

Walter Gray
4/31/2006
SIDE A

INTERVIEWER: When and where were you born?

INTERVIEWEE: I was born in Newton, Mississippi. 1939.

INTERVIEWER: Newton, Mississippi? Wow, okay. What was it like growing up in Mississippi?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I left there at age 5. So I don't know that much about it. It was beautiful.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: And we lived in a government project type modern building. My dad was a railroad worker and as such, we had those modern facilities. Unlike the shotgun houses that I've heard so much about.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. (laugh)

INTERVIEWEE: After age 5 we went to Chicago with a great migration after the war on the soldiers and everyone was on the move. So I more or less grew up there in Chicago.

INTERVIEWER: In Chicago, Okay age 5. Now your dad work for the railroad, is that correct?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And so, is that's what facilitate the move to Chicago, was his job?

INTERVIEWEE: It was the end of the war and everyone was, and my dad was then free to leave. Had he not worked for the railroad then he would have been drafted into the military. And so after the war then everyone was free to move about.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, now you said earlier that you were apart of the great migration going north.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, right.

INTERVIEWER: Was your father or your mother work there in Chicago, were they looking for specific employment in Chicago or just...

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, my dad got on construction. He was employed a number of places, but construction was mainly it. With the migration there and all of the soldiers coming, they needed more housing and so there was a construction boom in Chicago,

hence the great suburbs that surrounds, that now surrounds Chicago was developed at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What part of Chicago did you live in and were you, I imagine you were in the inner city, were you in a rural area, or?

INTERVIEWEE: Yep, the south side. And as the people moved on from the west side to the western suburbs then blacks moved into those apartments and into those houses, and so we moved too. People progressed right along. So we went from the south side to the west side, and then the near north side. So it was an ongoing process.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like growing up as a child growing, the environment, your associations, describe the neighborhood what did it look like itself your community.

INTERVIEWEE: They were lower middle class, as the neighborhood filled up with disadvantaged people of course we were red lined and things with down, housing went down because people couldn't get loans. The banks didn't supply them with money so as soon as one neighborhood became dilapidated then people would move on and that's unlike Waterloo. Waterloo is more stable racially and it's not quite as much moving defector segregation in that sense.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about how you got into the barber industry. Or not so much the barber industry, tell me about your first haircut.

INTERVIEWEE: My dad was the barber in the family; he cut all the kids hair. So during my graduation from grammar school I had my first professional hair cut. The barber just completely messed my hair up from what I told him, I gave him the instructions, and the guy just cut it the way he wanted to. So I rushed back home to re-cut it, I used my dad's clippers in order to take pictures for that afternoon. And so my brothers, cousins and all the kids in the neighborhood, they kind of like what I had did and so they wanted a haircut so I ended up that weekend cutting about three or four heads of hair and the next weekend they came back and so they started coming on a regular basis and I said well fifty cents.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, fifty cents. (Laugh)

INTERVIEWEE: And then some of the dads started coming around and they were sending the kids there regularly. This was in 1954 by 1956 I had such a regular clientele that I literally went into business. In one of the side rooms, my mom allowed me to go in there and set up a barbershop. An I did that for the next three or four years, and in 1960 I has worked enough that I saved enough to go to barber school. I paid the first.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, hold up don't get ahead of me. Because this is good, your doing good, this is really good. Tell me how did you...so, did your father teach you, because you said he was the barber in the family.

INTERVIEWEE: He cut the hair in the family

INTERVIEWER: He cut the hair in the family. Okay

INTERVIEWEE: He wasn't a good barber.

INTERVIEWER: He wasn't a good barber. (Laugh)

INTERVIEWEE: That why my brother and every one elected me, but my mom was actually a better barber.

INTERVIEWER: So you parents cutting you hair. Was this a way to save money?

INTERVIEWEE: It was out of necessity.

INTERVIEWER: Okay

INTERVIEWEE: Economically we really couldn't afford to have four boys getting their hair cut.

INTERVIEWER: Four boys, okay. All right, so your mother and your father would switch off from cutting the hair and take turns. And you mother was the better

INTERVIEWEE: She was better at it.

INTERVIEWER: She was the better of the two

INTERVIEWEE: But, you know my father took charge, he thought it was the manly thing to do. But we preferred my mom.

INTERVIEWER: And so here you are, you graduate from... It was an eight-grade ceremony

INTERVIEWEE: Yes

INTERVIEWER: Correct, and you cutting your hair for the first time. It just naturally came to you.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes,

INTERVIEWER: Did it?

INTERVIEWEE: Worked at it. If its something you don't like then change it. Then work at it. That simply how haircuts work. It's not a trade it's a profession like doctors, lawyers, sculptures, you work at it until you get it the way that you think that it's right. And so you have to use your own talents in order to achieve that.

INTERVIEWER: And so you said that you were cutting hair for people in the community, in the eight- ninth grade you were cutting hair as a youngster, a young teenager. Fifty cents a head.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, fifty cents a head, yes. Did quite well at that rate. It was a way of supplementing my school money, but also I enjoyed doing the service you know cutting the peoples hair. You would see the joy on their face, they would really enjoy the haircut and so that was a motivating factor for me. Since I had the money

INTERVIEWER: how did your parent react to this, because you got people traffic coming through the house, right?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, Well at that time people were unlike they are today, despite the fact that we were in Chicago, it was a neighborhood crowd there were family type people we all migrated from the south and so we had that southern atmosphere, family relationship and so it wasn't the frightful thing that it is today, although it was in Chicago. So they didn't discourage me, in fact they encouraged me. Not only myself but my brothers too I kind of taught them and we leaned on each other for a little knowledge as to what was right or wrong. And so, all three of us kind of developed out own little talents.

INTERVIEWER: Now with the success at such an early age that you were having, with cutting hair, did you envision yourself being a barber, owning a business, you know growing up, owning a business and being successful at it?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I kind of visualized that after a while because I would go out and take various jobs but then mainly they would just be seasonal or something to that affect, especially for a young kid in the ghetto and so I always wanted to own my own business, and I saw were it might be possible because as I developed the skills and it was a matter of supply and demand if people keep coming with money in hand, of course then you realize that you have something. And if I went to school then I could increase my talents and increase the money and so yes it was a natural progression.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a little bit about that because you were going to school and you would make it legal. Everything you were doing you'd get the license. Tell me about that, where did you go to school at, when.

INTERVIEWEE: I went to Molar Barber College in Chicago; it was in fact the first barber college in the nation. It was on the downtown section, what they call the "tramp section" or where, the homeless people I should say they used to call them that, but the homeless.

INTERVIEWER: okay

INTERVIEWEE: and we would cut the homeless hair, and because then the school would charge them very little money, if any sometimes. In addition to that, we would go to the hospitals the school would send the students to the hospitals and cut they peoples

hair there that needed it. And so I progress pretty fast out of the nineteen or twenty students that were there and I was the only black one and I had about half the clientele.

INTERVIEWER: Wow

INTERVIEWEE: I was doing hair at such a rate that I paid the first month or second month tuition. And I was given the rest of the course free because of the amount of money I was bringing in. Of course I had to approach them about that.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh, but this is good. (laugh)

INTERVIEWEE: So he says willing says yeah you can have the rest of the course free you just continue to do what you doing. An as a result I graduated.

INTERVIEWER: Around what time period was this?

INTERVIEWEE: this was in 1960

INTERVIEWER: Okay

INTERVIEWEE: So I graduated in '61

INTERVIEWER: Okay so you graduated in '61 and then right after barber school would you go work for someone else or would you go into business for yourself?

INTERVIEWEE: Well the owner of the school he offered me a barber shop, but I declined because I didn't want to work in that area and so I went to work for a fellow Ike Draper and he had a barber shop there and within a few months I was the manager and I managed that until I got drafted for the military. So I was the youngest guy in there, apparently he must have thought that I was the most honesty and wasn't going to "diddly-daddy" with his money. So I think that was one of the reasons not that I was the best barber at that time you know, but, I tried to be honest and straight forward with him and he apparently saw that.

INTERVIEWER: now you said that you were drafted into the military.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes

INTERVIEWER: shortly after that you'd be drafted it would cut your barber career short for that time period.

INTERVIEWEE: Willie it would seem so.

INTERVIEWER: Okay

INTERVIEWEE: But when I was in the military I became the battalion barber, that's the unit. The unit would have a fund that they would do recreational thing with so they set up a barbershop for me. And so I would cut hair from eight in the morning until about four in the evening, unofficially of course.

INTERVIEWER: Okay

INTERVIEWEE: My job, I was a communication specialist, a field communication specialist. I very seldom worked that when we were in the barracks, but if we went out on field trips of course, then I did my communications job, but other than that I cut hair in the barbershop.

INTERVIEWER: Wow, okay.

INTERVIEWEE: That was privileged, that was a real privilege. Some people didn't like it you know but if you were set up by the company commander of course, there was nothing that anyone else could do about it.

INTERVIEWER: Right, so they could see your talent, he could see your talent, it was evident that they wanted you there you were good at it, no one complained right?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, it was two-fold. I was charging two dollars a head. I had access to so many hundred of people, that in the run of a month, I was making more than a captain. And so the army didn't really like for me to do that and hence that why they set it up so that I could work, during working hours under this program. They limited my take to about sixty cents a head and so that reduced what I was able to make. So they really didn't want me to make two thousand dollars a month and the captain was only making eleven hundred so that was one of the prime reasons that I suspected. But being a licensed barber of course, they couldn't really legally restrict me from cutting hair in the evenings in my own free time because electricians would do things or people with other professions like photographer would take pictures, and so I had the right also and I fought for that.

INTERVIEWER: Wow, so your experience would extend into service, this is great. So then once you would leave the service would you go to Chicago? Would you return to Chicago?

INTERVIEWEE: I returned back to the job, by law if you were drafted, were ever you were drafted from; that company had to then give you that exact same job back it was a requirement of the government. So of course, I went back to managing, stayed there a year then bought my own shop.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: But it I stayed there in order to just get my feet back on solid ground, look around and see what I really wanted to do, and I did; I opened up my own barbershop within a year.

INTERVIEWER: Wow this is good, so now here you are, your maintaining the experience of cutting hair then you would go back, then you would acquire more business skills, develop your business skills, then, tell me about Waterloo. Here you are in Chicago, what events would develop or transpire to cause you to leave Chicago and come to Waterloo.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, interesting. The natural came into vogue and Jackson 5 had the big natural so every body wanted one. People didn't want there hair cut, they wanted more hair. I looked around, this is five or six years later, decided that it's time now to maybe go somewhere else while there a lull in this business and my wife had, at that time I had gotten married.

INTERVIEWER: Okay

INTERVIEWEE: My wife had a friend in Waterloo. I brought her here for the weekend, we got here Friday afternoon and I was going to go back Sunday morning but I like the place, it had a charm about it, it not the best looking place. I kind of like the people and the surroundings and so, and the opportunity of working a John Deere was another draw for us. SO I rented a house rented a shop, and went back and my mom say, 'Well boy did you go crazy, you took you first vacation-like, and you gonna leave" So she though it was kind of foolish on my par, but I saw something hear and it turned out to have been true. I'm very happy and I'm happy that we made the move.

INTERVIEWER: So, we have the Afro and the curl. Is that right?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, the Afro and then the curl

INTERVIEWER: Okay, we have the Afro to thank then, the Afro, or the natural hair you call it then. (Laugh)

INTERVIEWEE: The natural or the Afro, yes

INTERVIEWER: To thank for having you come to Waterloo. Also you said John Deere was an attraction, an important attraction for you

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, yes absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: What would you do at John Deere and how long would you work there?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, my wife got on she was a librarian, I got on, they kept turning me down. At that time the political situation and the economic situation was in a down turn

and John Deere was laying off. But, they had set up a shop that they wanted cleaned up, it was an experimental shop, and I heard that they were hiring individuals for that, it was just janitors, and I applied. I had to have that application in for about a year and the general knowledge around Waterloo was that is one member of a family worked at John Deere then they never hired anyone else, but I approached the individual about my application and he said “ Well yes there are some jobs, because janitorial, but you are over qualified for that Mr. Gray, I wouldn’t dare offer you that” and I was working out at Mart and Marietta in La Porte City and I was making 7.95 and I asked him how much did it pay and he said it was paying roughly about 10.50 so I told him I would take it for 10.50 then he repeated that I was overqualified I had my own business and they didn’t think that I would be happy to mop a floor. So asked them I asked them, check my DD-214, that’s my discharge paper stating that I had good conduct and it was in the best of view and that I was qualified because as a military soldier I had mopped a lot of floors had KP and that if I successfully completed that then I could work as a janitor for myself especially for that much more money. And he said, he just kind of shook his head, and sat back, so I told him “ I will sue you personally.” If I didn’t get this job or wasn’t considered for it and I would sue John Deere also. I was serious about that. And the next Monday I was called for the janitorial job and the rest is history.

INTERVIEWER: Now during your time there, it’s my understanding John Deere was known for laying off, for the lay-offs, and a lay-off would hit, correct?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes that correct.

INTERVIEWER: And this would be the point in which you would to the barber business, this would be the event that would lead to a permanent stay into the barber business.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes that correct. Three years later they laid off not only myself but ten thousand other people. They had roughly eighteen thousand people working here in Waterloo and ten thousand of them got laid off immediately after the President Regan took office thing took a real economic down turn. So, I looked around I decided to go back into barbing at that time. I volunteered for a lay-off. I took an early lay-off and about a year later then people began to get laid off in mass.

INTERVIEWER: Wow

INTERVIEWEE: By that time I had set up the barbershop knowing that these people were going to need haircuts and they were going to be out and the stores fronts and the business opportunity would dwindle if I waited. That why I got out early, set it, it became successful right off the bat. As I cut one individuals hair then they would tell people about it, or someone would ask about how their hair looked ant ask who did it. I also to stimulate interest had the storefront on Fourth St. I would put out building material I covered all the windows with paper and they would ask, “What’s going to be in there? What’s going in there?” And I’d say well you going to have to wait till I open the doors. And so rumors were flying all around the neighborhood. “Well, it’s going to be a jewelry store, maybe it’s going to be a little photo shop, or and then some would say a

barbershop” so they would stop and ask, “Well what’s going to be here.” Because Waterlooians curious about there neighborhood anyway and so I just let the rumors fly and that peeped the interest of most the people in the neighborhood. So when I opened the doors of course, the people that said barbershop were eager to prove that point, you know so free advertisement more or less and I think that another reason why it kind of took off real fast. We worked hard at it and that kind of kept it going.

INTERVIEWER: Here you coming to Waterloo, you open a barbershop, there’s already barbershops that were existing, for example Peps barbershop.

INTERVIEWEE: And Fraiser

INTERVIEWER: And Fraiser’s. So here you are you some in setting up your shop. What do you think about your competitors? You know, Pep, did you ever confide into him for any advice? What about Fraiser, did you ever confide in him or ask him advice, did you ever work with him or anything like that?

INTERVIEWEE: Well I had, gone to Mr. Fraiser prior to my going to John Deere and he said he wasn’t interested in hiring anyone.

INTERVIEWER: Okay

INTERVIEWEE: Well, with Pep, after I got laid off I went to him, I asked about employment working with him and he had a saxophone and he would just play on the saxophone he wouldn’t say very much, especially after he found out I was a barber. In fact I went back a couple of times and he just played there and he looked and he didn’t day to much and I kind of had the idea that maybe I should just really go ahead and get my own shop right away. That was the motivating factor. In fact I told him if I don’t work I here I’ll work somewhere else

INTERVIEWER: and you did

INTERVIEWEE: and I did I opened up down the street

INTERVIEWER: What was the address? Because I remember going to that shop

INTERVIEWEE: 1611 east Fourth Street

INTERVIEWER: 1611 east Fourth Street, I remember next to the church right?

INTERVIEWEE: It was in the gas station old BP oil company building it was office portion and we did quite a bit of business because of the gas station and we added to the gas station and they did quite a bit of business because of the barbershop, So it was a hand wash a hand type of thing

INTERVIEWER: That’s right, that’s right. Okay so you’re at this location how long?

INTERVIEWEE: From '83-'93

INTERVIEWER: Okay, and then you would expand! I know because you would be there for one time, then you would relocate, then you would expand so you had obviously a lot of success. Where were you located when you began to get a handle on the market as far as the clientele?

INTERVIEWEE: Well my daughter, went to beauty school, barber school first, and then beauty school and she was coming out and so I saw a need to expand, I needed more room and I bought the location at 211 Linn, that's Linn and Sumner St., Expanded it put in parking, there was no parking there was dirt there in that facility, revamped the building and just improved it. My daughter now operates the beauty shop side and I operated the barbershop side.

INTERVIEWER: This is good. So would you be her inspiration. Here she is, she going into the same line of work. Would you teach her anything would you inspire her? Did you nurture her?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes! Well I refuse to let her have the free periods in high school. She had a couple of free periods and basically all they going to do is boys are going to throw spit balls at you and girls are going to sit there and file there nails. And I went to the administrator and asked that, could she go to a barber school during these two periods of time and have credit for it and they said yes if I paid for it. So, of course I paid for her to do her senior year, those two credits in barber school. I knew that she wanted to become a beautician, but I wanted her to learn barbering also first step and at this point she's one of the most qualified individuals in not only in Iowa but perhaps in the Midwest. She grew up in the barbershop. Literally, in the barber chair stuffed with pillows and so she's got a natural talent for hair. She can cut short hair. She understands long hair. She can shave. She can sharpen razors. Few barbers can actually a sharpen razor the old fashion razors so she knows the business from top to bottom she's very, very good.

INTERVIEWER: So not only were you teaching her, inspiring her, molding, and shaping her to become a great beautician-barber you also worked with other youths in the community who have gone on and started their own businesses, learning from you, studying underneath you. Tell the about the gentlemen... tell me about two people that you've studied or mentored in the industry.

INTERVIEWEE: Well, Trent is one he's got his own barbershop. Bob he came by for...He worked in the shop a couple of weeks he wanted to kind of learn a little bit more. And then there were barbers in Cedar Rapids that came down I would tutor them a week or two.

INTERVIEWER: Okay

INTERVIEWEE: There's...who else is there? There are a number of people... Chris Dickens he was a barber that worked there. He was in a program, a school program and he wanted to.... I encouraged him to go into barbering and I hired him. There are a number of individual that have worked in the barbershop over the course of these years.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me more about Trent. I met him very interesting guy I remember when he was in the shop working with you. Now he's on his own independently. What was is like working with him? What type of guy? How would you describe his character, attitude, and his work ethic?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, very bubbly. Very funny. Trent is a very comical but yet a serious young man. He's very dedicated to what he is doing. Very nice person.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a little bit about Eric Thompson. He's working with you currently. He's one of your barbers working for you, working with you.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, Eric has been with me about eight years now. He's the manager of the barbershop. At this point I'm doing less work and I'm looking to retire and so he's kind of taking the lions share of responsibilities in the shop at this time and also he just kind of looks after things

INTERVIEWER: Okay you teaching him the business side of it. Make sure he learns the business side of it. This is good. This is good. Obviously he is having a lot of success there, working with you generating a lot of business. In fact I know you guys generate business or you have always generated business across the state. People have come.

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes. Well I also want to talk about another young man. Roderick Higgins, he's currently working with us also. He just started working with us a few months ago, but his business is taking off. He's doing a great job and as a result he gaining a lot of customers. We've always attracted people from around the state. From Sioux City, we've had people come in, from Cedar Rapids quite a few of those individuals. In fact I had a shop there and tried to encourage barbers to go and work there and I maintained it for about a year and a half but no one was really interested, from here leaving going there, so I eventually closed it. We had people from Minneapolis; many of the Waterlooian that spread out to these neighborhoods or different localities always come back. Cedar Falls, you know, we have all those people. So, yes, were not short on customers.

INTERVIEWER: I know! (laugh) because I've heard of people in Des Moines who would come...

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, Des Moines also.

INTERVIEWER: they would come for a special occasion if they had to get a perfect haircut they would make that trip for Des Moines, they would make it from Davenport. I had friend who went to Saint Ambrose who would come to get that perfect hair cut.

INTERVIEWEE: Well, thank you. We try hard. We don't know if it's perfect but were not lacking on trying and that one of the things that I think people realize, that we put our all into it, you know, we give them their moneys worth.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a little bit about some of... you got some of the community leaders that come into your shop. Who are some of the social leaders, excuse me, political leaders, educators from the community who come and visit.

INTERVIEWEE: Basically, at one time or another all of the individual in Waterloo, have been through. I really don like to mention names because if you leave someone out of course you can hurt feelings. But...

INTERVIEWER: Okay I respect that. (laugh)

INTERVIEWEE: I will throw out Walter Reid he just left he was a prominent customer. His wife brought all the kids, each one that was born she'd just bring them to the shop and so we've cut that families hair. Mr. Porter, in fact I just visited him, I go to his house now to cut his hair. He was such a support of the shop he would advertise things for us and we would support the radio from the inception. So I'm very fond of Mr. Porter and hope that he can recover and be back with us in the community. There are a number of individuals

INTERVIEWER: Okay, You mentioned Walter Reid. Great guy, I've been to the barbershop with him at the same time. Real good guy in fact he is one of many people who are on your wall of fame. You know you have this wall here with these photographs, newspaper clippings of people in the community who are doing things. What inspired you to create the wall and what does the wall mean to you?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, people in the community really didn't have an outlet, they would accomplish many things and so I started posting little things from the paper and it kind of grew out of that now I've got a wall full of things and I'm encouraged to take it down and change it from time to time but sometimes I don't do that as often as some people would like. Yes, I try to have the current points of interest up there especially about personality I like personalities and there are a number of things on that board I've noticed you looking at several times.

INTERVIEWER: Along with the wall you've got... The wall is a good centerpiece. I like the Wall. I think it's a good idea. Let's talk a little bit about an article, and article in *The Courier* titled *African American Perspectives*. They previewed Eric Thompson, one of your barbers...

INTERVIEWEE: yes

INTERVIEWER: He made front page. A real nice shot of him cutting another gentleman's hair and the dialogue, the article is really focused on some of the dialogue

that takes place in the barbershop. We've known that the barbershop, especially in the African American community, it's kind of a hub or center for conversation and dialogue, in expressing ones ideas, while you waiting for your haircut. Tell me about some of your opinions, why do you think that is, why do you think that the barbershop is a setting were people can express themselves.

INTERVIEWEE: Well it's a natural gathering especially for the black community. It's one place that they can come and meet and discuss current issues, the problems, it's a place that they can relax and so that's one of the reasons why it's a hub in a sense, rather than just a tavern. You know people they discuss all type of things and friend meet up, or associated that they wouldn't see in other setting they can see there in the black barber shop. That one of the reasons why I wanted a larger shop, also because the one on fourth street was small. But at the current location its large enough that an individual can watch T.V. and not be disturbed or another group can talk and several people can sit there or there's a section were an individual can read magazines and the paper. It's kind of an all-in-all for the black the community and plus get there hair cut at the same time. People naturally gravitate to a black barbershop it's not only a black barbershops are hubs but all barbershops are hubs. It's American traditions and America seems to love their barber shops. And Waterloo is no exception.

INTERVIEWER: What would you say would be the key to your success? Why does you barbershop stand out from the others and competitors.

INTERVIEWEE: WE are sincere, we work hard, we really try to listen and to cater to people we try to give them their moneys worth. It's a relaxed atmosphere. In today's world of course we know that there are bad elements in every community but I try to minimize those types of things in my shop. Everyone is invited, but I try to minimize rough talking or cursing, or anything of that sort so that people can relax. We have church people we have people from professional individuals so everyone feel free there. I try to discourage people from hanging around it's not always possible

END SIDE A

START SIDE B

INTERVIEWER: Were going to transition into another set of questions here... that ... forgive me Joyce! (laugh)Were going to transition into another set of questions here. There's some important issues I wanted to discuss with you but I didn't quite tie them into the discussion as I wanted to as I had planned to. How have you perceived yourself as and African American in Waterloo or in the Cedar Valley?

INTERVIEWEE: You need to explain that a little bit more

INTERVIEWER: How does Walter Gray perceive himself, your identity? When you're among the community how do you separate yourself from others in the way of your identity, a label, how you are structured, how you present yourself whether it be a business man or just a community... citizen of the community?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I try to be a first, good neighbor. Me and my family and as a business person I try to be an honest individual. Socially were Jehovah's Witnesses, my family and I, so we to live up to bible standards that's our base and so we try to promote integrity, honesty and we encourage that with some of the young people that come into the shop. Many young people lack direction and to the extent we can, for those who seem to listen we become surrogate parents or role models to those individuals and we've been quite successful in influencing young people we've had individual come back from all parts of the country. When ever they come they want to stop in at the shop just to rub elbows again or touch bases. I definitely see the good influence that we've had on a lot of people.

INTERVIEWER: How has intergenerational communication helped you to keep your African American identity? Intergenerational communication, with your daughter or grandchildren to keep them focuses or in tune with their African American identity

INTERVIEWEE: Well we don't have to work at it.

INTERVIEWER: Okay

INTERVIEWEE: It's a family tradition. WE adhere to certain principles, we work for common good. The shop not only is a hub for the community it's a hub for our family. So our life kind of evolves around that with my daughter being in business with me so the family get together we go in a we clean, we do mainly the cleanin and we'll do the outside work, the grandkids join in and so it's kind of a family project. It's on going

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Is there any conscious effort on your part or your wife's part to make sure that your grandchildren or any of your children in general are aware of their cultural heritage or background? Is there any conscious effort on your part to do anything like that?

INTERVIEWEE: No

INTERVIEWER: There isn't? Okay alright it's tied in with the family, the family arrangement is the key.

INTERVIEWEE: It's all tied in with the family. Were very concerned about being neutral they realize who they are but what we want them to be is good citizens and apart of the community be it black or white and we encourage them to be the very best that they can be, and happily. They are very good kids by in large.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, alright, what communication channels, such as the radio TV internet that is used to connect the African American community.

INTERVIEWEE: Early on it was KBBG, You know it was prominent in the shop. Right down today, but then there's the new program radio station that on 101 some of the young ones like listening to that also so there's a natural flow or natural connection in that. We don't limit ourselves to that, I like some of the Cedar Rapids talk shows. There's people that play toe old rock-in –roll out of Cedar Rapids so we tune into that. We don't limit ourselves to any particular thing.

INTERVIEWER: What would you say is the difference between KBBG and KBOL, your right, the 101-POINT-1, I think?

INTERVIEWEE: Point, yeah

INTERVIEWER: yeah, I think, but yeah what would you say is the difference between those two, because they're both African American stations, African American owned and operated.

INTERVIEWEE: yes

INTERVIEWER: What would be the difference?

INTERVIEWEE: Well KBBG is traditional. It has the church, it carried the church and so does 101 at this point, it carries new for the neighborhood, for the black community, both. But the 101 caters more to young people, I would imagine, because they play more updated young-type songs. But both are important, and both are play and I think listened to by young people.

INTERVIEWER: what resources would you say within the Waterloo, in particular the east side, the African American community, what resources exist or are there that reinforce or maintain the African American identity. You mentioned the radio station, definitely I would say, would you agree?

INTERVIEWEE: yeah, the radio station, Jessie Cosby center the various clubs, there are a number of thing I cant think of any more off hand.

INTERVIEWER: No that fine, your doing fine... you mentioned the Jessie Cosby center, Why the Jessie Cosby center, what does the Jessie Cosby center offer? I've never actually been in there. (laugh)

INTERVIEWEE: We'll neither have I, but the Jessie Cosby center have a long history, I fact on the wall that you referred to, there is a article about the co-founder this individual from a trucking company, it was originally called the African Palace, I believe, correct me if I'm wrong on that. It's history stemmed from that. So that was one little article I put

on there. The brothers were from a trucking company, I wish I could remember their names but they were great supporters of not only Waterloo but the east side, and this individual was a pioneer in supporting the black side, east side of town, and for that I would think that the Jessie Cosby center have been very supportive. It sponsored program in fact, my son took a computer program some eight or nine years ago from there and it was a summer program about eight courses and as of today he's in computer programming and he's making a living, he's quite successful just from that humble beginning from the Jessie Cosby center. They sponsor other program but I'm not that knowledgeable about their total program.

INTERVIEWER: Well, thank you very much I appreciate you making the time to come sit and share your life story with me, the business, all your success because you are a community leader. Definitely, I appreciate it thanks a lot

INTERVIEWEE: Well thank you, and thanks for having me

INTERVIEWER: It's been a pleasure

INTERVIEWEE: Yes

END SOUND ON SIDE B