

Ernest Van Arsdale Interview

Interviewer: So this is going to be an interview with Ernest Van Arsdale April 6, 2000 at his home at 427 Albany in Waterloo, Iowa. And with that let me start out by asking you where you were born and tell me a little bit about you family.

Interviewee: I was born in Haydock Iowa October 27, 1925. I had four brothers and five sisters, ten of us. My dad worked in the coal mines, started when he was six. My mother was out of Tennessee and she was, all of them were coal miners, her dad she had nothing but sisters, no uncles. My dad claim he had nobody no brothers no sister just was raised by his grandmother, and she was Indian.

Interviewer: What tribe?

Interviewee: Satow, See I was born in 25 my dad was born in 1877 so he was an old man when I was born. I remember he used to say some things, and that the good thing about it I can remember some of the things he talked about. Living in the hills of Kentucky he had all of them what you would call hillbilly. He played the violin, the mandolin Jews harp and just about anything he could whistle he could play on the harmonica. He was sort of a, a man that, he loved music and he told some really tales, he used to say, "I used to swim the Cumberland River." That how he talked, "I had a woman on the other side of the Cumberland River and I used to swim that river." We went out there my wife, my sister in law, and my sister who just passed. We went out there in that part of Kentucky, I seen the Cumberland River its about as wide as from here to Cedar Falls! So that's why he says he used to tell some tall tales. We were raised up from 1929 that's when the depression started and we were raised in the heart of the depression. Now my dad was working at Rays and we were living at 102 Ash, it's right were the Martin Luther King Highway has got 55ft of dirt over that area. I can remember, just close my eyes and remember the old house looked, the house when we moved I remember I was just a kid 3 or 4 but my dad was trying to dig the basement out because there wasn't hardly any basement it was just a house that set on level ground but he was going to have a basement so he could put some wood or coal cause in them days you didn't have a furnace you just has a potbelly stove with a big cooking range and it was digging. People in them days they didn't say a lot in front of their kids, anything especially sex, I mean you didn't know nothing. They were with my oldest brother, which my older brother is twenty years older than me. Danny was born in 1905 and I was born in 1925. But he had dig up some bones in the basement, they were human bones. Now you know in them days, if we would have told the kids. Well I was too young but they would have been scared to stay in that house. Where we stayed was a swamp.

Interviewer: Lets see, Ash and Mobile would it be on the corner of?

Interviewee: No Mobile is further west of Ash, there's mobile there's Ash, there Beach, Right down there is Lyndon and right here is the outskirts of land and were I'm at is four acres of land.

Interviewer: Yes, So it was Ash going down towards or closer to the railroad tracks.

Interviewee: It was toward at the time the Great Western Tracks. It was a grade. This grade was built and it run through a swamp down there were the Eleanor Central is and all along were East High Stadium is, there was swamp land. So the railroad built all of that up with dirt, borders, rocks, anything they could to bring the Great Western Tracks through but that swamp was still there. Where we lived at 102 Ash was swampy, in fact a fellow by the name of Melvin Wright a black that used to live in Buckston but he had come here earlier and he was a farmer, a black farmer but he worked a Coal Renden Works. So Coal Renden Works would give him animals that was supposed to have been slaughtered. Maybe the baby cow didn't have but one leg or something, or a goats something wrong with them, but he would take them and try to put them on pasture and if they died he'd thrown them in that swamp and you could smell that swamp, That why I guess didn't nobody lived down in that area. But down in that area as I remember the people that live across, there was old lady Koudoff she was Russian, old lady Pauloff she was Russian. old lady Schuler she was German, and Frank Avey was Mexican he lived on that block, We lived on one side, cause we was black. But I remember them people.

Interviewer: What did they do for a living. Avey, Koudoff, Schuler, what work did they do?

Interviewee: Well most of the people, even the Russian, they worked at the Eleanor Central. Now at that time a lot of people don't realize but the Red Packing company didn't hire people 'til 1920 and the Red Packing didn't start packing till 1896 but didn't hire black people 'til 1920 so my dad was fortunate to get a job there in 1927 and I remember he used to talk about, "I didn't make but 17 dollars this week" but he's got ten mouths to feed, that why I said it was tough. We had out door toilets; we had a well pump you know.

Interviewer: Electricity?

Interviewee: No electric. What is electric? My dad tried to blow out the first electric bulb he ever seen. See down in Buckston they didn't have electric. It was coal miner, they didn't have a house. Everything was company owned the store, the whole town. We didn't know nothing about electric until we moved here

I Interviewer: Was Buckston still a good place to live.

Interviewee: As far as my folks and people that live there in Iowa. There were more, there was over 5,00 black people in Buckston. Now, I wasn't born in Buckston I was born in Haydock that five miles from Buckston. But all of my family was. My dad had

come here in 1905. They always say people were treated pretty fair. Of course not perfect. They had their own Black Cemetery, their own black ball team

Interviewer: Very good I heard.

Interviewee: People went to church together, went to school together, the YMCA was, See when you are living under somebody else's rules all the coal company wanted people to do was to get along and to work and get that coal out of the ground so it wasn't much discrimination like it was in Waterloo, and Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, Davenport and these other places, then you must remember these people had just started coming to Buckston right after the Civil War, 1870. These were ex-slaves, they were people from the baulking countries, like what we have here Bosnians, Italian, a few Jewish people, a lot of Swedish, Swedish people, Germans, most of the white people come out of the mines of Pennsylvania, Virginia, hard coal they called it Anchorites

Interviewer: Good coal

Interviewee: Good coal yeah, and they knew the coalmines, and they lived together but Buckston wasn't really a long place say 25 or 30 years it didn't last to long

Interviewer: A lot of very important people came out of Buckston, George Woodson, Minnie London, there were the however short lived it was.

Interviewee: Milton Fields

Interviewer: Milton Fields, It produced some well-educated, highly motivated people.

Interviewee: Martis, Scott Martis. Yes they did; they had lawyers, they had doctors. The first name you mentioned?

Interviewer: George Woodson

Interviewee: Yeah my dad used to talk about him all the time. He come out of Virginia, ex-slave. We had people right here in Waterloo. I remember old man London and Mrs. London, that was Milton Field's wife mother and dad, he was a lawyer. You heard of Ferguson Fields up here Doc Ferguson course he come out of Texas, he come her I think around 29 or 30. It was a Betty Paige; I always think about this man, her dad was Clarence Hackett, nobody much talk about him but the man was smart. Back in the '30's he fixed peoples shoes. He had the shoes sewing machines, he had the whacha-ma-callies, thing you put shoes. I remember going there as a kid and he knew all about machinery. What I really remember about him was that he had a popcorn stand and he used to roast his own peanuts and you could smell them peanuts on a hot summer day. "Mr. Hackett is roasting peanuts!" You know, and thing was so simple in them days. Right on the end of Beach Street, Douglas and Beach we had a place called the Lawndale Playground. It was where black people would put on minstrel shows not white people and black people would paint their faces black. Two guys especially I remember was Bud

Howard...Robert Howard and Babe Ussman...William Ussman and they would call themselves Midnight and Daybreak. Now it wasn't like it is now, even before Amos and Andy. Them seats would be filled with white people. They would come from all over Waterloo, West side and everywhere. You had it being where black and white were all out here this neighborhood was, of course we were all on this side of the tracks

Interviewer: The north end?

Interviewee: Yes, I remember when it wasn't but one black family of Sumner Street. I remember when Doc Ferguson, as I said I was a kid, but I remember a lot. When Doc Ferguson moved up on Beach, I remember they burned a cross in his yard. We had a preacher on Beach were Vanetta Bird lives today, his name was Reverend Lewis, he was a ex-slave, an old preacher. His son was Walter Lewis who got to be a lawyer now all over the country. I remember when Lawyer Fields bought a house right up on Sumner right across from Grant School, on Sumner, he had a lot of trouble there. All of Beach Street was strictly white. Further down Beach Street between Albany and Douglas there was McKinley Cook and Old Man Sheldon who was. There was two brothers Paul and Saul

Interviewer: Sheldon?

Interviewee: Yeah. Paul Sheldon had a tavern down there where Cliff Shepard club used to be, sold nothing but Grain Belt Beer.

Interviewer: (laugh) Good Beer

Interviewee: But you had to be sitting on the stool all night. I shouldn't put that in there.(Laugh) It was good for a laxative, grain belt beer.

Interviewer: It was grainy stuff.

Interviewee: yes, and he had a beer tavern and he didn't have but one arm. His daughter was four tints, and his wife, both of them looked like they were white but they were black, and the daughter was hoar tints, she was real, real light. She married August Anderson and they had a son by the name of Dickey and Gussy Jr., Gussy still living but I put stuff in there like that just to try and let people.

Interviewer: Cliff Smith had a sister, Vivian, did you ever, she was a bit, she would have been a lot older than you. Was she around when you came?

Interviewee: He had a sister, but this one wasn't named Vivian, I'm trying to think.

Interviewer: She went to what then would have been call 'the old teachers college'

Interviewee: U-N-I

Interviewer: U-N-I

Interviewee: I'm trying to think of her name. The reason why I remember her is because her and another woman went downtown to eat and they went down in Jake Ensues's basement where black people could eat sitting down it was on 5th Street it was about two or three doors down from Pittsies, but you had to go in through the alley and go in the kitchen and Jake would give you a plate and you would stand in line and this includes the kids from East Jr. High School, which is now the police station on 6th Street and the black kids from East High. See we had East High and East Jr. High. East Jr. High was built before East High

Interviewer: Actually East Jr. High was the old East High.

Interviewee: Before they, yeah it was pretty well run down. But she went down there to eat, I'll get back to what I was saying, Cliff come in there he'd seen her or something and he beat her up them steps out of there and said, "don't you never come in here!" Cliff and Hubert, they both try to help people in their way, Cliff had quite a bit of history here in Waterloo he come out of Kentucky. Both of them they did things, of course Cliff was into selling beer. Excuse me, and now you talking about soul food

Interviewer: I've got a few pounds of Cliffs on my belt-line here.

Interviewee: Cliff had some cooks down there that was something else. He had a guy he called him Pri-lined it, his name was Percy McDaniel and he didn't. I remember we used to go down there and eat chitterlings but you want to hurry up and eat you chitterlings before it got to the bottom of the pot. When you got to that bottom seen rocks, corn straws everything. "Hey man get my chitterlings off the top."
"Well it's about gone I got to go to the bottom." (laugh)
But John Web he was a good cook, John was a good cook

Interviewer: You mentioned another name, I want to back up, Ussman, do you remember another woman by the name of Nanny Ussman

Interviewee: What's the first name?

Interviewer: They called her Nanny, that all I can say, she was born in Mississippi as a slave as a young child and then came up and live here to the mid '30's when she passed away. She was an older woman when she came up

Interviewee: I remember Blanche.

Interviewer: That might have been her name and Nanny was what they sort of called her.

Interviewee: Well, let me tell you something about her I don't think Blanche Ussman was old enough to be an ex-slave.

Interviewer: Okay

Interviewee: She lived on the corner of Hawley and Beach, right across from, what is that now, I get kind of short when...

Interviewer: Would you like to take a break and...

Interviewee: No, get to talk I got to keep on. She was what you would call a fortuneteller. This was back in the early 30's I was 7 or 8 years old, my brother who was 3 years older than me called him salty and a kid by the name of Leo Johnson. She used to get us to freeze ice-cream for her right across from Martin Luther King what is has something to do with it community college or what ever. Excuse me. She had people to come up there. White people, you'd see cars from Chicago, St. Paul, Minnesota, I named the state; Michigan, man where's Michigan its up here somewhere, man I ain't never been out of Iowa ; Buckston, Cedar Rapids, and Waterloo is as far as I've been. You know. She told people, mostly white women, old. "You gotta help me find, get my husband back." She had a great big crystal ball I used to go and look in the room and see all this stuff, you know drapes and stuff and she would wear different kinds of outfits with velvets something like a turban around her head. Mrs. Ussman, I don't know if its some kind of power she had or what, see people in them days believed in a lot of superstition stuff, voodoo and you take a person like I told you Don, when I was down at the Courier talking about the guy they called Trout, and she was sort of, people believed in a lot of this old stuff that a lot of it come out of Africa. She would tell these people. " Now you take... so-n-so." Obviously I'm guessing what she said but I'm trying to use an expanse of what I've read and what I think. " Now you take so-n-so and you put up under you mattress or your pillow and you get your husband back." People they believed her and they paid her good money and she had that place fixed up nice, wonderful furniture we'd go through there and look. " Now you kids go on down there and fix the ice-cream, don't be looking around." But she would pay us maybe 10 cents apiece, that was good money back in the '30's. Why you could go to show for a nickel, a buffalo nickel, and a bag of popcorn. Now the popcorn cost more than the show.

Interviewer: Was there anyone who could cure, who could heal, lay hands on, give you sort of a tea or something because there was a lot of people a lot of Germans in the area that I grew up, you had skin problems, shingles, arthritis, and you'd go to them and they could either rub you or put some little bit of sav on you and cure you I mean things that the doctor couldn't do. Was there anybody in the black community who could do that?

Interviewee: Your talking about my dad! This, what do you call this, big masalin out here in Riverside Cemetery, you seen the word Bickley?

Interviewer: yeah

Interviewee: Old man Bickley used to come to my dad's house. "George?" Yeah doctor Bickley have you got my medicine? Yeah I got I gotta go upstairs and get it out of the

Attic. He had what we called a Crocker sack or a gunny sack he used to go out into the woods and get different kinds of roots he had a wild weed he called bone sap Indian root, Muslim, all that kind of stuff he had roots he would dig up he learned from his grandmother. She taught him all that stuff. I remember women used to come to the house. "Uh Mr. Van Arsdale, my daughter is having trouble with her period" so he would fix what they call ginger tea, he would make tea out of ginger, out of sage, bone set and all kinds of stuff. If you got a bad you could go down or reach up in the flume of the stove and get soot then go in the basement and go in the corner and get a whole lot of spider webs, then mix and put that spider webs and soot over that burn. I remember I had this cut right here, fell on a piece of glass and he said, "Go out on the back porch over the door and get that jawbone." It was from a dog, well he broke that jawbone took the stick then took mar and put it over the cut. So as I got older, when you get older you think, my dad went out there and got that mar out that jawbone from the dog that we had found along the Great Western Tracks when we went picking up coal. "Boy get that dog skull and bring it here" he took it home, took the hammer and cracked it put it over the door. Now suppose that dog had rabies or some other disease, he put it on my cut but it healed up. But the worst thing, I'm just going to tell you about what he did to me. I was pretty good at playing sandlot football, because I didn't go no further than grad. School really it what I learned or what I know or little bitty things that I do know in learned at grad school from an old teacher named Marguerite Naggel and she looked just like Janet Reno! But Janet Reno was a little bit better looking, but they was both tall and she was full blood German. I hurt my leg playing football, I almost had a touchdown at grad school. If your ducking the guys after you and you ducking the sand babies that's where Big Sun got so tough, that where he started practice. I come home had this big knot right there. "Lets see your leg boy, you in there Eddie?" he called him Eddie we called him Salty. "Yall go out there to Melvin Wrights building get a grass pile of cow manure. Go in the attic get a gunny sack and take a shovel." So we went out got us a pile of cow manure with bugs [make fly noise(laugh)] all in it. Got a gunnysack, my leg wasn't no bigger than that. Put that manure all over my leg, took a gunny sack and tied it all up with bail entwine. "Pappa I don't have to go to school." "You going to school" so I went to school in the fall of the year, I never will forget the year, the manure began to percolate; bubbling then start smelling the girl in front of me "what's that smell?" The one in back of me "Ernie Van Arsdale he got something on his leg." Mrs. Naggel comes back. "What is that smell?"

"Just something my dad put on my leg to make it well." All the kids looking, this is a Grad school, 1937, '36. "What is that Ernest?" "Cow..." "What'd you say?" "Cow poop." "You get up take your books and go in the closet." But it got well. All right, that was about 1936 or 37, in 1952 I asked doctor Nash when he started practicing down there on the corner of 5th and Sycamore. Marsh Place building; which they are now remodeling, I said doctor Nash I got hurt when I was a kid and my dad had my brother and I to go out in the country and get some cow manure he wrapped that around my leg with a gunny sack and some twine. He said, "yeah, you ever heard of Tara Mason" I said no he said, "Well let me tell you something, your dad knew what he was doing. Tara in Latin means hurt and Tara Mason is a drug and that's in that cow manure when cow boys are riding these big bulls bucking horses, hurt there leg break an arm or something they get cow manure and put on there. Where'd your dad learn that from?" I said he must

have learned it from his grandmother I don't know but it healed the bump went down. I always thought that he had some kind of, but his was herbs.

Interviewer: Right, as opposed to that hands on.

Interviewee: Now I don't know what old lady, we called old lady Ussman, Mrs. Ussman. Now her husband, Old Man Ussman was the Indian, hair way down here. He used to ride a black horse down through the alley of Albany all the way from... he worked at the Eleanor Central, he'd come up to the Eleanor Central in this jet black horse no hoard or nothing, no saddle and that black hair would be come up through there just flying and that black would be straight up. "Old man Ussman must be late for his dinner." (laugh)

Interviewer: Keep talking, where did he come from?

Interviewee: He come out of Mississippi

Interviewer: Oh, he did come out of Mississippi too, Lets get back to Haydock, we got a little bit side tracked, Haydock we got a little bit side tracked.

Interviewee: Well I get the talking and I tell you I can't remember it so I better hurry up and say it.

Interviewer: Why did your family live in Haydock as opposed to Buckston?

Interviewee: Now remember this, coal was in different parts in the area. Buckston, the camps were named by number Rex 5, Rex... I used to hear Lewis Birkens. "We used to go down in old Buckston down in old Rick Swave"

Interviewer : Was a vein underneath the ground.

Interviewee: Yes, Yeah, so they found after, see they had mined coal way back down in that area not only Buckston there was other places Persian, Consul, Heightman around Oscar Luscen in that area coal fields. There's one name I can't pronounce

Interviewer: Begins with an "M" mucha...

Interviewee: matcha.... Matche-something. But they started way back. Well after the coal played out, or the mines, either the coal play out or the mines get flooded they cant deal with water in the mines, it's going to affect everything the electric, which they did have electric for the mines and for some of the store but not the streets of the peoples homes. So they moved to Buckston...ah... Haydock, which that didn't last to long. It take a lot of people to come her from Heightman, Consul, Levita, Buckston and Haydock was were most of them come from. This is the way I look at it the reason why I say Waterloo and Cedar Rapids had a lot of prejudice, most of your people that came to Waterloo black came to break a strike and the majority of them come out of Holmes county, Mississippi which is Durant all around Mississippi. Some from other place Water Valley, Mississippi

where the Eleanor Central run through. Well them people come up here they didn't know, they were treated similar to the way they were treated in Mississippi, and the people knew that here, the white people knew that. "Well they can't got to our church, they can't go in our restaurants, or our beer taverns. They even had a certain place in that cemetery where black people were buried; they weren't buried all over the place.

Interviewer: Which cemetery was this?

Interviewee: Out there by the old Cedar River park.

Interviewer: Umm yes.

Interviewee: It was a certain... way down there on the end. Right in one place. They had places in town where you could eat. I remember Morris, your couldn't even go in there to make a phone call. "No, No, get out of here." I always think of Hickies. Hickies was on 4th Street up by the Eleanor Central. I forget what street it was after you change, well, we had a black woman that fried chicken there her name was Lavelle Cook, Gary Cooks mother who was a preacher and we had a radio announcer that announced out here on the old twenty her cocks and he used to always get her own on the radio and say "Come to Hickies and eat Lavelle's famous chicken!" We couldn't go in Hickies, but it was a white guy that lived up the street named Glenn Head, he had a place on 4th Street called Super Chef, before Linburg got in there and Head he didn't, I don't know if he was mad at Hickie or what, but on Thursday he would get a bunch of us including your truly, not too many and he'd give each of us five dollars to go in there on a Thursday and occupy a booth, one person to a booth just sit there and the waitress would come and the wouldn't say "You want a glass of water?" or nothing they would just... so you sitting there you looking at them now if you say something if you say "I need a glass of water, when you gone serve me?" Your disturbing the quiet peace so Hickie would call the police then they would come and they would stare, now here come the pupil mostly John Deere from the west side. Come to eat LaVelle's famous chicken that Herm Cocktails advertised never did eat, I wish I wanted some. (Laugh)

Interviewer: When was this? Give me a year.

Interviewee: This was in the '50's I'd say...I don't want to be wrong because hey, I'm on television. Somebody looking, "I'm going to sue that guy because it wasn't that year." But it was in the '50's

Interviewer: That's good enough

Interviewee: And I ain't gone be exactly right so you get that straight.

Interviewer: And the man that got you to do it was?

Interviewee: Glenn Head. He was a white.

Interviewer: He was a white guy

Interviewee: Had a son that rode around in a wheel chair and he live up on Albany

Interviewer: What was the first place downtown that you remember that allowed blacks to come and eat or... how about this... well, come and eat lets start there.

Interviewee: Didn't none of them allow you to eat, you took it upon yourself

Interviewer: How many served you, who was the first to serve you?

Interviewee: Jake Ents, where we had to eat in a basement, where you go with your plate and go to the kitchen. On a Friday if you had fish if they bought the fish through the door back to the kitchen " Hey don't throw that out, bring that fish back over here." They 'd cut it off and put it on your plate. You had to be careful of your mashed potatoes because people who smoke would put the cigarettes out in them. " Ah, got me another cigarette(cough)" just move it aside and keep on eating because he couldn't cook

Interviewer: When did he let you eat upstairs?

Interviewee: Never!

Interviewer: How about theatres

Interviewee: Well we had the State on Fourth Street, we had the Palace on Sycamore, we had the Strand on Fourth Street, We had the Paramount on Fourth Street, We had Iowa on Commercial on the West Side, later on they built the Orpheus. Now believe it or not the one that gave us the hardest was the State right across from Woodward, here's blacks on, here Woodward the state would be where the oscar drove us. Billy was Jewish and my cousin Napoleon Robinson, black of course and another black fellow by the name of Clay. They worked as janitors cleaning up doing whatever Billy told them to do. She would direct us to go up in the balcony. "You were you go you go up in the balcony" Hey the balcony had the best seats and you could throw down there on the folks down there. "Who's throwin' that popcorn down there" You know. The State Theatre. The Strand wasn't no balcony that I knew of I mean not the Strand the Palace. The Paramount was beautiful, they tried to send us up stairs but it was so big you had two was to go. The shows were all right. Once you got in the show people forgot about segregation. They watching the show. I went to the show when it was 'no talk' movies 1928 Cedar Rapids the guy down there with the piano trying to keep up with every thing. The screen about that big and they moving real fast you know but I remember that I remember the show in 1928!

Interviewer: Lets get the sequence right, you were

(END OF SIDE)

(START OF SOUND ON SIDE) born in Haydock; did you move to live in Cedar Rapids at all?

Interviewee: yeah, but see my dad didn't have no house in Cedar Rapids. We stayed in Cedar Rapids with my older sister. Her name was Laura Belle Simmons. She married a guy named Sam Simmons and she had a little old house cute little old house by the river of course. Could you imagine everybody in that little house? I remember the first time in Cedar Rapids I seen a River. I said, "I see a River! I see a River!" And my oldest brother would pick me up and let me look at the River. First time I was scared of that train especially a train would switch them engines, and I remember them big old box cars and stuff like that. But no, we lived there I don't know for sure, maybe a year.

Interviewer: And then you came to Waterloo?

Interviewee: We came here in '28

Interviewer: '28?

Interviewee: '27 or '28

Interviewer: Got you.

Interviewee: but my dad was working on the hard road, building highways. A guy that, named Jess Harris, he went to Iowa him and a guy that Benjamin boys Wendell Benjamin and James Benjamin they went to Iowa.

Interviewer: Football players.

Interviewee: Wendell was I don't know James he wasn't to good.

Interviewer: Wendell was a good ball player.

Interviewee: Jess Harris was a track star at East High him and a guy named W.C. Anderson we called him "Boonie" he ran track. Edgar Penn then later on a guy by the name of Willie Pew, Edgar Penn, Big Sonny Flowers, all of these guys were stars in their own rights at East High.

Interviewer: In the 20's or in the 30's?

Interviewee: In the 20's. Big Sun played for Pat dad George Dean. Big guy right there. Big Sun wouldn't have been the star if it wasn't for George Dean. Whenever he got the ball George was this wide, hands twice as big as mine. See I get the talking and you got to bring me back.

Interviewer: Well, lets stop there for a minute because I find that quite interesting. East High had Blacks playing football,

Interviewee: yes

Interviewer: Track?

Interviewee: yes

Interviewer: basketball?

Interviewee: Now hold the phone,

Interviewer: okay, that where we want to go

Interviewee: They weren't too much on basketball.

Interviewer: why not?

Interviewee: and no swimming or wrestling at all

Interviewer: that's contact.

Interviewee: let me tell you something before I forget. This man right here my wife's dad, he told me a lot of stuff before he died. He said, Saully Taylor, used to call him Dicksy, he was a boxer used to box with

Interviewer: Pinky George?

Interviewee: Yeah Pinky George, but I'm trying to think of the guys name. He was a foreman at Rays over the sheet pill, Hardall, they called him Hardall, we used to go out there and watch him wrestle. But anyways, Charlie Taylor could go in the wrestling room at East High and start wrestling the lightest weight in the street clothes, beat everybody on the team up to the heavyweights but they wouldn't let him wrestle.

Interviewer: and the reason?

Interviewee: He's black

Interviewer: and why could blacks play football but not wrestle?

Interviewee: Well they said we had a smell. Said when we sweated we had a smell that was over bearing. (Laughs) this is what they say, see my son wrestled but Gabrielle wouldn't take him down to Iowa and he went down to Des Moines twice and won once... well he really won twice, he wrestled a kid by the name of Bill Tate Jr. and they went into two over times, they had three referees Mike had the green wrapped around his leg. The guy that was the coach come out of Waverly he worked with Bill Tate Sr. at John Deere. Mike had won down there the year before. So they went down into two overtime

Bill Tate Jr. and Mike this is down on his arm he come back, the two referees on the outside say, "Green one." What's that guys name? I said I'd never forget that guys name because I don't like him to this day.

Interviewer: We'll not mention his name.

Interviewee: No, I wont mention his name because he might hear it. It don't make me no difference! But anyway he said, "Mike" this is what he said when he got back in the huddle, "Mike you won it last year" Mike said, " He a point or two down" He said that Bill needs this, so he gave it to Bill Tate. That why I said he won twice, then he went to Iowa state and he took national.

Interviewer: So track stars, football players, when did East High allow them to start wrestling, play basketball, or swim? Do you remember when all sports were open to blacks?

Interviewee: I never know to this day if they ever had any swimming. I was one of the fastest swimmers in this... but I wasn't at school, I was at Red Packing Company. They started letting them Wrestle when a kid named Paul Stenson, Rev. Stenson that helped start up this church on Mobile, he got killed. I ain't going to go into details. Paul Stenson wrestled a kid name Dan Gable, beat him twice, Gable changed weights. Paul Stenson beat everything around here and there was another kid they called Doogie McDonald another black kid these kids were great but one of the greatest wrestlers that I think, black, was Ussman, Jim Ussman, got a brother around her named Emmitt. Jim Ussman was a football player, he was wrestler he was heavyweight, he beat everybody; good in track he was good at it. Everything that he went out for he was good but they didn't recognize things. Another kid that wrestled that I thought was good was Timmy Clinghammer. Wendell Love and Wayne Love, Wayne Love didn't know his own strength, Johnny Scott, Melvina Scott's son these were great wrestlers around her but I seen them get cheated so bad in different parts around here because my wife and I would carry these kids all over the states. We bought a brand new station wagon Oldsmobile just to carry these kids then we had a kid around there named, he's dead now, Aaron Roberts had a motor home, well we drove all the way down to Oklahoma we went all over with these little kids, with theses little nasty and stinking kids. "Tell him to stop at McDonalds." "I don't want to stop at McDonalds I want Chinese food!" and we spending our money, that's what we did with our two boys, we carried them all over. But you asked me a question, when did it start? They had some football players at east High that you wouldn't believe that they were black that you don't ever read about. You read about Jerry Moses, You read about big Sun Flowers, You never read about James Brooks, I never hear about James Brooks or people like that. We had a kid around here name Ezell Jefferson, tough but he did all his stuff in El Dora but he was a great football player.

Interviewer: Lets back up to education for a moment you said you went to gram school.

Interviewee: Yes I did

Interviewer: How difficult was it for kids to go on beyond Gram to East Jr. or East High you know did kids stop at grade school, grammar school, did most of them go on to Jr. High School so what number percentage went on to high school and what did you do if you didn't go on?

Interviewee: Well it wasn't much that you do if you didn't go to school. There was a place on the River the called the Waterloo Waste Paper Company. It was run by two Jewish fellow one named Tomah and one named Sherman and they would work your butt off. Me and a guy named Earl Gadson, most of us guys got out of school because we were too poor, I had two strikes against me. In the first place I don't know what happened when I was in 3rd grade I was a leader in the class, I would get up and talk I knew all of my arithmetic and all that kind of stuff but then something hit me, I don't know if after my mother died when I was six years old I got real shy, I got so shy I couldn't get up in front of the class and recite, I was nervous and that sucked me it still bothers me today and I'm 74 years old so what difference does it make? It had a lot to do with getting up in front of the class and making a report I was scared of people, as I get older it's still with me but not like it used to be. Then another reason I didn't go to school is because I was too poor. I'd say, well my dad; after my mother died, he started going with a woman that didn't give a darn about us she had two kids of her own, I'm not going to call her name and all of his packing house money which literally went to her. My dad wouldn't buy nothing out in this neighborhood like George Harpers store was on the corner of Douglas and Mobile. George Harper come out of Durant, Mississippi; he followed the black people up here and he opened up a store where the meat was rotten we used to go in that store and get, "don't you go in that store boy!" go in there and get candy bite down, worms! Spiders in your, when you eat your ice cream cone, you get down there and there's spider webs down there, you'd see spiders down in there. Sometime you *crunch noise* "Hmm that didn't taste right." You know you done ate a spider, and his kids, and the web too! (Laugh) He used to have in his basement after he closed the store, he had a machine were he use to get all the candy from Holland Candy Company, there used to be a lot of candy companies, and he would get all of his candy that done got old and he would melt it down and have little bars made out of them and sell it to us for a penny or 2 cents a piece. You'd go to school "man this got worms in it" carry that candy during school I want some of that candy, no that's got worms get that other one over there. It would be white on top the chocolate would be white, just take and wipe the chocolate and wonder if he didn't die it you know. But they did all that kind of stuff, My sister, the one that they had a white rose cleaner on Mobile, she married a guy named Joe Williams, when we first come here, she got some meat, she wasn't gone walk all the way out there, they had a store all the way out there on Ames street by Rays which Adam is on 9th, she carried that back down there said. "this meat is spoiled and I want my money back!" but George Harper argued her down an call the police, they put her in jail. Our Belle Simmons they put her in Jail. Sometime I like to go out there on Courier you know this thing when you look through, you cant hardly see, even with the magnifying glass you cant hardly see, you cant see and I see a lot of stuff that I remember, I see the headlines. One thing that I must tell you, during the 30's it was hard to get oil during the winter. We didn't have oil heat or gas heat, everything was by coal or wood, mostly coal. People would steal off the railroad, the Eleanor Central with the fence, of course they would tear

that fence and make a hole. I have seen preachers up there stealing coal. My brothers they would build what they call find a ground have a ground like Old mad Garrison and let them put a stove in there because sometime the train would come through at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. (*Whisper*) "Here it come" you'd hear the old train, *impersonate train noise*, coming into town you know and they would go and throw that coal off of that grade that I was telling you about that they built, where the Lawndale playground is. Starting from right there on Lyndon right where I'm pointing at to the Mobile Vine you'd see big old lumps of coal coming off of there. Well me and my brother we little, so we had us a little wagon so we'd go out there and some of them lumps was this big but then guy was men. Guys still living named Boot Mowhead, all man, if somebody would have taken him training her would have beat Joe Lewis in the ring he was a built powerful, he didn't know his own strength. Another guy, Frank Nun and my brother Bill, my one brother, oldest brother Danny, he wouldn't go up he'd wait till some body else got it while they was up there throwing he'd be stealing their coal (laugh) taking it to his girlfriend or my brother George. George didn't steal coal he wouldn't bring it home he would sell it.

Interviewer: Now you said you had a garage?

Interviewee: Just like uh...

Interviewer: a garage with coal in it

Interviewee: Somebody had a garage that didn't have no car or no horses in it, they would let them have it and put a stove in there and maybe some bunks make your own bunks, out of old mattresses something to lay on just somewhere they could lay with a kerosene lamp. You could always pick up an Eleanor Central lantern but you had the red globe so you had to buy you a globe that you could make a light out of.

Interviewer: So people were living in the garages then, that was home?

Interviewee: They were staying there too get coals, but you could buy a ton of coal for five dollars

Interviewer: If you had five dollars.

Interviewee: but if the people had it, see in them days people had a lot of bootleggers, they had bootleggers all over the north end, they had houses of what they called prostitution and they would you know visit them houses, white men, I've seen them, see the women sitting in the windows they'd see me they'd close the shades but all up Mobile Street old Ladder Street. This house here where I'm at where you're sitting at now was called the Plantation Barbeque. It had a big sign down there, see this is four acres this whole block both guys are dead. In 1947-'48 cars were parked all up and down this street all out in here was cars parked mostly weekends, the sold barbeque I can so you the pit, it's still back here in the back. They sold barbeque, it was good barbeque but I couldn't get in here, these guys; should I be telling you this? I mean most of these people are dead

Interviewer: Don't mention any names.

Interviewee: I'll mention me, I tried to get in here but they had young black women they would go to places like Iowa, University of Iowa, they would go across the line, Minnesota different, these were young girl but you know who come to this house lawyers, I know what I'm talking about, I'm not telling you nothing that's not true. Lawyers, judges, doctors people with money, they were white but black men couldn't come here to go with these girls in this house.

Interviewer: It was run by two black men?

Interviewee: Yes but I'm not going to call their names.

Interviewer: There was always, as I understand it and from what I had been told,. There was always an element in Waterloo that was able to avoid or the laws to sell liquor or whatever else there was and the reason they were able to avoid the law is because the law often time was there taking part. There was a set of rules for majority people but there was another set of rules for the plantations or the barbeques and that's what made it so difficult for the black community particularly the black churches because they had to live side by side with two sets of rules.

Interviewee: The black churches tried some of them, I said some of them. Its like it is today with your crack-cocaine I aint going into too much of that but I'm going to say one thing back in the 30's and 40's we had a sheriff, I know this for sure because I was in these, I used to drink a lot, I aint drank in four year I used to go to bootlegging joints. At one time I tried bootlegging myself but I drank up all my stuff, I just wanted company I was living by myself and I just tried it but I'd give everything away. I'd get my money back that I'd paid for the stuff then I'd put everything on the table and say, "ya'll take over I'm gone" so I'd take off and leave all the whiskey there, but what I'm saying is we had a Sheriff in Waterloo that took what they called payoff and I know one woman that had a baby by him, she's still in Waterloo, both the daughter and the woman. I aint gone have people know.

Interviewer: But the law would go into place like the clubs where there were illegal slot machines and so they never went in that door...

Interviewee: "Alright, you can run this place, you understand but I don't want no white men...no women and no white women in here period!" Cause you know the after hours.

Interviewer: Because the after hours places were famous

Interviewee: yeah

Interviewer: Was Spider Curse and after hours place?

Interviewee: Spider Curse had a dance hall out were the John Deere new foundry is in fact you could walk right out of Spider Curse and right into Electric Park. But Spider he had ot a leg shot off in WWI and at one time he was a boxer but he was one that would let black people have a dance in his hall. Now this is something you probably don't know, black people weren't allowed to use electric park, the park and the dance hall but once a year I mean is a hole in Waterloo I mean the emancipation the 3rd of August when they would have barbeques and they would even have a dance just for black people. Now when a black band like Duke Ellington especially Lewis Armstrong was here a lot because he was not only a good musician, he was a showman. Yeah he showed his teeth and everything and they called hid Satchamo. Now when Satchamo, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Jimmy Lungfords any of them guys come here they could go to electric park but we couldn't go we'd have to look in the window you know if they'd leave the shades up so we could see you couldn't go in there to hear them, you couldn't go to dance, and you couldn't go to the bar. That happened all through the 30's.

Interviewer: Did people like some of those groups ever go over to Spider Curse to play?

Interviewee: Yeah, Ray Charles, my wife, when I started going with here see we've been married since 1960 but we went together almost about 3 years before we got married on account of her color.

Her folks did want me in the family and my folks. But I already had a brother and sister that went over the line my brother George married a white woman and my sister married Old Man Whitland head of the Waterloo coal company down by the railroad tracks Elmer Whitland. People raised all kinds of hell but it was my life and it still is, we've been together over 40 this is starting on our 41st year.

Interviewer: Ray Charles?

Interviewee: Ray Charles used to play the saxophone and he could play it. He would play the saxophone and of course the piano just a young kid when he used to come here out to Spider Curse. Spider Curse would give people breaks, black people but black people had the fun at Spider Curse and believe me we had fun but when you got through with the dance, where was you gone eat. The first place that let use eat was the Mandarin, a Chinese place down there and they let us eat there. Bishops was on the corner of Sycamore and 5th Street. Yeah I remember that green and black drops of granite all around it. I remember as kid I'd be, nose running had to get up on my toes and watch them people eating all that food and women would say "Get over here" and I'd say, "Well where are we going to eat?" We'd be coming from the show but we couldn't go in there.

Interviewer: Spider Curse you could go and dance you could listen to groups black entertainers but the big bands wouldn't go over there like Duke Ellington, they would go over there to Spider Curse.

Interviewee: Yes! They played. Duke Ellington played, Duke Ellington sat... I had a beautiful sister my sister younger than me, about two years Dotty. A woman named Mrs. Qualls a black woman she had a place out there, Chicken Shack, they called it she used to fry some chicken bite down it grease running all down. But Duke Ellington sat with me and Dotty all night. Papa said, "You watch your sister boy. You watch her and you stay with her, you hear." And Duke Ellington said " I'm going to come back to this town and I'm going to open up a restaurant. I'm going to open it up and I'm going to let you run it." He told my sister Dotty that but he never did. Wait now let me get it right, you might be right. Maybe he played at the Electric Park but he come to Mrs. Quall to eat it was out by Spider Curse a little old shack but it was a chicken shack where you could get you pig feet, pig ears, tail and chitterlings and stuff greens and stuff.

Interviewer : I think it was Earl Garrison who told me that often times when Ellington or Cab Calloway would come through town they would play on a Saturday night at electric park but they couldn't stay in a hotel in town so they would stay in peoples homes and Sunday morning while they were wait for the train to come and pick them up to take them to Omaha or Denver or where ever they were going to go next, they would set up in a yard in the afternoon or morning waiting for the train and they would start playing and they would have sort of an informal jazz session.

Interviewee: I was raised with Earl Garrison we started Kindergarten in gram school om 1930 Earl is 11 day older than me. We were both born in October 1925. Mr. Garrison, his son Frank Garrison, Frank Garrison, Earl's brother the one that brought most of the bands here him and old man Garrison, he worked the Eleanor Central he come our of Water Valley, Mississippi. He is the one that put up the money and Frank was just a happy go lucky kind of guy, he could get along with everybody and Frank had a lot of bands come by here through his dad old man Garrison

Interviewer: Who he would act as an agent here.

Interviewee: I'm going to tell you something you won't believe. You know the guy on T.V. BB King he used to come stay with Old Man Garrison in the 30's and other 40's he would go to Rothmans store and get him a chunk of bologna " I need some bologna" BB King. Bologna and crackers but he played the guitar around you know see, I don't care how talented you were if you were a musician you had to stay in your own place. I'm not talking about just in Waterloo I'm talking about all over the country. You know who really got the black people out, like Chuck Berry, what the piano player *Tutti Frutti*

Interviewer: Oh... Little Richard

Interviewee: Little Richard all these big bands was Jewish people. They could see the hand writing on the walls, they knew it was coming. People like the woman that brought out the song You Ain't Nothing but A Hound Dog it was a black woman, Elvis took that and made millions! Big...see I told you my brain messes up...I cant think of the name but it was a (Phone rings) Excuse me for a minute

Interviewer: alright we'll turn that right off. Where live, we've talked about entertainment, we've talked a little bit about that athletics and sports, we've talked about school. Tell me a little bit about where your dad worked at Ralph and what you did as a young man when you were working, bring us up to let's say WWII

Interviewee: My dad worked all his years driving hogs. I think that's why he lived so long he lived to be 93. Driving hogs was a very filthy place, they had a place out at Ralph they called it the Hog Hotel where the farmers bring their hogs in and they at slats wasn't no windows you had to have air to ventilate the place. See people don't realize how much dirt and dust can accumulate when they come off a farm especially in the wintertime. Well, you can't wet them down because they would fall on the ice, the water would freeze. We had very bad conditions; working at Ralphs for black people my dad was the hog driver. They had what you called hog shacklers all black.

Interviewer: What did the hog driver do then what did the hog shackler do?

Interviewee: the hog driver drove the hog from the hog hotel to the place of slaughter. My dad would drive them to a guy then they had what they would call hog pinner's they would them into a pen, boom, dead end. They had an elevator that went up and had hooks like this you'd take a shackle a chain you put a hook around the hog one leg, hind leg, you'd run them hog in with them facing the wall and the hind parts facing you and you took, Ill try to show you. You brought them in a place like this you got your chains on a rail here what they call shackles, get a shackle, put that hook around that hind leg and put it on the thing and hold it and it would go up. Sometimes that hog would kick and fall off.

Interviewer: Hog still alive

Interviewee: Yeah, just got one chain on his hind leg, that's called hog shackling. Some guys could get as many as 35 hogs without missing, not to many of them. Now you got hogs in the 30's, (heavy sigh) had to get my wind again, that weighed as much as 500 pounds 600 pounds. I've seen hogs that way over 1000 pounds.

Interviewer: They weren't lean in those days

Interviewee: They raised them for their fat. How much they weight? Hogs... the Sows would come in where their... should I call it breast? Their breast would be wore to raw, nothing there it so fat. The farmer used what they called slopping the hogs in them days, what we throw in the garbage, food we didn't eat, or any kind of foul smelling, the hogs would eat anything find them with nails rocks anything. Now days they raise them for there leanness you know,

Interviewer: Now when you shackled a hog you not only had to be quick, you had to be incredibly...

BOTH: strong

Interviewee: the best hog shackler I ever seen was a guy by the name of Gomery, we called him Stream Line, he's got some kids that still live here. He wasn't no big man but he was strong and he had a record of about 35-40 hogs without missing them things that went up. He worked hard all his life. He's the one that started junking around here in the Black neighborhood, him and a guy named Charlie Green they started, had all his sons doing the same kind of work. All of them doing, well I don't know if they doing it now cause they up in age like I am but hog shackling, when the hogs went up a guy stood on a table named Johnny Mims, he was the best he started in 1921 he stuck them in the neck now them hogs is kicking and it's dangerous you had, I got a hog stick a knife in it you wanna see it.

Interviewer: Later on I'd like to see it yeah

Interviewee: Well anyways he's stood on this table now he's got to stick hogs on this side of the table and this side of the table and them hogs is kickin and some of them big sow's (pig groaning noise) they upside down, they in pain, they kicking they cant get away that chains on they leg it a wonder you couldn't hardly see from the steam from the blood. Blood on the floors that deep, that's where I started working I was dropping shackles, my job was dropping shackles, down to the deshacklers.

Interviewer: Once the hogs were off, you grabbed the shackle and sent it back down?

Interviewee: No the hogs was on their rail and the shackles had a hook and they would take wax and wax these rails and they would slide down to a guy that would drop them in a tub of hot water. I seen two guys drop dead on that job. That chain and a hook and they'd push down and pull this chain off the hogs hind legs and would drop them in the tub of hot water but all that strain all day and the foreman hollering "Get them hogs!" it was terrible "Higher, your running short of hogs!" You running 660 a hour on the rail upstairs but you got to drop about 700 hogs to keep that rail full and we had little old foreman riding Jack Farley, he wore most of the time an undershirt he had what I got now congested heart failure and he couldn't hardly breathe but he knew how to work people and all the way from where my dad worked form driving hogs, pinning hogs, sacking hogs, sticking hogs, dropping them, the tub was all black when you pull them hogs you had a hook where you had to pull them through this hot water.

Interviewer: Basically still all black men working here

Interviewee: all black, all right you got black on the tub. Then the hogs go to a scraper number 1 thank to just throw them all of just take the hair off of them, and they put chemicals in this tub it had something to do with help taking hair off the hogs but it was working on the me. We had guys that would come up with their nerves all shot we had something what you call rusolosus we called it Mauter fever. This is during the war I'm talking before 1942 43. I started in 1942. These guys, in the winter you could hardly see because of the steam accumulating, you know you could hardly see, it stink, you got blood, you got dirt from the hogs, you got manure from the hogs, and urine all this tub of water and all this had foam from the water from the dirt. Now a lot of people don't

realize but hogs got a lot of ticks on them, behind the ears. And they have it all over their bodies different kind's of insects, in the summer time it's pitiful. When these hogs come out of scrapper number 1 they go into scrapper number 2 now they come out on the conveyor. Now they got to be turned a certain way so the guy can cut the tendon in here we call it cutting cords with a short little knife and they cut these cords and they put what they call a gamble stick through it's hind legs and they be hanging upside down and that's how they went to the packing house where they open them and gut them and salt them. All down here after they come out of the scraper they went through the Rosin. Rosin is something like tar, it's real black and it come from trees and they cook it and the hog will go down there up to gambler stick he emerges with his head first, his head is down in the rosin and he'd moving along and when he comes out he's jet black and shiny but its tar but then its some water that kind of make it little so you could work with it guys would have a bucket of cold water, dip their hands in it and pull that Rosin off starting from their hind legs on down, till all the way off. Well it took the hair out by the roots if it worked right. Now you got black and white see because its bathe it hot especially in the summer because you got this thing cooking the tar and keeping it hot and it was terrible. That where you seen some pretty tough people

Interviewer: After the Rosin where did the hog go after that?

Interviewee: After the Rosin we had two guys on two great big blow torches the first job would burn up the top of the hog the worst part was around the neck, head; the head is still there you know and that where all the wrinkles were around his ears and they burned it see the hair was still there and you could smell it. All the hair didn't come off.

Interviewer: got you so they were still cleaning it off

Interviewee: Yeah, then they'd go upstairs to the, this is rabbit I'm talking about go up incline where a guy would put them on a rail then they'd go up, then the shaving rail you'd have guy that would have long knives and they would shave the hogs where the hair didn't come off it went around and they had what you called "bum-gut droppers" guys that cut the booty out you know what I mean and other parts of the hog

(END OF SAOUND ON TAPE)

TAPE #2

Ernest Van Arsdale

(SIDE A)

INTERVIEWEE: I started in 1942. In the winter you could hardly see because of all the steam accumulating from the steam. You could hardly see, it stink you know it smells. You know you got blood, you got dirt from the hogs, you got manure from the hogs, and

urine. All this tub of water and all it had foam on the water from the dirt. Now a lot of people don't realize it but hogs had a lot of ticks on them behind their ears and all over their bodies different kind of insects, the summertime was pitiful. When these hogs come out of scraper number 1 they go into scraper number 2. Now they come out on the conveyor, now they got to be turned a certain way so the guy can cut the tendons in here, they call it "cutting cords" with a little short knife and they'd cut these cords and they'd put what you call a gamble stick through the hogs hind legs and they'd be hanging upside down and that's how they went to the packing house you know where they gut them and open them and salt them. All down in here, then after they come out of the scraper they go through the rosin. Rosin is something like tar. It's real black and it come from trees and they cook it and the hogs would go down there; up to the gamble stick and he emerges his head first. His head is down in the rosin and he's moving along, and when he come out he's jet black it's shiny but its tar. Then there's some water that kind of makes it loose so you could work with it. Guys would have a buck of cold water they'd put their hands in a pull that rosin off, starting with their hind legs on down till all the way off. It took the hair off by the roots, if it worked right. Now you got black and white see because it's bad it hot, especially in the summer because they got this tar, this things working cooking it, keeping it hot and it was terrible. That's where you see some pretty tough people. There's some tough people working all the way back.

INTERVIEWER: After the rosin where did the hog go then?

INTERVIEWEE: After the rosin, you had two guys on torches, great big blow torches . They got one that would cook and burn up the top of the hogs. The worst part was around the neck, the head. The head is still there you know and that's where all the wrinkles were; around the ears and then they'd burn that and you could smell that hair burning. All the hair didn't come off.

INTERVIEWER: I got you. So they were still cleaning it off?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. And then they'd go up stairs to the, this is the rail I'm talking about, they'd go up incline where a guy would put them on the rail then they'd go up. Then the shaving rail, you'd have guys with them long knives and they would shave the hogs where the hair didn't come off and it went around and you had what they call "bum gut droppers" The guys would cut the booty out. You know what I mean and the other parts of the parts was female. And then thye would have guys with a knife, I got one of them in there too, who would open hogs and they would make a line all the way down the middle and then they would go down to the breast bone; which is hard some times they would have to have a machine to do that. Then they would do that, then they would have what you called "gut snatcher," which was a tough job; Oh god! They would wrap that bum gut around their arm and go in a grab right around the lung, the hog is open now it's got belly hooks to open it up, then they'd reach down in there and get that round lung and get the whole gut...

INTERVIEWER: and yank it out.

INTERVIEWEE: could you imagine a hog weighing 600 pounds, how much them guts must have weighed? It was two guys doing that hardly had any room. Why they would take them guts and put them in a pan and move them right along with the hog they had come out of. Then you got your inspectors.

INTERVIEWER: What's this type of knif?

INTERVIEWEE: This is a sticker knife. It's sharp on both ends, up here and here. This here is very important, you get this off of our boots we used to buy, and we'd get the leather strap and take it and put tape around it. You put this middle finger in there so when you stick the hole, a lot of guys just a break and their hand run up the blade. You got a razor sharp knife this here is needle sharp, suppose to be. And you stick that hog standing on the table, grab him by his flank, grab him by the flank and stick him in the neck and the blood just (*swoof*) blood all over your face. And all I had was Copenhagen, if I didn't have Copenhagen in my mouth I had blood and you got an apron on and this is when it was shackled. Now a lot of times a hog coming up, you got this knife, I was taught by the best Johnny Mills, the hog coming up kicking. Now you can't shut that chain off until he stops kicking, the foreman he's watching you. "Kick that hog!" Alright do you want you job, you got it. But you got this breast bone in there you hit that breast bone, your points gone. I've seen a guy, a hog kicked him and the knife stuck back here. He said he was drunk, New Years Eve 1943. He said, "Ernie, get that knife out of my back" so he shut the chain up. He couldn't get it because when the hog kicked him the knife went and stuck in his back and it was a heavy hog, he was bent all up like (*kick sound*) when he kicked him. So I said you better go down to first aid. Now this here was a white guy and he was good. Some white guys wanted to work around the black guys. Had a old guy named Jakes he'd go down there and shackle until the foreman yelled, "Get out of there Jakes!" I got that knife out. I said, "I'm going to get..." he said, "just don't worry about it" he said "If you go get them I'll get fired." And he finished sticking them with the blood running all down his back. This is a sticking knife. You could stick, I got so good I could use this knife to stick the little hogs or the big hogs, the light hogs or the heavy hogs, we called them heavy hogs but you had to be good with this. You had to have it sharp, you had to know how to sharpen that knife, you had to know how to make that point. The main thing is that you had to know how to grind it; how to make it. This is an ordinary butcher knife, they just cut it down ground it down and they put that on there and you put your finger in there. It made good money but it was very dangerous and you were always cough because there was hog dust in the air. They gave us mask to wear but you couldn't hardly use that mask. I got to spit my soot, my tobacco out. I got a mouth full of snuff. You know, "You got to stop spitting, you got to stop using snuff, you got to use that mask." I said, "Well." Some guys had fungus grow in their lungs with the Iowa City from hog dust.

INTERVIEWER: How far down the line were black men allowed to work?

INTERVIEWEE: Alright black men, you had the sheep kill, black and white for some reason. Hardall, he was the foreman, he used to box at Electric Park his real name it Leer. He has a brother, Kenny Leer and, all we know is Hardall, but his last name is Leer. And the sheep kill had black and white most of your jobs. Sheep gets stuck behind the ear; they didn't stick them in the neck like a hog. With a cow they would make a big slit, then they run their arm up in the cow and cut it's jugular in his neck. Sheep kill, beef kill that's where you had your best butchers like Homer Frank and Big Sun Flowers, Framers Wayland, Bill Boyd, Kenny Boyd, Kermit Boyd, Duckie Harris, them guys. Most of your butcher come out of Kansas for the beef kill packing house down there. The beef kill, the sheep kill, the hog kill, the tank each hide cellar, black; anywhere where it was dirty, foul smelling and dangerous, main thing number one; dangerous. I've seen hogs fall on a guy from way up. I seen a guy get caught up in a shackle. He went all the way up with his broken wrist and he was hollering but you could here him over the hogs. Johnny Mims, when they got Johnny Mims was a devil and he was half-crazy too. Because when I first started this job I said, " Mr. Mims, uh, I heard this job would run you crazy." He always had a mouth full of tobacco. He said, "well I wouldn't know about that, I was crazy before I started." It was nerve wrecking but I was the type of person that could stand all this. The blood didn't bother me. I've seen guys that, the blood is like jello and if you didn't keep that hole clean of shackles a hog would fall in there; it would keep building deeper and deeper. I've seen it so deep, guys would fall or try to be pulling the hog out of there and slide up under the blood because the floor went like that and you couldn't hardly walk to get back out of the blood, you know and the foreman be hollering, " Hey you covered..." I've been covered with blood that is looks like I've been in the bathtub. And the foreman, "did you hear what I said?" and you got to talk to him, "he..." and you got a mouth full... (Laughing). I don't know where my hog opening knife is, probably out in the garage somewhere.

INTERVIEWER: That's okay. Well I see its twelve o' clock.

INTERVIEWEE: Now I just started talking though.

INTERVIEWER: I'll tell you what, **(End of recording)**