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SHOLOMO LEVY: Hello, my name is Sholomo Levy. I'm a professor of history at Northampton Community College, and I'm delighted today to be with Mr. Clyde Bostek [sic] to talk to him about this oral-history project, "Voices of the African Diaspora: The Black Experience of Bethlehem and the Lehigh Valley." This is conducted as part of the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium, and we are here at the home of Mr. Clyde Bostek. Thank you for your willingness to speak to us. Can you please say and then spell your full name?

CLYDE BOSKET: My name is Clyde E. Bosket, Sr. Bosket is capital B-O-S-K-E-T. E is for Edward, E-D-W-A-R-D, and Bosket. Clyde is spelled C-L-Y-D-E. I'm a senior because I have a junior in the family. [00:01:00]

SL: OK. Well, thank you very much. Can you start off by telling us when you were born?

CB: I was born September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1929, in South Carolina -- Saluda County.

SL: And who were your parents?

CB: My parents were named Daniel Cleveland Bosket, Ida P. [Harriet?] Bosket -- of South Carolina.

SL: Describe for us what it was like growing up in South Carolina at that time.

CB: It was during sharecropping time [but more 12 born?] years of my life was on the farm, a plantation where we shared our goods. And as I grew up, my [operation along?] [00:02:00] the plantation changed. [It was?] always behind a horse. It was never a machine, although we wished for a machine that would do much more work than a horse, but my father, being from the old school, came over from Africa as a sharecropper, and hearing that -- different plantations he worked on -- and as we grew, he moved to a larger plantation that could house the family.

SL: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

CB: About 12 boys and 5 girls.

SL: So, you grew up as a sharecropper. When [00:03:00] and why did you and your family move to the North?

CB: For better opportunities -- education, mostly housing, employment -- and looking for an avenue that would feed the family in the future as they grow, and I journeyed from South Carolina to Philadelphia in 1953, in March of that year. And then three years later, I relocated myself.

SL: From Philadelphia to where?

CB: Allentown.

SL: And why did you move to the Lehigh Valley?

CB: Lehigh Valley needed an Afro-American professional [00:04:00] barber hairstylist. That includes Allentown, Easton, and Bethlehem. Because the cities were small, but Afro-Americans were small numbers in all three towns, I was able to serve them for 42 years as I trained different age groups in the business how to dress and style hair. So, then everything changed after 40 years to a different level of business.

SL: Let's talk with each of those periods. Forty years is a long time. Start by telling us what it was like in the 1950s.

CB: In the '50s, I spent two years in the [00:05:00] military in Germany. After discharge -- my wife and I got married on my first furlough home, and so I went on back to the military to finish up my time. On the day of my discharge, we hung around South Carolina for three weeks, and I told her we want to go north, where opportunities are more greater and wider.

SL: What branch of the military did you serve in during World War II?

CB: The Army.

SL: And where were you stationed?

CB: I was stationed at [Carol Port?], Louisiana, for about 14 months, and from there we went to Germany. I was stationed

over there up until the last month before discharge,  
[00:06:00] and then I received my discharge papers and come  
home, and I enter Tri-City Barber School for better  
opportunities in my business.

SL: So, the Tri-City Barber School -- was that in South  
Carolina or in Pennsylvan--

CB: Philadelphia.

SL: Oh, it was in Philadelphia.

CB: Uh-huh.

SL: And that's where you got your license and training --

CB: Yes.

SL: -- in hairdressing? And --

CB: I got my -- in barbering, but I also went to [Apix?] School  
of Cosmetology in Philadelphia as well. I was trained to  
do cosmetology work. So, when I came to Allentown to set  
up my foundation, I was able to do males' and females',  
children's [00:07:00] hair -- boys and girls.

SL: Now, you said just as you got discharged, you married your  
wife. What was her name, and how many children did you  
have?

CB: No, I married her before my discharge.

SL: Before. OK.

CB: I married her within -- my first furlough was after six  
months of training. That's when I came home, and I married

my high school sweetheart, and then I went back to finish my time with -- we moved to Philadelphia, and I got into all these schools when I graduated, got certified through Pennsylvania. [I said as?] a young man, motivated my mind to move to Bethlehem to open up a barber shop, and I tried it for several months -- maybe four or five months.

[00:08:00] I wasn't too successful in location. I moved to Allentown. On my first or second trip here, I found a location, so I established a two-chair barbershop for the first year. After that, I moved into an eight-chair -- five-chair barbershop, and it was [an eight wick?]. Three chairs were cosmetology work, and the five chairs were barber, and the building was [just that large?]. We're talking about maybe 800 square feet.

SL: And where was that located? Both, if you remember, the street in Bethlehem and then also in Allentown.

CB: At that time, I was located [00:09:00] 215 South 5th St., Allentown, and within two years, I established a barber -- the same in Bethlehem, and for about three or five, six years later, or maybe 10 years later, I established a location in Easton. So, I had Easton, Allentown, and Bethlehem [under my severe list?] in my practice -- teaching and having young men and women to move forward into the hair business. And so far, it was very

successful. Oh, that was up and down, but there's no room for that. I would [00:10:00] say my work and my time [patient?] has moved many plaques on my walls for my service to the community and organizations.

SL: Now, before we forget, what was your wife's name?

CB: Mattie A. Bosket. The A is for Abney. She graduated from the same school, two years [later?]. I think my [L ring fell out?].

SL: Is that better?

CB: (inaudible)

SL: You're doing great there, by the way.

CB: (inaudible) Well. [00:11:00]

SL: OK. All right. So, you were telling us about your wife, [that?] she also went to cosmetology school.

CB: No.

SL: No? OK.

CB: She was a nurse.

SL: A nurse. OK. And how many children did you have?

CB: We have eight kids.

SL: Eight. What are their names?

CB: [Cheryl?], John, Dan, Ervin, [Calvin?], Jennifer, David, Clyde Jr.

SL: OK. [00:12:00] And you said your wife was a nurse. Did she practice nursing in the area as well?

CB: No, she preferred being a housewife for [X?] number of years until the youngest got in school before she pursued a full-time job.

SL: And the barbershops that you owned -- were they operating at the same time in those different cities -- in Bethlehem, in Easton, in Allentown -- or did you move?

CB: No, they all were at the same -- the Allentown was No. 1, Easton was No. 2, and Bethlehem was No. 3.

SL: So, you owned, at one time, three barbershops at the same time?

CB: Three [large round?] [00:13:00] -- I owned six barbershops at the same time.

SL: Six?

CB: Yes, three large ones and three small ones.

SL: And all throughout the Lehigh Valley area. That's certainly a wonderful accomplishment in terms of black entrepreneurship and business interests. How were you received by both your black constituents and white business owners and patrons?

CB: Well, I was contributing my service to anybody -- first come, first served. It was a white establishment before. I had some Afro-American people tell me you have to serve them when they walk in, irregardless [sic] of who was waiting. [00:14:00] I said no, I didn't come to the Valley

for that. I came here to serve Afro-Americans. Whoever walks in can be next in line. I can work with all types of hair, so it doesn't matter what kind of hair it is. I called (inaudible) [expert?] in my travels. I found out that, in the hair business, there's a lot of [contrary?] movements because they didn't have training to receive professional services in a professional place. That training was usually in the back door of a house, where they were unlicensed. So, I went on for that for a number of years, and then I went on down the road. The hair business got real slow, [00:15:00] and that's when I went out to the big corporations for jobs like [Bethlehem?] Steel, AT&T. I got hired at a steel company, AT&T, and so --

SL: So, you worked for Bethlehem Steel for a while?

CB: Twenty-five years.

SL: Twenty-five years. When did you begin working for Bethlehem Steel?

CB: It was '73 -- 1973 in February, and just before that I worked for AT&T. It [called western Allegra?] about six months.

SL: And what did you do at both of those places? What was your job in --



CB: In AT&T, I was a laborer delivering [00:16:00] products to keep the different stations going, and at Bethlehem Steel I was a laborer for six months. I took a test and moved into inspection for about four years, and after that I moved into another shop as a [pattern?] machine operator.

SL: Now, for the benefit of people who haven't been in the steel business when it was operating, what did the inspector do?

CB: Repeat that.

SL: What was the job of the inspector?

CB: To inspect the steel that's been rolled and produced before it goes out for sale [for forks drive?]. Inspecting covers a lot of [detective?] [00:17:00] things. [We Paris?] ourselves like that.

SL: And you did that for about four years -- inspecting the steel before it went out.

CB: Yes.

SL: And then you had another position.

CB: [Well] next position I got was that [pattern?] machine operation in another shop where you cut pieces out to fit the job together or to repair the job. I fed material to many departments in the steel company at Bethlehem Steel, and some of my work was shipped out to other plants in the steel business.

SL: About how many other African Americans worked for Bethlehem Steel in the plants that you were at?

CB: I'd say maybe [00:18:00] two dozen. They were mostly laborers, welders, and [burners?]. Maybe two or three foremen at that time. Because I could read blueprints -- stuff like that -- so I was able to move around a lot of [materials?]. Because I had [trucking my quarry marry square root?] and all that stuff. My tools are very good with [square roots?] and all that. So, I was able to use my education from high school in South Carolina and what I learned at Benjamin Franklin Institute in Philadelphia [business-wise?]. I really enjoyed [00:19:00] working for the steel company because it helped me with my children because all benefits -- eyeglasses and vision and medical and all like that.

SL: So, you had good medical benefits with Bethlehem Steel at the time?

CB: Yes, very good [benefits?].

SL: And how long did you work for Bethlehem Steel?

CB: Twenty-five years.

SL: Twenty-five years. When did you retire?

CB: Eighty-eight, 1988. I retired in June 1988.

SL: And you said you enjoyed working there; it was considered a very good job. What were some of your experiences or observations about black workers at Bethlehem Steel?

CB: Well, most of the black workers at Bethlehem Steel were afraid [00:20:00] to speak out or take tests for higher up. We had one gentleman there who was a college graduate from [Union Brook College?]. Then he would set up classes to teach Afro-Americans to do different jobs, but the success wasn't too great. Even I went to the same school. But Bethlehem Steel to me was, more or less, like being a sharecropper -- dust flying everywhere. Dust. So, I was at home, you know, (laughs) actually, because I didn't mind getting dirty. [I would?] shower. Every day you finish work, you take a shower. So, I mean, [00:21:00] I found the Caucasian people a little bit [envious?] because of Reagan said that all minorities get first preference on the high-paying jobs, and I was one of them. And then the blacks, they'd come around and see -- wanted to know how to get that job. They'd been there [late?] 25 years or more. Some of them been doing labor work 25 years -- blacks. So I was a mover. I spoke out. I got [set up?] by certain things, but I still -- I had a family to raise, and I say, "Whatever you say against me, your name is not on my paycheck." [00:22:00] I left it like that.

SL: Did you belong to the union?

CB: Yes.

SL: And, again, Bethlehem's closed now, but in terms of the different plants, this would be all on the South Side?

CB: Yes, [right down on?] the South Side.

SL: Did you know many black people who worked in Bethlehem Tower?

CB: Yes, they all came to my shop for service. (laughs) I was the only one here, so if they wanted a good haircut to go on vacation, you had to come see Mr. Clyde.

SL: So, you were still operating your barbershop while you were still working at Bethlehem Steel?

CB: Yes. [A guy rather he?] kept things going. He was [next 16?].

SL: So, you would work at Bethlehem -- I guess not just during the day because they have different shifts -- but you would work there and then still operate [00:23:00] your barbershops during that whole --

CB: Yes.

SL: -- period.

CB: I've always had two jobs. I've always put in [00:16?] hours or more a week in my employment.

F1: [Can he?] elaborate more on his entrepreneurship as a black man working in Bethlehem?

CB: I'm not picking her up.

SL: So, tell us more about what it was like, again, in terms of being a black business owner in the Lehigh Valley. How many other black businesses existed, and did you work together in both organizations? [And then you?] talk about your church and [larger?] membership after that. But about how many other black businesses were there in the Lehigh Valley?

CB: There was a number of them -- electricians, maintenance people, carpenters, [chee bit finishing?], and all like that. We all came together on one or two different circumstances [00:24:00] like NAACP banquet -- we'd all come -- [or?] picnic time. Different churches would have picnics. Almost all the blacks were a member of some church, and in the five churches, we all would have our picnics together once a year and [that's when?] everybody would meet. But being a barber, all of those folks came to my business for their haircut. Kids -- I did press and curl on the ladies -- relaxers. I taught many operations on different Afro-Americans, Jamaicans, African people [period?], and the white, Caucasian -- I taught them. I taught a lot of Spanish people. I taught Spanish people all during the decade of the '90s [00:25:00] and the millennium year -- like the first part of 2000 -- when I

taught them. That's when I began to slow down because of my heart and so forth, but I never let my heart hold me back. Like right now I'm going through some things.

SL: So, you mentioned a number of black businesses. Were there more of them then than there are now, or would you say about the same?

CB: No, more than now.

SL: Or more now?

CB: Yes. Black businesses now -- they like working for somebody else, like Mack Trucks. Black -- oh, this kind of keeps coming out. [00:26:00]

SL: (inaudible) fell down in the chair.

CB: [Then?] roll it down.

SL: OK.

CB: That [little white thing goes?] in the ear.

SL: That goes...

CB: Yes, that goes in the ear.

SL: OK. Now what I'd like for you to do is to tell us about some of the organizations that you belonged to. You mentioned that there were five churches in the Lehigh Valley. Could you mention some of them and then the ones that you belonged to?

CB: When I moved to Lehigh Valley, in Bethlehem was St. John AME Zion Church-- the very first church I went to. But

being a Baptist, I was looking for a Baptist church, so I found Second Baptist, which was on [00:27:00] Broadway in Bethlehem. But then my business was in Allentown, so I needed a church close to where I worked, and I moved to Allentown. I met St. James AME Zion Church, and that still was not the one I wanted fellowship at. I found a house on the hill called Union [Baptist?], so I went there, and I petitioned for membership, and they took me in. I saw Union [Road?] from there. That's where [he is?] now [at one court 3-O-C?], North 6th St. now. That's where we're located now. You been to [Ewing?]?

SL: I haven't been there, but we've been to St. John's, and we've [00:28:00] interviewed people who belonged to those different churches. But it sounds like you, at one point, have visited or belonged to all of them -- most of them.

CB: I only belonged to Union because I visited all the rest of them before Union during my barbering and commuting back to Philly to hold my job, until I could make my establishment grow to a certain point. And so one day I said, well, this is it. I'm not going to Philly anymore. I'm going to contribute all my time to the business, so I did. But I still needed a second job, so I bought a lawnmower -- [go?] learn to cut grass in the South, landscaping, and all that. That one lawnmower -- I wound up with five lawnmowers, and

all the [00:29:00] boys between the age of 9 to 16 who couldn't get working papers, they helped me do lawn work. But now today, all of them [that be working now is like?] - - the white Caucasian boy has all that work now. Before it used to be me and [one boy girl?].

SL: So, you had a landscaping business as well.

CB: Yes. I built this house on one of my jobs -- 1969, I built this house. Because of my landscaping job -- helped me to train young men how to take care of lawns and so forth, and they all got married. Most of them [over?] -- they're grandfathers now -- grandmothers. "Your shrubbery looks good." They'll say, "Well, look who taught me."

(laughter) [00:30:00] If you get back [here to?] church (inaudible) -- I sang in all the churches.

SL: And you sang.

CB: I'm a vocalist, yes. I was a vocalist. I could still sing, but it's age that gets me now.

SL: OK, Mr. Bostek, [sic] this has been very interesting. Could you tell us about your lodge activities? What lodge did you belong to?

CB: I belonged to Wyoming lodge 135 [F and AM?].

SL: What is it called again?

CB: Wyoming.

SL: Wyoming. Like --



CB: W-Y --

SL: -- the state?

CB: -- O-M-I-N-G. [A Abraham F?] Prince Hall affiliation.

SL: And it's one of the Prince Hall lodges?

CB: Subordinate lodge. There's about over a hundred lodges in the order.

SL: So, it's an African-American lodge. It's part of the Prince Hall or --

CB: It's Afri--

SL: -- mostly --

CB: --can-Amer-- [00:31:00] it's African-American lodge.

SL: Some of the viewers may be familiar with Prince Hall as, you know, an African-American --

CB: Well, Prince Hall --

SL: -- Revolutionary-era --

CB: Prince Hall was the man that traveled from England the third time before the white lodges -- Caucasian lodges -- accepted him in Massachusetts, and when they accepted him, that became a black Prince Hall lodge established in Massachusetts, and from that they branched all around to different states, and different states have what you call subordinate lodges. Like, Pennsylvania has over a hundred subordinate lodges. My lodge is 135. That don't mean [00:32:00] we have 135 lodges. It's different numbers

because one lodge, 145, it started -- No. 3 was the first lodge in [Coast a veal in?]. I can't think of the first name, but --

SL: So, Wyoming -- does that refer to the state, or is it -- did it get its name some other way?

CB: It got its state from the -- Wyoming lodge got its name from the group through and became a member of Prince Hall. To be a member of Prince Hall, you have to have X number of brothers, and you choose a club from the clubs. You get the lodge going, and then you have [00:33:00] the lodge [you're going to give?] a name and a number, and then you get registered through the Grand Lodge. That means you have to do things under their jurisdiction.

SL: So, how long did the Wyoming Lodge exist in Pennsylvania?

CB: Well, it existed -- 1948 was the first [scroll?] -- what I'd call a charter -- but it [died?]. It went into [remission?]. Anyway.

SL: It was inactive for a while.

CB: Inactive, that's -- because it wasn't -- there weren't enough black participants to keep it going then [00:34:00] -- '48. That was '48 -- '45, '45. In '48, it came back with enough -- when they started [petitioning from brothers?] from Allentown, Bethlehem together -- because Easton had their own lodge, 109. You couldn't petition

over there. That's when I came in, in 1964, when I moved here. In 1956, I moved here to Allentown to start my business -- in 1964 -- '56, I moved here. [Bit shortly after?] I moved here, I petitioned for Wyoming Lodge 135 [F and AM?] as an apprentice Mason. And then, as I said, I pursued [00:35:00] my work rapidly, and in about three years, I was a Worshipful Master. A Worshipful Master is the head of the house.

F1: And did it start --

CB: [Day after?].

F1: -- out in Bethlehem?

CB: In Bethlehem, (inaudible) Bethlehem. [I'm out of?] Allentown. While [I was in the lodge?] petition for Allentown and Bethlehem. As I said, it couldn't go to Easton because Easton had 109 already there. It was doing fine. But in the '73, '74 up until '77, I became Deputy Grand Master of all the lodges in [ninth southern district?], which was Allentown, Easton, Bethlehem, Stroudsburg, Scranton, and Wilkes-Barre.

SL: And were all these Wyoming lodges or they were called --

CB: No.

SL: -- Prince Hall lodges? [00:36:00]

CB: Different lodges. One-oh-nine was Prince Hall Easton. One-forty-five was Gideon -- they were in Stroudsburg.

Golden Rule was in Wilkes-Barre. Oriental was in Scranton. And then Wyoming was in Bethlehem for many, many years, but all of a sudden we couldn't climb the steps (inaudible). The white lodges came to our Grand Lodge [and their grand people?], and they wanted to unite with us [because?] in various locations where us, as blacks, could keep their building going. That's how I saw it.

SL: And where in Bethlehem did you meet? The building -- where was it located?

CB: Three-sixteen Broad Street, [00:37:00] on top of the [X?] home. It's still there. The building's still there.

SL: And [when?] --

CB: (inaudible; overlapping dialogue)

SL: -- [did you?] be a member of the Elks --

CB: Yes, I remember the --

SL: -- the Elks Lodge --

CB: I remember the Elks.

SL: So, you had the Elks -- but these are Prince Hall lodges --

CB: Yes.

SL: -- and black people were involved in both the Prince Hall movement and Elk lodges and other lodges.

CB: That's a different [sit?]. See, Elks Lodge is different from -- but we moved from there because, over here, we

[would be as?] 1600 -- 1500 Linden St., across from [west park there?] now. [West park?], that's a [chipper?] for Allentown. Because before they wouldn't accept us, [but like?] some black guy got in there through other lodges, but we [00:38:00] -- because I said, the white Masons were declining and they needed help to keep going, so they accepted us. I saw it nationwide.

SL: So, first these lodge movements had been very segregated, and then by the '70s they started to integrate.

CB: [Well?] it took a Grand Master -- he flew from England three times in order to get registered by a white lodge in Boston.

SL: This is Prince Hall. Right.

CB: That's Prince Hall.

SL: This is during the colonial period, yes.

CB: Yes, Prince Hall. See, my mind --

SL: No, I understand.

CB: It's fr--

SL: And so that's how the black lodges got started, and then they continue even to this day. And when you were involved with them, they were still very segregated, and --

CB: Wh--

SL: -- the '70s --

CB: Yes.

SL: -- you start to see integration. [00:39:00]

CB: Well, when I petitioned the white Caucasian -- I would use the word Caucasian -- [that?] it did not [fellowship?] with the Afro-American people. Afro-American takes in Spanish, Jamaican, and (inaudible) because we're American Africans, but the Africans, they come from Nigeria and other places. Some of them came in too. But Prince Hall was a man that, like Martin Luther King -- I always knew about Martin Luther King --

SL: Well, I think probably the next thing -- if you could talk about the 1960s and the Civil Rights movement. But as we wrap up the lodge part of it, I think the point that we want to make is that the lodge movement was very active among African Americans in Lehigh Valley at that time.

CB: Our [lodge rad nine?] meets every second Friday at [00:40:00] 1600 Linden St., Allentown, with the Bethlehem charter.

SL: With the Bethlehem charter.

CB: Because the Bethlehem brothers who was running everything - - until I came in, they had Allentownians in there before me, but they [would not push us a leaders?]. I've always been a leader. Even in my church, [I've been?] head deacon for years. Anyway, my time in the Masonic gave me 32 degrees. They wanted me to become Grand Master, and I

declined because of my family -- my boys were 16, 15, and 16, 17 -- [mature?] boys. They were giving my wife [a little static?]. [00:41:00] She said, "You either come home, or I'm going to pack your bags." That was a shock, you know? I was [glad?] the Masons would move you around.

SL: So, you were busy with the Masons.

CB: I enjoyed being with the Masons. In business, it gave me a big lift.

SL: And also [be business?] because people -- members of the Masons would also go to your barbershops and --

CB: I ke-- you ke--

SL: This [is modern bason?] Masonic --

CB: (inaudible; overlapping dialogue)

SL: -- (inaudible; overlapping dialogue) although it was very close to a lot of people [sin that?].

CB: OK.

SL: But Mr. Bostek [*sic*], I want to thank you for your time today. You gave us a lot of valuable information, and we look forward to interviewing you more to talk about your experiences in Bethlehem and Lehigh Valley, and we wish you good health, and we look forward to talking to you again very soon. Thank you --

CB: (inaudible)

SL: -- and be well.

CB: Thank you very much for spending this time with me. You  
made my day. [00:42:00]

SL: (laughs) Thank you. OK.

CB: You made my day.

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