

Copy of Tarboro-CrossleyTaaz 20190911 edited

RAYAH LEVY: I am Rayah Levy here with Taaz Tarboro-Crossley 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 Levy home on Sunday, September 1st, 2019. Taaz Tarboro-Crossley, thank you for your willingness to speak with me. Can you please spell and state your full name?

TAAZ TARBORO-CROSSLEY: My full name is Taaz Tarboro-Crossley, Taaz T-A-A-Z, Tarboro T-A-R-B-O-R-O, Crossley C-R-O-S-S-L-E-Y.

RL: And what is your date of birth?

TTC: April 22nd, [01:00] 1960.

RL: Taaz, could you tell me where you were born?

TTC: I was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

RL: And what year did your family move to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania?

TTC: Well, my mom was from Bethlehem. Mary Ellen is my mother, which is -- she has a sister, Vivian, and two brothers, Bert and Johnny, so my mother, Mary Ellen, is from here. When she graduated out of Liberty High School, she moved to Harrisburg and started working for the state capital. And that's where we were born, me, my sister, and my brother.

RL: And when did you -- did you eventually move back to Bethlehem?

TTC: Yes.

RL: What year [02:00] was that roughly?

TTC: Let's see, I was born in '60. I want to say maybe '64, maybe somewhere around there, mid to late -- about mid-'60s.

RL: Okay. And do you have brothers and sisters?

TTC: Yes, I have one brother, Hulie Maurice, and one sister, Lisa Louise. And she's deceased.

RL: And tell me why do you think that your parents -- and actually what's your father's name?

TTC: My father's name was Hulie Maynard Diggs.

RL: And why do you think that they moved to Beth-- where were they from actually originally?

TTC: My dad met my mom in Harrisburg, but my dad was from, I want to [03:00] say, North Carolina. He was from North Carolina. They were in North Carolina and then his mom, Dorothy Pressley moved everybody to Harrisburg at that time, so my dad met my mom. My dad was a singer. My mom also sang. Both singers. Met my mom in Harrisburg, but the wedding -- when they got married, I want to say, she was 21. The wedding was held in Bethlehem. And I think shortly after that we moved -- she moved back to Bethlehem.

RL: Where did they live at that time? Where in Bethlehem?

TTC: Gosh, they were in Harrisburg. I don't know where the first house was before we got to Livingston. I'm not sure -- the first house [04:00], but from my recollection, my mom and dad, they did a lot of separating through the years. And my mom moved us back in with her parents, so there was a lot of going back and forth between my grandparents' house and wherever my mother resided at at the time.

RL: Yeah, because your mom went to Washington, D.C.

TTC: Yeah, and then we moved -- during the '60s, late '60s, I want to say '66 maybe, '67, my mom took a job at the McDonald's Corporation. The group that she was singing with at the time, The Jewel Tone Singers out of York, Pennsylvania, one of her girlfriends, Doretha McDaniel, her husband was working for McDonald's at the time. They had moved to Washington, D.C. And then, they asked my mom [05:00] to come work with [John] "Sunny" McDaniel at McDonald's Corporation, one of their corporate offices in Washington, D.C.

RL: The McDonald's Corporation, what kind of entity are they?

TTC: That's the food.

RL: Oh, it's food.

TTC: The fast-food chain. Mm-hmm, yes. Yes, so --

RL: The reason why I'm asking, you mentioned singing is...

TTC: Right. Well, my mom at the time -- well, my dad was a singer since he was very young. My mom came up singing. Her mom, Louise, taught them all how to sing. And then, my mom went on to sing with The Jewel Tone Singers. And The Jewel Tone Singers were out of York, Pennsylvania. And at the time, they were a recording group, so they had several albums out at the time. They did a lot of concerts in York, Pennsylvania and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. And then, they did a lot of traveling, so she met [06:00] Doretha. Her and Doretha McDaniel, one of the singers, became good friends. And when they moved to Washington, D.C. -- when Doretha McDaniel and Sunny and their kids moved to D.C., they asked my mom to come to D.C. to work. Sunny wanted her to work. She was like secretarial, secretary, so we went to D.C. in the '60s. I want to say mid to late '60s. We were there for a couple of years and then she moved us -- she didn't like the school system. And so, she moved us back to Bethlehem and that's where we stayed.

RL: So where did you go to school when you moved to Bethlehem?

TTC: I started school at Marvine Elementary School.

RL: Tell me about your experience in going to school at Marvine Elementary.

TTC: Well, Marvine, that was 5th and 6th grade. Prior to that, [07:00] we were at Donegan Elementary for like one year. And at that time, we were living -- we were back living with our grandparents. So we were at Donegan Elementary, which was on the Southside of Bethlehem. And then when we moved to Livingston Street, which was the Bethlehem Townhouses they called them back then, [redacted by interviewee], we were enrolled in Marvine Elementary School. So I came into Marvine Elementary, I think my 5th grade -- 5th and 6th grade at Marvine Elementary School.

RL: Tell me what was -- could you give me some of your experiences as a student and --

TTC: It was great. All of the friends that I have now from that area -- there was the Livingston Townhomes and eventually they built Ramblewood Townhomes, which was across the

street. But all of us [08:00] at that school at the time, it was just great. We did May Day. We had May Day in the spring. For Halloween, we dressed up in costumes and marched in the Pembroke area, the Pembroke Projects, which was right next to -- it was in walking distance from our school. But at the time, we marched in our costumes. And it was black and white students. And it was just a great time, great time of the year.

RL: How was the relationship between you and the white students (inaudible)?

TTC: It was good. We didn't -- back then, there was really -- we all played together, so we really at that age didn't experience any racism. [09:00] I didn't. Now, if my mom shielded us from it, I wouldn't know. But as far as on the kids' level, we all played together in the neighborhood. There was the Boys Club right there. We all hung out at the Boys Club of Bethlehem. But we all played together then and that was in the '60s. My middle school years were at Northeast, so that was like -- middle school years was '74 to '76 maybe. And then from there, Liberty High School from '76 to '78. And in the middle and in the high school, I didn't really notice any incidents, racial incidents, or anything like that. I mean, we would go to dances on Fridays [10:00]. And if it wasn't at the school, we would go to the Southside. We would hitchhike and people would pick us up and take us across the bridge to the Southside. And these would be white people or Black people that we knew, but we hitchhiked and it was nothing to get in the car. It wasn't like today where you can't do that, but that's how, I want to say, safe it was. So there was no -- I didn't notice any animosity. I will say though in high school we had a club, The Brotherhood Club. And it was a club just to promote and advance the African American experience and the Spanish experience or the Latin experience at the school. But even in that club, we had Blacks, Latinos, and whites. And that was my high school years. The only time we [11:00] got to thinking about racism per say -- we all -- at the high school level, we all read books and we knew the history of Martin Luther King, Jr., and by that time, slavery. By high school, we really knew all that, studied that stuff. When they aired -

RL: Did they teach that in high school here in Bethlehem
(inaudible) --

TTC: No.

RL: -- African American (inaudible)?

TTC: If we learned anything, it was in The Brotherhood Club and that was an after school club. I want to say -- the lady who was over it, Anita Amigo, she was a teacher, ESOL teacher. She was the head of The Brotherhood Club. And we took trips and we did spe-- like during Black History Month, we actually did programs, assembly programs, poetry, reading, dances. I belonged to a dance troupe by the Lehigh University, so we all performed during Black History week. [12:00] I will say though, do you remember the *Roots* teleseries that came out back in the '70s? It was Alex Haley. I believe it was 1977. I think that's when everybody, Black, white, started really thinking about racism and about how we as people treat each other. I think that docuseries -- everybody watched it, everybody. Black, white, everybody watched it. Seven o'clock, you were in front of your TV set, but it got everybody to thinking for us personally about our history and how we were viewed by Europeans, which would be our Caucasian brothers and sisters. So that was very thought-provoking. No incidences as far as anger or anything like that at the high school, but it just got everybody just to be -- just [13:00] more thought -- it was very thought-provoking. So I say high school, that was very pivotal for a lot of us when that docuseries -- I mean, like I said, we knew about our history. As far as anybody else knowing the depth -- and we really didn't know the depth of it until we watched the docuseries so that was a turning point for a lot of us at our age, which would've been like 17-18.

RL: Did they have discussions at school when that document--
(inaudible)?

TTC: The Brotherhood Club, we did, but it wasn't --

RL: On the school level?

TTC: Yes, it wasn't on a school level, but we were able to do a lot through The Brotherhood Club. Like I said, we did programs at the school to make everybody aware of not only

the African American experience, but the Latino experience as well.

RL: So when you left Liberty High School [14:00] -- actually, were you involved any other clubs besides The Brotherhood Club at Liberty?

TTC: I ran track for a little bit and didn't do the glee club. I think that was it.

RL: Did you compete when you ran track (inaudible)?

TTC: We did with the local schools, but I didn't go to state or anything like that. It was just at the school level.

RL: Tell me about when you graduated from Liberty. Where did you go to?

TTC: I went to Howard University in Washington, D.C.

RL: And what was your major?

TTC: My major was Journalism and I had a minor in Poli-Sci.

RL: Why did you go out of state to college?

TTC: I felt Howard University -- it was a Historical Black College. And I needed to learn more about my culture and that's why I went.

RL: [15:00] Do you think *Roots* was a wakeup call? Do you feel as if you were immersed because Bethlehem was more of a white community? Did you feel that you needed to escape that and --

TTC: Not so much escape it. It's just I needed to learn more about my history and what better way to do it was through Howard University. Now, we had a lot of other Historically Black Colleges like Lincoln University and other colleges, but Howard was the -- I don't want to say popular. It was very progressive in their education and their activities and that's why I decided to go.

RL: So did you go back and forth? During the holidays, you came home?

TTC: I came home, yes.

RL: What was that like when you -- to go to a big city and then come back to a small place, what was that like?

TTC: I'll tell you what after about two years at Howard, I knew that I would not stay in Bethlehem. [16:00] I mean, we were young. And for culture-wise, we went to New York for the plays. For the partying and the clubbing, we went to Philadelphia, but it was where there were many more of us and that's where we decided to go. So when I went to Howard and got my eyes and nose wide open, I decided that - - when I graduated, I came back for about a year and I was making plans. I wasn't sure I was going to go back to D.C. to work or not because I was just thinking where I was going to go, but then I met my husband and he was from Memphis. His name is Joseph. When we got to dating, he didn't want to live in D.C. either, so we focused on Atlanta, which [17:00] back then Atlanta was the mega city for progressive Black Americans. And that's where we dated for about a year, got married, and that's where we ended up moving to.

RL: Did you get married in Bethlehem?

TTC: Yes.

RL: Roughly what year was that?

TTC: September 1st, 1994.

RL: 1994. Before I move on, I would like to --

TTC: No, 1984.

RL: Okay. Before I move further, I want to get a sense of social life here in Bethlehem because right after college, you graduated and you went -- you got married a little while after and then you moved to Atlanta. And so, because this is focusing on -- and this is perfect. It's focusing on the past 15 years of the Black [18:00] experience here in Bethlehem, I want to get a sense from your voice what was it like as far social clubs and so forth -- socializing in Bethlehem, and the youth, and the teenager in Bethlehem, Liberty and Bethlehem. What did you do as a teenager?

TTC: We did a lot. Our generation, we were very active outdoors. We didn't have computers. We weren't on the phone, so everything we did was outside the house. So whether we were outside playing making up games -- I had an auntie, Auntie Elsie, which was one of the siblings that my grandfather and grandmother raised, Elsie and Uncle Buster

or Ricardo Sanders. She worked with the youth a lot, so we went roller skating, took us to the roller skating rinks. We went to concerts, [19:00] a lot of concerts at Kutztown University, middle and high schools, but we were very active. We liked dancing, so there were a lot of dances. We had DJs, a DJ out of Philadelphia that would come to Bethlehem.

RL: Where in Bethlehem? Where were these concerts or dances?

TTC: African American Cultural Center in Allentown, that was one of the main places, then other little places around Bethlehem. Wherever you had apartments and you had a clubhouse, the DJ would show up and we would go dance. So our thing was dancing.

RL: House parties? Any house parties? Were there house parties?

TTC: We had house parties too. We had house parties too, but we were -- back then, *Soul Train* was the hottest thing on tv, so we were trying out our new dances. Saturday, we were watching -- well, *American Bandstand* came on first, then *Soul Train*. [20:00] And we were trying out the -- I mean, that was our mindset. We weren't -- a lot of us weren't into crime or anything like that. We were just about having a good time and we did.

RL: Who were some of your childhood friends that you could recall hanging out with?

TTC: My best friend Debbie Eggleston, Sharon Butts, Sharon King now, Kimberly Walker, Lori Hinton that's her married name, gosh, Regina, my auntie's daughter, Regina, Freddie, her son. Let's see, a lot of folks that we went to Liberty High School with, the Davis', Kents', the Williams family. [21:00].

RL: So you had a family -- so did you have Caucasian friends that intermingled with some of these friends (inaudible) --

TTC: We did and I'm trying to remember. We had two girlfriends and one was -- gosh, what was her name? There was two of them, Chris, and then there was another one. I can't think of her name. And I just saw her I think the last time I came home. We usually catch up and go out to eat, but then I have a friend that was from Virginia, Loretta Ketchen.

Her sister, Brenda, lived in Livingston with us, Brenda White. They were from Virginia, but Brenda married Clyde and they ended up in Bethlehem. And I met Loretta through her sister, Brenda, so she was another one of -- good girlfriend [22:00] of mine that we all hung out. She would come up during the summers. She would visit her sister in Bethlehem and that's how I met her. Those are the two that I can think of. We did have a couple of guys that were white that we also hung out with too, but it was just normal.

RL: Most of these childhood friends, are they still living in Bethlehem; do you know?

TTC: Sharon is not. She's in New York. That's Sharon King. Debbie's still here. Lori, she's in Atlanta where I am. Kimberly Walker, she's in Baltimore, Maryland. So a lot of them have, like, married and gone on, but there's a good portion of other friends that we had in high school that are still here.

RL: It seems as if quite a few left. [23:00] Why do you think they left Bethlehem?

TTC: Better opportunities, especially jobs. Better opportunities. Then again, like I said, the culture. At the time, we really didn't have any acti-- other than the NAACP, which our parents and we all belonged to, but just cultural stuff like arts, not just plays, but movies and art museums and just a lot of historical stuff that we also needed to have our hands on.

RL: So you would think that that was a catalyst that made quite a few -- you and your childhood friends leave Bethlehem because that culture element was missing and the --

TTC: Opportunities.

RL: -- [24:00] historical and the --

TTC: And opportunities.

RL: -- other job (inaudible)?

TTC: There were jobs. Bethlehem has grown a lot since I've been gone. But as far as jobs are concerned, we only had -- I was in journalism. We only had two newspapers at the time, *Globe Times*, which I did like a little summer internship --

and I think it was the *Morning Call*. And then the Easton -

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A: And then it was the *Bethlehem Bulletin*.

TTC: Yes, our chain -- oh, before then?

A: Yeah.

TTC: Yeah. So as far as opportunities in journalism and like news stations and all that kind of stuff, you got them outside of Lehigh Valley at the time.

RL: I know your mom was instrumental as far as being a pillar in the Black community in Bethlehem. What did your mom do or your father, both of them?

TTC: Secretarial, my mom was pretty much. She was the church secretary at one time at St. Paul Baptist Church. [25:00] And then at one period of time, we had left St. Paul and went to Grace Deliverance when that church started, so she was secretary, same type of position at the church. She belonged to the NAACP. Let's see, like I said, she was a singer. She did a lot of singing. We all belonged to the Community Gospel Choir of Lehigh Valley. That was under the directorship of Faith Strong, Ella Strong, Gene Strong. So all of us, my mom, my mom's sister, Vivian, all of the kids, we were in the choir. It was like a family choir. I think at the time, she raised us pretty much by herself. My dad was in and out. So they stayed married for about 10 years, but I had a lot of aunties, female cousins that raised [26:00] their children by themselves because the husbands were not good, whether it was physical or mental abuse. It was a lot going on. So my mom and a lot of my aunties, we couldn't afford babysitters at the time, so they just drug us to the choir rehearsals. And then, Faith Strong just put us in the choir, so we had the moms and some dads and the kids. And we were a community choir and we went a lot of different places singing, but we were good. We were really good. But my mom, she was a singer, my dad was a singer, so it was naturally for me to sing. My sister sang. My brother sang. When I moved to Atlanta, I started singing with the Georgia Mass Choir, which is a mass choir in Georgia, recorded with them, and then I went on to sing [27:00] with James Bignon and the Chorale. So I recorded with them, so I was -- when I moved to Atlanta, I

kept doing the singing thing. My sister stayed. She sang, but she pretty much stayed with the -- whatever church, Grace at the time, and she sang on the choir.

RL: So your sister stayed in Bethlehem?

TTC: She stayed in Bethlehem, yeah.

RL: And she still lives here in Bethlehem?

TTC: Well, she's deceased.

RL: Oh, your sister's (inaudible)?

TTC: Yes, she passed in 2003. Yes, but she stayed. She got married. She married Oscar Huertas and he was from here. And so, they got married and stayed here.

RL: They have kids? Do they have kids?

TTC: Yes. They have two girls, Asia and Camille.

RL: Do they still live in Bethlehem?

TTC: Camille lives in Bethlehem with her dad, Oscar. Asia got married in 2017, so her [28:00] and her husband, Jude, live in Somerset, New Jersey.

RL: In 1968, you were eight at the time.

TTC: Right.

RL: That's the year King was assassinated. Do you recall any memories of that?

TTC: At that time, we were in Washington, D.C. I think Martin was assassinated in April. Bobby Kennedy was June, June or July of that same year. And there was a lot of racial unrest in Washington, D.C. There was a lot of riots going on, especially when Martin Luther King was assassinated. And then when Bobby was assassinated a couple of months after that, there was a lot of rioting going on in D.C. to the point that walking down the street, they had the tanks on the streets. And I remember we were -- my mom was still singing with The Jewel Tones then. She was taking us to rehearsal, and we were walking. And they stopped us. [29:00] Well, there was a guy. There was an African American gentleman that was walking in front of us. And like I said, there were tanks, military everywhere. And they stopped us and wanted to know if we were associated with

the guy that was ahead of us. And we weren't, but we were just walking the same way. But that's how -- pressure-wise, that's how tight it was with relations after those two were assassinated.

RL: Right. And how about when you moved back to Bethlehem, what was the climate like?

TTC: Like I said, it wasn't -- we were still young then at the time.

RL: Right, of course.

TTC: Yes, I was eight. So when we came back, we were really -- we just picked up where we left off at. My family was here. The friends that we had were still in Bethlehem, so we just -- so it wasn't -- we didn't notice anything when we got back to Bethlehem. And I think because D.C. is a bigger city -- [30:00] as far as Bethlehem, I don't remember any stories about any rioting going on. They might've marched or whatever, but it wasn't to the level of what was going on in Washington, D.C.

RL: As you know, I work at the library. Did you at any point visit the library when you were in high school?

TTC: Yes. We had to do projects, papers, so we were at the library a lot.

RL: Which one because we have two? Was it on the Southside?

TTC: Yes, on the Southside right by the bridge.

RL: Did you -- well, I think you answered this. Did you feel that you were treated unfairly and do you recall any memories that you were treated unfairly, whether in school or walking outside of the neighborhood or anything like that as a young person?

TTC: There was one instance in high school and I can't remember the teacher. [31:00] It was a social studies project. We had to do a social studies project on an individual. And I at the time -- I think it was around February, Black History Month, so I was going to do a term paper on Angela Davis. And the teacher at the time -- and I went back through the yearbook. I can't remember the teacher. He told me that I couldn't do the subject because Angela Davis back at the time she was a culturally aware activist, but she

was labeled as a communist. And so, I called my mom in to talk to this teacher because I said I'm doing this paper on Angela Davis because back then in high school still learning about our history, African American history -- back then, well, the '60s, you had the Black Panthers and so Davis was part of that, but she was labeled [32:00] radical like a lot of them, but they kept throwing the term communist. And we all know she wasn't a communist. I mean, they called Martin Luther King communist. So I called my mom in, had a meeting with the teacher, and I did my paper on Angela Davis.

RL: When you did your paper, did you have to present to the class?

TTC: I don't think so. I don't remember standing in front of the class. We just had to turn it in.

RL: And did your teacher treat you any differently after that incident?

TTC: By then, I had a boldness about me. By then, I just had the look on my face like if you said anything, I was coming at you correctly with some history. But after that, after I called my mom in -- because I really wasn't understanding why I couldn't do the topic. He said pick a topic and that's who I chose. Now, he may have received it better if I was doing it on Martin Luther King. But we all know with Angela Davis, the Black Power Movement, that upset [33:00] a lot of people. But, no, after that, he didn't say anything to me and we went on class as usual.

RL: So I noticed that some of the information that you were sharing with me, it appears that you were somewhat sheltered. Whereas, when it came to the Black experience and when you moved out of Bethlehem and you went to college or even learning about Angela Davis, did you feel as if that your eyes opened up in anyway whereas you can recall something happening, whereas you didn't realize that this was actually happening to you?

TTC: Not really. Like I said, we were young and a lot of [34:00] the racial tension or episodes or incidents that went on outside of Bethlehem, we weren't privy to. My mom didn't talk about it. My grandparents didn't talk about it. And I don't know if they were shielding it from us or just

assumed that when we would get older they would tell us more about our history. So, yeah, I would say shielded. But as far as being in Bethlehem, I, other than the incident in high school, as far as being on the track team or going to and from a grocery store, I don't think we were looked at differently. I couldn't catch -- nowadays, racial tensions are a little different, but never noticed anybody looking at me funny or where I would have to say "Excuse me," or something like that. I don't believe while we were in the store [35:00] -- we weren't watched. Nowadays, for people of color, you have employees always coming up to you, can I help you, can I help you? But what they're really doing is wanting to know what you're doing. A lot of that stuff, I don't recall any of that in the Bethlehem area, so I really wasn't -- didn't really notice.

RL: And, also, it seems as if the white community and the Black community looked out for you; is that fair in saying?

TTC: Yes.

RL: Because they gave you rides to the Southside, so they knew who you are, knew who you were, and so they knew your family, and so forth.

TTC: Right. And the Tarboro name carried a lot of weight because of my grandfather, Bert Tarboro. And then he had his brothers and sisters who were doing a lot like Uncle Roy, Uncle Robert. They were all involved in the community [36:00], but Pop more so than any of them. He carried the weight of the responsibility for us all. And the way he conducted himself in the community and at home was very positive. I don't remember Pop talking to -- he talked about how things were, but he never mentioned it in a negative kind of way. It was just an informational type thing. And he was telling us like, well, one day, you'll learn and read about it and learn more about what happened. But I think shielding us was not a bad thing. I think we -- you're idyllic when your young. You just have the world in front of you. Everything is positive. It's not clouded, and I think that's the way we were raised.

RL: Right. He didn't want you, the family, or the children to have these preconceived ideas. Perhaps, he wanted you to learn as you [37:00] go along so that, again, you wouldn't

have this stigma or think of yourself as being inferior or anything. You're just like them, so forth.

TTC: Right. Until I --

RL: And that's the sense that you got and how you --

TTC: Well, we started having -- we did have a lot of -- like I said, when the *Roots* teleseries came out, that's when we started having questions. But, still, we were still young. That was '77. I think I was in high school then, so my mom would answer questions. And I think Pop shared some stories way back when, when they were younger coming up. My grandfather was very positive, very quiet. My grandmother, we called her, "Nanny." She was the one that did the talking. She was the one that noticed everything. She pretty much raised her kids and then raised us too because like I said a lot of times the husbands were not in the picture. So my grandfather took on the role model of a father for us [38:00] and he took us on outings and that kind of thing. And that's how we learned to deal with other people or to deal with people in the community. We followed him and we followed my grandmother.

RL: So where are you living now?

TTC: I'm in Stone Mountain, Georgia.

RL: Stone Mountain, Georgia. Okay. When you think back -- so do you visit Bethlehem often?

TTC: Now, it's about once a year.

RL: And why is it -- why do you come back to visit once a year? How was it before?

TTC: Well, before I had kids, I would come back a couple times and working, so you had the money to do that then. But once I started having kids and they were in the school system, we were both working for different goals, the first house, cars, that kind of thing. So I would manage to get home maybe twice a year. And then when you have kids, your priorities [39:00] change, your life changes, so you get home -- I would get home with my kids who were both involved in sports since they were little, when I have time, not to take away time from my kids, but about once a year. Still working and stuff, it's about once a year.

And, of course, my mom now visiting her more often, it's about once a year when I get home.

RL: Your mom, where is your mom?

TTC: My mom now is at the Cedarbrook Nursing Facility in Allentown.

RL: And how is she?

TTC: She's about the same. Her condition is about the same. She --

RL: Could you tell us about her condition?

TTC: She was diagnosed with MS, multiple sclerosis. I think -- she would never say it, but she was having issues with MS when she was younger. I want to say she probably started having symptoms maybe early fifties and did not say anything [40:00] about it. And I'm not sure. She wasn't treating for it. But then as she got older what the doctor said is what they think happened with her, she had long remission periods where she would be symptomatic -- like say she would have a flu and be very weak, immune system very low. Then she'd go through a long remission period say of a couple years and then something else would flare up. And then, she would get sick. And we're thinking -- the kids, we're thinking you have the flu, bad case of the flu, mono, whatever it is. We just never thought of MS. And then, she got to her sixties, early seventies, she started having problems with her gait, balance, walking. We knew she had bad knees because she played softball in school, so she had problems with her right knee. She would get it drained, no big deal. So we knew that, but eventually she had knee [41:00] replacements on both knees because we just assumed that's what she needed to have. But then when her walking didn't get better and she kept falling, we were like something else is going on. And by me taking her to the doctor and getting MRIs done, we went to Temple, we went all over, found out that that's what it was. It was actually MS, but she had long remission periods. You can go into remission and not be symptomatic, which is what she had. That's what the doctors believe. Now, my mom would never say it if she was treating or if she had lab work done and it didn't look right -- the lab didn't look right, I will never know because she never was forthcoming. Like a

lot of our parents, they're -- I'm grown. I tell you what you need to know. So by the time we found out that that was really what it was, she was mid-seventies by then, [42:00] so her walking got to the point where she couldn't walk anymore. And now from the neck down, there's really no movement. There's really no movement. Her mind is not as sharp as it used to be, early Alzheimer's, but it's nothing dramatic. No dementia or anything like that. She can move her right hand a little bit, but from the neck down just nothing.

RL: So we're about to wrap up and I just want to ask you one more thing. So because you were going back and forth, there were some periods where you didn't live in Bethlehem and so forth, but that's besides the point. When you look back, let's say the 1970s when you were school age and now looking back now and coming back to visit Bethlehem, do you -- what are some of the changes -- whether [43:00] it be good or bad, what are some of the positive changes that you've seen happen in Bethlehem and what are some of the negative changes that you've seen as you think about your overall life here -- experience here in Bethlehem?

TTC: As far as employment opportunities, there's a change for the positive. Bethlehem has grown and I'm not sure if that's solely because of the casino, but there's a lot of growth everywhere. That's a positive change.

RL: Do you think it has grown for the Black population?

TTC: As far as --

RL: As far as jobs?

TTC: As far as jobs, yes. As far as jobs, there's many more opportunities to work here than there was back when I -- because the big thing back when I was young was the Bethlehem Steel and a lot of our family members and a lot of African Americans, the men especially worked at Bethlehem Steel.

A: And the mill.

TTC: Yes, and the mill. So that was [44:00] -- so now there are many more opportunities for that. Culturally wise, they have -- as far as arts, theater, they have a lot of small theaters here that encompass Black and white actors. I

have another girlfriend I had mentioned, Felecia Matt. She's married now. She was in high school with us. She does theater, so she -- wherever she's acting or whatever play she's doing, she lets us know. So there are a lot more small theaters for the African Americans to participate in if you're into that. Music wise, they bring a lot more musical acts to the area. And I think -- was it the Musikfest they have every year here? They bring a lot of top acts, Black and white, so that's a change. We didn't have that coming up[45:00], so that's a change. As far as relations, friendship or just relations on a whole, I want to say it's positive. I'm not going to say anything negative about it because we're in a different area -- or era, I should say. Like coming back now, I haven't had any issues as far as racial or anything. Because it's still a small town, of course, I believe it's safer than where I'm at in Georgia. But Atlanta -- we're on the suburbs of Atlanta, but Atlanta is a bigger city, so you're going to have a higher crime rate, poverty level, that kind of thing. It's a little bit different from the Lehigh Valley area. So when I come back, I feel it's safe. It's like phew. I ain't got to worry about locking my doors. I mean, [46:00] I'm sure everybody does, but I'm saying you're looking over your shoulder and that kind of thing, you do that in a big city, but here it's just like a breath of fresh air. We're north, so we have the best air that there is. But being from the south, I probably would've never moved to Atlanta or anywhere south during the height of the Civil Rights Movement because a lot of people from the south, racism and segregation and all that was -- a lot of it was going on in the south. That's why you had a lot of African Americans move north. Now, by moving north, did you still have segregation? Yes, but it was more behind the scenes. People were saying stuff behind your back. It wasn't as in your face in the south, but the south has changed and that's one of the reasons why we moved. It's become a lot more progressive. But here in the Bethlehem, Lehigh Valley area to me, it's all positive. I don't see any [47:00] negative -- I can't think of any negative connotations about it. Like I said, I have friends that are still here. My brother, he lived in Texas for a long time and he moved back here --

END OF AUDIO FILE