RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRYSON C. ARMSTEAD, SR.

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Bryson C. Armstead, Sr. in Haddonfield, New Jersey on March 7th, 2013 with Shaun Illingworth and…

Katherine Tassini: Katherine Tassini.

Kenneth Cleary: Kenneth Cleary.

SI: Okay. Mr. Armstead, thank you very much for coming here today. To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

Bryson Armstead: I was born in Haddonfield, 12-21-23.

SI: Okay. Now can you tell me what your parents' names were?

BA: My father's name was James. My mother's name was (Sadie?).

SI: Okay. Now starting with your father's side of the family, can you tell me what you may know about the family background, where the family came from?

BA: My father came from a little town called Lee Hall, Virginia which does not exist at the present time; it is now a part of Newport News. I would like to add, regarding my father…

SI: Sure.

BA: I had tried to obtain some background information on my father's family. I grew up in an age where children were born and you didn't ask questions. After being in the service and going to school, I was a little curious about some things and I found out that my father's relatives in that area, Newport News, spelt their name A-R-M-I-S-T-E-A-D. My father spelt the name A-R-M-S-T-E-A-D. So I tried to get some information from the Department of Vital Statistics in Richmond, Virginia. They finally informed me there was no one by that name. I have wondered why he changed his name. While I was working in Philadelphia, I took a group of my students to one of the historical places in Philadelphia and the director there told my students, "Your teacher comes from a very historical family." We did a little research and there was a Armstead who acted as somewhat of a spy during the Revolutionary War. I was later able to find out a little bit more history about that particular individual. The puzzling thing to me as to why, again, repeating, I grew up in an age where you did not ask your parents as to why such… It's just a little tidbit?

SI: Do you know how old your father was when he left Virginia or how anything about that journey?

BA: No, you don't ask. You don't ask those things. Thank you, thank you.

KT: You're welcome.

SI: Do you have any ideas about... Sorry.

BA: [laughter]

KT: I put that there.

BA: Oh no.

KT: I hit the table.

BA: [laughter] We can't take you nowhere. [laughter]

KT: You can't take me anywhere, Bryson. [laughter]

BA: [laughter] Thank you.

KT: I knocked us both for a loop.

SI: Do you have any ideas on why your father came to settle in this area, how that came about?

BA: I really have no idea.

SI: Okay.

BA: I mean, but I can imagine like anything else, I mean, when you stop and think about it many, of course at that time they were using the term "colored people," left the South in order to come north for a better way of living and etc. Now I know that he did not come by himself. A brother came north along with him and they found work wherever they could.

SI: Now, what about your mother's side of the family? Do you know where they came from?

BA: My mother came from Raleigh, North Carolina and she was one of about five other siblings. She had one younger brother. All the others were young ladies. Very interesting, my mother did domestic right across the street, that brick house there, a family by the name of Stern. I don't know if you recall, they used to own the *Courier-Post* and etc. She worked for them for years. I can remember on so many occasions--of course, you know what I mean when I say domestic--

SI: Yes.

BA: coming up here, because in many instances food which was left over [you] get, bring home to the family. That family was very, very good to us. I think the name was Dave Stern. Later in life one of the sons became editor of a newspaper down in New Orleans. I think as far as I know now I think most of that family is sort of… But they were good. When I say "good," in the fact they were supplying, in many instances, those things which were essential, such as food, at that period of time.

SI: With your mother's journey to the North, again, do you have any information on that or was it just not brought up?

BA: Never brought up.

SI: Okay.

BA: Never brought up.

SI: Do you have any sense of how your parents met?

BA: I have no idea as to how they might have met. I'm the youngest of three girls and five boys.

KT: Oh wow.

BA: I only have one brother living, all of them, my siblings, are deceased. My brother, who lives in Charlotte, [North Carolina], is a business manager of one of the black schools, J.C. Smith University. You probably never heard of it because you're not familiar with Afro-American institutions of higher learning. He has two sons, two children. He has a boy and a girl. His boy went to MIT, in fact, he was working on Wall Street in 9-11. When that happened he left Wall Street. He now works in some sort of stock. He lives up on Martha's Vineyard Island, up in Mass. He has a daughter down in the Dallas section.

SI: Were all of your siblings born in Haddonfield or were the older ones born elsewhere?

BA: My oldest son was born...

SI: Your siblings.

BA: My oldest son, Bryson Jr., was born in Lawnside where I happen to live. No, what am I talking about? Where was I living then? It might have been in Camden, I guess. [laughter] See, this is what happens when you get past thirty-nine. You see, you fellas hadn't gotten there yet. My youngest son we adopted and my second wife, we buried both of our children, so let's move on.

SI: Okay. Where was your family living in Haddonfield when you were born?

BA: On Potter Street in Haddonfield. Do you know where Potter Street is?

KT: Of course I know where it is.

BA: My father then moved to Douglass Avenue in Haddonfield.

SI: Are your earliest memories of growing up on Potter Street or Douglass?

BA: I have memories of both.

SI: Okay. What do you remember about Potter Street? What was the neighborhood like?

BA: You know it would probably be difficult for you young fellas. There were outhouses. There were no bathrooms in those homes, many of them. As I think about that book which old Haddonfield photos which were supplied by an individual by the name of (Lonnie?) Johnson. I knew (Lonnie?). I knew his brothers. I knew his grandfather. In fact, (Lonnie?) was raised by his grandfather, Jerry Holmes, and Jerry was a friend of my fathers. On Potter Street, I guess there were about five or six homes. There was a Jenkins family. There was a (Sharpless?) family. Another gentleman, I think he lived by himself, by the name of Brown. In that area, which is called The Point, there was a barbershop which was run by a man by the name of (Vogues?). Then there was Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith's house was on part of Potter Street and the other part was facing Ellis Street, and Mr. Smith had a laundry business but his laundry business was in the area of what is called Batesville, which is part of Cherry Hill. Batesville was a section of Cherry Hill where people of color lived. Mr. Smith had a very thriving laundry business. In those days, there was a hospitals that bring their laundry there and he had quite a business. In fact, he has a grandson who is still living over in Philadelphia named Vernon Smith. In those days, individual like Mr. Smith was thought to be quite a gentleman. You got a business, had people working for him. There are some other things I could say about this period of time because on Ellis Street, there was a (Hundley?) family; there was the (Mann?) family. Those houses there went all the way down to Mount Pisgah Church which would be leading there to going in towards Batesville or, of course you guys don't know, where that bridge happens to be there. There was a liquor store there, which is one that's still there. During the wintertime and of course when the pond would freeze over, if in the event that you could get a pair of ice skates that some other domestic family might have given to you, you would call yourself thinking that you were ice skating, trying to be like the other folks. Most of us never got them. In fact, I never even had a bicycle till I was able to buy one for myself.

SI: These houses you describe, were they single family houses?

BA: Single.

SI: Okay.

BA: They were single family houses.

SI: I'm obviously not from around here. How far is it from Potter Street to Douglass?

BA: A rather short distance.

SI: Okay.

BA: Very short.

SI: Would that all be considered in the same neighborhood?

BA: Yes.

SI: Okay.

BA: Maybe you better turn it off for a second.

SI: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Do you want me to try to turn it back on?

BA: Yes. You can turn it back on.

SI: Okay, go ahead.

BA: Kathy you might have heard of a lady who was a very good friend of mine, Mrs. Blakely.

KT: Oh, of course.

BA: Snooks, as I always called her.

KT: [laughter]

BA: She's deceased, Snooks passed at about ninety-seven years of age. Snooks was a trailblazer. If you would see Snooks, a very mild individual, you would think she wouldn't harm anything. Snooks' husband, Eddie Blakely, years ago, for many of the gentlemen, a good job would be being a chauffeur. As a chauffeur you were also a butler. I could see Eddie, Mr. Blakely, and Wilson and Mr. Washington with their uniform on and their hat standing on Kings Highway waiting for Mrs. Jones, you know what I mean, and open the door for her. I mean I used to say, "Oh God, Man. Boy, if I grow up…" Snooks, Mrs. Blakely, went to Virginia State; that's another Afro-American college. I think it's down in Petersburg, Virginia. She married Eddie and then, of course, he was chauffeuring. There were some families in Haddonfield who had domestics and those domestics lived there. Snooks and her family lived there. The family they worked for, the family that Eddie drove for, a family by the name of Pope. I think they spelled it P-O-P-E, because I was in school with one of the girls named Jean, fickle-minded and so forth. Snooks and her husband had this son named (Junie?) Blakely. On Lincoln Avenue, and you fellas don't know, but Kathy knows, there was this school, which is still there. As you go down Lincoln Avenue there was the school for the Afro-Americans where I went. At that time, Snooks and her family, living with this family, this family lived on Washington Avenue, if I'm not mistaken.

KT: That's correct.

BA: Snooks would have to take her young son past a school to go down to the Afro-American school. Snooks says, I'll have to [use] my little French here, "John Brown, I'm not going to

tolerate this." [Editor's Note: Here and throughout, Mr. Armstead uses the term "John Brown" instead of cursing.] In a communication, this was recorded by the *Inquirer*. I don't know what year it was. Oh, this was in '02. Come on Bryson.

KT: They're in no rush, Bryson.

BA: Mind if I read this?

SI: Sure.

BA: "In 1937 her first child, William Jr., entered kindergarten. Blakely, who worked for a wealthy family, lived in the white section of Haddonfield. 'They wanted me to take him to the colored school,' she explained, perched on a couch. 'When I refused [to] go past the white school and get to the colored school, politely, firmly, she insisted to go to the Elizabeth Haddon School.' Appeals to Trenton failed." This is your capital. Appeals to Trenton now failed. So finally Snooks put a sit-in in the superintendent's office. She said, "I'm going to sit in his office." She sat there until they finally decided to let… Can you imagine? This is during my time. Little [William] got to walk past the "John Brown" school to go to another school. While I'm here on Snooks, I'm going to read you some other things.

SI: Sure.

BA: You young fellas do not know, but in many instances, particularly for individuals of color, if you would come from maybe the South and etc. here, they would say, "Your grades are…," or, "You've got to do" so forth and so on "in order to qualify." This happened to Snooks. [Reading a letter from Snooks] "While I was in Haddonfield, I was told that no colored students had passed examination required for admission to Glassboro State. [Editor's Note: Mr. Armstead is referring to Glassboro State College, which is the former name of Rowan University.] During my teen years, I thought I knew everything so I was determined to try. Several similar incidents taught me to stick it out with my neck and fight for whatever you want." She took the examination and passed. Snooks, her grades qualified her to be valedictorian at Haddonfield in the year 1926, but she was denied that. If anyone had ever met that lady… I had to say to myself, "How in the world could you just keep on fighting?" This Snooks, was the first Afro-American mail carrier in Haddonfield. She didn't stay at it. But Snooks is very funny, she says, "Those bags are too heavy to be carrying." But here you see, of an individual, who was qualified and yet the other folks fighting her tooth and nail. This is your lovely Haddonfield. I have experienced some of this myself. It has not always been the nice place that you would think. But I thought you might like to know that because Snooks was a very dear friend of mine.

SI: Well thank you for sharing that. Can I ask you a question about that?

BA: Yes.

SI: You said it was 1937 when her son got into the John Brown School?

BA: No.

SI: John Brown was the…

KT: Central School.

SI: Central School. Okay.

KT: It's a euphemism.

SI: Okay.

KT: He's using a euphemism.

SI: Alright, okay.

BA: [laughter]

SI: Sorry. [laughter]

KT: [laughter]

SI: You were about fourteen or fifteen then?

BA: Now her oldest son is younger than I happen to be.

SI: Okay. I was wondering, did that reverberate with you at the time? Was it sort of celebrated in the African-American community that this barrier had broken?

BA: No, because most of us never knew this. We never knew this. Snooks was the type of individual who would do her thing and no one would know about it. This information was revealed to us when she was about ninety years of age. Most of us were never aware. I mean, you have to realize, I grew up at what they call The Point, where all the Afro-American… Snooks worked up on Washington Avenue, this is the Caucasian section.

KT: I can interject. Bill Blakely volunteered for a while here in our library and was working at amassing a history of the African-American community here in Haddonfield, when he was living in Willingboro. He has moved, I believe, south.

BA: Yes.

KT: So I don't know that he has continued to pursue it. I wish he would. But he told me the story of how he ended up going to Central and he would be an interesting interview.

BA: He really would be.

KT: Of what was it like to be the only African-American, because he was a very brilliant man with some impressive degrees as an adult. But what his experience was would be also very worthwhile.

BA: It really would be. Actually, because we call him (Junie?).

KT: Oh, okay. I call him Bill. [laughter]

BA: Yeah, (Junie?) lived in a different world from where I lived? I really never go to know (Junie?).

KT: He was a lot younger. Not a lot, but he was younger.

BA: He was younger. I mean, I guess he's about 20 years or so younger, you see. The very fact that his growing up was over here and ours was here. How did I meet his mother? We went to the same church. Somehow or another she always called me baby. I always called her Snooks, you know? You don't call her Ms. Blakely, Snooks. I used to pick her up after her husband passed and bring her to church. [laughter] Turn it off.

[Tape Paused]

BA: [laughter] Go ahead, go ahead.

SI: When you were growing up in The Point, was your church and religion in general important to you? Was it a big part of your life or your family's life?

BA: It was it was. It was a very big part of [my life]. My father was a deacon in the church. None of you would know what it's like in an Afro-American church. My father, being a deacon, and you're sitting there in church and all those deacons had to do was just move their head and if you were back here and you know you were doing something wrong. Every adult was your parent. I don't care who the adult was. They look at you and say, "Hey boy." Church was important. You used to have what they call the BYPU or something, I don't know. That's when the young people would come out on Sunday evening and this gave us an opportunity to see the girls. [laughter]

KT: Which church did you attend?

BA: Mount Olive Baptist Church.

KT: Mount Olive Baptist.

BA: Yes, down at Lincoln and Douglass. Now, since you are talking about the church, I knew the lady who, so they say, was one of the ones who was responsible for starting the church. I don't know whether or not you had it recorded in the what you call … Mrs. Rodney?

KT: Oh, yes.

BA: Yes, I knew Mrs. Rodney, she had two daughters. One of them was Marie and I can't think of the other one. Marie and (Seeley?) or something like that, yes. Mrs. Rodney lived on Ellis Street. She was supposedly the one who was somewhat responsible for starting the church as a missionary and so forth. But the church is a very, very important part of my life. Church was something that you had to attend. Then, with your father being in the position of a deacon… You know what I mean when I say a deacon in the Baptist Church? I can remember these gentlemen, these deacons, sitting up there in the front. You don't see that now with the chain, with the watches, you know what I mean, which would open. Boy, I thought they were something else. I said, "Oh, man. Look at those guys." Collection come along and, man, they take out but a couple quarters in there, man. I must've thought that was… In the Afro-American church there was almost every Saturday they would have what they would refer to as a social. Selling dinners and things of that sort was necessary in order to raise money to maintain the church. I remember, one of the first… I don't remember this first minister's name. [His last name] was Gregory, but I remembered his wife Mrs. Gregory who lived there on Douglass Avenue. As a result of the marriage of Mrs. Gregory and Reverend Gregory, was one of the early ministers of the church, they had a son who I remember, who later had a funeral home on Kane Avenue in Camden. These are the days when Camden was really something. You would walk down Broadway, all the theaters, the Stanley's, the (Var?), (Hurleys?), Walt Whitman Hotel--Camden was something else. God, you just have no idea. I can remember the days when on Market Street in Philadelphia there was the Earle Theater. The big bands, the Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway would come there, but there was some law in Philadelphia that they could not play on the weekends or Sunday. Where would they come? They would come to Camden, to Walt Whitman Hotel. God, Camden was something else. Camden, with the New York Shipyard, Esterbrook Penn, RCA, Campbell Soup. When you worked at any of those places, I mean, you were something else. You had a job for life. It's so sad when I think of this is what has happened to Camden. They're taken these things. This was the backbone of the individuals who did not have the skill and etc. Because I'm getting off the track.

SI: How often would you go into Camden when you were growing up, when you were a teenager or a young man? Was it something that you did frequently?

BA: Not frequently, we didn't have the money. [laughter] You know, one day to get into Camden you had to depend on… Maybe I shouldn't, but I'm going to say it and you can have it for the records.

SI: Okay you can always strike it later.

BA: Back in those days there was gambling, but there was what they call the numbers, and a number of Afro-American men had these books. You want a number, 2-2-2? How much you can put on for ten cents for. This will be based on, I don't know, the horses or some kind of something. Based on how much you are given, maybe on your ten cents you would get a dollar back. Many individuals had what we called a book and would take these, particularly in barbershops, you know what I mean. Man sitting around and in many instances those individuals who wrote the numbers in books, I mean, they had vehicles. Why? They had to get around in order to see you and get your numbers, [and] of course, what the price of gas [was]

twenty-five cents. You could take two dollars and fill your John Brown tank up. The price of gas was a little or nothing. In some instances, I remember, because the father--you might've heard of this name, the Mann family.

KT: Oh sure.

BA: Alex Mann, who died.

KT: Yes, Alex just died a year or two ago.

BA: Yes. His father was carried a book. Alex had a book.

KT: [laughter]

BA: Alex and I were in school together. He went to junior high with me but he was way advanced in life. [laughter]

KT: [laughter]

BA: He didn't stay in junior high with Mr. Harper and Mrs. (Turnley?) too long. Now you don't know about Mr. Harper and Mrs. (Turnley?). They were a couple of teachers up at the school. He had a book and he had a car. He would get into Camden and so he might take me into Camden. My name is Bryson, but everybody called me Butch. Why they call me Butch, I don't know. I'm not that big bad. [laughter]

KT: [laughter]

BA: But, I can elaborate more on that, but it probably wouldn't be too good. [laughter] Let's move on.

KC: I have a question, if I could, about the shows you went to see in Camden, the Cab Calloway and the other African-American performers. When you went to see them, was the audiences mixed or were they mostly black or white?

BA: You know what, most of the time, because here now that I'm (____?), we would go over to the Earle Theater over in Philly, which is on Market Street. When they would come over to Camden, they would be there at the Walt Whitman Hotel, which is not in business anymore, which brings me to another spot. Many of them would come to Lawnside. In Lawnside there was the Hi-Hat, the Cotton Club, Jack Brady's Dreamland. What am I saying? I didn't have to go into Walt Whitman to see them because they would come to Lawnside, which is predominantly an Afro-American community. Now there's a strip of Lawnside on Evesham Avenue where barbecue pits, and here's Jack Brady's Dreamland and the Cotton Club across the street and may I say, at one time, that area was something else. There was [an] amusement park there in Lawnside. All of these fellows, Cab Calloway and you know, come out there to quench their thirst. Many of them would perform a little. I mean, they wouldn't have the whole band.

Because I'm a little teenager, I would sneak in there and bartender, "Hey boy, you can't come in here." But Lawnside was something else.

KC: I've heard that if black performers were performing to a mostly or exclusively black audience, the shows were different than they were if they were performing at the bigger venues where you had a more Caucasian audience.

BA: I wouldn't be surprised.

KC: Did you ever see that?

BA: I never noticed. Because later in life there was the Latin Casino there in Cherry Hill where they would perform, because what was happening they were beginning to shut down such activities in Philadelphia and in Camden, and the Latin Casino opened up in Cherry Hill right there on Route...

KT: 38.

BA: Yes, wherever it was.

KT: 38. It was near the Cherry Hill Mall area, on Route 38.

BA: Yes, in that area.

KT: It was a Supper Club.

BA: Yes, the Supper Club. Yes, it was. Those were the days.

KT: It's gone too.

BA: Yes.

SI: Can we go back to when you were younger when you are going to the Lincoln School? What was that school like? What was your experience there like?

BA: Okay. [laughter] When I was at Lincoln School there were three teachers. There was Mrs. (Dansberry?), who I just talked with her son last night. There was Mrs. Walker and there was Mr. Fortune. Mrs. (Dansberry?) taught the lower grades--when I say lower grades, first, second, third, maybe the fourth. Mrs. Walker taught the upper grades. Mr. Fortune, I think he was supposed to be the principle. I don't know what he taught. I think he just walked around, big potbelly.

KT: [laughter]

BA: My buddy would tell them he said he think he taught manual arts or something. But those were the days when it just so happened that the house that I spent most of my life, when we

moved from Potter Street to Douglass Avenue, that house that I lived in was a school and it was for individuals of color. It was school number four. I was not a student at that school. When I came along, the Lincoln school, which now happens to be apartments for senior citizens, my teacher Mrs. (Danberry?), we were next-door neighbors. I happen to be a southpaw and many a time my fingers were cracked.

KT: [laughter]

BA: I was retained, I know, several times in school. "You're not ready." In those days, in the Afro-American community, the teacher was more than a teacher. Their word was… If she says, "Sky is falling," sky is falling. I mean, you had to do what you are told to do and there was no ifs and buts about it. They were your teacher. They were your parents. They were everything. I guess there is something good about that because I guess I could've been a problem.

KT: [laughter] I can't believe you could be a problem.

BA: [laughter]

SI: How many students would be in the class? How many students would each teacher have to deal with?

BA: Now here Mrs. (Dansberry?), she has about four grades, so you can imagine. At that time, the population of Afro-Americans in Haddonfield was much larger, three or four times larger than it is, even more than that. I sometime, as I've gotten past thirty-nine, I think the others have worked it a way to move them out of here. When I say "move them out of here," move people of my color out of here. Because when I was living on Potter Street they were going to tear those houses down and build some for us. I'm still waiting. I'm still waiting. Then what comes along? In back of the house where I was living on Douglass Avenue, big area there, they were going to build some houses for us. What they do? Put up a ballpark. But they gone build some houses for us. What did they do on Potter Street? Put up a ballpark. What does that give you? Don't that give you an indication of what's happening? You know, it's very easy to talk, but when you see something like that happen during your lifetime maybe you shouldn't have (____?). But, I say to myself, "Dammit." You walk along Sunday, Quakers and Christianity. Where is your Christianity? From 11 to 1, I wonder what Bible you're reading. "Do unto others" and you build a ballpark. Tear down where I was living and you build another ballpark. I have seen the time. Across from the church that I attend there was a house on Lincoln Avenue. The mayor at that time was Jack Tarditi. I knew Jack quite well. I says, "Jack," the house was dilapidated and so forth and I says, "John Brown, can't you do something about that?" I said, "Now Jack," who was a member of the Baptist church up on Kings Highway, I said, "Jack, if that house was on Kings Highway it wouldn't have been there five John Brown minutes," and yet, two years or so [have gone by]. You can't tell me you could not have done something better. Yet when they talk about this and that Christianity. While we're talking about Christianity… Stop me now. Hit me on the head if I…

KT: [laughter]

BA: I served on the board of several organizations. One was called the Good Samaritan in Camden. The founder of that just passed away, Tillie Myers.

KT: Right.

BA: Tillie was such a great friend of mine. I wanted to get to that service at that Lutheran Church but I… Tillie started the Good Samaritan. I served on that chamber of that board, I guess, for about five or ten years. We were located 325 Market Street. Tillie started, I don't know, saw something in Camden or some needs and so forth and so on. She encouraged her husband. But to make a long story short, the organization's purpose was to give food and clothing to those who are less fortunate in Camden. We relied on donations from churches in Haddonfield, Cherry Hill. At Thanksgiving and Christmas we would give out two or three hundred turkeys with all the trimmings based on our source of income, which we could not guarantee. I'll never forget one meeting. I don't know whether it was in the Presbyterian Church in Haddonfield. It wasn't the Methodist Church. It had to be the Presbyterian Church. I was there. This is a meeting in the evening to thank the churches for the support they had given to us and so forth and so on, because we knew that basically much of our support came from the affluent Cherry Hill and so we had to try to butter them up, I don't know.

KT: [laughter]

BA: A letter had come into the organization about they needed a few funds in order to take care of a situation. I'll never forget this gentleman from one of the churches, I don't know, one of the affluent churches said something like this, "Oh, there those people asking for money again." How do you think I felt? May I just say, in many instances, there are many Caucasians that are not aware of the fact when they speak and they say "those people" they're referring to me. Referring to me and here I am with these around me attempting to help those individuals. They are human beings likewise. But those individuals do not think they are human--"those people." Then I felt as if I was 6'10" I would've run over and smacked [him]. I said that to say this. This is the reaction that one gets even today. I say to myself, "Where is your Christianity? What Bible are you reading?" Now this is a Christian group. We're here in the Presbyterian Church. I think sometimes I do more from a biblical and Christian standpoint than some of those around that table do in a whole damn year. But I have learned to sort of keep my mouth a little quiet. But they did finally agree give them, I guess, a little thousand dollars or so.

SI: This period you are talking about, was that when you were in your 40s or 50s, or before or later?

BA: Oh, this was after I had retired.

SI: Okay, so very recently.

BA: I retired in '86 and that's when I took office far as volunteering is concerned. I really just ran into Tillie and ran into Interfaith and a few other projects that I've been working on. But old-age has caught up with me now and I can't do very much.

SI: Let me pause for a second.

[Tape Paused]

SI: So the Lincoln school, was that up to the sixth grade?

BA: I think so because I remember my seventh and eighth grade I went up to the central school and I had spoken to about a couple of the teachers that I remember--Mr. Harper who taught history and Mrs. (Turnley?) who taught English. Do you remember seeing Mrs. (Turnley?)

KT: I don't, I think she was gone by the time I came. I did know Sid Harper through the Boy Scouts.

BA: Sid Harper.

KT: He's a character. [laugher]

BA: [laughter] I'm glad you said it. My last meeting of Mr. Harper, while I was volunteering down to the hospital he came in one day and because I guess I was doing little or nothing, I was there in front [laughter] and I said, "Hi Mr. Harper, how are you?" [laughter] Pardon me. Because he had some flowers and his wife was a patient in the hospital. I said, "How can I help you?" He finally recognized me and he said "Oh, Bryson. Yes." So I led him to the elevator and took his flowers so he could go up to see his wife. But those were some days. As one gets older, you could tell by his reaction… [laughter] "What the hell is he…" He doesn't have to say a word but, facial expressions and etc. reveals more than words. I guess he was about ready to… [laughter] The fact that I was there and looking halfway decent [laughter] and directing him and taking him up to his wife, I guess he went, "What in the hell is he [doing]."

KT: How was he as a teacher back when you were young? Did the African-American students…

BA: Experience, by my standards, if I look back, I don't think Sidney Harper was a very good teacher.

KT: For anybody.

BA: Maybe he was a good Boy Scout leader.

KT: You were in education yourself.

BA: Yes, and I don't think by my standards, shoot, if I had evaluated him I think he would've [lasted], no way baby cakes. I was always taught that Africa was [everywhere] a jungle. Don't get me on that education bit. You don't want to start there; we'll be here until 9 o'clock tonight.

SI: Well maybe you can tell us a little bit about what you found interesting, what you look back on, and do you think it was misinformation that you were being given, that sort of thing?

BA: Actually, we were given no information.

SI: Okay, right.

BA: There was little or no information given as to the part that individuals of color played as far as our country was concerned in junior high school or in high school, no information. All the information that I have been able to obtain was after leaving. The impression that we were individuals, were natives of… We're just… It's so sad. Because I say to myself as I've gotten past that age of thirty-nine, that when are we going to be able to learn and be able to do like the Egyptians and the mummies? We're still not able to do it and yet we think of ourselves being so intelligent. I go back and I said then these individuals must have had something upstairs. I think of the pyramids. How were they able to do that? Yet these native [people figured it out]. We still haven't figured out. Having an opportunity to visit some of these places in Africa, we have so much to learn here. I say we, I mean as a country and as a people. We have so much to learn. It's so sad that some of the great universities of years ago, where were they? They were in Africa. You cannot build a great university and have all of the things without those individuals having a little something upstairs, and yet, we have portrayed them over the years as not having, can only do manual stuff like that. When I was sort of in high school, "You don't take this course, that's for the other folks." Determining what I can do because of the color of my skin. Putting all of us in that same bag and etc., and yet who was it laid out Washington? It was a man of color. It's sad, but at my old age I know things are not going to change. I'm going to be gone in a couple of years.

KT: When you were in high school, the Memorial High School...

BA: Right down the street.

KT: Yeah, you went to the Memorial High School, because you are class of what '43?

BA: '43.

KT: So did you listen to them or did you fight to take the courses that you want or how are you prepared?

BA: Being brought up in the family like I was brought up, I'm the youngest.

KT: Right.

BA: My father, my mother had very limited [education]. I doubt if my mother finished eighth grade. There were many times, I know, that I would have to write letters to her sister in North Carolina. I'd write them for my mother. My father had more education. But what am I saying? I mean, I was brought up in an environment wherein you accept. Not like this time of day with PTA, the parents, you know what I mean and so forth and so on. There was no one to, should you say, fight for you like Snooks did for her children. Snooks was an exceptional person along that line. But you had most of the parents in that time would work and when they got home… I

don't even remember such a thing as a PTA when I was growing up. I don't even remember. I never heard of it. I never heard of say, open house for parents to come in; it didn't exist. It's possible that they had it, but not for us in a sense, because old bull Reynolds was the principle. Why did we call him bull? John Brown potbelly.

KT: [laughter]

SI: Was it always assumed that you would finish high school or did you ever come to a point where you had to consider leaving school at all?

BA: I grew up with the father saying, "You go to school boy." You went to school. Even though most of my friends dropped out, as I was telling Kathy, Alex dropped out, George dropped out. Some of the girls dropped out, Edna Cooper dropped out. If I'm not mistaken, I was the only one of color in my class. School was so different. Different from the standpoint that there was not that opportunity for boys and girls like myself to take part in activities, number one, because we were too John Brown poor. Some of us might have a little paper route, because years ago, boys, the big job was serving papers at Harry (Newmar's?) on Kings Highway. If you get a job serving papers you're a big shot man because you're going to be making money. Then I sort of got the idea that they were not interested in having you taking part. You had the glee club. You had this, "This is for you folks." I mean, we can go out there and play football and track. Because Lonnie Johnson was one of the better track [athletes], and football, we had Freddie Cooper, who probably you've never heard of.

KT: I have.

BA: You haven't?

KT: I have.

BA: Oh, called Cannonball, probably one of the greatest football players that ever finished Haddonfield High School. But do you think this town ever gave him any recognition? I guess he was an O.J. Simpson of that time. He was something else. When they say Freddie Cannonball Cooper he was… He did play for one of the professional teams in New York, the Giants or something for a couple of years or something. But at that time he was passed his peak. So school was you go and that's it. Sy (Motter?) who was the coach. I think Sy; he was a friend of the black athletes. He was one of the teachers there who taught something. I don't know. All of (Zanny?) Richardson, Lonnie Johnson, Cannonball Cooper and they all had a great deal of respect for Sy (Motter?). Why? Because Sy, he thought of them as human beings. I remember the Latin teacher, can't think of her John Brown name. They had Mr. (Dyqusen?), taught history. I never hear him speak of anything that my people did in history. Mr. McCoy, I think, tall something, I think he taught Spanish. Life in school for me wasn't very pleasant. Have you heard of Malcolm Wells?

KT: Sure.

BA: Fifty years, he was a classmate of mine. Parker Griffith was a classmate of mine.

KT: Oh, I love Parker Griffith.

BA: He died recently. He died about…

KT: About a year and a half ago.

BA: Yes. Malcolm Wells wrote me a letter I guess ten or fifteen years ago. Of course, after he left Haddonfield and so forth he went and moved up to New England states somewhere. Malcolm was always sort of quiet. I guess you would think he's… He said, "Butch, I don't know how you got through it." He says, "Anytime you're up this way, stop by and see me." Of course, he has since passed away. I said that to say this; that was the atmosphere.

SI: So they pretty much pressured you into taking a business course, as opposed to a college prep course?

BA: It's not a matter of pressure, I mean, here it is.

KT: This is what you're doing.

BA: This is what you're doing.

SI: This is what's available to you.

BA: Um hm.

SI: Did you have a sense, when you are in high school, of what type of job you might be able to get once you graduated?

BA: Who hears a little teeny Afro-American or colored boy? I mean, you don't think about that. All you're thinking about is pleasing your parents. This is a big thing--you're pleasing your parents. You have to go to school and that's it. No thinking about what you're going to be doing, that's for your parents are thinking about for you. It's not for us, because our role models are who? Mr. Blakely, the chauffeur standing on the corner, Campbell Soup, RCA, individuals who work there, they are our role models. We have no idea. They are the individuals that we have in mind because of… May I say some of us have in mind the number writers. Why? They are the ones who have the cars, you see. We have no friends whose families are doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs. We have none of that. When I speak of doctor… This is later in life, when I have been to college and degreed and my master's and so forth, run into them. But here at this stage…

SI: Did you know anybody who had been to one of the historically black colleges or anybody in The Point, including your teachers?

BA: You know, years ago, like Mrs. (Dansberry?) whose son I was talking to last night and who lives up in New York… This is an interesting story. You better wait till Kathy comes in she'll tell you [cause?] complete story. Years ago, individuals would have what they say, a normal

college education--two years. That is what Mrs. (Dansberry?) had when she started teaching. As I look back now, they thought that was good enough for us. "She don't need four. Two was good enough for'em." Yes, this is my book. [laughter]

SI: We're looking at the Haddon High year book for 1943.

BA: Yes. [To Kathy] I'm glad you came back. I was talking about Mrs. (Dansberry?). When she started out she had two years of what they call normal school. I think she came from Delaware, if I'm not mistaken. I had jot something down. She taught the lower grades. We had Mrs. Walker to the upper grades, Mr. Fortune, shop. Mrs. (Danberry?) came from the Delaware Normal School. Now, I believe it was in '48, or something along that line. Is that…

KT: '47.

BA: Was it '47? Is that when they closed it?

KT: Well, '47 is when the law was enacted that there could not be segregated schools.

BA: Okay. This is very interesting. I think Al Driscoll was the governor. He's from this area. One of my oldest brothers went to school with Al Driscoll. That didn't mean anything; he couldn't get a job even though Al was the governor. But to get back to Mrs. (Dansberry?), when they closed those schools, Mrs. Walker, who was one of the teachers, they provided and got a job for her in Camden. Mr. Fortune, I don't know what happened. Mrs. (Dansberry?) refused to go into Camden to work. I'm getting this from her son. The Board of Education paid her for a whole year. She didn't work here in Haddonfield. She refused to go into Camden. Well, they asked her what did she want to do. She said she wanted to be a reading teacher. They sent her down to Glassboro State to get certified as a reading teacher. After she got certified as a reading teacher, Mrs. (Dansberry?) taught here in Haddonfield the lower grades as a reading specialist. I don't know whether it tells you something, but it tells me something.

KC: What does it tell you?

BA: Now this was in the '40s,'47, '48. At that time, I was in the service fighting for Haddonfield in World War II, fighting the war to end all wars, and yet I have to come back here and fight another damn war. It's tough when you're supposed to be fighting the enemy. My enemy is here. While I'm talking about my enemy, I guess I better get it off my chest. There's a little place down there on the left-hand side called the Haddon House. It used to be a restaurant. It now has business offices in there. I waited tables in the Haddon House at one time, but you know what? I couldn't sit in the dining room and have a meal.

KC: When was this?

BA: When was this? This was in the '40s. I have seen the time that my wife could not go into a shop in Haddonfield and try on a dress. This is not something I've been told, I know. This is the lovely Haddonfield.

SI: Can you share with us some more examples of places where African-Americans were not welcome, where they were barred from?

BA: During that period in time, Afro-Americans were not really welcomed almost anywhere in Haddonfield. You could go in, I mean, but it's things like these that sort of… So it gets next to. People say, "Oh well, you're living in the past," and so forth and so on. But I think, some of these experiences have helped to make me look at life a little different and I look at people a little different. I believe this is one of the reasons why I attempt to volunteer as I do. Because my feeling is that which you do for someone else, in my case, they are doing something for me. You guys are going to get me all shook up here now.

KT: Can I go back and just ask one? Was B.F. Fowler around in your day?

BA: Yes. We used to have it there up on Kings Highway and it's a gift shop. It used to be a drugstore.

KT: Right.

BA: In fact, I was in school with another Fowler as a sort of real estate agent. He became a lawyer and he died. He was living down in Cape May or something. He died a couple of years ago, George Fowler and Alan (Pageant?), Jack (Pageant?).

KT: I heard from some other people that Fowler's was one store that was welcoming to African-Americans and that he was a real Baptist who is supportive of the Mount Olive Vet. Were you aware of any of that?

BA: I was not aware. But I will tell you this, Yampell's was a store and Ricky's was a shoe store. You've heard of it?

KT: Yes, I remember when it burned.

BA: Yes, they were very supportive, Ricky's and Yampell. For example, Yampell… Pardon me but I am pointing my finger.

KT: You're not, you're emphasizing.

BA: Yampell used to make the rings for us, high school rings.

KT: Oh, okay.

BA: That family was ever so supportive, you know what I mean. Ricky's, where we used to get our shoes, and Harry (Newmar's?) where the paper store, God, they would give us jobs serving papers. Those places we could depend on. On the corner of Tanner Street there was Thor's drugstore.

KT: Oh, yes.

BA: Now Thor's was pretty nice to us too. Because a couple of fellows, I think, used to work in Thor's.

KT: They had a soda fountain right? Didn't Thor's have a soda fountain?

BA: Yes, but I never had enough money to grab a soda.

KT: Oh well. [laughter]

BA: You've got to realize. [laughter]

KT: Yes, you had no money.

BA: No money, we didn't know what it was to get an allowance. Had no idea what it was to get an allowance. Let me tell you this. I can remember trucks coming from Batesville, not trucks, horse and wagons loaded with tomatoes going into Campbell's Soup in Camden. Of course, I'm young and of course, being devilish, bored. We'd see these horses pulling these [carts]. The horse would only go so fast. We would jump and pull some tomatoes off. Not that we wanted tomatoes, but just to be devilish that's all. [laughter] We probably eat a half of it and throw it away. Oh God. Later on, and I'll say we were in high school, we would go line up down at Campbell's to get a job. Boy, if you got a job at Campbell's during this high season, where they're making this soup then you're big [wheel].

KC: Since you brought up high school again and jobs, I was wondering, you mentioned a lot of your classmates dropped out before they graduated. Was it because they got jobs or was it to work? How did you feel about your classmates? How did you feel about them dropping out while you were still sticking it out?

BA: As I look back, school was not their main priority. In many instances, I would say their parents were not as pushy. That's one of those things. I mean, it's not one of those things, but I mean at that time in the Afro-American community there were, just like it is today in many [households], you have parents who look at things a little different. At that particular time, as I think of the Mann family, I think of the Cooper family, I think of other's family, those parents were working and they just did not bother. "If that's what you want to do, alright." There was not that push. You have to realize, we grew up at a time when we were trying to survive and in many instances you needed all hands in order to survive. Sometimes that little extra hand, whether son or daughter, made the difference. I know because I think of the (Hunley?) family, who lived on Ellis Street. See, the father worked for New Jersey Water Company or whatever it was. Several of the sons worked for them, because if your father worked there, there was a possibility that you could get on there. So why stay in school if you can get out when you're seventeen or eighteen and go out and make some money, because if you stay in school you're not sure if you're going to get a job. We knew that we had to depend on going to Campbell, RCA, Esterbrook Penn, New York Shipyard. These were where the jobs were, as I am repeating myself, individuals who worked there or who were chauffeurs; these were the individuals we sort of looked up to. I mean, these were the jobs.

KT: Did your dad work for any of the big companies?

BA: My dad, later in life, was a cripple, hit by a car on Ellis Street. Before that he [was one of the] what they call cement finishers. This is what he used to do. So he said, "I don't know..." My dad was a heckuva cook. [laughter] I guess he did most of the cooking. I don't really know how we survived.

KT: It was the depression.

BA: Yes.

KT: How aware were you of all that?

BA: I remember such a thing called a script. You ever heard of it?

KT: Yes, yes.

BA: It wasn't money and yet it was money.

KT: Right.

BA: I can hear my father, "Hey boy." You probably heard of Ellis Meat Market?

KT: Of course.

BA: I remember there was a son of Ellis that used to come by on Saturday with meat in his wagon, selling it from door-to-door. But my father sometime he had some money. "Hey boy, go up to the store there and get me a pound of hamburger." "Okay dad." "Tell them to ground it twice." I didn't know what the heck he was talking about. I have to go up to there and repeat it. "Ground it twice." The probably never did anyhow, [laughter] but it was something else.

KT: Did all of your siblings graduate from high school or, as the baby, did you get pushed harder?

BA: No. Let me tell you about my siblings. [laughter] I don't know where to start. My father was married twice. I guess that's why I decided to marry twice. [laughter]

KT: [laughter] Worked for him.

BA: But I'm telling you, I had the loveliest wife in the world.

KT: Yes, you did.

BA: They threw away the pattern with my second wife. But you want to know about my siblings. I don't know how to start about this, let's start with my oldest. My oldest brother

Clifford was by my father's first wife. Clifford worked for the [Burr?] here in Haddonfield for a number of years. He married. Then my oldest sister, Lorena, when I was very young she married and she moved into Camden. Then there were two other sisters who were raised somewhat by my grandmother in Raleigh, North Carolina. Don't ask me how that came about, because you don't ask questions at my age in coming up. Then one of my older brothers, Jimmy, that's the one that was here in high school with Al Driscoll. Now Jimmy, I know, finished high school and he went to you might've heard of Hampton Institute, down in Virginia.

KT: Um hm.

BA: I do not believe he finished. Then my two other brothers, Oliver and (Ferness?), they both went to Haddonfield High School. I think they finished '39.

KT: Were they twins?

BA: No, (____?). Here again, I cannot overemphasize the fact, I don't know whether it is because of color, I had made mention to you that I was retained, I know, twice in school. In those days, coming up there was no moving on. I mean, the teacher had something on you and you stayed in the same grade. I think this might have been one reason why there's some Afro-Americans, or Negroes or whatever you want to call it, would leave school due to the fact that they had had this experience of being retained where others was moved on. I might've thought that, I mean, but my parents had different ideas even though I was retained. That kind of (____?) does not exist now and that can be tough on a child. It might be best for the child, but by the same token, when you see your classmates--and children can be cruel. Children, they are cruel. [Mimics child's laughter] It hurts, and I really believe this is why I found some of my classmates… Then I came along and even though being retained, I stuck it out. So, old bull Reynolds…

KT: [laughter]

SI: There was a very active African-American press back then. Did your family receive any papers? I doubt it was called it then, but it became the Afro-American. Were you exposed to any papers or African-American media?

BA: I can remember there was a Pittsburgh something used to come out and of course there is one which is still in existence, the *Philadelphia Tribune*. [The *Pittsburgh Courier* was a prominent African-American. The paper was founded in 1910 and ceased publication in 1966.] But here again, papers cost money and in many instances the family is not going be spending no money to be buying a paper. Because all we had was a radio. Listen to the *Lone Ranger*. Of course, you guys don't know about the *Lone Ranger*. The never even heard about the *Lone Ranger*. [laughter]

(KC?): I heard of him.

BA: You heard of him? Boy, but I'm telling you that was the highlight man, sitting around that radio listening to the Lone Ranger. [laughter] Don't be bashful, ask me anything. I'll tell you whether or not I want to answer it. [laughter]

SI: As you were going through high school in the late 30s and early 40s, were you aware of what was happening in the world, in Europe?

BA: Not really, no. You know you go through life… I lived in the area where we called "The Point," down at the lower end of Potter and Ellis Street. This area up here was another area, altogether a different environment and everything else. I can remember in high school, I don't know whether we had a half an hour or forty-five minutes for lunch. I never had a bicycle. I would swipe a bicycle, lunchtime, ride home, bring the bicycle back. No one ever [know], because I could not get home and back in time.

KT: Did everybody go home?

BA: Hmm?

KT: Did everybody go home?

BA: No, most of the others, they had money in order to pay for their lunch.

KT: Oh, so there was a cafeteria?

BA: Yes, a cafeteria. I didn't have it. I had to go home and make maybe a peanut butter and jelly and get back to school, you see. Of course, during my high school there's a couple of fellas who became really good friends of mine, (Reed?) Perkins, he's dead, I guess I would swipe (Reed's?) bicycle because he wouldn't… Another fellow that became very good [friends], Bob (Radcliffe?). I think Bob (Radcliffe?) has passed likewise. There were a few fellows there who for lack of a better term let their hair down and you could communicate with them, never talk about anything from a racial standpoint.

KT: He's in uniform.

BA: Yes.

KT: Robert (Radcliffe?).

BA: Yes.

KT: Did some guys enlist before they graduated?

BA: Yes, Johnny (Sapio?), his father had the beer tavern on Haddon Avenue.

KT: That they gerrymandered out of Haddonfield.

BA: Yes, sort of heavyset fellow and I think he was killed.

KT: Yes.

BA: Oh, God, and here was (Reed?) Perkins who, he's dead. He lived there on Jefferson Avenue. He was a helluva [guy]. God I shouldn't have.

KT: I was surprised to see a uniform for Robert (Radcliffe?).

BA: Yes, and this is the young lady here, who Ms. Blakely's, (Jean? Pope?), I think her parents were in some big kind of cheese company over in Philadelphia. Of course, (Reed), I was surprised when they told me he had passed. Then another young lady who, I think I was at her 60th anniversary I went to, because most of these people are in their happy hunting ground now. No, Mary (McConnell?) died in the last two or three years.

KT: Oh, Mary (McConnell?) Taylor, and then she married...

BA: She married a fellow whose father was a doctor, Wyatt. God, she was a good friend. In fact, after she married Wyatt, Hun-bun and I, the four of us used to go out together on several occasions. I didn't get to her funeral.

KT: She had been a librarian at the central middle school for years.

BA: Yes. You know, I guess one of the reasons why I didn't go, to be truthful with you--there are times when one individual of color, like I happen to be, comes into an environment that is different. One encounters strange looks and etc. even today. I think that this is one of the reasons why I didn't get Mary's [funeral]. Because Mary and I were very close. After the time she divorced her first husband we would meet there at the Acme. Not meet, but she'd be coming…

KT: Run into each other.

BA: Run into each other. She would keep me abreast of her two daughters. I say that recently with the memorial which they had for Joan Gault. Joan Gault, she started the organization called the Interfaith Caregivers, which I was one of the original trustees here in Haddonfield. Interfaith Caregivers, which is still in existence, I think we're celebrating our 20th or 21st or something like that. Joan had just finished. She retired from Temple Medical School and so she called me up. I don't know how, she probably got my name because one time I was a little active here in Haddonfield even though I'd not resided here for a number of years. I was active with the Council of Churches. Joan called me up and says, "Hey Bryson, I'm going to be starting this" so forth and so on "Would you like to be part of it?" I told Joan, "No, my hands are tied." She called back and so I said okay. Interfaith Caregivers is an organization that started to help individuals to maintain and stay in their homes if we can provide certain services for them such as carry them to the doctor, carry them to the hairdresser, take'em shopping, anything. Many of these ladies never learned how to drive and they were in these big houses and so forth and so on. If many of those services could be provided for them, they could still maintain. I've had some

interesting experiences along that line. Should I share this one with them? [laughter] Serving as a member of the Board of Trustees, I also served as a driver. Your wife calls into the main office of Interfaith and she wants to know whether or not she could have someone to pick her up to go to the bank and the Interfaith office would call me and say "Bryson, would you available on Wednesday to pick up Mrs. Jones?" I say, "Okay, yes." I usually make a dry run to find out where. When we started Interfaith served only the individuals of Haddonfield because that is where we made our survey and etc. We now serve at night. We only served individuals who attended places of worship in Haddonfield, so that meant that there were a lot of people in Cherry Hill and so forth and so on. I'll never forget this lady who lives here in Haddonfield. I went to pick her up to carry her to the bank. This was when… Not the TD bank. What was it before that?

KT: Commerce, Commerce Bank. The TD the corner of Euclid and Haddon?

BA: Oh well, I had to carry her to the bank. So I went to the house, knocked on the door, had my identification and I said, "I'm Bryson Armstead. You have an appointment to go to the bank at 10 o'clock?" I said, "It's 10:10." I said, "I always come a little early because you never know what might happen between point A and point B." She says, "Oh," trying to get herself together. She hemmed and hawed and so forth and so on. I said, "According to my time I don't want you to be late" and so forth and so on. I finally told the lady, "Now, I think you're wondering as to why here I am to pick you up." I said, "You probably spoke with Joan." I said, "You refer to her as Dr. Gault." I said, "Joan is a personal friend of mine." She started turning a little red in the beak; it tells me something. "What in the hell is this little Afro-American here." I'm here to help you and you are going to question me when I'm trying to help you. What happened? I took her to the bank. I went back to the office I think I told Joan, "You know, I think it would be a good idea if in the event that there's an assignment that you would like for me that you let them know who I happen to be." This is Christianity in Haddonfield. I was assigned to her another day. "Oh, come on in." Putting her arms around me. I don't want that. To me that's tiddlywinks. "Just get your coat on baby cakes and let's go." You know, seeing people like that, it just… What can you be thinking about? These are individuals who, supposedly, with all this book learning they don't have no damn common sense how to treat somebody who's giving you a hand, something you can't do for yourself. Another episode, I was driving, I would always ask my clients on the way back, I'd say, "Is there somewhere that you want to stop? I don't mind if you want to stop at the store to pick up a prescription that your doctor might have [written]." This lady said, "Oh no, I don't want to stop to pick up a prescription." I said, "Okay." But she said, "I would like to make a stop." I said, "Okay, you let me know." I had just taken her from the doctor, left Cherry Hill and there on Kings Highway there was a liquor store. She said, "Oh yeah, let me stop here." I said, "Oh, do you want to stop here?" "Oh, yes." I said, "Do you want me to help you?" "Oh, no. I'm okay." I know I was not supposed to, but my feeling is if this is what you want and we're passing by, because how else are you going to get there unless you call a cab or something. This happened when I was driving more than once. This is in Haddonfield, that Christian community of Quakers.

SA: I want to go back to something else we had talked about. You said that you would go to Campbell and maybe some other places to find work for a day when you're in high school? Was that correct?

BA: Um hm.

SA: Was that during breaks in school or would you miss a day of school to go and look for work?

BA: No. You know, years ago school would get out in the summer about early June. You had your working papers. You go into Campbell's lineup, they would select X number of people. Particularly, during the height of tomato season, they needed all hands that they possibly could, in order, you see. They have these young studs, because they would work 24 hours, I mean around-the-clock.

KT: If you got a job was it for the summer?

BA: Just for the summer.

KT: It was for the summer.

BA: For the summer.

KT: Once you got hired, you had a job for the summer?

BA: Yes, you had a job for the summer. That meant, God…

KT: Money.

BA: That meant money. You were sitting on top of the world.

SA: From other African-Americans who work in factories during this period there seem to be a hierarchy of jobs. Was that the case at Campbell's?

BA: Yes, in many instances. I don't know if you've ever heard of the Woodson family who lives in Haddonfield. Their uncle worked at Campbell's. Now these two nephews who lived in Virginia and came up to Haddonfield to live with their uncle, they both worked at Campbell's. Why? Because their uncle worked there and they dropped out of school and worked at Campbell's and retired from Campbell's. You know the incentive, it was there for them. It was a job. Why stay in school when you had a job? Staying in school is not going to assure you of a job. In the Afro-American community at that time staying in school was no assurance that you would have a job, but if you got a job during the summer and the man is going to hold you on, [then] why are you going, just stop school. Those two Woodson boys are [an] example. They did that. They never finished high school. They lived right down the street from me. Of course, they were both younger, two or three years younger than I am. Both of them have passed away now.

KT: When you got a job like that, like the Woodson's, did they stay in Haddonfield or did they then buy homes elsewhere when they had such a long career at Campbell's?

BA: Both of them stayed in Haddonfield. In fact, the youngest Woodson, who passed away a couple of years ago, he took over his uncle's house

KT: Down by Douglass?

BA: Yes and his brother married a lady who had two or three children and he bought a house right near his brother. Of course, that's another story. We won't go into that.

SA: What type of work would you do at Campbell's?

BA: [To Kathy] Make sure you don't get it spilled over on yourself. I'm telling you, we can't take you out anywhere. [laughter] I can remember, I guess you would call it the assembly line. Cans of soup would come by and you had to grab them and put them wherever they were supposed to go. You fellas probably have never been into a factory and an assembly line, a type of activities, or maybe you might be assigned to the janitorial, just cleaning up because with a situation like that there's always a lot of spill and stuff on the floor from tomatoes. But every individual that I know of was pleased and anxious because they had a job. Because they knew that getting into Campbell's at that time, that was something special. Sometimes some of the older ones who had been there for years come by and encourage you, "Nice seeing you, boy," pat you on the head. You felt good.

SA: Was Campbell's considered a fair place for African-American workers?

BA: Yes, I would say so, because you have to remember that it was a job. Individuals were well aware of the fact that what? We were limited. We did not have the technical skills and etc., so the fact that we had a job, that was it. We were going to get a payday every Friday, every other Friday. They would move up maybe to… Thank you.

KT: You're welcome.

BA: But it was a job.

SA: Did you ever have the opportunity to work in any defense plants after Pearl Harbor was attacked or in a shipyard or anything like that?

BA: No, I had a brother who worked in New York Shipyard. One of my old brothers worked in New York Shipyard. I never had an opportunity to work in New York Shipyard. There was a New York Shipyard there in Camden, used to be quite a yard. It employed a number of individuals, but I never worked there. That was considered to be a very, very good job. As I said, the three places, Esterbrook Pen Company, which you probably never heard. Have you ever heard of Esterbrook Pen?

KT: I've heard of it.

BA: They employed a number of Afro-Americans, and of course, RCA and Campbell Soup were the top of them, and were considered top shelf jobs. I mean, if you worked at RCA, God, you were thought of as the cream of the crop. [laughter] Don't be bashful, go ahead.

KT: What kind of jobs were there for African-Americans at RCA and were there people in this area that got them?

BA: Yes. You ever heard of the (Seifers?) family?

KT: Yes.

BA: Catherine (Seifers?)?

KT: Uh huh.

BA: Oh, Catherine worked there for years. From what I have learned now Catherine lives here in Haddonfield. I haven't seen her. They tell me that she's having a few problems upstairs. Wake up there young fella.

KC: Huh?

KT: [laughter]

BA: [laughter]

BA: I guess I'm putting you to sleep. [laughter] But having never worked there and having just a few individuals that I knew who worked there like Catherine, but it seemed like a place where you could do reasonably well for yourself.

SI: When you worked at Campbell's was there a union? Did you belong to a union or did they have one in the plant?

BA: I think they might have. But when they hired these summer workers we didn't have no union. You're just there. I think they had a union though.

SI: During your time in high school, obviously, World War II started. What do you remember about the beginning of the war, Pearl Harbor being attacked? What do you remember about that day?

BA: That was in '41, I believe. You know, you hear these things and then you're young, you're silly. For that particular day you say, "Oh my. How could such happen?" Then I remember a young man, who was a couple of years older than I, in the Jenkins family who lived on Potter Street where I lived at one time, Ollie Jenkins. He was one of the early ones that I remember going into the service. Of course, I'm still in high school. As the year of '43 came along and I'm finishing high school, I think I finished on June 10th. July, I was in the service. I went into the Navy because I said, "Well," silly, I said, "I want to have some place where I can sleep every

night." [laughter] I didn't want to be out in the Army, silly thinking. In those days, the big naval base was out at Great Lakes. I think it was out by Michigan somewhere. They sent me to Maryland. I think it's called New Bainbridge, Maryland.

SI: Bainbridge, yeah.

BA: They had a small base down there and training. So, I'm going through my training and the course at the time they measure your swimming and see if you could swim. I better go back now. Years ago, hear in Haddonfield, there was a pool called Mount Well, Mount Well Pool. It's a swimming pool.

KT: Off Center Street.

BA: Yes, I could not go in there even though it was probably pretty close to my home. "No, no, no, Bryson. You're not the right color." To get back to my training, came time for the swimming test. [They] threw me in the pool. I didn't know how to swim. I guess after I went down a couple of times they rescued me and said, "He's good." That was the last test. They sent me across country to Frisco, boarded the ship called the *Mount Vernon*. I'm now a qualified sailor, never learned how to swim.

SI: How many weeks of training did you have at Bainbridge?

BA: It might have been two months. It wasn't all that long, but they taught me how to swim, because they refused to allow me to swim in my home town. This is a little side bit about Mount Well and about swimming. There was a very rather prominent family in Lawnside where I lived. You might have heard of a doctor Young?

KT: Absolutely.

BA: Doctor William Young, he's a medical doctor. His wife had a PhD from University of Pennsylvania. She taught at Rowan. They had a daughter who was a medical doctor. They have a son who is a medical doctor. Years ago, the son was a little devilish. At night he was sort of caught in the Mount Well pool. He wasn't supposed to be there, gave him a hard way to go.

KC: Was there no pool anywhere else that was open to the African-American community?

BA: I'm going to be telling you about that too.

KC: Okay.

BA: Let's stick with doctor Young and them--individuals, four of them everyone with advanced degrees, three medical doctors, one with a PhD. The father and the mother are now deceased. Some years ago they made an attempt to buy an old school building on Warrick Road. This was some years ago. They checked with one of the banks here in Haddonfield and they said, "No, no, no." How in the H individuals with such--color of your skin. Let's go back to the swimming, because I've had some of that experience too. In Lawnside, I became a very good friend, I guess

he took me under his wing, I.R. Bryant; he was the father of Wayne Bryant. You all know about Wayne, so we needn't go there. I had Wayne as a Boy Scout. I.R. and I became very close. We served on the Board of Education. We used to go play golf. I.R. had a group which we called the High Y Boys. They were high school boys trying to take him under, or Wayne, to keep him out of trouble. We would meet on a Friday. During the summer time, we were able to take them over to the Pennsauken Vocational School because they had a swimming pool. We could do that during the summer once during the month. I say to myself when I think to myself, if some of those young boys had had an opportunity to go to Mount Well when they were younger what a difference it would have made. I think even today by not allowing, this is one of the reasons why we do not have Afro-Americans engaged in that particular sport. To me it's so sad that you limit individuals because of his or her color to only have to go once a month. Now that same board, now that they now have 2 schools run by the Camden County, one's in Pennsauken one's down in Sicklerville. Later on to Wayne Bryant, who I had as a boy scout. When he became Senator Bryant, I spoke to Wayne, I says, "You know, I'd like to get on some of these county boards." He always said, "Which one you want to get on Mr. Armstead?" because he always addressed me as Mr. Armstead. I says, "I don't know. Give me some idea." Long story short, I became a member of the board of education of the county, which controls those two schools. One's in Pennsauken, the other is in Sicklerville. I brought up these two schools because over the years people have referred to them as a vocational school, and in many instances people think of vocational schools as dumping ground for boys and girls. That is not the case. You ever heard of Hutchinson? Plummer?

SI: No.

KT: I have. They are a very big plumbing firm in this area, big.

BA: That's where he went to learn his plumbing, vocational school in Pennsauken. Now he's probably one of the biggest, he's dead now, one of the biggest plumbing concerns in South Jersey.

KT: His sons run it now.

BA: Yes. I sometime fault our counselors. Why don't they go to these schools and see what's offered. Everyone is not college material. Some of us got to work with our hands and we still need plumbers. We still need electricians. When the casinos first opened I was on the board of the vocational technical school and we started a culinary school, I mean, whatever you want to call it. When those casinos first started we had boys and girls leaving there because they had the fundamentals. They had the fundamentals. I know of no other high school whose exhibits are at the flower show, but those technical schools for years have had their exhibits at the Philadelphia Flower Show. Haddonfield High School doesn't have it. [laughter] Cherry Hill doesn't have it. Flowers are a big business. Those two schools have it. [Editor's Note: The Philadelphia Flower Show is a yearly national exhibition supported by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. The first event was held in 1829.] What am I saying? Working with your hands, to me this is an area where some of these counselors need to… But, Haddonfield is all academic--everyone going to college, everybody's going to be a professor, everyone. Be realistic, everyone is not going to go

to college. Some of them do, but they don't belong there. Most of the girls are looking for a husband anyhow.

SI: Can I go back to your training in Bainbridge for a second? You were in this training company or some type of unit. Were the men who were with you from all over the East? Was it a mixture of folks from the Northeast, the middle states, the South?

BA: You know, I don't really know.

SI: Okay.

BA: Because the only contact with my military servers, that I can recall, are individuals that I met on the ship. Because I served on the same ship the whole time, the *US Mount Vernon*. I guess half of them, most of them, are happy hunting ground now. But, so, I don't recall anyone that I had my in my training.

KT: Was that a base that was only for African-Americans trainees?

BA: I'm inclined to believe so. I can't recall. You know, let me go back to that training. Individuals like myself went into the service as steward mates. Do you know what steward mates mean?

SI: Um hm.

KC: I think so.

BA: We're like what?

KC: You kind of… I'm trying to get the term.

BA: Okay, you can…

SI: You're like servants for the officers.

KC: Yes, you're like servants for the officers.

BA: Yes, you're servants for the officers. Yes, you know.

KC: Chauffer, kind of like that.

BA: You just serve the officers and then your advancement was you didn't get too far. What the heck. But it was pretty good service. You got to see places which I would never have been before. Oh well, move on. [laughter]

SI: Before for you went into the service, had you ever really been outside of the Haddonfield, Philadelphia sphere?

BA: No. Yes, I had. I was a baby [laughter] and my mother--this might have been the reason why I might have been retained--I can remember my mother taking me out of the school, going to down to Raleigh to see her mother, my grandmother. I would go down to Raleigh with my mother on the train and of course, I didn't know the difference, where you had the seat in the back of [the train]. But this is mother; you do what you're told. Yeah, so I went to Raleigh a couple of times when I was little, yeah. So, go head.

SI: Did you know what to expect when you are traveling to Maryland or on the way to North Carolina?

BA: No. Jim Crow was expected, I didn't know. This was just like living here in Haddonfield. The Point, this is where I live. I can remember so vividly, this area back here is very familiar to me because I would walk to school and come up this way to this (____?). See, where I live, Potter Street, is not too far you see and I would walk here to school. But to walk home during lunch time and get back, that was another story. I had to move a little more rapidly in order to do that, you see. We walked to school. Really, at Haddonfield, we used to have children coming in, were bused in from as far south as Berlin. This was really a, I guess, a magnet school. I mean, they had boys and girls from [all over], because there were no other high schools, there was only Haddonfield, Collingswood, Haddon Heights, Autobahn. Boys and girls who lived in certain parts of Haddon Township had a choice of either going to Collingswood or Haddonfield. Of course, there was a small section of Haddon Township called Saddlertown, which was predominately Afro-Americans, and they could either go to Collingswood. Don't talk about Collingswood now. You ever knew about Collingswood?

KT: No. Did they come here, the Saddlertown kids?

BA: If you lived in Saddlertown, which was part of Haddon Township, you could go to Collingswood or Haddonfield. The Afro-Americans who lived in that little conclave of Saddlertown, all of those individuals, basically came to Haddonfield.

KT: Okay.

BA: Let me tell you the reason why. When I was growing up, Collingsworth was something else. It was not friendly to us, by no means, and I mean that in no uncertain terms. Collingswood was not friendly. This is the reason why you might have heard of the young man whose last name was Wilson, from Saddlertown, who went to Virginia State and later became the athletic director of Rutgers in Camden.

KT: Oh, yes.

BA: Yes, he's from Saddlertown. Yes, he came and went to Haddonfield High School, became quite a football player. I can't think of his last [name]. His name was Wilson, last name was Wilson. Of course, he was behind me, younger. But that's the way it was. Collingswood was really rough on us. Only in recent years that Collingswood has changed. Now I look, couple years ago, the basketball team at Collingswood was just about all Afro-Americans. Just a couple

years ago the coach here at Collingswood ran into some problems. Some of the family was saying that he's playing too many of us. That's the way it goes, you can't win.

SI: You said you went out to San Francisco and joined the crew of the *Mount Vernon*. What type of ship was the *Mount Vernon*?

BA: The *Mount Vernon* was built here in the New York shipyard. It was a converted passenger ship. What we used to do, we would, I think my first trip--I should've brought my John Brown book. We would sail across the Pacific. We went to Australia twice. We would pick up the wounded. If you recall, the early part of the war MacArthur says, "I will return." Many of those troops would be sent to Australia for rehab or rest period. We would pick those troops up; bring them back to the states. Another trip, we left Frisco went to India. I don't know why we went to India. After we left Bombay, India, we came through the Panama Canal up to the Atlantic. I think we went to Boston, up to Boston. Let me stop. We operated without an escort.

KT: Wow.

BA: So they say that we could out run, supposedly [laughter]

KT: A torpedo? [laughter]

BA: a submarine. [laughter] Then we made a trip up to Boston after coming through the Panama Canal. We made another trip up in Pacific, which I probably forgot about. But anyhow, went up to Boston. Then we operated between Boston and Liverpool, England. I'll never forget, on one of those trips between Boston and Liverpool, boy it was cold, and got some kind of warning that a submarine was following us. So we had to go off course. Instead of going to Liverpool, England we went on farther north and I remember getting up that morning and looking out and seeing those icebergs. [laughter] But that's the only time that we had the experience were they informed us that someone was [following us]. But we operated between Boston and Liverpool for about three trips. Then we started operating between Boston and Le Havre, France. Le Havre, France is like a very exclusive, warm, where the rich go. At that time, General Patton, old blood and guts, he was one of these daredevils; we would pick up the troops there who were wounded and bring them back. I don't know how many of you have ever heard of the Red Ball?

SI: Um hm.

BA: Now the Red Ball was an Afro-American group. Their duty was to supply the forces with supplies. Being in the Navy you only had liberty every other night. Your half of the ship would have liberty one night and my half would have [the other night]. Maybe I shouldn't say that, giving respect to the young lady. Liberty meant, as far as we were concerned, getting up, drinking, going to shore, drinking. I'll never forget, I was at this bar, I was getting a soda. [laughter]

KT: Okay. [laughter]

BA: You know, it means so much when you're in the service if you run across someone, not like you, but say, from the same area. I went into this bar and this fella, he says, "Hey man, where you from?" I said, "I'm from New Jersey." "Oh." I don't mean to exaggerate but the joker pulled out a roll of money, a fistful of money and said, "Whatever you want, drink." God, it makes you feel. Of course, you guys haven't been in the service, you didn't know. But when you're away like that, you been away, because when we would go out wouldn't be anything, be on that boat for a month and not see nothing but water and sky. To get off and see someone and then have a drink of soda, [laughter] God, what more could you ask for?

KT: Now would you go over empty and come back full or would you have troops going over to Europe, to Liverpool?

BA: We would take some troops over, but we would bring back the wounded.

KT: That was your main job.

BA: To bring back the wounded, yes. I'm telling you, I'll never forget we brought back some Germans, God.

KT: Take a break?

SI: Yes. Let's take a break.

[Tape Paused]

SI: Before we took our break, you were about to tell a story about bringing German prisoners back?

BA: Let's start with just an observation. Here we are bringing German prisoners back. In a sense, you [are] carrying out your duty and yet here the enemy which we are fighting. This is from observation; that enemy is treated better than I'm treated. Here I am bringing your enemy back, and excuse my French again, I'm coming back to this country, bringing this enemy and that enemy is going to get better treatment than I'm getting, and he is going to be put in a hospital, in some instances even aboard the ship. This individual is treated better than I am. I can see seamen--when I say a seaman that's the lowest class--could not quite see it as I saw it. How in the world? This enemy of ours… Because aboard ship there were only certain things that I was permitted because of the rank which I had as a steward mate, but this wounded individual that I'm bringing back for to give him medical treatment. But you know, aboard a ship, the captain, he's God. When you went on a ship and there is nothing but sky and water for a month, sometimes some strange things happen. There are sometimes some fella might be missing. Let's move on.

SI: Can you tell us what your daily duties were on the ship?

BA: Your daily duties, of course, would start rather early. You had to go up to the flight. I wasn't the only steward mate, there were others. Some be assigned up to the flight deck because

on the flight deck is, I guess you would say, the pilot who's steering, you know what I mean. You had to go up there maybe, coffee. They had to be served twenty-four hours. There would be times when I may have the night duty and you have to see that he got his coffee, to serve them the meals. Of course, in the morning, you were serving them breakfast, lunch. Of course, there might [be] some officers who were not on duty; you would have to take them to their room. Didn't have no suites or things of that sort. You had to tidy up their rooms and etc. There were some of them that were, for lack of a better word, rather decent. Others were just the opposite, but there wasn't a whole lot you could say. Every so often I think, I guess about every week, regardless as to whether you were in port or out at sea, there was a captain's inspection. You had to be out on the deck, all around. Of course, you had to stand at attention and he would come by and if you had one hair out of place on your chin he would bring it to your attention and you had to correct that. If anything, I can say being out on the ship you learned to be reasonably clean. [laughter] The regiment you learn from it. I say today, I wish it was required that our young people would have a certain amount of training. We need it. They need it. I think it did something for me.

SI: What were your quarters like on the ship?

BA: We had a bunk bed. It was rather tight but when you're young you can make out with anything, it doesn't bother you, didn't bother me. I thought I thought things were great. Because all I'm looking forward to was the next time I get into port I'm going to be finger popping. It might be a month before I get there--quarters and things, you played cards, you do this. Life aboard ship it was pretty nice. I say nice, and this, when you're young you can adapt.

SI: So all the steward's mates were African-American? Were there any Filipinos who also served as steward's mates? Is that correct?

BA: I think there were a few [Filipinos]. Yes, a few, but basic they were Afro-Americans aboard the ship that I was on.

KT: When you were in port in Europe, either in England or Le Havre, did you feel that it was a different atmosphere toward you as an African-American?

BA: Yes, I did. I really did. Let me tell you about when we pulled into Liverpool one time. I was so ignorant. I came from a household of close knit family. So we were in Liverpool and, of course, all of the fellas we were looking to have fun. Some of them were smoking. We went into this cabaret or whatever you want to call it and some of the other fellas says, "Did you smell that?" I said, "Smell what? What are you talking about?" Anyhow, he told me later that person was smoking pot. What am I saying? The fella that I was with was much more knowledgeable of things out in the world than I [was]. "Pot," I said, "what are you talking about?" I didn't know what he was talking about. I said, "He was smoking a cigarette." [laughter] I went into the service in '43. This must've been about '44. (____?) I had no idea. "What's he talking about?" So that pot's been around a long time. [laughter]

SI: Were you ordered to only go to certain places when you were on leave or were you barred from going to certain places?

BA: No, not really, no. I don't remember any time that they told us. I think, when we were over in India, I think there, there was some restrictions. You know those fellas don't follow those restrictions. They don't follow those rules once you get off of a [ship]. You got to be kidding. [laughter] We sloop to get on the ship. [laughter] You don't think, you follow your own now, you know that. Here you are eighteen and nineteen, you don't follow no rules. Otherwise I wouldn't have been thrown in the brig. You know what the brig happens to be?

SI: Yes, the jail.

BA: Yeah. They put me in jail. We were in Boston. I was taking my leave and all I had [to owe'em?] was take my leave. When I went to get up on the gangplank I couldn't walk to well.

KT: [laughter] You've blown my image.

BA: Man, oh man. They threw men in the brig for three days. [laughter] But you learn from it, bread and water.

KT: Wow.

SI: Did they have marines on the ship?

BA: Yes.

SI: From the brig?

BA: Yes. Marines guard the ship. Marines were always on the ship. They were walking around. But let me say, I never saw a black marine. At that time, there were few if any black marines, very few.

SI: Were there any other African-Americans on the ship serving in any other capacity or were African-Americans limited to serving as steward mates?

BA: There might have been one or two. Now, in that department of the steward mates, for example, if I had brought that book with me, there were some gentlemen who had been in the service twenty or more years. You might have seen them with the stripes on which indicate the number of years. In the steward mate division they were above us and they were the ones who would be telling us and assigning us to the various categories or rooms that we were to go to on the ship. They were individuals who were making a career out of [it]. I can't recall any Afro-Americans who were seamens, but we had a number of individual Afro-Americans in the steward division who had been in for fifteen or twenty years before I came on. This is their livelihood.

SI: Did you have a battle station? What would you do if general quarters were called?

BA: Yes, alright. That would be called ever so often to alert the individuals as to what they would do if an event that an emergency came up and as to where you was supposed to be, what you're supposed to do, and where the lifeboats was and what lifeboat you would be assigned to.

SI: Was there a particular duty you and the other steward's mates had during an emergency like that or drill?

BA: No. You would be informed as to where you were to be stationed and you had to do that. You had to be there at that particular station in X number of minutes. This was a thing that they emphasized so much. When the drill is called it is mandatory that you be at your station within that period of time. Otherwise, lieutenant or someone is going to be on your rear end. "Where were you?" Now if in event that you are on duty, when I say on duty you are doing what you are supposed do on that particular day, you could not do that anymore. Because maybe you're carrying something up to the lieutenant up on the flight station. But if you are not then you are supposed to be there. Even though you might have worked that night, when that call is made you get up out of bed and be there. Of course, if you had a lieutenant who was reasonably understanding he would say, "Okay, I know you that you worked last night." But not all of them were like that. What are they doing? They are trying to make it look good for themselves because advancement. They want to move up the ladder. Of course, we had one captain, I don't know where we were coming from, something in Boston or somewhere, he did something and I guess they almost wanted to demote him on the spot. They relieved him of being captain of that ship soon as he got in. But that's the way it goes.

SI: How many captains did you serve under?

BA: I think there were about three captains I served under.

SI: Did the other officers turnover often?

BA: There would only be a turnover when you came in because, remember now, we are out in the Pacific. When you go into India and Australia there's not going to be no change over. Of course, we operated there in the Pacific I know for a year, or maybe a year and a half. The only change came along when we came through the Panama Canal, came over on the east coast and then we'd begin to have a change, but before that it was generally the same crew, as far as the steward's mates, they were the same.

SI: You are going on these long voyages there is often stretches of boredom. How did you maintain your morale over those long periods of time?

BA: Really, young and foolish, it didn't take much to maintain. [laughter] Playing cards and really doing a lot of little silly things, really. You are out at sea for a long period of time. My first trip across out in Pacific to tell you the truth I was really afraid. Get up in the morning, look up, see the sky, see the water, day after day. You look around, you don't see anything else. You know, for a young [man] this was frightening. In my first trip, I said to myself, "Bryson, why in the hell did you want to…" Let's face it; I had never been away from home this long a period of time. This is an experience that… But as time went on you adjust to it. You found things

aboard ship that you could do and then you begin to meet fellas and they can relate their experience and you begin to feel a little more comfortable, because I'm just a young stud and some of these fellas had been on board. Because if I'm not mistaken, before they converted the ship it had made a trip around the world and some of these old stewards on there had been on the ship. They had fascinating tales to tell you. You sit around and listen to them. So after our first trip there, of course, you had plenty of time, a month or six weeks to listen to them. [laughter] Where am I going to go? I can go to the store next-door. [laughter] It's an experience which I look back on my life now and I wished I sort of had stayed in the service for at least twenty years. Then come out and gone to school, because then I would have two loaves of bread, pension from the service and from whatever else, because we had such a good G. I. Bill. That's how I got my schooling, through the G. I. Bill.

SI: Did you learn about the G. I. Bill while you were in the service? Did you start thinking about what you might do?

BA: No. [laughter] While I was in the service I was thinking about the next port I'm going to come into. [laughter] You ever heard of Billy Eckstine?

KT: I think I've heard the name.

BA: Well, Billy Eckstine was a very famous Afro-American singer. He was often compared to Frank Sinatra. The first time I saw Billy Eckstine was up in Boston, and boy I just really thought I was king of the mountain. I had liberty that night. Well we better not talk about that. [laughter] Go ahead.

SI: When going to port were there bars and clubs that mostly African-American servicemen would go to?

BA: Yes. They were basically Afro-American clubs that we would go to.

SI: Was that the case overseas or just in the states?

BA: In the states and know they were basically [Afro-American clubs]. Overseas, I think we would just go anywhere where we could get a drink. Remember, you're aboard ship for a month. You don't go anywhere where you can't get a drink. He looks like he's goody-goody guy there. [laughter] For example, when we were in Bombay, India, you know? No, you don't know. Those individuals, when a Navy ship would come in, they thought we had money. These sailors, these American sailors, they got money. People would come around you know what I mean and God. So you get something to drink and half of the time, I mean, you're satisfied. You just get something to drink and… That's where they told us about watch what we eat. Let me tell you about the experience in Australia. Did I tell you?

KT: No. I never knew you went to Australia.

BA: I went there twice. That's why I should've brought that book, God. It tells all of the trips that we made, when we first went to Australia. The reason why we were in Australia [was]

because of soldiers who had been sent to Australia for rehab and we would pick them up. There were many other people in Australia who would look at us and would want to look at our rear end to see if we had tails. There were some of the individuals, I don't remember whether they were soldiers or what, but they had informed them that these Afro-Americans were monkeys and had tails. I'm not telling you something that I heard. This I have experienced. Yet we can fight for good old America. That's why I say some of the experiences were not too good. Go ahead.

SI: When you are going on leave would you and your fellow steward's mates make a conscious effort not go to where other white sailors went for rest and relaxation?

BA: When we would go ashore, you always had your buddies; two or three of us would be together. There was a limited amount of time. We did not have the pleasure of [being picky]. Remember these places are strange to us. So, we got to find anyplace that we possibly can to get a drink. It didn't make any difference and this is why, little me, I wouldn't go by myself because what the hell. Pardon me. Two or three of us would be together and we always felt that if they were two or three of us together we can probably get a bottle or they'll serve us. This was the way it was. In many instances, I found that there were a number should we say Caucasian individuals on the boat who were reasonable fellows. I couldn't say all of them; that's just life, even out now here now, but there were some of them you would go ashore and blah, blah, blah, and things would move along. Because there was sometimes that liberty, that's what we call it, liberty, maybe we got off maybe at 6, maybe we had to be back at 12. Because if they say that boat is going to be pulling out at about two you better be there two hours before that boat pulls off otherwise you are going to be in a world of trouble, you see.

SI: Did any of the ship's company go AWOL or not make the boat back?

BA: I don't know. I really don't know. Only thing I know about was my case. Someone puts something in my drink and that's what it was. I was wobbly-legged when I was wobbly-legged. [laughter]

KT: You teasing me? [laughter]

KC: Put something in your soda. [laughter]

BA: [laughter]

SI: Were there any other times when you would bring prisoners back to the states?

BA: No, only when we were on the West Coast, we'd bring those individuals, because they were troops from MacArthur. MacArthur was in the Philippines.

KT: Right, when they had evacuated them to Australia.

BA: Australia. Then we would bring them back to Frisco, but then we only had three trips in the Pacific and then the rest of them were in the Atlantic. Yes, the rest of them were in the Atlantic.

SI: When you were transporting wounded, would you have a red cross on your ship or would it be lit up or would you follow blackout conditions?

BA: I don't remember having any red cross on the ship.

SI: Okay.

BA: Because on the ships there was always a doctor. These ships would generally carry a full staff of what have you and of course there was a doctor who was a Navy doctor. Even if we got sick, I mean, we could go to the doctor. Fortunately enough I was young and foolish and I never got sick, never had to go to the [doctor], because I was well fortified with my soda which kept my system in pretty good order.

SI: Was there any bringing bottles onto the ship and hiding them in areas of the ship?

BA: There probably was. [laughter]

SI: [laughter]

BA: There is a gangplank. On the ship there is a gangplank and of course you're coming in from liberty, from offshore. There an officer there and of course you to have to [laughter] you have to salute their colors. [laughter] That officer has the right to do whatever he wants. He can search you. He can do [laughter]… It all depends on that officer there. If he wants to he can almost have you strip down [laughter] but in many instances they might let you go on by. But, if the event you were wobbly and slootin' you were in a world of trouble. You were in a world of trouble if you can't [salute]. [laughter]

SI: Did you have much chance to interact with the troops that you were either bringing over or you are bringing back?

BA: No, no, very little. No, little or no time to interact with [them].

SI: What do you remember about the end of the war both VE Day in Europe and VJ Day? Do you remember what you were for both of those days?

BA: I believe I was up in either Boston or New York. You start talking about going home, can't wait to want to go home. Of course, I can remember some of those old seasoned mates of mine who had been in the service for twenty or more years, they paid it no attention--just another day as far as they were concerned. But the young fellas, I remember a very good friend of mine from Mississippi and I went to see him years later, hard talking about it. This young babe he had left at home, he was going to get married. You're just thinking about those things. But I wished I had thought about something else, but here again, you're young. You had no plan. I had no plan. My only plan was getting out and seeing this girl. If I look back, that's not enough in life. But that's the only plan I had, couldn't wait. I think that's most of us who went in, they are just ready to get out and fingerpop. Here again, to me, it goes back to my parents. I don't blame my parents, but my parents did not have, like probably your parents had for you, the insight to plan

and prepare me. As I've said before, my role models were the chauffeurs standing on Kings Highway, Campbell Soup employees, you see. These were the ones that I looked up to as far as work was concerned. I knew no others and so coming out of the service this is what I was looking forward to. Get a job at Campbell's or RCA. I remember, I did get a job at Esterbrook Pen Company for a while and I thought I was something else.

SI: Was this right after you were discharged?

BA: I think it was not long after I was discharged. It just so happened, how did I go to school? Right across the street from me on Douglass Avenue there was a family named (LaCount?). Do you know them?

KT: I know them from the directories.

BA: Betty and Joe (LaCount?). I think that names French or something, isn't it? My brother and I, he had finished high school. He finished in '39. I finished in '43. Well, Betty and Joel (LaCount?) both had gone to St. Augustine's College, which is a small Episcopal school in Raleigh, North Carolina. When we both got out of the service, we didn't know what [we were going to do]. "What are you gonna do?" "Ah..." So, we're talking to Joe (LaCount?), who lived across the street. I think he had finished St. Aug., as we call it, or something. But anyhow, we encouraged us to go to St. Aug. where he went. My parents had no money. My parents couldn't have sent us to [an expensive school], so my brother and I we both went to St. Aug, down in Raleigh, small Episcopal school. At that time, the G.I. Bill, they paid everything. The G.I. in those days was better than a job. I can make out better going to school than I'd be working at RCA. Yes, because they paid for everything, everything, and then gave me spending change, God. What do you talk about at that time? I was married, God. Of course, I came out and acted silly like some darn fool, got married and had a child. But that G.I. Bill, while I'm on the G.I. Bill, paid for my undergraduate work. I went to St. Aug. for three years, finished. Then they paid for my graduate work a Glassboro. [I] hadn't put out a cent. [I] hadn't put out one cent. Then they paid for me over at Temple I had thirty-two hours above my Master's over at Temple and the G.I. paid it. The best thing I have ever done in my life, the best thing.

SI: You said that you went to St. Augustine with your brother?

BA: Um hm.

SI: What had he done in the service?

BA: Of course, my brother is one of these, he's like my dad--you ask him a question today you might get an answer next week, you might. I believe my brother was selected for the Tuskegee Airmen and I don't remember whether he flunked out or what, but he was in the Air Force. When I was in the Navy in the states up in Frisco he was down in an airbase down in San Diego and I can remember when that ship would come in to Frisco I would get a bus and go down to spend time with him on a weekend. But my brother, a man of a few words.

SI: Did any of your other siblings serving the military?

BA: I had two other brothers, my oldest brother, Clifford and another brother named Jimmy, he served in the military. I think they were both in the Army, but they didn't…

SI: Do you have other questions? I thought maybe next time we would pick up more with his education and then move forward.

KT: The only other question that I had which ends at the war is, the dropping of the atomic bomb, were you aware of it? In retrospect from all of us, it was huge, but what was it like at the time? Was it a big deal in the papers or in the military?

BA: Not really. I can't recall it being a big deal. You know, when I think of that, so much of that, and my reaction comes after, when I think of the treatment of the Japanese in the camps and etc. and again I say to myself, "How can we?" I don't know. I guess there's more than one way to look at something like this. I can recall the one time that I was in Japan, not in the service, but the time my wife and I, we were on our way to China and we stopped in Japan. I don't know. I think when an individual like myself… I guess I've gotten older because I'm a little touchy. I remember when we, Honeybun and I, stopped in Japan, the reaction of the Japanese to us. This was in the 90s because we were on our way to China. I just thought to myself I said, "I wonder, is this reaction a carryover from what has happened as far as the war, dropping of the bomb and etc.?" Of course, that's probably silly of me, but I have silly thoughts.

SI: What was the reaction?

KT: Yeah, that was my question. What was the reaction?

BA: Standoffish, we wanted to buy something. You're taking out your money, you know what I mean. Maybe I'm too self-conscious or something, but if I come into your store and to purchase something, I do expect, I'm purchasing something from you, that there to be a certain reaction. Maybe I should not think that way, but I think there are a number of us, of Afro-Americans, have that feeling. I think because of the fact that, put it mildly, we have lived in an oppressed environment most of our lives. It is very easy for the reaction that which you do to have a different feeling from me. Occasionally, I tell people, I'm going to tell you this and then you're going to leave. I've been handicapped all my damn life. Why? Because the society that I was forced to live in had made me a handicapped all my life. I was born into a handicap society. See the sign out there that I'm parked in, for handicaps. I kid and joke with them sometimes, I say, "Any damn where I want to park is a handicap for me." This is how I look at it from my perspective, but you would look at it from a different perspective. But from my perspective, for these eighty-nine years since I've been here Haddonfield has made me a handicap, when they could have done much better. Then we'll talk about this one day next week, have a little beer or something. [laughter]

SI: Do we have time for one more question?

BA: Oh, I got time.

KC: It's going to be another topic, because it's about your time in the Navy. It's one question, but it's kind of two. At one point, you said that looking back you might've liked to stay in the Navy longer. However, you also talked a bit about how you and other African-Americans were treated on the ship and how even some of the prisoners were treated better than you. So I guess what I'm curious about is, and I don't know how comfortable you feel talking about this but, on the one hand, what was it that you loved about the Navy enough that you thought you might have liked to stay in it for twenty years and yet at the same time you are acknowledging that there are things about being in the Navy that were very unpleasant?

BA: I look at it from this point, I felt that way after being out of the service. After getting out of the service, I think I got a little more, how do I say, wisdom, and went to school, and I said to myself... I found that there were other individuals who had been in the service and now they were in school and I said to myself, "Bryson, how silly could you been? You could've stayed there and this G.I. Bill would have served you in the same way that some of these others…" Now I would have had, say, my pension from the service and still been able to use my G.I. Bill for my education. Because I had encountered individuals who had spent more time in the service then I had, and were now using their G.I. Bill. It's been my experience, I don't care where you might be or what you might [do], there are some good and not so good, regardless, and in my thinking that time in the service there was more good than not so good. I think that good part, I know that good part overshadows those unpleasant. It made me into a better person wherein I could handle these unpleasant, every day, not every day, but I think as time went on, I was able to adjust. Life to me is a matter of adjusting to individuals. You know, as time goes on I begin to learn the buttons I can push for this individual, the buttons I can push for that individual. It doesn't happen overnight. So I say, in the service if I had stayed I would have learned how to push the buttons on for these unpleasant things and I would have found probably more and I didn't learn these things until I got out. I have sort of tried to learn how to look [at] people and I know now that I learn more by observation then running my damn mouth. That tells me a lot about you. Don't have to say a word. I [go] down to the hospital. But you don't so learn it overnight. That's why I look at some of my young people, all that energy, they waste. If only they would stop and listen a little more. Yet, I'm going to tell you this and then we're gone to get out of here. Next week there's a group in Lawnside that's going to be honoring me called the Lawnside Scholarship Club. This is going to be over at Tavistock. The Lawnside Scholarship Club for the last fifty or forty years was formed by a group of ladies in Lawnside. Why were they formed? They were formed in order to encourage and help the boys and girls that go to Haddon Heights High School. When it started out they were just giving maybe twenty-five dollars for books and so forth. Of course, they are doing better than that now. I know some of the women. Of course, the group now has dwindled down to seven or eight. One of the individuals I know quite well. I call her my adopted daughter, she doesn't know it. This is another one of my adopted daughter's. But over the years that group of ladies have given scholarships, have given money, to boys and girls who finished Haddon Heights. There's one who finished--a famous brain surgeon down in the area of Maryland. I guess we got a dozen or more who are now attorneys. There's a little girl named Ivory Foster, got her scholarship, she went to [Haddon Heights], all of these went to Haddon Heights and got a scholarship to either Georgia or Georgia Tech for track and field. That young lady, the whole time she was in Haddon Heights, was never defeated in a field event. She finished either Georgia or Georgia Tech about seven or eight years ago, I guess, or longer than that. I'm one of these ones even

though we don't have any children, of course, we won't go over that anymore, but I go to the field events and the track and the football. Four or five years ago before Hunbun, Hunbun is my wife and passed, I was cutting grass and Ivory, this little girl, came by, "Hello Mr. Armstead." I said, "Hello" "Mr. Armstead, don't you remember me?" It was Ivory Foster. What am I saying? God, it's our boys and girls that we have to help. If she can remember me then dammit, I'm going to… What is this have to do with them honoring me? In some way, I've tried to give them a few coins, because to me there is nothing more important than our young people. You know we complain and complain, but dammit, don't complain, do something. I don't mean give a quarter, dollar. Because so many times all our young people want is to look up in the stand and see a mother, grandmother or see someone who looks like them. I know, right now, I go to so many events down at Haddon Heights, "He don't have to pay," because some of those boys and girls look up and they see a face. Well, that's me, come on, come on, you couldn't embarrass me here now.

SI: Thank you very much for all of your time here today.

BA: I have nothing but time.

SI: We appreciate it and look forward to our next session. Thank you.

BA: Okay.

----------End of Interview----------
Reviewed by William Buie 3/2/16
Reviewed by Yolanda Romery 4/15/2016