

Interview with Luther Butler

**Interviewed by Susan Hawes
Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project
Interviewed on August 3, 1979**

**Transcribed and edited by John Brockenwitsch, ANTH 640, University of Maryland,
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Luther Butler – LB
Mrs. Butler – Wife of LB
Sharon Hawes – SH

SH: The following interview is being conducted through Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project in the Hampden Woodbury Community. The interviewee is Mr. Luther Butler and the interviewer is Susan Hawes. Today is the August 3, 1979. We are at 1024 West 38th Street. Hah. All systems go. Mr. Butler, you told me a little bit about your mother coming up from North Carolina. It was very interesting?

LB: North Carolina. Right.

SH: It was very interesting and I wonder if you would describe that, again; the story of how she came up here?

LB: Well, my mother has had experience working in the mills down in the South. We lived in Laurel Mill, NC. In Scotland County. Work was very scarce. Of course, I have to remind you that going back to 1919 or 1920 in that area. My mother came up here because of a, cotton mills in the Hampden-Woodbury area to get a job. And she got a job. And then she at first boarded with a lady she worked with...

SH: ...do you know where that was?

LB: On the 25th street near Howard Street. She finally found a place in Hampden and she remarried because her father [husband?] got killed in WW I. She married a man that she worked with at a mill. They rented house in Hampden and they came down and got me and brought me up.

SH: You were about eight years?

LB: I was approximately 8 years old, 'round about.

SH: The interesting thing about your life, seems to be that the variety of jobs that you had and the different job experiences that you had. Wonder if you could briefly describe your jobs a little bit and tell me which one was your favorite one...If you could briefly describe the jobs that you had?

LB: Well, The first job I was a messenger boy for the Western Union Telegraph Company. I was delivering telegrams with a bicycle and then later on, I progressed and became of age to get a drivers license and went to work with a motorcycle for Western Union. I made a little bit more money and delivering to all the various counties. Because we didn't have communications like you have now and I was assigned more or less to deliver messages to all the various police departments in the twenty-three counties. I wasn't making much money and I was making about, even with my motorcycle about, fourteen to fourteen fifty dollars a week--if I had a real good week. Then, I got a job at the Hampden Transfer Storage and that was where my stepfather worked and he got me a job there. Later on and I was promoted to a driver. I went from twenty cents an hours to twenty five cents an hour.

SH: This was about what year?

LB: This was about let's see, 1928 or 1929 and we stayed there until 1938. I got a job at the Martin Company. They had came from Cleveland OH with airplanes. I went to Martin's and this time and you can very well say that was a job that I really cherished. I had met so many nice people and so many friends. I began as a sum foreman--like an assistant foreman. Then I became a general foreman and then assistant to chief inspector, Mr. Joseph [unclear]. He made me his special investigator and I traveled all over the United States and some of the islands. Again, making friends with people. I won't go in all the various names of all of the people who became famous. But I would like to mention one, because now it is famous all over the world maybe--surfing. But, I met Bob Drake who was a champion in California. Because he had went to work for a law firm in which I was doing a investigation job at Oakland at the time. I went down to Bakersfield and I met him there and that was a very good acquaintance and we had some real good times on our off moments, not drinking or carousing, but just talking and being good friends.

SH: Well you, you didn't go beyond the 8th grade and yet you had a job and you really, really did well and you really grew quickly and you bettered yourself. How do you think that happened?

LB: Well, it actually happened that when I went to work at the Martin Company. I went to work as a mechanic. I found out that we were having trouble with planes leaking. On my lunch hour, I was eating with one hand and checking blueprints and specifications with the other. I found out that they were counter sinking the wrong type of flush head rivets. Instead of a 87 & 1/2 degrees they were making a, if I think a 78 1/2 degrees. Consequently, you have a gap, a gap [unclear]. A gap between the opening with the rivet near the upper part where it meets the metal with the metal and metal was because of the leak. Mr. Jim Ritchie who was the General Foreman of Inspection Department came and asked who found this because I had put it in the suggestion box. Needless to say, down through the plant they had place where you could put in a suggestion form. He came to me and my boss and he wanted to take me off the floor and to Mr. Joe Paul, the Chief Inspector. Not long Mr. Paul became the Director of Quality, which used to be Inspection

Department and is now called Quality Control. So anyway, I met with Mr. Paul and I explained to him. He asked, "Why were you working through your lunch period." I said, "Well, it was a problem to me--if the company has a problem, then I have a problem. I am a team player." That's when he asked me right then and there how would I like to become an inspector. I said what does the job pay. I want to get ahead. I want to make the same amount of money. At the time I was making about fifty-five cents an hour. Mr. Paul said, "No, you will start out making eighty or eighty-five cents an hour". I said, "I will take the job!" Of course, I will not mention at this time what my eventual salary came to. It was a very handsome figure. When I became an assistant to the chief inspector, I traveled all over the United States wherever there was a problem or a complaint about a Martin product or any malfunction or any of our people, or subcontractors, because we had subcontractors making parts all over the United States.

SH: Were there a lot of people from Hampden that worked there for Martin's?

LB: Quite a few. I would say just off the top of my head. I would know 200-300 people.

SH: Do you think that there were lots of people in your generation from Hampden that didn't work in the mill, who worked in a job like Martins?

LB: Well, you gotta remember now, that Martin's came after the Mills.

SH: You began working for Martin's in 1938?

LB: 1938. One thing of one portion of your question I didn't answer was; you said because of my lack of education, how did I get there? During my interview, Mr. Paul he asked me about my educational background. He had a folder in front of him and he kept glancing at me about it. And then he said, "Well, look, would you be willing to if we pay for whatever it would take for you to go to night school. I said, "Yes sir, I would do anything". I quit school to work because my grandfather was ailing and it was just one of things my mother couldn't get out of work at the time. Because she had decisions and my stepfather wasn't making much money. And so I say that I will do anything, I'll go nighttime and do anything and I did. Sometimes, I would drive all the way back to Middle River to go to the school at nighttime and when I finally wound up. I took various schools. First, I got my high school equivalency, then I took psychology and management. Then I took studies of motion uh, I took well..., just at the top of my head. I was cramming anything I could get. They made an evaluation called the Hersey test. I don't know if you heard of Hersey test. They could evaluate you. My equivalency was two years of college.

SH: Well, you said then that the mills weren't hiring people any more.

LB: It was not; It was hard to get a job in the mills even then; things were tough. When you talk about the early twenties and early thirties. Things were tough. Take my word for it.

SH: Did you see what was happening around you?

LB: We lived on King street in 1921...

SH: ..and then around the time of Depression, you were living where?

LB: The Depression was still in 21...

SH: ...Okay, what did you see happening around you? Why did you say it was so difficult?

LB: Well, because I can't believe what I see today. I can't believe it! I been down here since E & T (unclear). The wife and I have an itinerary with our coupons on Saturdays and I been down here in E & T (unclear). I see kids at least four or five dollars of quarters and they are pitching quarters against the wall. I can't believe. Well, when you see it, you gotta believe it. But who would ever see something like that!

SH: You wouldn't have done that in 1921?

LB: Are you kidding? [laughing]. For a quarter I could go to the movies and get a couple of hot dogs, soda and everything, my heaven (unclear).

SH: You met your wife...she was from Woodbury?

LB: My wife was from Woodbury.

SH: How did you happen to meet a girl from Woodbury? ...sounds like people normally didn't get together.

LB: She came after the number fifty-eight, I think was the number she went to right off of Woodbury Methodist Church what is now called Druid Park Drive was Woodbury Avenue and I went to the number fifty-five. After the fifth grade, uhh, after the fourth grade, those rich kids had to go to Robert Poole. Now starting in the fourth grade, we were at fifty-fifth, the bullies would take the manual train. Although, I haven't met her, that's when I saw my first wife. [laughter].

SH: That's great, was there some difference between Woodbury and Hampden; that was considered a very different place?

LB: Oh no, it was actually close, but the railroad tracks was the dividing line.

SH: Did people find it unusual for a boy from Hampden to go out with a girl from Woodbury?

LB: Well, I have heard tales. But I would never have any problems. I have heard tales of this guy from Woodbury dating this gal and they got beat up. I actually see them and I didn't bother them. But, You see that we had a "tripper", what they call a tripper, which was a small little street car that ran from 36th street right at the (unclear) down to "The Bottom". See, that was they call The Bottom right there on that street where the old mill was. And there was a tavern right across the street there and Pepsi Cola. That's where it turn around and that man used a crow bar and went out to change the track.

SH: When you were in school what was your idea of the Hampden area, what were your ideas of the boundaries. Not the boundaries in your head I mean now I know you have done a lot of official things and you know the all official boundaries but in your heart sort what were your boundaries for Hampden?

LB: Well, needless to say it is very easy to define Hampden. If you go up here to Cold Spring Lane, just on the other side of Cold Spring are millionaires. No millionaires live in Hampden, that's the Northern line. The western boundary is Jones Falls or the railroad tracks, that a natural dividing line. The eastern boundary is Wyman Park, that's a natural boundary, there is no homes or anything there. Now, when you come down to the lower end on Stieff (unclear) and the Boy Scouts down and out that is the southern boundary. Very easily defined.

SH: What about the dividing line between Roland and Hampden?

LB: Cold Spring Lane. Very easily to tell the difference between the two. See, right today, a lot of people think of 41st street as being the boundary. But, it really isn't.

SH: Where's Evergreen?

LB: Evergreen, It's North of Cold Spring Lane. But, it is down by Martinsville Road and Keswick Road. It is a small section down there.

SH: For instance, Evan's Chapel road. Is that a part of Hampden?

LB: Yes ma'am. That is called Kite's Hill [Hoe's Heights]. That's where all the kids used to go up there on the hill because it was open up there. We used to go up there and fly our kites. All the kids around here. Fact is there were so many kids from Woodbury would go up there. Because if you knew the hill up there, you would see what I mean. There was a peak.

SH: By the way, wonder if you tell me in your own words the story as you see it about politics in Hampden of what you remember and as far back as you can remember and you were interested in that kind of thing in your life.

LB: That's right. Well, I tell you, I guess my stepfather and father, well, my mother too. I would never forget when I went down there to register. I became twenty-one, I registered to vote when I became twenty-one. They talked to me. I would never forget.

They talked to me and said, “you got to remember one thing, this is our right now and you have a responsibility and whatever right--there is a responsibility.” And every body forgets that. You think about your candidate and get to know what is all about. There might come a time where you say I don’t like any one of them. But they say what should you do even though you don’t like either one of them--exercise your franchise and take the lesser of two evils. He explained to me then about the primary election and you got to vote with your party uhh, really have and then with a general election you can with your republican, democratic or independent state went through the whole bit. I got interested and I went to a rally down in Red Man’s Hall. And that was a ... [pause] Holy cow! That was that was an assemblage and I met quite a few people.

SH: Was that a Democratic rally?

LB: It was a Democratic rally, because I registered as a Democrat.

SH: Was your family?

LB: Registered Democrats. But, that was why they explained it to me now look don’t forget now that you registered as a Democrat, you have to vote for your own party, you can’t in the primary, you have vote for your own ticket. Because you always have more candidates in the primary than the general election. Primary is primarily to separate the good from the bad and get the one that represents this party. The one that represents this party then you take. In the general you don’t have to stay in with your party you can vote either way and That’s when I really became interested, In fact, I would say I was highly interested by the time I was twenty-two years old.

SH: What people did you meet at the rally you went to..?

LB: ...well, the man who stands out the most is Herbert O’Connor. Because he even said to me, “Who are you with?”. I said, “10th Street.” Connor replied, “That is in Hampden, isn’t it”. I said, “Yes, sir”. He come and grab and hug me and said, “You know, I’m not quite in Hampden, but I am right on the line and I said, “Who are you with?”. It was five, I forget exact number, But it was where 40th street would come down. Five houses down on the right-hand side. He and I were just like that. He became governor [1939-1947], you know and when I met him he was the state attorney. He went from State’s attorney, attorney general and then governor. But he was a fine man, lovely family and nice people.

SH: In those days, what would you say the strongest political force, or group in Hampden when you first ...

LB: I would say the Trenton Democratic Club, which was headed by Jack Pollack.

SH: And in those days before you became a member, who was Pollack’s helper in Hampden?

LB: He had a couple of people and they would as you would say, not totally allied to him they were sort of semi-independent. Frank Looghi, Cleve Wood, Snag (?) Garrett...there would be a couple of others, really can't remember. Not really, what you say, always with him or what.

SH: They were sort of independent?

LB: They were sort of semi-independent, you might say, there was one election I noticed. And back then, I was in the background with Pollack after observing seeing what was going on. Because my stepfather told you just keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut and you will learn a lot. I would walk around the different polls and watch who was doing what and everything amazing what you learn by just taking it in.

SH: What did you learn?

LB: I learn that some of them would be working for two, in the primary, sometimes two and four people, because I see them come around and shift money. That was surprising but when another comes around and gives them money. What a minute! They are calm and for about it. It wound up and I never got involved with them; I wouldn't dream of such of thing. To me that was a traitor. I tell you one thing and I am your friend something else.

SH: Who else would they be for?

LB: A lot of times they would have ballots, in other words depending on who was coming. They shift the bottom of the ballot and balance off the top and that way I found that out. and I guess used this sort of acquaintance. I wouldn't call him a friend. We were at the poll and I went down to vote at a Mount Vernon Church and said, "Uh, I have to go to the bathroom" and I held his stuff for him. Because I have been there talking and don't ask me why and a certain friend came over that and ask me, "Say, what ballot are you? Try upside down and I turned them over. In other words he knew more about it than I did. Some would speak for Pollack's ticket and then they would, you would turn them over and the would be someone else's ticket. They would be on the bottom of the pile, in other words, if you deal with top or bottom. That's why they get paid different amounts. That's why they would walk around and sometimes they would be on the corner and they would have ballots in the pocket right here. And they, when, the collected and see somebody coming and they take this right of here and take that and have different ticket.

SH: How did you end up being involved in, once you decided more than just to walk around and listen?

LB: Mr. Pollack had come to me and sent word that he wanted to talk with me...I said, "Why you can tell him where I live and give him my phone number and he can call me if he wants I don't have time to go to downtown". I have to miss work to go to his office. So he called me and we agreed and he said that he was having a meeting at the Red

Man's Hall and then he said I would like to talk with you. So I agreed to meet there early. I met him and we walk to the El Paso and sit down to have a hotdog and a cup of coffee back in the dining room. The mood got serious and he asked me if I would take over the district for him. And, I said well let me think it over I am still getting my feet wet and I want to know what is going on and he said, "Look I can point in the right direction and people can really tell what it is all about" and so he did.

SH: People in the neighborhood?

LB: No, no, people who knew and not only knew this neighborhood, East Baltimore, North Baltimore, Northwest Baltimore and West Baltimore. Anyway and I talked to him. One of them was Erve Colvin and at the time Erve lived over on Woodbrook Avenue Reservoir or Druid Hill. I went over his house. Jack called him and setup a meeting and I talked to him and finally, to make a long story short, I wound up getting evaluated and line up people and that's all four precincts in Hampden Woodburn and I used the a method and singular system which they use today. And whoever, I had in charge, like the captain, and I would have a person right on the captain and she or he was like he was his right-hand--in case he was sick or something happen or what. Needless to say slightest the over the years, I lost quite a good people who uses this progressive system and everybody still like, we just had our 46th anniversary.

SH: Of the Trenton Democratic Club, so you were an official in the Trenton Democratic Club.

LB: I was an executive.

SH: Does that mean 2nd, what does that mean?

LB: I am the executive in this district.

SH: How many executives did he have?

LB: I think that was a like military secret.

SH: Oh really.

LB: I really don't know. Needless to say, Jack Pollack covered the whole State

SH: If you knew how many executives you had, you would know how much territory they...

LB: ...no matter what anybody said about Jack Pollack, to me, he was a man that was always honest and fair.

SH: Saying about Jack Pollack?

LB: Well, Jack and I, had an agreement in the very beginning. I said Jack, "I am a total conservative, red-blooded American patriot and if you or anybody else comes with a candidate that in anyway, libel, ultra-libel or anyway other. My feeling will not be on any tickets I pass out and my people feel the same way. Call it the Ku Klux Klan if you want, I don't give a damn! That is way the mustards going to be cut! And he never bucked me and anytime. I went up there and had a ticket and I am not taking that, not taking that, and I call immediately all my captains and I told them and they all marked their ballots off. I never, never in all those years had one dissenting vote. Because if they had dissented; I would run them out of the door. That's the way, Mrs. Pollack and the girls all of them. I know them very well and been in their homes "oodles and oodles" of times. Went all the way up to see Jack and Mrs. Pollack, went up in the living room and they just grabbed me because after all, 40 years is a long time.

SH: Tell me what did I ask you before, what did Pollack do for Hampden and Woodbury? And you told me some things it sounds like, also what Pollack helped you do in Woodbury?

LB: Well, me and my people, if they knew anybody that was in dire need of help, in the job and they were really hard up and they were good hard honest people. Good solid Americans. They were told and I begged them please let me know about it, maybe I can't do anything but I will sure as hell try and I never yet had anyone that I went to Jack and said, Joe Jones is got a problem his mother left stand his wife's having another baby. Jack we got to do something for this guy. Jack this is urgent! Never yet did he let me down.

SH: Did people get jobs as a result?

LB: We had to go down and make up the application and everything, but uh, that was a way it came down and I had a friend now needless to say maybe I should even say this on this tape but...

SH: ...you can say whatever you think.

LB: I think I told him in our previous meeting a certain party was having a drink problems in the service. Rather than get thrown out of service his parents came to me to see what could be down and he only had a matter of a few months to go. And I didn't want to call Jack and I went to him and explain how close the people were to me and the boy I knew ever since he was born. I said if there is something in some way does stall this off in for about just three or four months so he can muster out without a dishonorable discharge. I got results. Consequently, the guy today is one of the department of Baltimore City and I didn't get him the job. He got out of service with a good record. He went to this Alcoholics Anonymous and I did talk to him about that. And he went not that I told him or anything, but he did go and get straighten out and got a job in one of those department. Excellent. Got a wife and 4 children so...

SH: What kind of things the Trenton Democratic Club and you and your system and Pollacks do for the community, not necessarily individuals, but the kinds things that Hampden would need when they need a voice to get something done in the neighborhood?

LB: In many instances, one thing, Jack would tell me and I made sure that I did this before I went to him and he said make sure that I use the regular lines of communication. He would say, "When you don't get results then you come to me". That when the heads would roll. Not only would I make certain the people would tell me this I would go down and do some checking myself because I know a lot of people that work for city. I would get different one to check on us and we would sit down and say okay. Then I would go to Jack and tell him what I done. Okay, he would get on the phone and we got action. Something in politics you gotta remember now, I hear tales about Jack Pollack this, and Jack Pollack that, and it all goes back to since when I was kid. My parents told me everyday is the surprise and always the will of life and it ain't what you know it is who you know.

SH: In the 60's, the Trenton Democratic club was still strong in the 50's. Is that right? Okay, in the 50's there was talk about filling in the reservoir a couple of times, one or twice, and people got upset. And that's what I know about people can call on the community issue, what is there any way you would act or did act?

LB: Yes. I was called by several people they said that they was having a meeting in the Hampden Methodist Church and that I won't mention the man's name, the man in charge of the Department of Woodbridge of (?) circle said that we was going to be there and... So, I called Jack Pollack and told him about the meeting and I said I was going to be there and wanted to get all the facts and everything and I wanted to get with you. Pollack said, "Maybe tomorrow and come over to my office and tell Ms. Herbert what you think. Anyway, he had all the plans there and everything, there having been a kid and swam there a couple times. I know of others that got hurt because of the way the lake was slanted and all. It was not being used at that time and after I got all the facts together. And then I, all considered, what's involved, who is involved and why? We as human beings, we have our doubts about any kind of change. Any change we like is getting a new car. We have a dislike of, why you gonna put that light over there why you put it there; it got to be a reason for that. Anyway, I went down and attended the meeting. They had the plans and everything down there and they had the architect and grant and all the blueprints and I look things over and then I tried to close my eyes and tried to make a mental picture of what it would be, what it was now and what is now, what it's gonna be. Actually, sure I could show you a picture of it. I got picture of it downstairs; you want to see it? Did you want to see it? I went to Jack the next day and I said Jack, "I said I have been personally involved because we were kids we dove off the granite building". Down at the end and it is about as big as the room here and kids used to climb up and the stone stuck out about that far from the climb up on that and you could see the cobblestones, the cobblestone bottom there, if you don't cut real quick you and see. But as kids this isn't a challenge here and I know several that got hurt. I was convinced that was a better thing. So, I went over there to a lot of people to Mr. & Mrs. Benson and I

talk to them Mr. and Mrs. Parrish the elders of the church solid citizens who think and don't get upset of course they are all dead now. All of them, Mr. Charlie Fischer anyway he was with me and ...

SH: ...they had an influence on the community?

LB: Oh yeah!

SH: People would listen to them?

LB: Because they were successful people in the neighborhood and all they didn't feed into any politics or anything. They would naturally vote but they didn't stand out here and beat any drums.

SH: But how would they influence people then?

LB: Well, because they would talk out and you see now being in business they met an awful lot of people. I am guessing and the people, they talk to would spread the gospel. Sort of like gospel like Archie Ford, who is dead, and he had the paper route here in Hampden and he was the (unclear) of Hampden Methodist Church. Did you know the Hampden Methodist Church had the largest congregation and men's bible class in the world? Did you know that? A little piece of Hampden, it is a piece of history, it is a fact. Take my word for it.

SH: Did you influence people the same way?

LB: Archie Newark. Archie would come around like I was over on Penn street he would carry the guys off the court on Sundays. He would say, "Come on fellas, let's go on to church, come on" and the way he done it you had to go.

SH: I was wondering if he was so strong being to get people to come to church; was he, did he get influence people, any other way?

LB: Well, he didn't take politics too much; like I am saying he would say, "Don't worry about the "resy" (reservoir) everything is going to be alright. It will be an improvement". Just a little few short words you had to respect the man, he knows something I don't know.

SH: Did he at the time?

LB: Well, he was always on the streets. He had the News American Paper here in Hampden. And you would always see him 'round the streets and collect it and he always had the kids. The kids served the papers off. But he collected. He ran into everybody here in...

SH: I would if he had the power to influence even though he didn't plan with politics, I wonder did he have the power to influence people?

LB: Well, actually what I think; My personal opinion was that he people are little hesitant about change and Archie had the personal and everything and influence. He would say, don't worry about he "resy" (reservoir) it going to be an improvement. Whesh, gee whiz! That was a relief like a hot day and you get a good, cold soda you know.

SH: Was he alive then at that time?

LB: Archie didn't die until the 60's until 62, 63. We lived on Hickory Avenue at the time just 2 doors beyond him.

SH: You would talk to him too?

LB: Oh yeah. I made it a point to when around and talking one that I know that knew people like Barney Mueller as Rose Conner Hamson on 34th and Chestnut that was Morris corner. Gosh, when I was little kid.

SH: So how did that turn out?

LB: You see the "res" (reservoir) and that's an improvement really, plus we got the ball diamonds down there and they put another one down there.

SH: Some people were very upset and go, where and...[airplane passing by]

LB: Yeah, they are really uptight. A lot of them went down there to walk their dog down there and of course, I used to box there and you would go around that track and well enough and see what happens. Lack of consideration for other people.

SH: You answered, before, why a few reasons why Pollack would come to you from the very beginning like he did?

LB: Well, I used to box and I played football in the Hampden Club and they were a monumental league and I knew a lot of people in Hampden. He mention to me that he say, "I have been talking to a lot of people and they like respect your opinions and all, and you are highly regarded in the neighborhood and I like to get with you and set up something.

SH: So you say you were a leader in some way before Pollack approached you?

LB: Well, I don't like to call myself a leader but I know a lot of people and I like people. I guess that goes back to the first thing that I have ever done that I really loved and felt some satisfaction was a very poor, O my God! Family on our street. It was awful. And we kids, Billy Sullivan, Roland Kane and I we started scouting around in the alleys for

look for bootleg bottlers to take back to the soda bottles or anything. Don't laugh at this, I often laugh at this but just done my heart so much good but anyway, but we bought stocking at this firm. Carl and his sister, Hazel Miller and I think they both are dead now but they were a lovely family, lovely family. The mother was trying, doing in sewing and taking in washing and everything and uh I think then back then, I was about nine or ten and they were about six or seven, and I guess I was like a mother. Then we as kids wore our pants up to here and we call them hazel boots. They called the stocking. And they were long black stockings back then. I felt so sorry for them. Anyway, Carl, Roland and I, we started scouting around and they was a big store over on Halliburton. [Clock chimes]

That's where we got the stockings and I forgot how much they were but we got some money to get them stockings and each one of them two pair of stockings.

SH: That doesn't happen here often.

LB: Back then, people were more looking out for one another more than now. I keep telling my wife that I hate to see it. I hate to see it and it is coming. It will be the best thing in the world for this. One hell of a Depression. Then people will start to appreciate people. Take my word for it. Back then if you heard a woman scream or a kid scream you'd see people fly from everywhere now, (laughing) about 6 years ago I couldn't believe it. I read it about five or six times to believe it what I was reading! A little girl up in New York, something like twenty years old went from stoop to stoop and people were like closing their doors and this guy stabbing her, stab here; like thirty something times. My God!, who...

SH: ...back from the Depression, tell me who, I know you can't remember them all but tell me again who were some of your captains. People you remember real well.

LB: Well let see, uh, let see, well, Mike Triplett for one he is still with me, down on Laurie Avenue. Helen Reynolds, she is still with it, George Bailey he is still with it, Patty Brown on Chester Avenue. Uh, what the heck is her name over on Woodbury? Estelle Frederick...

SH: Estelle...

LB: ...Estelle. Clara Minitor. Of course, She just died. Clara Minitor...

SH: She said Estelle was from Woodbury. Was there anyone else from Woodbury?

LB: No she just had one precinct over. Woodbury Methodist church and in the Hampden, if you want to get technical in Hampden there are eleven precincts and Woodbury was 12 so we just say Hampden Woodbury precinct. And think we have just off the top of my head. In can't think of any other.

SH: What did they do and how did they carry out their jobs so well?

LB: Specifically was when they had their meeting, I would send my captains to the meeting at Trenton Democratic Club. Then, when they got the ballots and everything and we would come back there and the captain jobs was to they would pick up the ballots for themselves and the core groups on the day of election. They would have the election and captains and co-captains would go into the precinct. I gave the challenge to watch the ballots they would go in and count them and I would have them here. Sometimes I would call them and they would call me and get the figures. But in the last few year is would say, seven or eight years, I wouldn't bother too much about that. Because now, they got a more rapid system setup and fact in some of the precincts. In other words if you up there and they are getting the figures downtown. You could say "uh-oh" we only got only eighteen more precincts to come and ain't enough votes here to change it and this is the winner. That was the main purpose they wanted at the headquarters. They can get that a lot faster down there. But that was specifically what they were supposed to do.

SH: I wanted to see how Hampden felt about Pollack's action where there any stance or platforms that he had that people definitely disagree with.

LB: Well, Over the years, up in the club after we had our meeting up, we would say, "Well I don't like this!" and we would hash it out. In between us, we collectively had a set rule that the majority went and you went along with it.

SH: What kinds of things would happen that you disagree with?

LB: Uh, well one big thing was when they with this re-alignment, this was the 4th district period for years and years like gas was 29.9 cents and gold was 36 an ounces per year and they wanted to change and they did. They chopped Hampden up beautifully. They got their point and man we were ready to declare revolution. They really chop us up bad!

SH: How do you think that happened?

LB: Well, the colored people put so much pressure and it was a pacification and we had such weak leaders that they gave in and they didn't have enough guts to say hey its been that way for a long time and many years and you show me something better, I'll change it. Until you show me something better, I ain't changing. They wouldn't take that stand.

SH: Who were the Black leaders who put that? ...Who were the leaders who let it happen on our side, the Hampden side?

LB: I...[pause] better not mention those names either, I might open up some old wounds in case this might get into the wrong hands. But I can tell you this Jack Pollack was against this and I was against it and all my people was against it. We wanted like it was the alternative was not an improvement it was actually like, I can't write with this hand. Well, I'm right-handed. Hell, but I might as well just cut it off. That's an improvement?! That's what they done to Hampden Woodbury take my word for it and we had big meeting downtime I even told the governor, "To go to hell! If you don't like it--come on down to Calvert street!" Because it was an awful thing the way it was being handled like

I say I won't mention any names someday comes the revolution and you will see who ..who has the final word.

SH: The real purpose was to do what? That real purpose was?

LB: To chop us up, they wanted, the real purpose meant, the coloreds were saying, "Hey, look it is not that we are qualified not that we have good candidates or anything. But look if you chop this up here we have a better chance of getting electing somebody". Now isn't that something! That is a very poor excuse if only they wanted four years they never would have done that.

SH: How? How is that?

LB: Because The Jewish people were running and the 4th was moving up all the time. Right. But they didn't change Jack Pollack and he's still living on the same street he said he wouldn't. He said the hell with them.

SH: That was in ...?

LB: ...the year they changed that in 1966, I think it was.

SH: And what do you think the conditions are now in Hampden is the Trenton Democratic club still strong?

LB: Oh, no, no...you know Jack's dead. Morty. Don't have the old get in there and the charisma--he just don't have anything

SH: Is that what happened? Is that why strength isn't there?

LB: Well, I know an awful lot of guys who don't even bother going up there to the club anymore. It is a go ahead meeting up there on Thursdays nights. I know a lot of guys I stopped down there in the sheriff's office. We had a special meeting on Fridays two weeks ago on Friday. I was talking to the fellas and some of the Jewish people was in there. Herby Shapiro was there and I said, "You fellas bought the club" At first, Herbie said, "Yeah why haven't you been up there". I said, "Well, the last couple of times I went up there nobody was there and I am not going to sit up there and hold my own hand." The representative spoke up and said, "Don't pay no attention to him!" We haven't had nobody been up there anymore. Personally I think Morty's gonna sell the building.

SH: What is the story now in Hampden in politics and who are the leaders?

LB: Personally, now I had several people approach me and uh, about the org. I had Tom Wood and [unclear] and Jack Pollack, and Tory Brown. I had word to contact Mary Pat Clark but I haven't been up to see her yet. Because I wanted to get something else because I want to make a tradeoff if I can. I got this house. Did you notice that next door?

SH: I forgot to look again.

LB: Well, when you got out there the ceiling in the front on the gutter house is falling down. I went through all the normal procedures. The courthouse meeting was postponed on the nineteenth. I am waiting to see Mary Pat Clark cause maybe I can make a trade off. So I haven't made no outright commitment the only thing was I did tell Tom Ward and Tom is in our outfit.

[microphone of recorder goes off...]

SH: The following interview is being conducted through Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project in the Hampden Woodbury community. The interviewee is Mr. Luther Butler and the interviewer is Susan Hawes. Today is the 3rd of August 1979. We are at 1024 West 38th Street. Please repeat. [clock chimes]

LB: But, anyway, now this is last year and I told Tom Ward go head and put my name in the fact is that I didn't file and they sent me a card and on the card it said I am a liberal democrat. I am no liberal! I ain't signing that card. And in good conscience I can't-- so I never did sign it. It is laying there somewhere with my junk and I am not about to tie with that. No sirree!

SH: Is the system still in operation are your captains still...?

LB: Ohh, they are there in case I want to activate them.

SH: But, they haven't been activated in awhile.

LB: No, we were just a little bit active in the last election but uh, that is the governor election.

SH: Who speaks for Hampden now? Who speaks for Hampden in city hall who do people identify as leaders here?

LB: Well, actually I don't know, I think mention to you Bunny Evans calls and they kid him and call him that because he likes to talk. When they parade, he is down there on the stamper with decent people and tall like that. He is on the mayor's staff, but Bunny was never active in politics.

SH: You say that he helped people in the community at times?

LB: Well, he helped at times. I say, "Look Bunny, I got one special party that I pushing. How 'bout helping me out". I had given him some ballots and he would pass them out. I would check on him to make sure that he was passing them out. He hangs out in the precincts and he acts like a watcher or something and that's all.

SH: So, is there anyone that who you think who speaks face for the community or?

LB: Other than the city council, and this is why, right now I am leaning, getting myself prepared to get with Mary Pat Clark. Now, Tory Brown sent word that he wanted to see but some of his bills are too liberal for me. In good faith—I just can't do it.

SH: Tell me, Going back a little bit, some people have said that Pollack had some liberal stands especially towards the Black community in Hampden, not in Hampden, but in Baltimore did that sometimes, was that sometimes was a problem for people here?

LB: There wasn't a problem for us. No real problem for us. In fact at that whole particular time I called him on the side up. That is what we called the inner sanctum we would have a hush-hush meeting. I said, "Jack, a couple of these guys I knew from my later jobs" and I said, "Jack don't trust them guys; I don't trust as far I can throw that the automobile and I couldn't even raise a fender. The next day, it was in the paper. Thousands of ballots in Greenspring Avenue there were words and there was a certain party they did there. They went down there and got the money for the workers and everything and went got the ballots and they were scooting off. I went back to Jack and said, "I hate like hell to tell you this, but I told you it would happen like didn't it". I put my arm around him and he said, " You were right I just felt certain". Well, I never let my feelings enter something like that when you start talking about money and my lines about it. I don't let feelings get into it. It is like ice water in my veins.

SH: Back again, in '38 I heard some people say that they were some people in Hampden made a move to create a strong inner local group of strong political group I wonder if you heard about that or know anything about that.

LB: Yeah, I heard about that never really got off the ground in fact I attended a couple of meetings

SH: Do you know why?

LB: Well, I think it was a clash of personalities, that was my feelings. In other words they all wanted to be boss. No one could ever say, "Hey, this is going to be open then put your name on a piece of paper if you wouldn't to run for this and then only...you don't vote for someone if they didn't want to run and take the job right or he don't show up for meetings" Right. But, it just never got off the ground that's a dog ol' shame.

SH: Would you tell me who was involved in that?

LB: No, I rather not it was just open up some old wounds and were a couple of fistfights at the same time.

SH: You mention that there was nobody to define as a leader also?

LB: It was a questions of finding a leader, you had leader but you had clashes of personalities. I want to be top dog and you can be number two dog.

SH: You said money was a problem?

LB: Money was a big problem. You see you gotta remember one thing in politics more so today than it was back then. Money is the number one commodity.

SH: It seems that way.

LB: Now, just to give you an example when they have these rallies, I am going to use this as a small example. But, it's money. When they have these rallies and all, my wife and I went to a couple of rallies. You would see people at these rallies that are not registered voters! Why do you think they come? Hot dogs and beer. That's money. See, you gotta have money at the end or forget it.

SH: You mentioned that Red Man's Hall, Red Man's Lodge had a lot of democratic rallies. Would you say the fraternal order and some of the big clubs social clubs had some casual or informal political leanings that you could count on that they helped certain candidates that they had an important political function for people too?

LB: Well, We not only had the Redman's Hall, but you got Vincent's Hall and the McCann's Hall. There been political functions but because the McCann's is right on the first floor. Well, not but practically on the 1st floor just about seven or eight steps off. A lot people wouldn't come because the older people couldn't make to the McCann's because they were on the 4th floor. You see you had the bowling alley on the 3rd floor in the basement.

SH: But were any of the sort of lodges aligned politically one way or the other?

LB: No, the Red Man's was there and they just rented it out for occasions and all.

SH: You wouldn't say the Red Man's or some of the local Oddfellows had a particular...?

LB: ...now, I had one thing going in and Jack and I originally talked about buying it. It was really going to go over big!

SH: What's that?

LB: He was going the old Hampden Theater from. Not buy it for himself, but I was going to organize it and set up weddings parties half and halves and stuff like that. We would try to make it self-sustaining but Bob was only buying time.

SH: Bob Burns?

LB: Well, Bob Burns, he was only out there for one thing. Money. And far as that club is concerned, They had no political power. One-third of the people aren't registered and

another third were registered don't even vote. I don't understand meeting people who aren't registered to vote.

SH: Was Bob Burns too young to be involved to be in things?

LB: But, Bob Burns was another guys Jack Pollack helped out. He was in the fire department. He was fired about three or four times. From making book and he moved around different places. Jack got him back in the fire department in each time. Finally, that was it! He got picked up on a federal job and he did some time up North.

SH: What kind of jobs could people get as part of the systems, what kind of jobs?

LB: Well, I don't think he could get a big job. A clerking job or a truck driver, something normal. I don't know anybody who got a big deal out of it. I think you could get a big deal I would think you would have to get in there and work your way up. You know that is my personal opinion. I know a lot of people who worked for the state and I know that a lot of people who work for the city. The ones that I know got their jobs politically are just a clerks like everybody else.

SH: Do you think that any of the churches were informally aligned again like the lodges were align in any way politically with the action that certain people with certain belief also had others beliefs or...?

LB: ...no to my knowledge and I knew an awful lot of church people, no...

SH: ...what political party do you feel dominates in Hampden and do you think always have?

LB: What party, oh, I can prove it democrat. But, there is awful lot of them over the years educated in fact that that is one of things I used to do with my people look this vote you can't do anything now you got go with your ticket and in general I will see but this bum don't vote for him period.

SH: You said sort of answered that question before you were sort of telling me about the bond time in the Hampden, the Benson, parishes and the Fischer were there any others?

LB: Well, The Hamshires moved up on Joppa but they lived here on Elm Avenue and they were rich people in Hampden.

SH: You mention that they did have an effect on people that they were good community organizers in a way because of the way they talked to people?

LB: You see the further back we go the more people had more respect for anybody who kept themselves neatly attired and had good job, had good money and they acted really nice person you see but you heard them and the people had respect for them and people would listen them.

SH: That makes sense.

LB: That's right psychologically, this would be a norm because actually you are envying that person because you would like to be in their place.

SH: Now, I have one question please, you know, answer it any whatever way you would prefer, I think it is important to ask because people have a lot of conceptions of Hampden and how people think in Hampden and be aware of that about some generalizations people make. I think it is important to enlighten people about those things and one of those generalizations that people have is that people have talked about their feelings about race in Hampden and they do also talk about the Klan here and they have some ideas about that and I was wondering if you would explain and how you see that, how you see people's conception of race and their feelings about the black race in particular here and what role the Klan has had as you see it and you think it might be the same or different from people's ideas about? Well, That's a long question.

LB: First let me clear up something about the Klan. There was over 870 members here and one thing you hear all kinds of tales, you hear all kinds of things. First you think, some guy on the horse with a whip, whipping on the darkies and stuff like that. That's a lot of hogwash. The Klan in Hampden was definitely out for rapists, child abusers and wife abusers and that's all. That is all. They would naturally work them over and then tar and feather and tie them to a cross and push them down Jones Falls. Now, We got colored people here, my God!, like (unclear) here and some of these people I have known here since I was a kid. The Spencer family, the Stacks had the family up there. Billy Stacks used to wait on the corner for me up there. Timmy Sullivan would wait for us and Bill and his cousin, Elliott, I think it was, would wait for us and we would walk up to the country club and caddy. They respected us and we respected them. And I think my personal opinion you go anywhere if you act like a dog; you be treated like a dog, you act like a human being with manners and respect you will be treated the same way. And this is the way it should be I might add. And if you want to talk about colored people there's five houses up the street a colored man visit his girlfriend up there. I didn't see nobody shoot him or anything. Lives up down the alley, park his car out front.

SH: Would that have happened 5 or 10 years ago?

LB: Well, because ah (pause), I think he would have been politely told, hey, we don't believe in mixing the races now be a nice person and go mind your business, I think he would have got the message and ahh, but today I don't know, nothing much would surprise me.

SH: Well, it is unusual to hear of one of the only places in the city where there are no black houses living except Evans Chapel road where there has been no?

LB: Kite Hill, my God!! They built up lately, when did they build those houses since before the war, 1938 or 39 it is unique.

SH: But it is unique, it makes Hampden unique.

LB: These people comedown here on 36th and I went down there and got my what its call it thing are was some colored people down there and we go to A& P and then we cut our coupons and go to the A&P or Giant and then you see. Look, in fact there's hasn't been not to long ago that lady was looking for (unclear) or something. A lady and their husband and they had a little kid. And I told her and she said to me. Excuse mister you know where they keep the (unclear) Doggone if I know but I will try to find out. I went and found out and come back for them. Did they thank me? A longs as you are a nice person what do I care. Of course, I don't want them to sleep in my house I don't want nobody to sleep in my house, I don't care if they're from Czechoslovakia unless they are invited.

SH: There are 870 members in the clan?

LB: A little bit over 870 members, that's right.

SH: In Hampden or all together?

LB: In Hampden period.

SH: Was that awhile back?

LB: The picture I got is taken on the 2nd floor of the fire engine house and it has an inscription and everything in there and something, 874, 875 or something like that, from all Hampden, Remington and Laurel Park.

SH: That's a pretty big area!

LB: We were talking about in the old days, the Klan more used to be like any other social club. Right, the only thing that they were after were rapists, child abusers and wife beaters.

SH: What kinds of things did they do in older times farther back what kinds things that they would do that made them more visible in the community and more like a social club?

LB: Certain occasions they would have the full regalia.

SH: What's that?

LB: That's the hood and everything.

SH: They would be really visible in the community?

LB: Oh yeah,

SH: For parades, for instance?

LB: For their parades...Someone told me that they would march on Declaration Day. That's right.

Wife of LB: Wasn't too long ago they were up the Avenue [36th Street].

LB: Right

Wife of LB: couple of years ago.

SH: For parade or march?

Wife of LB: Trying to get members.

LB: Yeah. A couple of [unclear] back there but they were doing it.

SH: So it was really an organization for a social group just like the Red Man's hall or lodge or something?

LB: Fact is down in McCann's Hall it seems just all time had it inside. Two or three months now, they had a meeting--just beer and drinks, card games, crap games you name it.

Wife of LB: I don't remember that.

LB: Naturally, you wouldn't been there cause women weren't allowed, you wouldn't have been there.

SH: There was a women's sect, chapter?

LB: We didn't have one.

SH: Thank you that is really helpful if it really makes a difference.

LB: I don't know about this guy Vince, the new clan. I can't think of his name.

SH: The new grand dragon.

LB: The grand dragon and I don't know about his philosophy but I hear rumors the other day I was on 36th street, they are going to reactivate the old clan with the guys that are still willing are willing. They honored.

SH: There was one thing that I heard that I didn't quite understand around and I wondered if you heard about to around the late 60's. It was a family that moved and people thought they were black and apparently they might not have been, they might have been Indian. But they moved in on Chestnut, I think?

LB: Hickory.

SH: Hickory. Oh , you know the story?

LB: I went down and check it out. He might have been a half Indian but the rest of them were colored all the characteristics were there take my word for it. Of course, he had all the Indian characteristics like the high cheekbones. But the way people told me is that they weren't so politely asked to leave. They were going to burn the house out and the only thing was worried me about was the neighbors.

SH: But, what do think about an action like that, do you think how do you feel about that with a situation like?

LB: I didn't want anything to happen to them. Well, I guess my answer would be like this and you have a flat tire, what do you do. You fix it. Okay. If your generator is going up, you fix it. Right. Well, if that is the only way to get them out. But try the easy method because nobody wants to get hurt but if that doesn't work do what is necessary.

SH: Do you think that Hampden has changed since you were a boy going up?

LB: Oh my God!, Hampden has changed 1000%.

SH: How do think it's changed?

LB: Well, I walked out on the Avenue of course they haven't said anything in front of me well let me first of all, not too long before I retired I'm down on 33rd street and the fishers motorcycle where they got hurt down there. Mort was walking and an old lady said something to this young punk about 16 or 17 years old and I was walking up. And then Merv jumped in and said, "Don't you talk to her like that, boy, I will knock your goddam head off." I said hey, "What's going here! Hey, Hold it and Merv told me what happen. In the meantime the guy starts walking way. It is his grandmother! And the words he called his grandmother. Ol' so & so. I wouldn't call that to a dog!

Wife of LB: She may mean about the house...

SH: Anything that he said.

LB: I remember years ago, ten years ago, what a minute! Merv is dead now. Ten years ago, he would have knocked that guy's head off. In fact, after he told me I would have knocked his head off myself. I walking out on 36th street and now and I look around when I hear this words coming out of peoples' mouth. If there aren't any women or

children, I am going to tell them where to get off. The profanity the words they use, I wouldn't dare use it. There's no respect in this punks I... and some of the girls too. My God!, it is amazing!

SH: Why do you think it is different from the way you acted?

LB: Well, I think it goes right back and I am glad that you asked that. You know that right now I am going back to up to 1950 and 1960. It was rare. The first time a house was on auction off in Hampden. Well let me say it's been less than fifteen years the first house ever auctions in Hampden Woodbury was auctioned off. The first one.

SH: What does that mean?

Wife of LB: Don't ask me!

LB: That means lately, it is common to see them auctioned off. In fact, I bought one just last October right in the back.

Wife of LB: The way that means everybody is old residents in Hampden.

LB: They are dying off and moving out and the people that are moving in are renters.

SH: Where are they from?

Wife of LB: Everywhere.

LB: Everywhere. You know it. But they have no manners no respect no nothing. I don't think they were born by a mother or father. I think they were born by some jip dog out in the park.

SH: I heard some people say that they think they are from the south or the hills?

LB: I would say that the majority of them are from the hills or the south because of the way they talked. Their vocabulary is ferocious. The words they use--just embarrasses me. It's...I don't know! I just...and that is why I think the whole gist of the thing. Because I walk around the streets a lot, of course, I like to get in touch with a lot of people. They are places where people have lovely homes, just lovely homes--well painted well groomed. I see different people there now. You say hello to them and they have no friendliness; they might say, "Hi, how are you today and you say, "Nice day". Passing a word of congeniality, they say something and if they say three words two of them are curse words. And I see this all over the place.

I stopped on this avenue and I was talking to her and she was telling me about her neighbors she said, Mr. Butler she says not only down here the porch front house that's where the play lot is. She lives in the end one up here at the end of the block. She says, "I put it this way, I don't go anywhere; I get my groceries delivered from easy I am afraid to go out of the street". I say you don't have to do that. I say anytime you want to go out on

the street, I reach down and gave her one of my old cards and I tell her to call me at home I'll come down and I will take you out. But, I see around about my block. Ms. Mulcher is dead now. Mr. Brown got the house and I am sure he got a lot of rummage from there Ms. Muchler her sister died and she is there all by herself now. Ms. Newell is dead and her son spends a lot of time there and of course her grandchildren.

[Interruption on tape]

LB: Help them out in different ways.

SH: What do you predict the future of this block?

LB: In this block, Well, I haven't got around to each and every one yet. But of course, I haven't had that one. I had something else forming at one time. Mrs. Wilson she died in a nursing home up in Hagerstown and she must have put in her will that a law firm that was handling her will. I told them I got something big going down right now but I want the neighbor next door to have the house. I got the house for a sum of \$3200 but anyway.

Of course, Mrs. Hanover father and mother died over they were nice, nice people so I called him up and I said I am coming up to see and I said how would you like to buy it. Said, you bought that didn't you. No, I got the rights to buy it. But I got something else going and I won't to handle this because I knew that you were wanting to buying it. A big tall guy was so excited, my God! We will take it and what money do you want well the lawyers will want to come up and see it. I got the call and the guys comes and buys the house. Now, I can't get rid of him. Over here all the time.

SH: Let me ask you do you think Hampden is very different from the rest of Baltimore, would you say that was a unique place?

LB: Yes it is unique, even with the booming because of the boundaries that are situated around here. Some people that I know that have been born here and died here. You value everything. I don't have to go out here and look for anything. I leave my car and I left my car out here for a couple of weeks. I don't need it.

SH: How did it get like that?

LB: I think it is basically because of these natural boundaries, the east side of Wyman Park the west side Jones Falls and the railroad track in the south Druid Hill Park and the north you can't go up there and the rich people up there and you can't afford that. So it's like a funnel almost like.

SH: What do you think about the people in Hampden? Do you think they are different from other people in Hampden?

LB: Well, I know a lot people I don't think the people are any different. In fact, I had a lot of people contact me and ask me if I ever owned house. You wanted to rent in

Hampden. Just the other day, I was at the bakery and I was coming in and Ms. Nelly showed me where can I rent a house. She said just put a sign and they have billboard out there and It's just a unique place to live and that if we just keep the home, right?

The real nucleus of the whole thing; that is why I don't need a house I got another house but I got my family in it. This one here when I am done fixing it up-- voila. He just got out of service. She is a nurse and they got a baby, eleven months old and her father and mother live on Hickory Avenue. I have known her since she was little girl. His father and mother I have known when they were living on down there. Bill Harris was a cop, his father was a cop and I have know him since the department. His mother a Jew is almost like family. They wanted to buy it you can buy it there.

SH: You spent a lotta time other places you spend time outside of Baltimore and probably had a lot of opportunities to move, if you wanted to. Why is that you never moved did move out of Hampden?

LB: I had bigger job opportunities. The Dewwhite Motor Company. I guess I can talk about this now back then you were working on a circle in the US repairing the antennas for detection on these trailers. The Martin Company had the contract. The Dewwhite Motor Company came in because I was headed up the contract getting off the ground you might say getting people organize and getting people smoothed was one of my special assignments. They offered in fact they paid me and I went out there on one weekend to Cleveland oh and we sat down and talked salary and one thing or another they even took me over to what was that name, explained to me it wasn't clear. Heights...something called Heights.

SH: I think I know what you mean. Shaker Heights.

LB: Shaker Heights! That's it, they took me down there and showed me the home and everything. But, there to take care of things the whole bit and I was at this whole other building and that was going to be it. I was going to be the King Tut of the whole fabulous styling. I came home and told my wife about it and she wasn't thrilled about it. We were a little out about it. Sharon or our little Nancy was just a little baby. Anyway, Sharon was just a baby and about five If I recall correct, but Janey was involved she wanted to go. My wife started crying and we talked about it and talked it over. But, I got to thinking and my wife said, "You are not going to be happy. I know you not going to be happy out there. You and your old cronies and everything; you will never be happy! That money ain't going to buys you happiness!". She was right and I finally seen the light. Everyday they sat down and my kids was always wanting started taking turns saying grace. I never forget! Finally, I said she was right. Janey is the only one who wants to go and all want to go. I can see everybody pulling their roots and then it was another thing after the job is over. Where am I going to go? Who do I know out there? So I turn it down, but they offered me fabulous dollars, fabulous.

SH: If you think back, what that lots more happy times what was the best time in your life what was the best time in your life?

LB: You mean the happiest time in my life. The day my children were born. Yeah.

SW: I have heard a lot of people say that.

LB: Yeah, I have five wonderful daughters, wonderful daughters. Never give one minutes problems of course you went out there and we have a half of bath on the first floor. You go out there and look on the back of the bathroom door, you will see a razor strop hanging up there. See, I used to use a straight razor and I would get that strop up. I would come here and mother would say come back. I am going to give you a break this time; but I am going to really give you one so that you won't be able to sit for a week's time. When I sat down with them for the first time. I like that and that scared them enough.

SW: What would you say the hardest time?

LB: I will never forget that, was my first child I had to get \$25 dollars together for the doctor. And there wasn't no place that IOU or something like that and I had to have it. Dr. [unclear] is dead now. But he says, "I want that money, like a week before". [unclear] I was doing anything to get a couple of bucks the but the job was only part-time and you could work any time you could get and I can. You would work anytime you could get. I was lucky if I had counting all the hours together two to three days a week. To get \$25 that was the roughest time of my life and now I look back and I say \$25 – it is sure is different.

SH: What helped you through that?

LB: I was working for bootleggers, too. I was an enforcer. I would go around collecting for guys who wouldn't pay up I would go around and if they gave me money or part of it I would just take it out on their hide cause see, I got twenty percent of whatever I collected. Once I got that money I was a happy son of a gun. I calculated and took it to his house.

SH: Anything you would do differently or anything you add, anything you wouldn't do if somebody walked up to you and said we hereby grant you another 100 years of life on this planet?

LB: [laughing] Naw, I was very happy a good family, good wife. We bought our home and worked for almost fifty years and my wife was very stingy with a buck. Cause we know what is to not have, I think I am probably keep on doing what I am doing and then I would help somebody. I would help them, so I am satisfied. That means even more only right now, I have no regrets.

SH: Would you be willing to share anything you may have learned in the last century that is real important anything you might learn that is real important to share with other people what would that be?

LB: I think the big thing is share with other people. Helping hand even if it is to just help somebody up and a person who has a hand in the gap. Just the little things wind up being big things and you do a lot of the little things and you will pay someday and you will get paid I should say I am certain. In some way I ain't telling you will get paid in money now I am just saying by just satisfaction know the Lord will reward you for lending a hand.

SH: Umm, is there anything that I haven't asked you or asked you or you feel unfinished about, about yourself or about Hampden that you think is important to be on this tape a little bit?

LB: One thing as far as my employment, I left Martin Company back and I retired from the sheriff's department in Baltimore City and I had 11 ½ years there and several combinations. I guess uh, that's about it

SH: Anything you think is important for people to know who remember about the past about Hampden or about yourself, that we have not talked about yet?

LB: Off hand, I can't think about something, but in closing I would like to say one thing we could walk around Hampden. Now what you see, albeit, a far cry from what I seen as a (unclear) and even up in the neighborhood [unclear] because in these places I am talking about are houses are for rent and everything and nothing is the same. A renter doesn't take care of it like somebody else.

I think this is an important thing and this is (clock ringing, indistinct conversation) and if anything is wrong I want to know about it. This is important and if the housing laws were only enforced more so. This would help take care of it so but I can remember where I will always cherished is the members of history gone by. In the summertime when I became sixteen years old, we were singing on the quartet out there cause it is like a cow field out there. You would sing songs many times. I am talking about before radios came out in 1927. You kept your mouth shut or you got a mouth full of knuckles

(background music)

Three of the older guys would have the best quartet and we was up in the recreation center and we would be on the hill right above the "resy" [reservoir] and we could see Baltimore back up in the stands of course it was a hot night and the wind would not circulate too good and we would go out on the fields and they would sit down just behind second base. Ahh man, it was just cool you off and just ease your mind just relax and it was just living.

SH: What were some of the songs you would sing?

LB: Ohh, any old songs you could think of. Some of the people on the street would say, Hey fellas, Why don't you sing this or something like". Then we would have a live band at the old grandstand on Powers Street. Sometimes, when they practiced they practice back on 33rd street – those houses wasn't there. On 32nd street, there was a big mansion with a big high fence and an old lady [unclear] and practiced. And of course, needless to say all the kids come around and listen to the music

SH: And this was something you did instead of listening to?

LB: Well, it was just so relaxed, nobody hollering and raising heck like you have now days! No motorcycles and all that jazz. Everybody sat down talked and friendly, but, uhh, if anybody had a problem, back then, Gee Louise! A woman screamed, kids screamed; everybody responded, including even women and now days, somebody can holler bloody murderpeople just stand around and just ignore it.

SH: I am real glad I asked was there anything else cause that was very interesting, thank you very much.

LB: Believe me, if you could only see something that was almost impossible to explain back. Everybody was cleaning off their steps off in the morning. The women did everything, by the time the sun came up--all the work was done on the pavement. I haven't seen nobody out, but now tonight it is a Friday day. My mother I don't she got something but I go by and stop. Years ago, She made me promise to give her one night a week. In the morning, I went and stayed with her one night a week. She gets out there with her hose as far as it can reach a fifty foot hose and she washed all the pavement down including the outside and rear of her house. There is a quarter of garages and she washes up the alley. But, we were talking a couple of weeks ago, I said, "Mom what are why don't you worry bout your own pavement!". That is all you ever see, nobody else but I haven't seen anyone else out since old lady (unclear) died.

But then it was different then, it was the hustle and bustle. Two guys got in to an argument and they would just go to the park. Guys didn't fight in front of kids and women you went in the park and right, just like that and but now, these guys (laughing) it's a whole different ball game! Every three words they say and two of them have to be curse words. The people that come out of this man's old place, oh my God!

SH: Thank you very much.

LB: I am sorry if I bore you. Sometimes I get carried away because I see some of things I and some of the things just tear me up I look back and know what was what and compare and it just tears me up. Just tears me up.

SH: That's old' man Dixon.

LB: Old man Dixon was a cop and he had the old Indian side car in his department. He worked specifically Roosevelt Park. He would come down there and say, "Alright you guys, come on now! This would be to anyone--he would take that that stick and rawhide and hit you across the butt. He would say, "Get in that side car!" and take you where you live and some of us he knew and take you home. In my case, my mother jumped on me and whap me across with the tail of the rawhide, my mother would whap. My stepfather would come home and take his belt off and my grandfather would come home. I got three whoopings out of that.

SH: Just for hanging out down there?

LB: It was dangerous for kids. Just one of things, now, we wouldn't call Mr. Dixon Old man Dixon to his face. He got that motorcycle as a regular police thing and he would jack us to the lines and put us in the side car and take us to our parents. The parents backed him up which was proper. Right after all, he was doing his job trying to look out for the welfare of the kids. Back then, we didn't appreciate the fact. But, looking back then and some of things; I look at all the pictures I got and I think thrown away. Largest male bible class in the world, all the steps, I forgot how many, all the way up it was packed, 400 or 500 it was packed.

SH: You said you were counting one time and found that there was as many bars as their were churches in Hampden?

LB: There were twenty-two bars and we just kidding one night. We started talking about and anyway and we started putting down on paper. Churches and bars. There were twenty-two bars and twenty-two chapels in Hampden.

SH: When was that?

LB: Early 40's. In fact, it was in the early 40s because I was working at Morons. That was coincidence twenty-two bars and twenty-two chapels.

SH: Thank you.