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Arnold Saunders
August 30, 2004
Interviewed by Bernard Herman
Transcribed by Megan Dwyre

Bernard Herman (BH): I'll introduce the tape. This is Bernie Herman on the 30th of August at Pilgrim Baptist Church with Arnold Saunders working on the history of The Village in Newark and actually I go ahead and start, if you would just start to tell me a little bit about growing up in Newark.

Arnold Saunders (AS): Growing up in Newark I had a wonderful life. I didn't know nothing about being poor because looked like we had everything to me. My grandmother raised me half my life and I didn't want for anything because there usually was food on the table and we had clothes on our back. I didn't know until later years how hard it really was for the family to supply these things back in, when I was born in '43, September 5, '43, and raised up on Grey's Avenue up on 896, what they call New London Road. I went to the colored school on New London Road from grades one to six and then I believe in 1954 they integrated the high schools in Delaware. To me, integration went smoothly because of our activities with the whites in the neighborhood. We played ball with them, we went [inaudible.], we did everything together except go to school. So when integration came I thought it went smoothly. We didn't have any problems integrating here in Newark because we didn't have those problems. As a junior in high school I started playing football and I graduated from Newark High School in 1962 with a scholarship to go to Delaware State University, and I didn't graduate, but I went a year and then I hooked up with the Eagles farm system, and I played football for about eight years in their system. Never made it to the big time, but I enjoyed my life as a football player. But as a youngster growing up in Newark, we just did everything together. The neighborhood was tight. We loved one another. Not that families didn't have problems every once in awhile with other families, but we grew up loving one another in The Village. If somebody was sick, everybody turned out to bring them a pot of soup or clean their houses. If somebody had a fire, if somebody had a piece of furniture or something to give them, or get them back up on their feet. The neighborhood consist of, when I came up, consist of a black barbershop, which my uncle Bob, I called him uncle Bob, he was my cousin, Saunders, he had a barbershop where everybody met, usually on a Saturday to get your hair cut, and at that time to save money you'd have to get a bald head. I mean, all your hair was cut off as a kid. I can remember one time, my mother had five boys in a row, we decided we were going to get a trim up, what they called a trim up, and that's not all your hair cut off, so we were [inaudible.] up to get this trim up but as soon as we got home, I tell you, we got turned right back around and sent right back to the barber shop to get all our hair cut off, and I didn't understand why at the time, but the time was, if you got a trim up that means I had to go to the barbershop more than usual to get a haircut and that costs money, but if we got a bald head, it was less money to spend for haircuts for kids. Back then they saved any way you could, growing up. And cousin Bob had a gas station which [inaudible.] on the corner of West Cleveland and New London, and what they called a little hop joint, or where we used to dance and listen to music. He had that two part of his shop where the kids met. We had the Elks Home was there and beside the Elks Home, we [inaudible.] the Dust Bowl, where kids would come and we'd play basketball, I mean, until dusk, until it was time to go home. The meeting place actually was up at the old colored school. We had such great meetings up there,

especially on the weekends in the summertime when we played baseball and all kinds of sports up on the hill where, if there wasn't anything doing down around in Newark, everybody knew everybody was up on the hill. They either were picnicking or playing basketball, pitching horseshoes, or any other get together was up on the hill, and that's what they called it, 'up on the hill.' That was essentially my growing up there in Newark. I had many mothers and fathers because at that point growing up other than the today when if you touch another child in this time, you'd get locked up or you'd be in trouble with the parent in that family, but I grew up getting beat by mothers and fathers all over The Village, and then getting another beating when I got home for disrespect. I grew up with respect of grownups because the grownups respected us in every form. Everything that we got into, for instance when I went to college there was guys who'd travel all over the place to see me play football. For instance I was at Howard University playing, and I looked up and there's the crowd, there's my dad, Fats Watson, Bubbles Conkey, and I called him, his name was Roy, but what did I call him? Puddy, Old Pud was up the stands and it made me feel great that the guys would follow you around in sports back there. Made you want to go to school and to learn because they were backing you. When I played those games for the Eagles in the farm system I started working for Acme Markets, and today, after 41 years, I still work for Acme Markets. That's probably my whole life in a nutshell growing up in Newark.

BH: Well let me ask. You mentioned that you were raised by your grandmother, Miss Sara Pennington Johnson.

AS: Yes.

BH: Could you tell me a little bit about her?

AS. Oh, grandma? [Laughs.]. Grandma was one of a kind. Grandmom could call, now we were, Grandma took care of fourteen grandkids, my mother's children and my Aunt Sara, which had, she had five at the beginning but ended up with seven. So did my mother, but my grandmother took care of us, and all the way in the middle of Newark, the City of Newark. My grandmother must have lived a mile and a half away. When she wanted the kids, when she called, 'Chilleen,' you could hear her all the way downtown and that meant to come home right away, and if you didn't come home right away, you got a tanning. Grandma was a carpenter [inaudible.]. She built part of Newark. Matter of fact, she built her own home. Right across from her home on Graze avenue, she had a little patch of land, maybe a acre or two acres where she gardened, and the kids built and took care of it, but she built one of her daughters home over there too and it was a pretty big home, and then a tragedy struck. My Aunt Sara had four children to burn up in a house caught on fire and was burnt up, and we lost four. They were the Corseys, which was my first cousins, my sister's sister. Grandmom was a religious person. It wasn't whether you wanted to go to Sunday school or church, you went to Sunday school and church. She marches down off that hill in a line, and people used to say, 'Here comes the penitence,' but we [inaudible.] were Saunders and Corseys, but Grandmom would take us to church every Sunday. You had to be awful sick not to go to church every Sunday. She supported almost all the ministers that was there and I can remember a minister who told me that, first ever, that he received five dollars, and five dollars was a big piece of money back then, was from Sara Pennington, and that was Revered Minus. He lives in Pennsylvania now, but he says he sees the first woman that ever gave me five dollars in an offer. Grandmom was a hard worker. She canned in the summer, to support

us in the winter. We hardly ever went downtown for any food except for some flour and sugar. Everything else was raised right there. We had apple trees, cherry trees, peach trees, and we just did all our canning and farming there. We raised pigs for meat, and that was [inaudible.] Grandmom. We respected her, because if you didn't respect Grandmom, you got beat with anything. Anything that she had in her hand back then. You got beat with shovels, chunks of wood, hangars, broomsticks [laughter.]. That's how you got beat, but back then, when you got a beating, all they did was tell you. They didn't chase you down. They says, 'You going to get a beating for that,' and sure enough just as soon as you got out those last stitches of clothes to get into bed last night, here she was, upstairs to give you your beating. Also there was a field up there where the Towers are now, that was owned by a man named Mr. Green, and Mr. Green let my grandmother farm that land of his when he was living, but he donated that land to University of Delaware after he died, and my grandmother used to farm that land. There's so much stories I could tell you that happened with the kids and grandmother, that you wouldn't have much long tape to hear them, but one was we lost a couple kids in the cornfield up there in Green's. The cornfield was such a large field that we lost my brother Munroe in there one time, and we was out there calling for him. He was only about two, and you called for him and all you could hear, I mean you couldn't hear him, but he was sitting there going, 'Huh, huh,' until you ran up on top of him. Another story was, we used to ride Mr. Sherman's pigs. We were ornery kids. [Laughter.].

BH: Pig riding.

AS: Oh yeah, we used to ride his pigs, and when he come home he'd chase us back home, but sure enough you just come up there and Grandma was good as a tanning.

BH: How do you a ride a pig?

AS: You grab him by his ears, and just hold on tight as you can. They'll be squealing, but you just grab them ears and just hold on and ride, but we did that. That's [inaudible.] Grandmom, she had about fourteen children. My mother was the last one to pass away out of all of them. It was a good life. Grandmom was a hard woman but a lovable woman. You know the beatings that you would get from Grandmom was discipline, but get sick, she'd drop you in one of them long dresses that they have and just rock you all night long, until morning when you—I remember I got sick one time and Grandmom just kept me in her lap the entire night, the entire night. She made sure that I was well. She wouldn't lay me in the bed. She just rocked me in her lap, and then at four o' clock in the morning when she laid me down, she'd just get up and go do her farm work after staying up all night with me, and that's love. I miss my grandmother. She was a great woman in my life. My dad was a great person in my life, if I could speak about him. James Marshall Saunders, they called him Choppy. They nicknamed him Choppy because every time they'd look for dad, he'd be up a tree eating pork chops, so they named him Choppy. My dad was a big influence in my life coming up. Dad told me anything that I wanted, that I could get, says nobody could stop you from doing anything back then, and that if I wanted it just to go for it, and that's what I did. I never felt deprived of anything that I wanted to go get, there was just no stopping me on account of that's the way Dad raised us. Going to school or playing Little League, or anything that I wanted to do I just remember him saying, 'Anything you want, if you want it, go get it,' and he was a great influence in my life. There's people I looked up to. I looked

up to my Uncle Pete growing up, Pete Saunders, which [inaudible.] is his name. He was on my dad's side, and he just [inaudible.] as a person, a self made man. He spent most of his life in the Army, but I looked up to him as a guy that had succeeded in life, Uncle Pete, and I looked up to him. That's about it.

BH: I was going to ask you to talk a little bit about the barbershop and your Uncle Bob. The barbershop was such a center to the community.

AS: And it was, and it was. That's where you got all the info on anything that was happening. You know what I mean? Even if you didn't have a haircut, you'd go in, sit down, and just listen to what was going on. But Uncle Bob was a great influence other than cutting hair in Newark. Uncle Bob instigated a sit-in when the bowling alley. When that bowling alley was built in Newark shopping center, they wouldn't allow blacks to bowl. He was one of the instigators that went down and had a sit-in so that we could bowl, and he did other great things for kids at that time. Uncle Bob would spend his money and send them to camp, or if they needed equipment, he would give to them. He just, he was a strong person in the neighborhood, Uncle Bob was. If something happened that people needed help, Uncle Bob would come to the rescue, and his barbershop. When I was a kid, he had one helper, Oswald Watson, who would cut your hair. I can remember Oswald and Uncle Bob, and I think most of the people liked Oswald to cut their hair though. He was a good barber, but Uncle Bob did a good job, but usually Oswald Watson usually cut mine, as I grew up, out of childhood. Uncle Bob did all the cutting hair when we was kids. Yes, the barbershop was a great central point, not only for kids, but mostly for grownups.

BH: What did it look like? Could you describe a little bit? It's been gone a long time.

AS: The barbershop had two chairs in it. It's set in the middle of two homes, that set in the back of it, and it was no wider or bigger than one of these sheds that we put up now. Some of these sheds that people put up, was actually bigger than the barbershop. It had two chairs and I guess it could hold, if you set around this barbershop, maybe eight to ten people, and that would be it. They would be standing outside waiting to go in, because you couldn't go sit down. You had to take a number. It wasn't a big shop.

BH: And then behind that was I've heard it called different things, the Hen's Nest? Is that right? There was a little community hall behind it, for recreation.

AS: Oh. That was, I can't remember, it was a recreational center where we met and had dances. That was right beside the Elks, but it was behind the barbershop, and I can't remember what the community center, what was the name of it. You'd have to check with somebody that would know more. When we had weekend dances, I can remember my brother Marshall belonged to a singing group. They sung there one night, but it was a community center.

BH: So were there a lot of performers who did the singing?

AS: Everybody, everybody back then had a group. We had a group that sang on the corners [laughter.], but I think Marshall now, was more organized then we were. They had put a group together that traveled to sing to each other communities that they had like, Louis L. Ready used

to have dances at their high school. Groups would go down there and sing that wanted to get some exposure. The armory in Wilmington. All these communities [inaudible.] those guys would sing, but ours, my group never got off the ground. We were just corner singers and that's about it, but back then everybody sung on the corner. Everybody had a group.

BH: So what kind of music was this?

AS: I don't know. [Laughter.]. It was rock n'roll. We called it the rock'n roll era, Chuck Berry and all of those, Aretha Franklin. That's the era I come up in, where music meant something. The words meant something. I don't know what the words mean now, that these people be singing about now, but if our youths could remember their lessons in school like they could remember the words to those records today, then they'd be A students. [Laughter.].

BH: Churches were a big part of the community.

AS: Oh, was churches a big part of the community. We had three, all of them set right on New London. If you start at the railroad track and start up New London, Pilgrim Baptist came first, and then there was St. John's, and then there was Mt. Zion on the way down the hill on New London. I guess if it wasn't for the churches, we would have more, I guess, rowdy kids than anything. I think the churches, on account of we had to go to church, played a great part, and I think the children that went to church learned a lot about self esteem, learned about, more about God. Right now, the children that came up with me, my age, ninety percent of them that lived away from church, even I did, when I went to college I stopped going to church, but when the seed was planted back then, we all, most of us just returned back to, either [inaudible.]. We've got some that have been preachers. Sam E. Jackson, I come up with, he lived on the top of the hill right by the school, he became a minister. I'm a deacon in the church. Our upbringing in those churches was a great influence in our lives. Not only that, on account of the community and how tight they were, even the in the summertime when summer school started, they called them vacation bible school. Pilgrim would hold it for one week, and then we would move to St. John's for a week, and then we'd move to Mt. Zion for a week. So the community was locked in with the churches, where we did things together. The only thing that separated our churches were, it's just the way that, you know Pilgrim has a way of doing their devotions, and so does St. John, so does Mount Zion, but all churches, even today, we only serve one God, but we have a different method of our organization. What I'm trying to say is what we might call our, I'm a deacon in a Baptist church, they call them stewards in Methodist church and so on, but that's the only difference is. All of us believe in God and that's the reason why we work together, and in Jesus Christ. If you don't then I feel sorry for some people because if you don't believe that Jesus is God's son than we're in trouble, or they in trouble. That's about it. The churches was a great part of the community.

BH: Well I have two questions about the churches. One is churches, as we know from this past Saturday also had socials, could you talk about church socials?

AS: Oh, church socials. The big thing church socials, if one had it they all had it. Whatever socials they threw, all the churches was invited to come, and same as today. I was a great part of, Black religion is—when sanctuaries was built, they always built a place to eat, and eating was

part of our culture, of saying that we love you, invite you in, and we had big, matter of fact, we'd go up on the school ground, and have big events, social events that the churches would put on, but one church wouldn't borrow, another church would come and we were all together, just like the last one we just had. All churches was invited to come, to enjoy. There was always, each church would have what they called an outing, and they invited another church, or all churches together, like I can remember Lenapi park. If we had an outing, Pilgrim had an outing, they would send letters to the other churches, that we're going to Lenapi park, all invited to go, and things like that.

BH: Did the churches ever have camp meetings?

AS: I can't remember camp meetings, but they talk about it. They talk about camp meetings. I can't remember going to one myself. I know Pilgrim Baptist started in a tent.

BH: Well tell me about the origins of Pilgrim Baptist Church.

AS: It started in a tent on Church Street, and then, there was an old theater that was bought. Then they move into the theater, and then into Pilgrim Baptist Church on New London.

BH: Where was the theater?

AS: I don't know. I got the history.

BH: We'll take a pause here. The tenets of Pilgrim Baptist Church. You were talking about baptism. I was wondering where baptisms took place for the church over time.

AS: Well, back when we [inaudible.], it was done in White Clay Creek. They would go down and baptize into the creek. Then they built a baptismal pool in the church, and usually there's one in each, the choir box was the old baptism pool in the old Pilgrim, and usually baptism took place on the first Sundays, but now we have them the fourth Sundays of the month.

BH: So were you baptized in White Clay Creek?

AS: No.

BH: You got the pool.

AS: I got the pool. I was lucky and got the pool. [Laughter].

BH: Where along White Clay Creek? Was it the same place or did they go from place to place?

AS: No, I think it was the same place, and it was down by the, there was an old cider mill.

BH: Right down at the bottom of North College.

AS: Yes, yes, yes. Right down in there, where they had baptism I believe. I could be wrong, but they had a place up there, up at the second dam they called it, where we used to swim. They might have down it there. You would have to check with somebody else about where, but I thought I heard somebody say it was down by the old cider mill.

BH: Well I was going to ask you. I wanted to go back to something that you brought up earlier. Actually I'd like to know if you could describe what a church social was like. I'd like to ask you about that.

AS: How do you mean social?

BH: Well some folks will talk about picnics, or down at the old George Wilson Center, where the old school was, and it's been awhile, I was wondering if you ever remember any of those growing up down there.

AS: At the church social?

BH: Yes.

AS: Usually, when I grew up, I can't remember too many church socials that we had prominently here. The biggest church social that I can remember is when they held the [inaudible.] in Wilmington, where they used to have [inaudible.], I call it, there used to be eight blocks of churches. They'd hold it there for a week, and now it's down about maybe one block, two blocks. It's not attended like it was when I was a kid coming up, but it'd be a whole week up there. Other than, church socials other than that, I can't remember any other than just get together up on, I'd say up on the school hill, where all the churches got together and had a picnic or so.

BH: Did different people have different specialties that they would bring?

AS: Oh yes, absolutely, absolutely. Your specialties had to be brought. Sister Moseley and her macaroni and cheese. Today they get her to still make macaroni and cheese. Chicken, fried chicken, was a big part of a social. The chitlins, and pig feet, and potato salad, coleslaw, the pies that they used to make. Great eating, great eating.

BH: Somebody told me there used to be lots of little sort of cafes, where people would cook themselves food. They'd have a little place in their house, or—

AS: Brother Davis had a little café, a little place that he had for where the kids used to go. Uncle Bob had his little store, where they used to serve meals, had a couple tables in there. Mostly, I can't remember any down in Newark. That's about most I can remember there, but I know there was other places like out in Arden Hill, they had a black restaurant out there. I can't remember the name of it, and we used to call them 'greasy spoons,' because mostly we cooked in greasy stuff. Collard greens, with ham hocks and stuff in it, short ribs. Most of that was greasy stuff, but good eating.

BH: That's what I grew up on.

AS: Oh yea? [Laughter].

BH: [Inaudible.].

AS: And black eyed peas, and stuff like that there. That's about, see a lot of the Newark, the villagers would cook and have meals sold out of their house, dinner sold out of their house. Sister Money was great for crabcakes, and other mothers that was there used to sell dinners out of their house, and you would go to them. Churches sold dinners.

BH: But you would go to somebody's house and buy dinner to take away?

AS: Yes, yes. They would announce in church that so and so, Mr. and Mrs. so and so was having dinners. You could go pick them up.

BH: Somebody told me that some folks, like the Chrysler workers and the GM workers would come in and they would be able to get meals after shift. [Laughter.].

AS: Oh yes. Matter of fact that was a big thing. Chrysler shift would get meals, matter of fact they would buy dinners when churches ran dinners. Oh, hundreds of dinners they would sell to Chrysler or hospital workers, or GM workers. They would all have meals. They'd give them a list what it was and we would deliver them to them, but some came.

BH: I was going to ask you. You mentioned the fire that took the Corsey girls?

AS: Yes, it was four of them. I think it was two girls and two boys. Don't ask me there names, because I wouldn't be able to remember their names. You'd have to get one of them to tell you their names. I can't remember my grandkids's names [laughter].

BH: How old were you when that happened?

AS: I think I was six. I was six years old I believe.

BH: That must have been an unbelievable time of grief for the community.

AS: Oh, it was. They had somebody up there to try to get them out, but the fire had gotten so bad, they couldn't even get in there and get them. Yes, it was devastating to lose four children in a fire. It was devastating to lose one in the neighborhood, to pass away. Back then the community grieved as one. When we lost a person it was like the community lost a child. That was the best part about growing up in The Village. No matter how ornery, or how we might be cross at one another, time of grief come, then you could really see the love of the community show, and that was such a great part about living in Newark.

BH: Well it sounds like it was just this wonderfully dynamic and rich community that all these

relationships were built up over time. Were there a lot of family connections through The Village?

AS: Oh yes. I would say half of it was related to one another here. Through marriage or [inaudible.], but the relationship was like family, so we treated one another like family.

BH: I want to come back to your grandmother a second. I have my notes from when we chatted at the picnic.

AS: Yes.

BH: And you talked about her table, and I was wondering if you could just sort of describe, I guess describe meals at your grandmothers house growing up.

AS: Meals, oh boy, you talking about meals, and plenty of it. We had a table I would say was, it was sort of like a picnic table. It was long. It could seat at least fourteen kids, and when my grandmother cooked, she cooked. For the children or fourteen people, or more. She cooked on an old wooden stove, which had an oven and it had a tank on the back for hot water. She had a grill that covered the entire top of that wooden stove that when she cooked pancakes they would come off of there, well me, I mean I could eat ten or fifteen pancakes as a kid, and that's how she would cook, cook tons of food. The food that she cooked, baked-- we had apple cobbler, peach cobbler. Matter of fact up there at the old Towers that the University has now, there's a field full of blackberries, and as a kid you'd have to go out and pick tubs full of these blackberries, and we'd have blackberry mush and blackberry cobbler, and always we had, seems like we had fried chicken on Sundays all the time. The greens, we had every kind of green there was, collard greens, mustard greens. Have you ever heard of poke?

BH: I have.

AS: Poke salad. [Laughter.]. Yes, we had poke. We had that, We had all of that. Grandmom never cooked by measuring, spoons and stuff, it's always dumped in her hand. She could measure that stuff out in her hand. If it was a teaspoon, she could put it in her hand as a teaspoon, or whatever. They never had to measure anything, and it always turned out A number one. Matter of fact, I'd rather [laughter.], eat at grandmom's than eat at my mother's house. My grandmom, not that my mother couldn't cook, Grandmom was a great cook.

BH: Could you describe what we were chatting earlier about, how everybody sat to the table.

AS: Oh yes, sat to the table and the discipline at the table. Whatever was set down you had to eat, I mean, that just was [inaudible.]. If it was set before you, you ate it, and if you didn't, or if you was unruly at the table, my grandmother had this long wooden spoon. Let me tell you something, many hickeys I took right, right in the middle of the forehead. If she said straighten up and you didn't straighten up, she could reach down that long table with that long wooden spoon and crack you right in the middle of the forehead, and that was the disciplinary action at the table, but we still loved her though.

BH: We talked about her garden and your Aunt Roberta and the water.

AS: Oh yes, bringing the little bit of water. My grandmom hit her with the shovel. [Laughter.]. As kids growing up, when my grandmother was upset, she'd—if you hear the word 'Lord, God,' run, because Grandmom was about to hit you with something. Evidently you'd done something wrong, and that was the first word, 'Lord, God, look what this child have done,' or, 'Lord, God, look what this child had brought to me,' 'Lord, God.' So when you heard that, it was just like playing golf when somebody says 'four.' Heads would look up to see what was going on, cause Grandmom was about to hit somebody, and this particular time I had a cousin Roberta that my grandmother asked her to go get some water for the tomato plants, and she went and got her about a couple cups of water in this big bucket, and I heard Grandmama says, 'Lord, God look what she done brought me,' and I turned and that's when she hit her with the shovel she was digging with, and we usually teased Birdie. If Birdie heard the word 'binggg,' that's what it meant [laughter.]. Grandmom was rough with us, but she loved us. She was a great woman.

BH: I was going to ask you about holidays in The Village. What were the big holidays? How did people celebrate?

AS: I can't remember [laughter.]. Holidays that we all celebrate. Christmas, the only two that I can remember is Thanksgiving and Christmas. Halloween wasn't a big one for us, although we loved to go out trick or treating for candy and stuff. You had to dress up in outfits in order to get it, but as now we teach in Pilgrim there, we don't celebrate Halloween. So what we have down here is Hallelujah Night, where we have games and the kids puts on shows, and we just don't celebrate anymore [inaudible.], but Thanksgiving and Christmas in the 'hood were great days, great times, especially Thanksgiving. See Thanksgiving was a holiday that everybody's family came for meals. Even if I came to your house, and not my house, you were allowed to eat. Thanksgiving was the greatest time for me because it was food, it was eating, and it was the love of the family. Christmas was okay too, but usually Christmas, the family usually stayed at their own house and you would run, kids would run to other houses to see what we got, and what did you get, and so on, but Thanksgiving was the greatest holiday for me in The Village.

BH: Were their Fourth of July celebrations at all?

AS: Up on the hill, yes, they had Fourth of July. They set off fireworks and things like that. The fireworks were about the best part. It wasn't like a party going before that day, we just say that we set the fireworks at nine o'clock or so, and everybody, you know, you would have your barbeques or whatever, at your own home. That would be it, or we'd go over to the airport. When it got dark, when it started setting them off. University of Delaware at some times had fireworks down there, at one point. That was about it.

BH: So when did you leave Newark? When'd you move out?

AS: When did I leave Newark? Well, my mother moved to Wilmington for about, I think I was in college then, on West Fifth Street, West Second Street, that's what she lived on. I stayed with her my first year in college, and a couple years of playing in the Eagles farm system. Then I bought a home in Ogletown, at 601 Harmony Road in Ogletown, and from there I moved to what

they call New Castle. I bought a home in [inaudible.] off Appleby Road. But I would say I left Newark when I went to college in '63, the Village of Newark, but always, the fellowship of my church has always been Pilgrim Baptist. I always came back to here to go to church. I always came back to the fellowship of the people in Newark, but still only knew Newark even though I wasn't actually in Newark, but the Newark area's the only place I really know.

BH: Can you think of something that I haven't ask, or an area that we should explore a little bit? [Pause.]. Actually I know an area that I wanted to ask about, is baseball.

AS: Baseball. You know, we had our own baseball team, which was Newark. I think every black community had a baseball team, and we played doubleheaders on Saturdays and Sundays, in baseball, and that was a great, a great community I think for baseball. I think Newark had one. Elkton had one. Iron Hill had a baseball team. Wilmington had a baseball team. I can remember going to Woodstown, New Jersey. They had a baseball team. Kennet or Avondale had a baseball team. I can't remember which one, but they played between Kennet and Avondale, so I don't know who had the team.

BH: What was the name of the Newark team?

AS: Oh, I can't remember. I can't remember one I played with Pete Bessick and I've got news clippings. I think my brother had news clippings from playing with Pete back there. Oh, I can't remember the name. You can get the name from one of the other guys, they got it.

BH: I will.

AS: Yes, they got it. Oh, geez.

BH: But anyway, you played on one of these teams?

AS: Yes, I played for Newark when they had theirs, and then what happened was, we joined forces with Elkton's baseball team run by Pete Bessick and we used to travel up and down the east coast playing ball.

BH: Was this semi-pro or--?

AS: It wasn't semi-pro as a league-wise was, but what it was, was just a community team and we had guys that left our baseball team and played semi-pro and some went to the pros to play ball. For instance we had a tragedy, his name was Herman Hubbard. He played on our team, but he also played Triple A for Milwaukee Braves, Milwaukee, and he was killed in a car accident where he left it running one winter, and the exhaust got him, and that was one. There was a guy by the name, his name was [inaudible.], we called him R.J. Hubbard, who had an opportunity to go to the minors or the majors, but his mother was such a religious person that, you played ball on Sundays, he couldn't go. He could play ball with us on Saturdays, but he couldn't play ball on Sundays. Even majors, she wouldn't let him go, even if he signed up, and he played. He was a pretty good pitcher. Then as those leagues faded out, then we started playing semi-pro ball for people like Canada Dry. I played on the Canada Dry team for a couple of years and so on, but

they were mostly just black people with hardball teams, that we even traveled to Washington D.C. We played a team down there who had a one armed catcher, and was pretty good.

BH: And what position did you play?

AS: I played center field and second base at times, when they needed second base, but usually I just played center field. Good hitter, but had a guy named Billy Smoot, who played on the team, and we always had a ten dollar bet who would end up with the highest batting average, and I just couldn't beat that man. He just could hit the ball. He could hit the ball.

BH: So what was your best year for batting average?

AS: I guess I batted maybe .350, .379. That was my best batting, maybe .350, .379. I guess Billy hit over .400 that one year, but he was just a single. He wasn't a long ball hitter, but he could just hit those singles, I mean left and right, whenever he come down there. Any day he could go four for four. I had about, maybe two homeruns in my career. I wasn't a long ball hitter either, but I got picked up by—I played a lot of American Legion ball. A guy name of, his name was Mike McGlenchy, we called him Mr. McGlenchy, and he was a great guy as I was coming up as a kid. He sent four of us away to Milwaukee to their camp. They had a couple guys stay, I mean made it, but other than that, that's about it, in ball.

BH: Well I appreciate the time you've taken today to come up here and talk. I'm sure we'll get a chance to do so again. I hope so, and once you start thinking along these terms more and more things come back, and at some point is, I think we talked about, you still have some family photographs.

AS: Yes.

BH: And I'd love to see those.

AS: Of Grandmama. I tried to get my grandmother's photograph from, my brother had it who passed away, but his wife still has it. I'll try to get that one, and the neighborhood—Spence Taylor, which was an excellent charcoal photograph of him, drawn in the [inaudible.] City Hall for a long time.

BH: He was the police officer is that right?

AS: No, he wasn't a police officer, but the police officers gave it to me to give to him when they took it down out of the hall. Spence was a farmer. He lived up on New London Avenue, just like we did. Those guys, when I come along, I barely know what they did for a living, but we had three farmers up there. My grandmother was one, Sherman Woods was one, and Spence Taylor was one, and they sold eggs and things like that off the farm. He was one of the guys that I was scared of as a child, but I had to go up and buy eggs from him. I mean, 'cause whenever your parents say to do something, my grandmother, you had to go do it.

BH: So why was he scary?

AS: He looked just like a goat to me. I mean, he had a goatee that came down, like a goose goatee, and that's what I saw in him as kid. He used to scare me. He looked just like a goat. Other than that, that's about it.

BH: Well I want to thank you again for taking the time, and we'll get to follow up, and like I said you'll get copies of everything, and when it all starts to come together I think we're going to have a really great history of The Village. So thank you very much.

AS: No problem. My pleasure, my pleasure.

BH: So the police knew your grandmother?

AS: Yes, the police new Grandmom. She was one of the major citizens in Newark. I can remember one time, my uncle got unruly in the house, and I had two uncles that lived with her, and they got to fighting, and Grandmom called the police and they drug them out the house, and they just said, "I'll just see you downtown Mrs. Pennington," and no problem. When the kids got unruly, they didn't have to chase us down. They knew who we belonged to, and all they did was come up and talk to Grandmom. Grandmom had great rapport with the city of Newark. They knew her and they respected her. Grandmom got a lot of things done that ordinary people couldn't get done on account of she was respected by the authorities downtown.

BH: For example, what's something that she got done?

AS: Her kids not sent to jail.

BH: [Laughter.]. Oh, okay, I'm with you.

AS: You know what I mean? She'd go down and on account of her rapport with the city and the state, they would release them unto her, where they would have been locked up.

BH: When did she pass away?

AS: Oh, geez. I think I was—I know Grandmom didn't see me graduate. I can't tell you what year. I'd have to look that up.

BH: But you were still in Newark then?

AS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Matter of fact, we lived in Grandmom's house. Matter of fact, my mother moved up in Grandmom's house when she passed away.

BH: The community must have mourned her passing.

AS: They did. Was respected by the community, muchly. They still talk about Grandmom and the way she handled it, but everybody was bound the same cord as Grandmom, and my grandmother stayed to her convictions, and I guess that's why they respected her even more.

Course she had—my uncles was ornery. I had some ornery uncles. I can remember the stories. These are stories that came down. I can remember my Aunt Florence. Some guy pulling my Aunt Florence hair out of her head. See we hunted for a living too. We hunted for our meats, like we got squirrels, rabbits, [inaudible.], and my Uncle James, he could shoot a rabbit on the hop and not put a pellet nowhere but in his head, and he told that one guy, ‘The hand that you pulled my sister’s hair out, I’m gonna blow it off,’ and sure enough at the pool hall he was shooting, I mean he was shooting pool, and he blew his hand off. These were stories that come down to me, but Uncle James could shoot. He could shoot. So there’s all kind of stories I could tell you. Those stories they used to tell us to keep us in the house. The old school, people walking around there with chains on them. You know what I mean? Rattling chains. [Laughter.]. No headed guy down at the end of the walkway and I could by myself as a kid, peeping down the walkway to see if that no headed guy was down there [laughter.]. All kind of stuff. These were great stories that you told because they didn’t have TV back when I come up as a kid, and also we didn’t have electricity. We studied by lamps, and the radio was, I’m telling you, was number one in the house. If your kids crying out to see TV, we cried out to hear the radio because then we had The Shadow, we had [inaudible.] and Molly, you had Lone Ranger, you had all of these stories that was on the radio, and because you use your imagination because it was on the radio, I think kids had more aptitude of learning because, man, if I had to bed and I listened to the Lone Ranger or something, man it hurt, but that was the greatest thing. And then, when there was no stories on, and late at night, as I said we sat around, what we called a furnace, in the middle of the dining room, you sat around and they would tell stories of this and that. It was a great life, it was a great life.

BH: Remember any stories?

AS: That they would told. Not exactly, not exactly, but they told those stories. I can’t remember any specific ones, but I used to sit around listen to them. Nothing special [laughter.].

BH: Well it’s all special I think.

[Tape ends.].