be out front with that [00:47:00] group, but --

RL: When did you become president?

EL: Don't ask me; I don't know. (laughter) You know, it's --

RL: The 1980s, perhaps?

EL: It could've been. Could've been. I've been there a long time. I don't know. I must have someone look it up.

RL: Okay. I know you were really active in the NAACP. What is that made you want to become the president of the NAACP?

EL: Well, not only just the president but to make the NAACP an organization that would be respected in this community, that would stand for the worth of what we need it to be. I recognized there were so many issues that we -- were confronting us, our children, and we didn't have the strength to stand up to it. I remember going to meetings and I would do this from the third vice president's seat. I'd push the presidents into making decisions. [00:48:00] I'd decide with them, I'd -- "You know, we really ought to march, Bill." And we did. Willie Howard was the president and Fred was the president. I, you know, from the back, I was -- move them along. "We have to fight for this. We just have to." But I, you know, I'm trying -- I don't know what year I got involved, so I can't tell you --

RL: Were you there when Ralph Abernathy came to the NAACP banquet?

EL: I may have been in Bethlehem but I wasn't on hand.

RL: You can't recall being there?

EL: Nuh-uh.

RL: Was it in the 1970s?

EL: I don't remember being there.

RL: Can you recall what prominent leaders came when you were or when you began in that position? [00:49:00] What prominent leaders would you invite to be guest speakers? Were there any that you could think of?

EL: I can't think of any -- you know what? I have to tell you that I have a belief that every person that's a leader is not always the person that injects the information that a community will need so, you know, I don't know that the group learnt itself to finding people who are leaders. I've

seen people -- because they did it more indirectly, because one year, there's a person that was invited who was really a dud as a speaker. And, you know, we thought no more of that. And it was somebody that was supposed to be an acclaimed person and that doesn't always work. [00:50:00] But you can't go by just the fact that, you know, it may be just (inaudible) [today?] --

RL: And how about issues fought for as president. Can you recall a major issue that was....

EL: Yeah, the Martin Luther King holiday.

RL: [How so?]?

EL: Year after year. Year after year, in the -- you know, it's always a winter holiday, so it's sleet, snow, and rain when we're out there protesting the school district. And, you know, we only got that holiday a couple years ago.

RL: Will you tell me more about that?

EL: You know how good I am about dates, so I can't remember.

RL: Right, right, no, no

EL: It's recent, though.

RL: Not the date. I'm talking about -- so, are you saying to me that with the Martin Luther King holiday that the people didn't celebrate it here in Bethlehem?

EL: That's right. We celebrated it but it was not a --

RL: A national holiday.

EL: -- was not considered a holiday. I mean, the city didn't observe it. School district didn't observe it. [00:51:00] We had to fight for that. And we stood, year after year.

RL: How long did you fight for it?

EL: Oh, my God. Oh, I thought I'd freeze in the street because it was always so cold that they'd come out and invite us in. I said, "Oh, no, thanks. We'll bear it."

RL: Where did you guys march? At city hall?

EL: No, what I would do -- for the school district, we marched right over there where the ed center is-- we'd stand right out there, although it wasn't the best site, you know,

because the school district -- ed. center is kind of behind [places?]. But I'd call the press and they'd know we were there.

RL: And they came, yeah.

EL: Was always covered. And the city of Bethlehem, same thing. We used to get large crowds to march across the bridge for the city took care of [00:52:00] the holiday, but --

RL: So, right, you had a good crowd of Blacks as well as whites showing up at the protests that you --

EL: Yeah, right.

RL: Is there anything else that you would like to share pertaining to the NAACP -- tell me a little bit about the J.F. Goodwin Scholarship Fund and why is it that -- Is it under the NAACP, the J. F. Goodwin or is it separate?

EL: No, that's a separate group because the originator is Dr. Goodwin. James F. Goodwin, who was a Howard University graduate who came by Bethlehem and organized the Goodwin scholarship.

RL: And I understand that he lived here once upon a time?

EL: He did, 1935, yeah. And, well, [00:53:00] he had a practice here. In fact, my cousin, who's a couple years older than me, he said Goodwin had a practice in the house across the street from where I live now because, you know, you had to go wherever Blacks were. But he had his practice in that rooming house, in that man's house. It was a deacon from Second Baptist. But that's where he had his practice.

RL: You know, speaking about doctors, what was it like going to a hospital here in Bethlehem as a person of color?

EL: Didn't bother me because I went there to get my tonsils out, you know, which they did when we were kids.

RL: So, you weren't treated any differently?

EL: Not that I noticed.

RL: Did you really notice any treatment as far as -- like, for example, going into a restaurant or police station or any kind of organizations here in Bethlehem where the majority of the people [00:54:00] were white? Did you feel at any point -- that you felt unwelcome?

EL: Yes, yeah, I did. I remember at the -- we had the family, Jessica and Billy. We went out for dinner. Maybe they weren't used to seeing colored folks go out to eat. And the waitress took her time coming and I was -- reading her lines and finally she came over and took an order, when she was ready. And after I ordered, I got up and left. And said, "There, that's for you."

RL: (inaudible)

EL: [But she was?] -- I mean, it was obvious to us and we just had a feeling, you know? Yes, that was -- this was a racist town. It is a racist town.

RL: How are things -- banks?

EL: Banks. Banks are racist, too. You know, I [00:55:00] concluded that -- when Bill and I went to buy that first little house I told you about that had the cracks in the walls and -- so to speak -- but it was going to be ours. I'm sure that the man I work for, which was this little Jewish man that owned this dry cleaners, that he was happy [with man -- the bank?] that owned -- was about three blocks away -- who used to come into the facility and he'd see me -- that I became one of their little colored people. And so, I think he sold them on us and we were able to get that mortgage through that company. because do you think of any -- and this was in the '50s. So, do you think that, you know, we had anything to offer? We had nothing. But that's what I concluded, you know, because I was honorable and I worked there. And Bill worked and had an honorable [00:56:00] job. But in those times, I don't think they would have just automatically given us a loan without -- because we had nothing.

RL: Tell me about the church, actually -- what church did you go to again?

EL: I went to Second Baptist --

RL: Second Baptist?

EL: -- on Broadway.

RL: And what role did you play there and you have played?

EL: Well, you know what, you know, when you grow up in [a little?] church -- and there aren't many -- there weren't

many young people that stayed after, you know, graduation. So, I was always interested in the organization of the church. And so, I found myself doing various jobs and I enjoyed them because, see, really, I had nothing else to do, you know? There wasn't much here. I'd go to the movies a lot. I entertained myself. But I did a lot at church. I liked to sing [00:57:00] and my sisters and I, at one point, we were a choir. But, you know, you kind of grow up with it, you know?

RL: I know you play a big role within the church. How you seen changes over the years within it?

EL: Yeah, too many, and they're all negative.

RL: (inaudible)

EL: You know, I find that people grow up and they have no foundation, and that's something I'm going through right now. They come to church and they come to a Baptist church with feelings from somewhere else. You may have someone that has grown up a Pentecostal and Pentecostals are much [00:58:00] different than old Baptist people, you know? And the other part is that we were kind of silent Baptists, you know? We merely shook our head if we agreed, you know, with something that the preacher was saying. Now they want to jump all over you and, you know, there's a difference in how they worship. But they don't have a foundation of why they're doing it. So, I had difficulty with that. And so, I've said to myself that -- even after my husband died, I said to the dean at the other church, said, "I don't know. I may be there any day." (laughs) But every church has its problems because I would find -- in all these years, I have not joined the Episcopal church and I doubt whether I'd do it now. But I have trouble. I'm like an organizer and I like to know the foundation of what I'm doing. I'm not a genius. I don't propose that I am. But I just don't like to get engaged with people [00:59:00] that are -- don't have any substance. That bothers me.

RL: I noticed you're also involved with the Nativity church? --

EL: Yeah, that's the Episcopal church.

RL: That's interesting.

EL: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's what my husband -- my husband was born into the church (inaudible) and the children were baptized (inaudible) and just like I just told this new preacher that we're getting at our Baptist church, that I did not have the children baptized in the Baptist church because I've got a problem with how administration -- education is administered, Christian education is administered in the Baptist church. I've got difficulties with that.

RL: Okay, the Episcopal church, are you -- were you the only Black family or are there other Black families in --

EL: Well, initially, you know, [01:00:00] I think Bill's family was the only family there. Now, the Bradley family, you know, we speak of the Bradley family. Now, Emma was a friend, and I told you about Bill's grandmother? The little lady that was adopted? Those two ladies were friends. Now, Grandma Lane stayed at Nativity. Emma, they suggested that for her own good, [she go to a?] church. She went to the Methodist church. I think she was part of the origination (inaudible) of the Methodist church over there.

RL: [All right?].

EL: The African American church (inaudible) yeah.

RL: Is there a reason why you didn't stay with your husband at the Nativity?

EL: Yeah, because I'm Baptist, you know? There's a difference in the sharing of how we worship, you know? That's all it is. It's very basic. He could not become a Baptist because -- the basis. [01:01:00] He's not going to be baptized again. He was baptized once and he's not going to be baptized again. He had every reason to leave that church because he thought the strains of discrimination -- because --

RL: (pause) Mrs. Lee, could you tell me about some of the important Black leaders here in the Bethlehem community

EL: Yes. You know, the people that organize the -- I always think of the '40s, when most of the Black organizations came into fruition. Eddie Prime, huge, huge man, [01:02:00] both in the community and in size. Booker

Francis was part of the African American church. Samson Taylor was another man, was -- they're affluent. I mean, they helped to organize things. And Lillian Taylor, who was -- she organized many -- not many but she was there for females and she organized the Girl Scout troop, of which I was a member. And she did -- Lillian was very aggressive in the community. You know, I don't know if she was born in Bethlehem or not but she seemed to always have moving upward on her mind. Now, she was a very light-skinned lady and always the -- I'd always hear her talk about how the whites treated you, you know, but -- and she [01:03:00] worked as a -- like, a licensed practical nurse, something in that vein. But these were people that organized these clubs. What'd they call that, the Elks organization, which my mother was always a part of. But these are all people that were -- helped to build, you know, Black, Negro Bethlehem.

RL: And what about organizations --

EL: Yeah, well, see, we had the CVA, which was Colored Voters Association. That's what it was. And object was to keep Negroes in Bethlehem voting. And they had sessions when election time came. You know, the politicians would go to that club, buy them beer, and tell them who to vote for. And then, we had the Elks organization. [01:04:00] It almost -- like, the same people would become members of both groups, you know, because you only had so many people in Bethlehem, you know? Yeah.

RL: Can you recall who started the CVA, the Colored Voters Association?

EL: I think it was Paul Sharper. Now, Paul Sharper, I don't know if he was an invalid from war but he had one leg and one arm. But he functioned as a whole individual. I admired him. Now, the Elks organization was a different group, because William Wilton was in charge, more or less, of that group. He organized it. That was more intelligent and functioning group. You know, Elks are -- they come from a national group, so they're governed by other rules and regulations. CVA was a local [01:05:00] structured group.

RL: How 'bout politically were there any political leaders?

EL: Well, in the sense, you know, the CVA -- like, Paul Sharper, Eddie Prime, you know, those men would be out in the forefront because they deal with local businesses and they'd get money for what they wanted to do, you know, in those days

RL: What about [Tarber? Talboro?] when did they come into the picture?

EL: Well, [Tarber?] was a member -- Bert Tarber was a member of St. Paul Baptist Church. And I think he was in Bethlehem very long time. And he was active with sports as I'm told, I'd see him around. I don't even know how old he was. But he was a very active man.

RL: Politically too, right?

EL: Yes, yes, yes. You didn't hear about him so much, you know, because I don't know how effective he [01:06:00] was, because -- you know he was a union man, as well.

RL: How about you? What made you become politically involved in Bethlehem?

EL: Well, I'll tell you, I saw things happening around me and I just concluded -- nobody directed me. I just concluded that the way to get solutions to problems for us as a people was to move forward. And I selected the NAACP in order to funnel these concerns through. I thought that the nature and the length of time that NAACP has been organized and what we fought for and our purpose in life drew me to it. And I contend that today.

RL: Did you run for any office?

EL: In the --

RL: In Bethlehem?

EL: Yeah, I ran for city council.

RL: Tell us about that.

EL: Oh, I just enjoyed it because I lost -- you [01:07:00] know, there was a faction that went on -- when you're on school board, when you come off, if you want to go on the city council, you know, you just put your papers in and you win, except for me. I was the only who didn't win. Every white man -- because I was the first woman on school board. Every

white man that vied for a city council seat won it. When I ran for city council, I did not get it. I then ran six times. Did not win. What do you think they were telling me? So, was it racial or was it just me?

RL: Were there other people of color that ran?

EL: Well, yes, because there were two ministers, Reverend [Harbow?] and the Reverend Wakefield Roberts ran. Let's see, who else ran? I think they were the only two out of the (inaudible)

RL: And I take it that they didn't win, either.

EL: They didn't win, either.

RL: And ever since then, [01:08:00] [they didn't run?].

EL: Nobody's run since. Nobody ran since, I did.

RL: Do you think that someone should take up that mantle and go with it within the African American community?

EL: Oh, I think, you know, it -- see, politics is something that you almost have to feel, you know, because nobody's going to give you direction. And you have to feel what it is that you want to see accomplished. So, you know, I mean, that's why I've stayed in it all these years. And even now, if I thought that there'd be any worth -- now, you've heard me say I wouldn't even bother to go to a city council meeting. I have no time to waste, you know, because I know what they're up to.

RL: Are you still involved in the school world, school board are you still involved in that?

EL: I'm still involved in the education system, yes. In fact, the superintendent and I converse, you know, on and off. [01:09:00] I belong to his advisory -- superintendent's advisory board, and where, you know, you have opportunity to exchange -- I've invited you to come to that because I found that it's a way that we can -- if there's anything that troubles us, we can bring that up at that time as I did at the last meeting. I requested the number of IDPs for African Americans and Latinos in the Bethlehem area school district, simply because I want to know how many children are in trouble, are in real trouble, or is it just a place -- a dumping ground? Now, parents have to sign off

on that document but how many of them know what they're signing?

RL: So, how can we get the community involved?

EL: Well, you know, I'm trying. Now, I want to organize a parent group, so that parents should be more conscious [01:10:00] about their children, you know, and their learning. We had a meeting and I think there was, like, three people that came. But, you know, they come at -- the wrong reasons, you know? So, I don't know if that's going to be successful.

RL: When you attend these meetings [at this board?], are there other people of color there with you?

EL: Not too many, no. Tomacene goes. Not quite as vocal as I am, because, you know, I can't tell her what to say.

RL: Right.

EL: But at the last meeting, for instance, there's one guidance counselor that came who is a part of the district but at one of the elementary schools. But at that time, I expressed to the superintendent that we needed to have more people of color as guidance counselors that looked like our children. And hopefully, that will bring about some changes. But you know, children wanting to [01:11:00] aspire for something, who is there in the district to talk to them about their aspirations?

RL: And haven't you been fighting for this issue for the longest --?

EL: Forever. I can remember when I ran for school board, I ran on the fact that we need guidance counselors. It was one of the things I brought up. It was the very same thing then, you know?

RL: Do you think the issue is it's because there aren't enough of us standing behind you to make this happen?

EL: Yes. Yeah, because, you know, I -- you know, I'm saying yes. There are parents who don't even know, understand why or what they stand for. I thought if parents came together, we could, you know, direct them as to the weaknesses of the district in regard to our children. Children are doing well with one thing but children that

are out there in this mass number of [01:12:00] a big question mark, it's another story. And we're not going to get that day to day. And I think they talk to me because I was a former school board member.

RL: Tell us about -- what party do you belong to? Do you mind sharing that with us?

EL: No, I'm a Democrat.

RL: Okay.

EL: A Democrat now. I wasn't always.

RL: So, tell us about that.

EL: Yeah, well, you know, [inaudible] --

RL: Why did you switch?

EL: I switched because I wanted to test the waters. I wanted to see if things were better over on the other side. And I have to share with you that in Bethlehem, you know, everything's done, like, in cities and the people, the small groups that you work with. But the Republicans, the local Republicans were very warm towards me. They were so warm that they elected me as their city chairperson. Now, being a chairperson, you know, is a [01:13:00] lot of work. You have to go out there and you have to find people to run for office. You know, it's not just the title. But I enjoyed that and I felt very comfortable. And then, people got on me about being a Republican.

RL: Roughly how long ago was this?

EL: Oh, let's see, '90s, I think. But I enjoyed it. I could understand why they are what they are, you know? I don't have any money, you know?

RL: Is that the reason why you are no longer -- because you don't have any money?

EL: No, no, no. I just thought I'd better get back over -- back on -- (laughs) and particularly working with the NAACP, I didn't feel comfortable, you know?

RL: Because Blacks, once upon a time, Blacks were Republican.

EL: Well, my aunt was a Republican, yes, absolutely.

RL: In Bethlehem?

EL: In Bethlehem, yes.

RL: And what's her name?

EL: Della Annie Smith, yeah.

RL: And she was always Republican? [01:14:00]

EL: Yes.

RL: Okay. Did she come from the South?

EL: Yes.

RL: So, she was of that period.

EL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RL: Okay.

EL: Yeah. So, you know, we experienced a little - of both, you know -- and people very rarely talk about their party. The poor folks are Democrats.

RL: They're poor, because you think because they were poor and Black, that's why they were Democrats?

EL: I think. And not only that, I believe that, at least here locally, they thought that they'd be helped more from Democrats. I don't know that that's so true, you know? That's why I kind of had, you know, turn -- I don't remember if that's a fact.

RL: Right. I just want to go back to something. You mentioned that you had to fight for Martin Luther King Day.

EL: Yes. [01:15:00]

RL: I know that you raised two kids here in Bethlehem and you were part of the -- you were really entrenched with education and so forth. While you were in the school system, were they celebrating Black History Month in February?

EL: When I was on the school board?

RL: Yes.

EL: They did some form of the celebration, yeah.

RL: Did you speak out about -- I mean, did you speak, did you feel that there was enough --

EL: No.

RL: -- being taught and did you speak out about that?

EL: Yeah, I spoke out about everything, always. And I always spoke about it to the superintendent, the administration.

RL: So, that was back then. How about now?

EL: I'm even worse now.

RL: But do they -- do you feel that they're more --

EL: They're conscious, yes.

RL: Yeah.

EL: Yeah.

RL: So, we were talking about Black History Month and fighting for a certain type of curriculum when it --

EL: Yes.

RL: -- came to the (inaudible)

EL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RL: And when you think about then and now, have you seen a difference?

EL: No.

RL: You have not seen a difference.

EL: No, no, I'm still waiting. And that's why I continue to press because there are no changes.

RL: Even teaching our kids about --

EL: Very little. You know, what I consider is that it should be long-term. You know, we're fighting for history to be injected in a system where, [you know?], it's meaningful as -- it's [01:17:00] history. So, why do we have to push it, you know, two weeks in February? Let's do a week in every month. What are we talking about?

RL: So, you're saying that means we shouldn't wait for February to -- right.

EL: We shouldn't wait for February. And we've been talking about that, with the system -- with the school system for -- ongoing. Now, what they -- the answers that they give

me, because they try to give me an answer, that the -- we ask for things to be inserted in books and they say, "Well, we have pamphlets that they use at that particular time." I'm not looking for a pamphlet. Don't you hear well? We're asking for Black history to be incorporated in books. So, they haven't gotten that yet.

RL: In their curriculum. I want to go back again about Save the Children, because I see that there is a thread --  
[01:18:00]

EL: Yeah.

RL: -- well, because we're talking about Black History Month and now Save the Children. Could you tell me a little bit more about that? Was it an organization --

EL: No.

RL: -- of parents or was it just a march pertaining to Save the Children?

EL: No, it was I actually got the Puerto Rican leadership and encouraged them that we were going to fight for education. I actually, you know, [forced them?], encouraged them, and they got together and we all came together on that point and marched for that cause, Save the Children, which had to do with education because they weren't being treated fairly. Now, what has transpired, what you see occurring, you know, those that are watching -- that the Latinos have overtaken us in the education system, because their needs are being [01:19:00] met more so than African Americans because of the language, language barrier. You know, and our state legislative people have much to do with that because of the numbers. Numbers clearly make a difference, you know? The numbers of Latinos that are inhabiting just Lehigh Valley have much to do with what's being weeded out, education-wise. You know, I said at these meetings -- [and I have to?] fight for us as African Americans. I could clearly come out and say, "What are we doing for African Americans?" Just that clear.

RL: How is your relationship with the community?

EL: Good. I keep it that way. Yeah. Yeah, you know, what I -- I'm not wasn't going to say I'm smart but I'm strategic and  
[01:20:00] I've always been because you -- we need that

piece to keep us afloat of -- really what's going on in the community and that's how politics comes into play, you know? When I heard a young woman that's on the council now, she's --

RL: Olga? Are you referring to Olga (inaudible)

EL: Yeah, Olga. Yeah, last year at the Black History Month party she told them -- she stood up and she said that she felt that I had made a way for her, you know? And I'd like to keep that political nature moving, that it's not about me, it's about us as minorities.

RL: Right.

EL: It just happens that Latinos have a greater number.

RL: Because a house divided cannot stand.

EL: Cannot stand. And I'm glad that I can take a position that over-stretches me, you know? I think it's more important that we stand together as a body.

RL: I just -- we've had this [01:21:00] great conversation and I'm sure that I probably forgot to ask you certain questions and --

EL: That's okay.

RL: -- but I want you to look over the past 50 years. I don't want to go back further.

EL: Okay.

RL: I want you to think back over the past 50 years and I want to know what are some of the positive changes and negative changes that have left an impact on you and, I should say, and the African American community?

EL: Well, changes, you know, unfortunately, I would hope that after all these years I could see changes. I don't. If I saw changes, I'd see somebody -- and I've been watching -- for people to want [01:22:00] to step up to the plate to become involved in politics. It's important. Take some little task, you know? You know, I didn't always start at the top, you know? There are tests -- can be done in wards and in rural communities where you live. Start doing something. And I don't even see that. I did get one young man to take on the election, that took on the election

board down in Easton. He's doing that. But, you know, I'm saddened almost that after all this time, that there isn't anyone that could feel what I've felt and feel, continue to feel, about politics, education, the ineffectiveness of the government and how we're treated as a people. [01:23:00] I don't see anybody speaking out about anything. It's sad. It's sad. And negatives, you know, we continue to pull at one another. You know, if I were a different person, I probably wouldn't be standing. But I ignore a lot, you know? So, it doesn't affect me. But are people negative by choice or is it happenstance? I don't know. But it keeps us from moving forward as a people. And I don't know, unless we change a bit, I see no hope in the near future.

RL: Anything positive?

EL: I don't. You know, that's why we're in the schools, because the NAACP in the schools, it -- I'm hopeful that some of the young people will take on the initiatives of the work or the leadership in any form. You know, in our churches, they talk about leadership. They're not affecting leadership. [01:24:00] So, you know, I don't know that I can answer that any clearer.

RL: Okay. You mentioned, you know, being involved in politics and so forth and understanding policies. I remember about two weeks ago, Ibram [Abraham?] Kendi came to Lehigh University and he spoke about how to be an anti-racist. And he spoke a lot about policies and understanding policies.

EL: Okay.

RL: Do you see that as something very important within the black community in Bethlehem, whereas they're not understanding policies, therefore they have decided to not get involved?

EL: Oh, sure, because, listen, [inaudible], basically, if we don't understand policies, we don't have an interest. Now, I have to go all the way back to high school when I took government and that's [01:25:00] where it started for me. I was completely interested in government. And so, you know, it just triggered other things as I went along. But see, if you don't have interest in things, then you're not motivated to move forward, I think. And we had -- excellent teacher. But aside from that, it really has to

come from the inside. And if you don't understand policies, you're never going to move forward. That's personal.

RL: Right, and so therefore, your hope for the community, you probably answered that already, but your hope [for this?] -  
-

EL: Well, it's sad. That's why everybody keeps walking and stumbling. They're stumbling. They're not moving forward. I wish there was better news. I wish there was better news but they're not picking up on it. They'd rather languish over the fact that "I did this" or [01:26:00] "I did that." Well, that's not going to help them, you know?

RL: Okay, thank you so much, Ms. Esther Lee, for this interview. It's been great and I appreciate you taking the time out today.

EL: I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it, yeah. I'm sure there are other points that we could've, you know, talked about, but --

RL: Is there anything that I left out that you want to --

EL: Well, no, I mean I'm sure there's more in the life of a -- 80-year-old woman that -- but we can't touch on everything.

RL: Exactly.

EL: You know?

RL: Okay. Thank you so much.

EL: Thanks, ya. That's [Dutch of me?], "ya." (laughter)

M: That was great!

END OF AUDIO FILE