INTERVIEW SUMMARY - TAPE INDEX

NAME: BUCKNER, DOROTHY
DATE: January 23, 1981
LOCATION: Boise, Idaho
INTERVIEWER: Mateo Osa
SUBJECT: Lee Street
REEL NO.: 375
OH NO.: 562

OH 562

TAPE MINUTE	SUMMARY OF CONTENTS
0-2:00	Introduction.
2:01-5:20	Blacks lived all over Boise, World War II difficulty renting anywhere; Ash-Miller-Pioneer concentrated area, Mr. Kaiser landlord, Mr. Nelson real estate agent, Luther Johnson; "good darkies" scattered everywhere.
5:21-7:40	Claude and Mary Buckner, Doc and Suzie Hanna, Bannock Street; Coopers, North End; Mamie Breew, Harrison Blvd.; Charlie Hubbard, South Boise.
7:41-10:55	Ash Street an okay street for Blacks; Lee Street for many years "lily White"; Ben Thomas landlord discriminated against Blacks.
10:56-15:10	Early Black people scattered around town; colorful people on Pioneer Street: Big Mama, lady of the Evening; Kansas City pimp Junior; Tracy.
15:11-21:45	Pioneer Street neon sign, Blackjack's barbecue sauce, father's gambling house on River Street, police would do anything to keep "niggers" off of Main Street; restaurants discriminated against servicemen. Her father, good relations with policeman, Dorothy's father known as "Mr. Pistol" from Van Buren, Arkansas.
21:46-25:00	Heyday of Pioneer Street, World War II years; ration tickets; father's pawn shop on River St., "log cabin,": gambling, potter, shoot craps, booze, did a lot of it; local clientele, social activities.
25:01-end	Dorothy's mother and father separated, mother lived at 1114 Miller Street boarding house, shoe shine men lunched there and father had bootleg joint -- "log cabin," then moved to corner of Pioneer and Grand; renters wouldn't pay Kaiser, Pistol rented houses through Walson for Kaiser on Pioneer Street -- 60-40 deal.

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

0-5:15	Grew up in Minidoka, father hoboed to Idaho, early jobs -- gardening, caretaking, shoe shiners, waiters; attitudes change with influx of Black servicemen; old pioneer Blacks mad at activist role, "cryptic type" discrimination; father's encouragement.
5:16-8:50	Wanted best for children, hard getting others involved, few local Blacks participated; different values concerning discrimination, past attitudes haven't completely vanished; child better off now, school incident.
8:51-14:20	Renting and house buying discrimination, cross burnt in Dorothy's lawn, "first-class" cross; buying houses hard for friends, renting more difficult; old Black pioneers were "good darkies," no threat.
14:21-17:20	Concentrate Blacks in an area, C. C. Anderson, cops knew every "dark cloud" in Boise, float "rough niggers" out of town; World War II brought money -- threat of Blacks scared people.
17:21-20:55	New York trip, different interest, Y.W.C.A. Board, Black Awareness Group, River Street Center; community action center, place to air gripes, need for people to be heard; outsider more active than locals -- 1971-72.
20:56-27:30	Large Black population in River Street in early 1970's, Blacks spread out from Pioneer and Grand, still more Whites than Blacks in neighborhood; Black population grew out of war years, still going on, unstable times, Black people needed something quick, couldn't afford court battles or time involved to integrate other neighborhoods.
27:31-end	State Civil Rights Law preceded Federal Civil Rights Act.

TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

0-8:25	Things better in Boise than South, still not okay; social activities -- church, G.A.R. hall dances, picnics, Miramar Ballroom; prejudices; Chinese restaurants open; Blacks and Chinese could marry; St. Paul's Baptist Church, Bethel A.M.E.; Pioneer Street died out about 15 years ago (1965).
8:26-14:50	Dorothy's sheltered existence, not concerned when young; Boise's need for improvement, Whites threatened by large influx of Blacks; War years -- Black U.S.O., N.A.A.C.P.

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DB: As far as I can remember, Blacks have lived all over Boise. You know, in the North End, South Boise. There was no concentration of, you know, just one area. But during the war years when it all of a sudden, a group of servicemen and their wives and what-have-you, and people got uptight about it. So they had difficulty renting houses and finding any place to stay. My dad, wheeler-dealer good guy, that knew a Mr. Nelson who was a realtor. But the guy that owned all of these run-down houses in the Pioneer Street area.

MO: Just on Pioneer Street?

DB: Well I'm just saying that area -- it's Pioneer primarily.

MO: Miller, Grand, Ash.

DB: No, the street -- right, right, Ash, Miller, Pioneer -- that was the concentrated area. Oh God, the name's escaped me, I'd thought I'd written it down someplace. It doesn't matter who. Kaiser owned the places, a lot of the houses, some of these run-down places. He was having difficulty renting them because he wouldn't fix them up and the guys would, you know, move out and not pay him. So this Mr. Nelson thought that my dad could probably, and he did -- he was renting them on a forty-sixty cut. You know, he was an okay crook. You know, there's crooks and then there's okay-crooks. But anyway, he fixed the windows and did things of that sort and the guys liked him a lot, and that kind of thing. That's where a large percent of the service people -- because there was no place --

MO: So that's why they ended up going there?

DB: Yeah. And many had come from big cities, larger cities, where, I think, it was just an automatic thing like, Blacks and Polish and blah-blah, just lived in certain areas, more or less, for that time and period.

MO: So that before World War II, it seemed like there really weren't too many concentrations of Blacks anywhere?

DB: No, because they were the old, you know, the good darkies that were scattered all over Boise -- living in "masta's" backyard or something like that, you know. Literally -- because it was all over Boise. I remember the few people that, these are just names, Coopers. And I can't tell you anything about them, I just barely remember a little bit about these people. Okay Buck's folks have lived here forever.

MO: And they were on Bannock?

DB: Yeah, right.

MO: Claude and Mary Buckner on Bannock?

DB: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And Hannas, Doc Hanna and Suzie Hanna. I remember them just minutely as a youngster in Sunday School. And the Coopers and the --

MO: Where did the Coopers live?

DB: I don't know. I can't get my bearings about them because I was very young. It was in the North End somewhere.

MO: North End somewhere. They weren't down Miller Street or Grand?

DB: Huh-uh, huh-uh. And Mamie Green lived on the end of Harrison Boulevard here. She was a cateress. And Charlie Hubbard that worked for the Owyhee Hotel, was a waiter at the Owyhee Hotel for many, many years, lived in South Boise on Longmont, if I'm not mistaken, or somewhere in that area. So you see this gives --

MO: They were spread around pretty good?

DB: Yeah, really. Strange as it seems in Boise, there were certain streets that Blacks, you know, lived on and right around the corner was another landlord that would not rent to -- like Ash Street was an okay street, Lee Street for many, many years was lily White.

MO: They wouldn't rent to any Blacks?

DB: That's right.

MO: But they would on Ash?

DB: Ash Street.

MO: And this was at what time?

DB: During this same war years.

MO: Pre-war maybe?

DB: I don't think even, well I'm sure sorry that I don't have all this together before.

MO: Well, for example, when do you remember the first colored person on Lee Street?

DB: Okay, as I said -- Willa lives on Lee Street --

MO: How about Ash?

DB: Ash Street, right.

MO: Willa Mae, was she the first, do you think, on Lee Street?

DB: Lee Street has not had many Black people period. I'd have to think about it, I can't be sure, but it was a heck of a long time. And it wasn't, you know, a special neighborhood or anything. The houses were no more unique than any place else. It just depended on the landlord. And Ben Thomas owned a lot of property down here and Ben Thomas was a Mr. Son-of-a-bitch also, you know.

MO: Why is that -- the way he ran his renting practices, or -- ?

DB: Yeah, right.

MO: And that he -- what was his practice?

DB: Well, no niggers. Very polite to all the darkies and what-have-you and that kind of stuff. He definitely did not rent for I don't know how long.

MO: Is that right?

DB: Yeah.

MO: And he owned a lot of houses on Lee Street?

DB: You bet. Pioneer Street, Lee Street, he had places scattered in a complete area.

MO: I suppose he had a lot of land over by the river? In some of those open fields out there.

DB: Yeah. There were little -- and later there were some little tiny cabin-like houses there that he rented on occasion as I understand it.

MO: Ramshackle type thing?

DB: Yeah, yeah. Transient houses.

MO: He got rent for those?

DB: Yeah. Picking up a lot of good stuff. (Chuckles)

MO: Did he build them, or had them built?

DB: I don't know. I have no idea how they happened to be there.

MO: So it seems like, what we're going through, is that some of the early colored people in Boise --

DB: I say Black.

MO: Okay, Black people.

DB: I mean, talking to somebody else they probably, you know, a lot of folks in Boise, well they're not Black, they're still colored, they get uptight. So, okay. Take your choice. I prefer Black -- I am Black.

MO: I will use Black then. Did a lot of the early Black people live all over

Boise?

[Editor's note: Prior to this interview, Mateo Osa had interviewed older Blacks in the Boise area, who used the term "colored" to describe themselves. Mateo was following their usage. M.B.]

DB: Right.

MO: For example, well could we go back and talk about, like, the Buckners on Bannock and who else -- do you remember?

DB: Well the Hannas.

MO: The Hannas.

DB: They're dead. They're no longer here. The Grants lived on Bannock.

MO: The Grants? What was his name?

DB: Yeah. Bud Grant. That was after the Hannas died and they lived in the Hanna's house on Bannock Street.

MO: So that was in -- approximately when?

DB: Have you talked with Mary Buckner?

MO: Uh-huh.

DB: I was going to say, she's the busiest bitch in Boise. She should be able to give you a lot of good background stuff. (Chuckles)

MO: Yeah, she has.

DB: I mean that kind of stuff, way back there. She know everybody's business, you know. (Laughter) She's my husband's mother, by the way.

MO: Yeah, I know that.

DB: Okay, so much for that. But I'm just saying that she'd know. As a matter of fact, she had scrapbooks and she read the obits daily. You know, has a collection of everybody that ever died, you know, that's what keeps her alive, I suppose, for many, many years. I mean, I don't know about. You know, the truth of the matter is that wasn't really the period that I was really interested. I just remember a lot of colorful

people that lived in the area that I thought were really kind of -- in the Pioneer Street, Lovers Lane, Lee Street, Ash Street, in that little vicinity -- I thought they -- that was [unintelligible].

MO: Who were some of those people?

DB: Okay, well, Big Mama -- this was, she was about five by five hundred.

MO: She was a huge woman, huh?

DB: Yeah. Well she was a lady of the evening. And I remember -- oh, Warren, the Reverend Warren, he lived over on Thirteenth Street, I believe. But he had the first -- what was the name of that little church -- some Methodist Church there.

MO: A.M.E.?

DB: Yeah.

MO: Bethel A.M.E.?

DB: Right, Bethel A.M.E., he was the pastor of that church and I think she was a lady of the evening but I think she was also -- I don't know whether she was ever one of the stewards, I don't know that much about Methodists, anyway, you know, in the church she was a constant shouter every Sunday in church, you know. Joyous jolly -- these are the good folks that I remember good things about. She was absolutely delightful! She used to wear hot pants and sit out in the, you know, out on the sidewalk. Very pleasant woman -- just delightful. But because my folks, you know, my father and my mother have been separated for ninety-nine years, you know, they don't believe in divorce, they just kind of hissed at each other. There a lot of these things [unintelligible]. As an example, I said "Well how could she be a hooker?" Of course, I couldn't use that expression to him, I'd say "How could she become a lady of the evening?" And blah, blah, he said "Well, what else could she do? You

know, she's nine by nine hundred and you don't know what you're talking about. Maybe circumstances and situations, you don't make people -- " He's a great guy, you know, that make, 'cause, people do a lot of things. And after thinking about it a little bit, she was just enormous, but a jolly, really neat person. Her little Kansas City pimp, Junior, and she cried a lot because she'd get awfully uptight with him because he wouldn't even scrub her floors. (Laughter) That was a constant crack-up. "He wouldn't even scrub my floors." And all of these things sound so hoky, but thinking about them, they're just really hilarious, to say "After all I've done for you, blah, blah, you won't even scrub my floors." When I was writing all this junk down I sat down and I just roared. (Laughter) Everything she's done, she didn't want much in life, she just wanted him to scrub her floors. You know, dirty rat, wouldn't even scrub her floors! (Laughter) Absolutely good-hearted, good-natured, I mean, really, she was just, you know.

MO: When did she come to Boise?

DB: So many of these people just kind of floated in Boise and just, you know -- I can't give any time, places or what-have-you like when they left and how long. Have you any idea how long she was around here or did you know her? [to friend]

THIRD PERSON: That's before my time.

DB: That's what I'm saying, I don't know if you even --

THIRD PERSON: I heard [unintelligible] talking about it.

DB: And okay, right next door, this was another place on Pioneer Street and a run-down joint, you know, and the guy had an enormous, beautiful, neon sign put out on this raggedy, run-down, knocked-out house. There was a fireplace built inside, you know, and the great big sign "Barbecue," it was Blackjack's place, a barbecue joint you know. Well, it was said that

mind because it was a cover for a whore-home. You know, but he also had a barbecue joint. I thought that was brassy, all these things -- I think it's just absolutely. Well my dad said --

MO: You never said which sauce you were really --

DB: [Unintelligible] He had the best sauce in town. My dad maintained that as long as, because the one time Daddy had -- now this was on River Street also, there was a great big log house there, they used to run a gambling joint and bootleg. It was okay because everybody hung out there, all the soldiers and everybody because Daddy said the police would do anything to keep the niggers off of Main Street, you know, he said. "It doesn't matter," he said. Because I've often wondered, "Gee, how can you get away with this?" And he said, "Look, as long as you keep the niggers off of Main Street the White folks are so happy." Because they had a couple of incidents, you know, a couple of the fellows had turned out a couple of places downtown, machine guns and the whole good stuff.

MO: [Unintelligible] run them out?

DB: Well they had supposedly. This is a rumor, I didn't witness any of this. But a couple of little greasy joints that wouldn't serve some of the Black servicemen, and the guys went back to the base and they supposedly came back with machine guns and they were going to clean up the town. Everybody got uptight and a lot of things happened. So Daddy could operate with ease. You could do anything as long as, you know, over the way.

MO: So he kept it to Pioneer Street or Lover's Lane.

DB: As long as you kept it off Main Street. Cops would come around once in a while, I guess, just, you know, they'd wave. Well, they were on good

terms, "Oh, Mr. Johnson, how are you?" You know, it was Mr. Pistol, as a matter of fact.

MO: Mr. Pistol?

DB: Mr. Pistol.

mo: Mr. Pistol Johnson?

DB: Mr. Pistol, yeah. As a matter of fact, they didn't call them cops from where he came from. "The lawmen" he was a country cop, back east, he used to help raid joints and all that kind of stuff. So he was pretty versed in being an okay crook too.

MO: Oh, he was an ex-cop himself?

DB: Yeah.

MO: Where did he come from?

DB: Van Buren.

MO: Van Buren, Arkansas?

DB: Arkansas. Yeah. Right. And Blackjack, Tracy.

MO: Did Big Mama have another name -- did they ever call her Queenie?

DB: I have never -- that's the only thing I have ever known in my life.

MO: What was her last name?

DB: I have no idea. It's like Blackjack. These are people that, growing up I thought it was their name. I didn't know that there was another name. It was just, "This is Big Mama."

MO: There's a gal over on Eleventh Street, her name is Ethel Clark, she's a White lady, and she mentioned a big lady over there named Queenie there and I'm pretty sure it must be the same woman. Everyone called her Queenie and everyone did just what she said. Had absolute control practically.

DB: Huh? Well, could be, could be. I don't remember hearing anything referred to her. But you see there have been more than one --

MO: Madams? Was she a madam or was she more a --

DB: I don't think she even had girls working for her. No, she was just her own -- she was small-time operator, you know, to my knowledge. Well, there are other people that I've heard about and what-have-you, but they're still alive and I hesitate to talk about them. (Laughter) We'll wait a while. Big Mama's dead, that's okay.

MO: Did she die here in Boise?

DB: I don't even know. Did she, do you remember? I don't even remember.

MO: So what, were there two houses on Pioneer Street, or Lover's Lane, Big Mama's and Blackjack's?

DB: Oh no, let's see, one, two, three, four -- there were seven houses and then right on the corner as you rounded there was a house that stayed vacant for ninety-nine years because it was Ben Thomas's house and he board it up and he wouldn't rent it. But there were other little tiny houses along there. They had about seven houses there.

MO: Were there Black people in all of them?

DB: Yeah, after one period the house on the corner -- an Austrian family that lived there.

MO: Do you remember their names?

DB: I know the little girl's name, the daughter's name is Mary Joyce.

MO: Grimach -- sound familiar?

DB: I can't -- sort of.

MO: Grimach?

DB: I don't know, Mary Joyce is all I can --

MO: So what would you say would have been the heyday of the Lover's Lane or Pioneer Street activities there?

DB: Oh the war years.

MO: The war years?

DB: Yeah. That's a wild guess [unintelligible] but I would say that. Because every other place had a jukebox or a gambling in the back and it was just a way of life, you know. I'd never heard of nylons until the war. (Chuckles) Everybody had nylon hose and this kind of stuff, I was in the bobby sox era -- I wasn't even supposed to wear nylons. All of a sudden here, bundles of nylons.

MO: Where'd they come from?

DB: Well anything that you needed a ration ticket for, you could get for, you didn't need what-have-you. I suppose -- I grew up with margarine and all of a sudden we had lots of butter. I didn't smoke then so I don't know, but I'd seen my dad with lots of cigarettes. Well guys, first of all, he'd get in crap games, get in poker games, he had a miniature pawn shop -- they'd pawn anything. Anything that you wanted, well, you know.

MO: Who had that?

DB: My dad.

MO: There on Pioneer Street?

DB: Well see at that time my dad lived, it was actually on River Street. It's where this -- hey, what's this new fitness place is -- it's right there. There was a huge, old log house there.

THIRD PERSON: Where the center is?

DB: No, not where the center is -- see, this is over on River Street, there's a physical fitness place.

MO: Family Fitness.

DB: Family fitness place -- there were big trees and a great big -- well it wasn't completely log, it was stone and brick and something else. But it sat way back in the back -- way back, and there were lots of huge trees and everything. Everybody just kind of congregated there.

MO: Was it close to the river there?

DB: Not any closer than it is now. I mean, you know, the river has always been in the same place.

MO: Yeah, but River Street hasn't.

DB: Okay, as to where River Street is now, it would be like the same location that that Family Fitness place is.

MO: Okay. He had a log cabin down there?

DB: Well, he called it the log cabin -- it was just an old house, you know. It was logs and stone and what-have-you. It was just a run -- gambling games, poker, shoot craps, booze.

MO: When was this?

DB: Forty years --

MO: During the war?

DB: Yeah.

MO: Did he do any of that before the war or was it just mostly the war years?

DB: I suppose he'd probably done it off and on most of his life. But I wasn't very aware of it until then.

MO: How about his clientele -- were they mostly soldiers or were they -- ?

DB: Oh, locals. All the local yokels always hung out here. Friday night fight and a Saturday night shoot-out was regular. You know, it was just fun and jollies -- everybody socialized. (Laughter) God, he'd turn over if he heard -- no, he wouldn't, he would find it riotous, because it's true.

MO: So when did he move from that location to Pioneer Street -- or was it vice versa? Or did he have both at the same time?

DB: Oh, later after they tore that doggone place down -- [unintelligible] sold that. Well, you see my mother lived on Miller Street and my mother

and father were separated. They had lived on Miller Street -- my mother in a boardinghouse on Miller Street as a matter of fact. It was a huge, -- 1114 Miller, if I'm not mistaken. It was right on the alley -- a huge house.

MO: Coming in from which way?

DB: I have no sense of direction.

MO: So it would have been on the Eleventh Street side of Miller or one the Pioneer Street side of Miller?

DB: Well, like where Grand Avenue would curve around and run right into Miller that way -- so it was on the left-hand side because there's never been any houses on the right side. There was a warehouse in later years, so it was on the left-hand side.

MO: So that would be the west side?

DB: Uh-huh, yeah.

MO: Your mother had a boardinghouse down there?

DB: Yeah. Well, because a lot of the guys at that time -- you worked in a shoe shop or shined shoes or something and they'd come there for lunch and she'd fix -- well, it was dinner at twelve o'clock really.

MO: A lot of the guys came down from downtown, is that it?

DB: Yeah. I don't even remember what year my mother -- they were always kind of friendly enemies, you know, but that was my mother and father's home really. Then when they broke up, we still lived there, but my father had the bootleg joint.

MO: That was the one over by --

DB: The log cabin. And later when they tore that down he moved to the corner of Miller -- no, Pioneer and Grand. That's where the first little neighborhood center was. It was a house across the street from where the neighborhood center is now.

MO: Did your father ever have a place right on Pioneer Street during the heyday there, with, say Big Mama or Blackjack? Did he operate in cahoots with them or was he --

DB: He was renting the houses, you see, this Mr. Nelson, the realtor that tried to get the houses -- okay, Kaiser owned the houses. Kaiser was not having success renting the houses because the guys wouldn't pay him -- the women or the guys, because he was such a son-of-a-bitch. You know, the water would leak, the windows rotted and so they just moved out or break out and wouldn't pay anything. And this Mr. Nelson -- I can't remember his first name --

MO: He was the realtor?

DB: Yeah, right, was a good friend of my dad's, and said "Hey," to old Kaiser, "I know somebody that can rent these places." So Daddy, he didn't fix them up that good, you know, he would do a little something so they were at least kind of livable. And my dad was renting the houses through Nelson for Kaiser -- you know, I think it was kid of a sixty-forty split or something like that. Anyway, he got the best end of the --

MO: That was on Pioneer Street?

DB: That was on Pioneer Street -- right.

MO: There was about seven houses down there?

DB: Right. Well, not all seven of them he'd be in control of, because I said mostly Black and I'm thinking -- one on the corner this Austrian family lived. Then it seemed to me there was a Chinese or Oriental family that lived at one time -- that was the kind of thing I can't really be sure of that. But for the most part the houses on Pioneer Street are the ones [unintelligible] -- Pioneer Street into, I think, maybe a couple on

Lover's Lane. You know, Pioneer Street was kind of curved right down. People thought, in fact we've had many disputes about that -- some people said "That was the alley." And they said "No," because I looked on the map and what-have-you and there's actually a continuation of the street, it got chopped up.

MO: Pioneer Street?

DB: Lover's Lane.

MO: I thought Pioneer Street and Lover's Lane were the same thing.

DB: Pioneer Street ran into -- there's a little curve that went like this, what-have-you, and this section of it down through there, was Lover's Lane.

MO: That's -- okay. Pioneer Street ran into Lover's Lane.

DB: But then it had been, you know -- okay, sometimes it was commonly referred to -- the whole of it was Lover's Lane. Where they got that name, I haven't the foggiest idea. But Pioneer was the street and then there was this little section that curved off here -- so maybe four or five houses down in there. It was really labeled -- called -- Lover's Lane.

MO: Was it like, maybe, south of the tracks where Lover's Lane started and Pioneer ended, or -- ?

DB: Pioneer Street came this way, like if this is Pioneer Street -- I can't remember this. [Looking at map.]

MO: Okay, here's Lee Street and Miller -- here's Pioneer and Grand, and Ash.

DB: Okay, now Pioneer Street went past Miller and then there's a little -- no, I'm going a wrong way.

MO: But does Pioneer really angle off more this way?

DB: Well, what I'm trying to say is, it was a little street that was just a continuation of Pioneer Street and probably went this way and Ash Street

was the street -- it was kind of like an alleyway, and Ash Street was another street kind of in front of it. It looked like -- I can't explain it.

MO: And your mother and father's house was --

DB: Right -- it was on the alley of Miller Street.

MO: Is this the alley here?

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

DB: . . . no jobs, you know, that's probably the reason that most people would come from any place. Why they chose Idaho, because I had a sister that lived in Minidoka. I grew up in Minidoka -- nobody's ever heard of Minidoka. I lived in Minidoka before, I don't even know anything about Arkansas because, I was, you know, two years old or something like that. I came to Minidoka and I lived with my sister here. Okay people, well my father hoboed to Idaho and then he'd send for the rest of the family and then I think he had a sister, whose husband worked for the railroad or something, and they could get a pass. Then they'd bring somebody else. That's the way people came. I think, primarily, most of the jobs at that time were gardening, caretaking, shoe shining and that kind of thing -- a waiter or what-have-you. There were not that many things that were open. But the usual reason for people migrating to another town, another community.

MO: So, supposedly some of the other Black people found work here and filled up a few of those service openings that are available most any place?

DB: Right.

MO: You think possibly, that --

DB: I'm sure of that -- I'm sure of it.

MO: Then maybe later, an increase in the Black population due to the service

and did you notice attitudes changing, or --

DB: Sure, as a matter of fact, I was very fortunate in that I was able to lobby in the legislature for the first state civil rights bill that was passed here. Which was even stronger than the federal civil rights bill. It was way-back-when. Did a whole lot of hell-raising and crusading and canvassing --

MO: When was that, do you remember?

DB: Oh God, I have all that stuff in scrapbooks and what-have-you but I think what-is-her-name has -- to get N.A.A.C.P. -- which I can't remember dates. I'm sure it's a matter of record some place. As a matter of fact, Polly had a lot of this kind of stuff that she kept -- Polly Crook.

MO: Polly Crook?

DB: Uh-huh -- she's in New York, she can't help.

MO: So did it look like there's an increase in maybe discrimination or at least some of the things you experienced -- can you elaborate on some of that?

DB: Well sure, the truth of the matter is, unfortunately, for such a long period of time, somebody -- "Old Pioneer," you know, Blacks that lived here -- were really non-plussed by focusing any attention on any discriminatory acts or anything, because I caught all kinds of flak, you know, for everything. "Why are you rocking the boat?" "Why are you, blah-blah-blah -- things are so much better here than they were in Mississippi." Well, I have no way of knowing because I'd never been in Mississippi and that ain't all. And the truth of the matter is, personally, I have witnessed very little -- the only type of discrimination that I can really put my finger on is a cryptic type -- you know, that you know it's there, but defining it. It's so subtle, it's so, you know, that type of thing but nonetheless it's there. Then on the other hand, I

think there are certain people that have become so accustomed to certain things that okay, it's your condition to take second-best and it's a way of life. Well, I've always had a very positive attitude about everything and I had a father that backed me on anything that I wanted to do. He said "Anything that you think you are, anything that you think you want to do, you can." You know, I've always known that I was "King of the May" -- so that's okay. But then I felt that -- tiny things would happen with the kids in school. Teachers biased and there's no Black books -- all the, you know, "Oh see Dick, oh see Jane." You know, all these blonde-haired, blue eyes. All of a sudden all these kinds of things kind of bugged me a lot, you know. Well, I knew that I wanted the best for my children and okay, I had no qualms about accosting the teacher and I insisted that they had this and that -- and that's sort of on a one-to-one basis. But then, trying to get other people involved took a hell of a lot of doing. As a matter of fact, we had outsiders that were the source of strength. There were very few of the local Blacks that participated in any of the activities. A precious few. Not only did they not participate -- they were doing everything they could to -- I said "Hey, if you don't want to help, just don't hurt, just bow out, bug off." But little, I guess fear motivates a lot of things. People were afraid. But heck, I was young and courageous and I didn't care if school kept, you know, it didn't make any difference to me, so it was okay. I had my kids marching carrying placards or whatever. Cherie is waving to her friends, "Down with Reagan." You know, she didn't know what the hell she was doing, it's just that Mama said, "Do it." She said, "Okay." (Laughter)

MO: So those old-timers definitely seemed to have had different values as far as discrimination?

DB: Oh, very definitely. I'm sure, okay, kids [unintelligible] always do. It was probably a protective mechanism. I mean, you think it's safe, this is a safety or so. If I don't do so-and-so, then I won't get hurt and I don't want so-and-so to get hurt. I don't know if it's a safety mechanism or cowardism. I have no idea.

MO: Now in retrospect, do you still feel strongly about some of your earlier notions concerning discrimination in Boise -- or maybe attitudes in this area?

DB: They certainly haven't completely diminished and they never shall. Because, daily a new breed of folks come into Boise and so be it. Okay, then there's always people bring their personal prejudice and their this and their that. But I hate dummies, so --

MO: Do you feel your child is better off in public school in Boise now than perhaps thirty years ago?

DB: Oh, you bet; oh, I know so. Because my kids are very secure in that if anything goes wrong, well, there's certain instances they will say, "Talk to my dad," and others will say, "Call my mother," or they won't. Buck's a well-liked -- he's a good guy. You know, good guys usually don't do a damn thing. Everybody likes Buck. If everybody likes you, they cut your throat, you know, really. I mean, I need him, that's good. You know, I don't mean this derogatorily, it's okay. But my kids grew up knowing, that hey, if they were right and they felt they were right, that they had somebody that's really going to back them up. As an example, when Carol was tiny and she was in Washington School and a teacher that she really liked, and the teacher was really fond of her --

MO: She was in Washington School?

DB: Yeah. This is my -- Carol is fifteen years old now. And she was cranky with the teacher about something and I went in for a conference and Mrs.

Charlson said -- she's really fond of Carol 'cause she's a good student, most teachers like their good students. She said "Well," laughingly, "Carol is such a love and she's so-and-so, but I think she probably stretches the truth on this one little thing. You know, Carol told me that -- I threatened her that I was going to spank her if she didn't behave, if she didn't do so-and-so, and Carol said that you said you would burn the school down." I said "Well, I didn't, I said I'd burn the God-damn school down." You know, attitudes --

Oh, you know -- housing discrimination and what-have-you and a local lady that had moved here from Tennessee and said "Just where do you get all these ideas about places not serving people and not being able to move into places?" And I said "When's the last time you've been out to dinner?" She never goes out to dinner, you know. "When you found a house to live in, it was right in the area, and I happen to know you had somebody to go get it all straightened up, and they didn't even know you were Black, colored." This kind of stuff.

MO: So like there was a lot of discrimination as far as where you could rent or where you could buy?

DB: Right, right.

MO: When was this -- in the?

DB: Well, even as we've lived here, about twenty years, and after we had lived here -- even things was kind of cool then. We had lived here about two and a half years, and this is so strange, and we had a cross burned on our lawn after we lived here. I said somebody must have thought, "Oops, we missed one." (Laughter)

MO: Here at this house?

DB: Yeah, Nineteenth Street.

MO: Nineteenth Street.

DB: Yeah, this has been the last -- you know, we've lived here twenty years. We'd lived here two years and then all of a sudden. But I must say this, Buck got kind of cranky about it -- they give us a first-class cross because I kept it for a centerpiece for a long time. It wasn't something that somebody just threw together. It was meticulously wrapped. I mean, really, they gave a lot of thought. Not just -- you know, throw a couple of sticks together and nail it, I would have resented that. It was a first-class cross -- a work of art, really well done.

MO: That's some confirmation.

DB: Oh yeah, I hate second-class things; it really bothers me.

MO: How about some of your friends, did any of your friends have problems renting around Boise in what -- the war years or -- ?

DB: I'm sure they did. Buying houses wasn't even easy. You know, it's like who you knew to a degree. There are ways of getting around things -- I don't care how many laws there are, you know, that you're supposed to rent to and blah-blah, there's particular ways of getting around of who you could rent to. Well renting, of course, there'd be much more of a problem then buying. But there are areas that they definitely did not want Blacks in.

MO: For example?

DB: Most of Boise. (Laughter) Send them back to Africa! You know. (Laughter)

MO: Let's qualify that a little bit.

DB: Keep 'em down on the farm, send them back there, you know.

MO: For example, the early pioneers seemed to have been scattered around quite a bit.

DB: Yeah, but that was okay because they were usually housekeepers,

gardeners, and old mis' and old masta' looked out for them and took care of them -- they were good darkies. They weren't going to do anything, cause any trouble, that was okay. But here all these, you know, renegades from elsewhere coming in here -- they're probably troublemakers, so that was a threat. Not going to have any of that, so, keep them down there.

MO: Down where?

DB: Well, anywhere, but preferably send them back where they came from, but primarily, let's concentrate them in a little area -- stop. Okay, as an example, C. C. Anderson sent for, through somebody else that they knew, from Kansas --

MO: Is this a Black man from Boise?

DB: C. C. Anderson owned the Bon Marche years ago -- C. C. Anderson blah, blah, blah, Mr. Rich So-and-so. Anyway, they needed a housekeeper and butler. So they, through somehow and another, got this Black couple from Kansas who came out here. They lived at the Andersons', C. C. Anderson's, you know, maybe an apartment, what-have-you, for them and I got to know them, and the lady that worked for them. She said -- one of the ladies and she said "Well, the darkies have finally arrived." (Laughter) She said "I was really tempted to put a spider in her soup, but I could stoop to something much more meager than that." And the Falks had always had Black help. So that's why people were so scattered because these were people that were no threats to anybody. They all worked for old masta' and what-have-you.

MO: So it seemed like -- were they southern gentry-type people here or the attitudes of those type of people?

DB: I suppose. I guess when people began the resentment of renting, it seems

to me there was little thought of where Black people lived in the community until the war years, and all of a sudden here's these strangers. At one time everybody knew everybody. I mean, let me tell you, the cops knew every dark cloud in Boise. Everybody knew everybody, they could put their finger out. First of all, they had a thing that [unintelligible] if some rough nigger showed up here, he was a bad action, they'd float him out of town, you know.

MO: How's that?

DB: You just say, "Nigger, there's the highway. Give you 24 hours to get out of town." That's what they called floating folks out of town.

MO: That actually happened?

DB: That actually happened many, many, many times.

MO: And if they don't leave?

DB: Put them in jail, keep them in jail for a long time. Lock them up. So that's the only way it could have happened that people got uptight about people moving elsewhere because in the beginning, everybody, you know, the handful of Blacks that were here lived all over Boise. They were very scattered. But this was how they were living. There's a lady that lived on the end of Harrison Boulevard, Mamie Green, okay, well she was a caterer, she worked for all the rich bitches, you know, what-have-you. And I understand before she died she willed her Harrison Boulevard property to some nice, White folks that she worked for for years. So they put a little cabin in their backyard and let her die in there so they took over her nice property. All kinds of good stuff like that.

MO: How about some of the Black people that didn't live with those people? For example, maybe Doc Sewell ran a barbershop or some of those guys. Did you ever -- ?

DB: That was before my time. I don't -- you'd have to get that from someone,

really historical. My personal awareness of things going on during the war years, prior to that I don't know. And then between then, I lived in New York for a number of years, you know, and then I came back to Boise.

MO: How did it change? When you came back to Boise?

DB: I don't know whether Boise had changed, but I had changed a great deal. Because I was interested in the theatre and the arts and you know, that kind of thing. It was just a completely different world. My interests were so different. I found that the multitude of people that I had, you know, associated with growing up with, that I had outgrown. I found them very small-minded and smug and very insecure group of people, you know. Their sense of values was very limited, very small and, you know.

MO: The Black people here in Boise that you --

DB: Black and Whites that I grew up with. Both, I kind of outgrew, you think, "Hey, we have nothing in common any more. Our interests are so dissimilar."

MO: How about as far as some of the attitudes of the people in this community, whether Black or White, have you noticed any change as far as attitudes towards racism and prejudices?

DB: Okay, at the risk of patting yourself on the fanny and saying "The I," but this is the only way I can gauge this, because I had an acute awareness of the smallness of things that were happening in Boise, or were not happening. Okay, I joined the Y -- the Y.W.C.A. -- and I was in the Y.W.C.A. board. I attempted to get Blacks on the Y board, I went to, you know, the national conference in Houston, we had awareness groups that incorporated a lot of the Unitarian Fellowship -- these are usually, I'm not a joiner, but organizations or groups that I attended or belonged to are usually thinking people, radicals for the most part. You know,

people that didn't mind standing up to be counted. I felt very short-patient with people that were, want to stay secure and not rock the boat, and that kind of thing. So through this type of association, I think there was created an awareness, more and more. People, you know, were saying "Well, maybe you should get to know them." And I said, "Sorry, there are only fifteen of us and I've been spoken for twenty times. There are not enough of us to go around." This kind of stuff.

But it's like, hey, people are people are people are people, in spite of our pigmentation. It's like you learn to like or hate me. I have the right to be hated because I'm a bitch, you know -- you don't have the right to hate me because I'm Black, you know. If I'm just an impossible bitch you know, you have the right and that type of thing. An attempt, an awareness, a sense of values and that type of thing, and instilling it in the children. Then I would like to think, even through the struggle with our first little dinky, tiny neighborhood center, you know --

MO: On River Street?

DB: Yeah. Okay, there was more shit about this -- guess where all the flak came from -- the colored folks. My goodness, they wanted a giant building of some sort. This was an experimental thing, because I've known. Anything can work if you -- it's like first steps first. It's this cohesiveness among kids -- if kids can work together, you know, what-have-you this kind of thing. I had great dreams for that but after so many years of working with something like that, you were a [unintelligible]. It's time to step down and let somebody else come take a ride. Now I think it's gone to pot, completely.

MO: River Street Community Center?

DB: As far as I'm concerned. I think it's a waste of a lot of things.

That's just one person's opinion. You know, because it's lost its original purpose and I think we're too inclined to turn everything into a social hour. Well, I love to read, I love to do so many things that I'm interested in, I don't want you to waste my time with, "Let's get together for a cup of" -- you know, this kind of thing.

MO: So what was its intended purpose or what was your idea -- ?

DB: Okay, because rental landlords were not fixing up houses, we had VISTA workers trying to teach people, hey, the reason for voting, that one person can do nothing, ten people can do a little more, twenty people can turn a community upside down if there's cohesiveness. You know, it's just an attempt to get people to stick together a little because basically Black people have been conditioned not to. The White folks taught us really good. That's a hangover from slavery, sure. Because, old masta' taught everybody to snitch and spy on each other for another crust of bread or piece of so-and-so. So this is an old hangover and Black people are still doing that kind of stuff. It's sad. But this was my idea -- the neighborhood center. A place that you could air your gripes or your what-have-you. I'd find out where do you go -- I started going to city council meetings and that sort of stuff because I felt that there was a need for people to be heard. Hey, you are somebody. Everybody is important in some manner.

MO: So you would have liked to seen people get more involved and more active and more aware?

DB: When there was problems, when there were things -- heck, good groups. But for the most part, I'm sorry to say, it was outsiders that were the participants more so than the people -- the people that lived here sat and bitched and whined and criticized.

MO: That community center, when were you active in that River Street Community Center?

DB: Nine years ago.

MO: Early seventies?

DB: Yeah.

MO: And you feel that a lot of the Black people that lived down there had the same values or attitude type values as a lot of the old Black people?

DB: I was afraid so, I mean, I'm afraid so. There was resentment because they used to think, well, you don't live in the area. Well, what's that got to do with the price of wheat? You know, I grew up in the area, was quite different. I mean, you can live anywhere -- it's up to you. But I felt compelled to -- well, I don't know, that's too much "I" in that, I don't want to dwell on that. This is just something. I think it's much more important to be concerned with how other people feel and how they, because I'm, frankly, opinionated anyway. That's pretty obvious.

MO: So there was quite a large Black population on River Street at that time, in the late sixties, early seventies?

DB: Yeah, because the Black population has spread from the initial Pioneer, Miller Street, Ash Street, over to 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, you know, over in that area also. Because prior to that there were no Blacks living, you know -- So, I think that was the time that there was probably the largest concentration of Blacks in that area.

MO: Okay, and would you say even then, would it have been a 50-50 Black-White ratio?

DB: No, more Whites than Blacks, even then. More Whites than Blacks even then.

MO: More like 60-40?

DB: Yeah.

MO: 75-25?

DB: Well, okay your guess is as good as mine. It's always been much more, you know, never been equally proportioned. Three-fourths.

MO: And this Black population sort of grew out of the war years?

DB: I think so. And it's the continuation now, even. See, servicemen that were stationed in Mountain Home have retired, are now building and buying and their families are living in Boise now. So, service-connected people or people that have been formerly stationed in Mountain Home or Gowen Field, have come back to Boise.

MO: And as far as the concentration of Blacks, even though there were not that many Blacks in Boise, especially up to World War II and concentration of them seems to have been around River Street area, would you say that?

DB: Well, that's something I get tied in knots about. It's so hard for me to say that because only during the war years, as I say, prior to that, no they were scattered. And for that short period of time everybody was compelled. Okay, people would come in, it was an overnight stay -- an overnight, well, I do need a house real quick, you know. Nobody had time to fight battles or whatever. Nobody was willing or ready to. Everything was so unstable that you'd find a house, you know, right now, okay. I guess, slowly, as a result of that. There had to be some kind of an outgrowth, of reaching out to other areas. And as I said there were concerned people who really cared like, "Hey here are things that you can do about finding a house, about getting a house, and you know, this kind of thing."

MO: But at that time, sort of because those people were unstable, maybe, they needed someplace quick, they couldn't afford to go through the courthouse

or whatever trying to integrate other neighborhoods. River Street was available.

DB: Right.

MO: And it was available because?

DB: Okay, as an example, if you had come from a large city and from a primary ethnic area, you're a total stranger in town and you're going to be here six months or something, what-have-you. Unless you're a real crusader, you're really not going to go out looking for someplace that you're going to have to, you know, knock somebody down and get a house. You would probably be drawn to a like neighborhood where you felt that there were Black people, primarily. This is the way that I would feel that people would think in terms. People, maybe even from larger cities that hadn't even lived in an all-Black neighborhood primarily. Well, there's safety in numbers. Okay, nobody's ever heard of Idaho and the only thing they knew about Idaho was Sun Valley and potatoes. They said, "Iowa?", "Ohio?" You know, this is the wild west. They still think people are eating buffalo, well, you know they are. But, we're still wild and woolly and what-have-you. This is savage country. Nobody ever thought anything about this. They thought the safe thing to do, probably, was try to find a colored neighborhood. Slowly they, and as I said, with some of the VISTA workers, with some of the federally-funded programs and what-have-you, trying to, of course, these were communistically-inspired things to do. You know, help them. Hey, you don't have to sit still and take all of this. And there are things available, there is money available, there are houses and if you want to stand up and be counted, you can. It's just having the balls to do it.

END OF TAPE ONE.

TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

MO: You had some different values, you weren't raised in the South like maybe some of those other people. I'm wondering if life here was that much better than the South or just that they were determined to make it here because they didn't really have any other place to go?

DB: Well, as I said, it would make sense that people would migrate from elsewhere because things were probably -- I mean, almost every person that you would talk with, if they were completely honest, would tell you even now. But hey, things are so much better here than they were wherever they came from. But then, that needn't make you content with your life, because it was better here than there. I mean, it's like saying this pig pen is a little cleaner than that pig pen -- that doesn't make it okay. I think being removed from a situation that is so unpleasant to one that is a little more pleasant can sometimes make people become content or make themselves content, or lazy -- take your

MO: How about as far as, speaking of content -- what did some of the Black people do for their own thing when you were active and when you were growing up in Boise? What did they do to -- social activities or whatever?

DB: Well, as a kid the only thing that I remember really was, okay, there were churches -- I went to Sunday school and picnics. Periodically they had dances at the G.A.R. Hall and the Miramar Ballroom.

MO: Miramar?

DB: Yeah, it was out on Fairview and they had big bands that came here, often, for a long period of time; Black people were certainly not allowed there. Then after I became a teeny-bopper and a lot of the band leaders stayed at my mother's house at times. When I was old enough to go they'd

take me there so I was okay. But I think that was -- and often times they would jam at different places, you know, or what-have-you.

MO: Were a lot of those early functions, were they strictly Black people?

DB: Yeah, yeah, for the most part.

MO: There wasn't that much community mixing with the White and Black communities?

DB: No. It was just kind of an accepted way. School and -- I don't remember that, it was stated that you couldn't. Okay, Chinese, Oriental restaurants were open to Blacks, but there were other restaurants that were certainly off limits to.

MO: Is that right?

DB: Yeah.

MO: Chinese, because they were an ethnic group minority also?

DB: I suppose. Well, the Chinese weren't treated too royally, you know. As a matter of fact, it's my understanding for many, many years this miscegenation was still on the books up until I don't know how long ago. But it was perfectly okay for a Black and a Chinese cold marry. No Black and White.

MO: As far as intermarriage between ethnic groups, it was okay, but not Black and Whites.

DB: A lot of sleeping around, but don't make it legal, you know.

MO: So you had church activities around St. Paul's Baptist Church?

DB: Yeah, and then there was another -- this little Bethel A.M.E. Church.

MO: Would you say that was the strong gathering point and source of strength for the Black community in Boise?

DB: And the gambling houses -- poker joints. All kinds of social activities. (Laughter) People didn't have that much money, anyway. The truth of the matter is I doubt seriously if there were enough people that had money

enough to go out. Nobody did. It's like nobody knew they were poor because nobody told you, nobody had anything, everybody was in kind of the same boat, so it was kind of -- you know. I suppose they had picnics and potlucks and social gatherings and -- down on the farm, I suppose.

MO: When did that Pioneer Street get torn down anyway?

DB: I can remember my dad died, they started, Tillotson, was going to get rich off of the property from way back in the -- I'm going to try and go through somebody's scrapbooks or something, find some things, or what-have-you.

THIRD PERSON: [Unintelligible]

DB: I really don't, no, I'm terrible with dates.

THIRD PERSON: Well, wasn't Carol born right when --

DB: That's very possible. Has he been dead that long?

MO: How many years ago was that?

DB: Carol's fifteen.

MO: So that's when Pioneer Street died out too?

DB: Gee.

MO: It would only seem natural that they would go at the same time, huh?

DB: Yeah, you're probably right. I'm sure you are. Well, the houses were deteriorating and there were landlords that knew that they were going to do things with the property. They were eager to gobble up the property down here in a hurry, you know.

MO: Do you remember trouble getting services and goods in the Black community as you were growing up, perhaps like waited on in a restaurant or store maybe, something like that?

DB: I don't. As I said, to a degree my existence was pretty sheltered, really. You know, I give a lot of rah-rah-rah about a lot of things but

the truth of the matter is I was very fortunate in many instances. As I said, I lived in New York for a number of years, I lived in Portland for a number of years -- I went away to school, you know, just a lot of things what-have-you. I wasn't even aware of these things until I -- you know when I went to New York and I came back then I'd hear other people talk about these things or what-have-you. Because to me they were just non-existent.

MO: Boise, what was that -- after you got out of high school?

DB: Yeah.

MO: And things seemed to strike you differently after that? Is that when you got more of an active role?

DB: Right. Yeah, because prior to that having lived here and not being particularly concerned with what was going on, or there wasn't even an awareness that there was anything. Well, you can sense the things should be maybe a little different, maybe a little, but my world was an okay world. I wasn't really particularly concerned with anybody else's, you know, existence or what-have-you. There was no reason for me to be. I mean, I was -- things were okay for me and my family. That sounds very smug and very selfish but that's all a part of growing up and I think there's a period in everybody's life when, you know, okay so my biggest worry was like what book I wanted to read or what painting or what things I want to do. You know, that sort of thing, I suppose. I wasn't particularl

MO: But you definitely saw room for improvement in Boise?

DB: OH, very definitely. I was appalled with -- all of a sudden it was like, hey, people are living like mid-Victorian. [Unintelligible] hill, all kinds of what-have-you, this should be. This is too bad, bad news.

MO: Would you say that a lot of these ideas sprung out from the treatening of the White community feeling threatened from the increase -- the large

influx of the Blacks?

DB: I'm sure of it, I'm sure.

MO: But yet it seems like some of these attitudes were present even before your time?

DB: But there were not enough people to be a threat, you see. There were not enough. Okay, what are you going to do with 30 people, what are they going to do?

MO: Well, in 1903 supposedly, there were a hundred colored registered voters.

DB: Is that right?

MO: So they seemed to have been pretty well --

DB: Scattered.

MO: One lady, Erma --

DB: Hayman.

MO: She mentioned that she heard a lot of the early pioneer Blacks were more active and then for a long time there were a bunch of them that seemed pretty docile, passing in their role and then it sort of picked up again around the forties as far as active and trying to get organizations and equality. Can you comment on that?

DB: Well, during the war years they had the U.S.O., you know, there was a Black U.S.O., White U.S.O., that kind of thing. You know, social activities and that kind of thing. Once there were a couple of attempts at a N.A.A.C.P. Fell flat on its face, then we all went through a period of reviving that. As to getting a number of Black local people interested in that. I thought that served a specific purpose. Then it sort of turned into a social hour so I bowed out of that. I think I'm going to get back in that again because there's a Black woman that I have nudged her to do a little work -- There's a need for it now. But it's just

truly, one woman's opinion. It's when things turn into social get-togethers. Socializing is fine, but I have other things that are important to me. Just small talk is --

MO: Cheap?

DB: Really, it's time wasted. I'd rather watch the birds and paint.

MO: Well, anything else you'd like to talk about. You have some notes there.

DB: No, there isn't anything in these.

MO: Any personalities. You certainly are a candid spokesperson.

DB: No, but why don't you give me a phone number and in the next few days if I can pick up some dates or things that might be of interest, I'd like to give them to you.

END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE. END OF INTERVIEW.