

[0:00:00]

Max Hardy: When you're ready **Holly**. All right. On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom at Rhode's College we want to thank you for coming here today and sharing your story with us. Today is July 20th, 2010 and it is 8:30 a.m. My name is **Max Hardy** and this **Bryson Whitney**. We are both honored to be conducting this interview and to find out a little bit more about Memphis and the Evergreen community. Today's interview will be available online at www.CrossroadsToFreedom.org. Let's start out with some basic biographical questions to get your memory going. What is your name please?

Ron Raybuck: **Ron Raybuck.**

Max Hardy: What year were you born?

Ron Raybuck: 1947.

Max Hardy: Where were you born and raised?

Ron Raybuck: Born right here in Memphis, Tennessee and raised right here, Midtown.

Max Hardy: What is your occupation right now?

Ron Raybuck: Right now I am a courier for a lab.

[0:01:00] After 9/11 went off the printing industry kind of went south and about two years after that they closed down. So everybody was scrambling to find a job and I took a courier position.

Max Hardy: Can you say your parents' names please?

Ron Raybuck: My father was **Paul** Raybuck whom I never knew. My mother was **Dorothy** Raybuck **Milum** and my stepfather was **Walter** Milum he passed away last June, June 9th. He's the one that actually raised me.

Max Hardy: What were their occupations? Can you describe what they were like?

Ron Raybuck: They both worked at a Memphis lamp plant. It was a division of GE and they made light bulbs.

[0:02:00] Well my father or stepfather he was a mechanic and my mother was in production. They made light bulbs.

Bryson Whitney: Where was that plant located?

Ron Raybuck: On **Riverside** Drive.

Bryson Whitney: Riverside Drive. Do you know is it still there?

Ron Raybuck: The building is still there. Now whether it's being used I don't know.

Max Hardy: Can you describe what they were like briefly?

Ron Raybuck: Well yeah. It was just a typical family. They worked – as a matter of fact both of them worked third shift. So I wouldn't say I was home alone but sometimes it felt like that. We had an apartment in our house and there was someone – someone was always in the house with me from like from the 2nd grade on. But yeah, they were good parents.

[0:03:00] I have no issues with them. I miss them.

Max Hardy: Where were you living at that point?

Ron Raybuck: 663 **Dickinson** which is about five blocks from here, six blocks.

Bryson Whitney: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Ron Raybuck: No. I was an only child.

Max Hardy: That's great. I'm going to ask you a little bit about growing up in Memphis, specifically in Evergreen. Can you tell me a little bit about the neighborhood that you were growing up in at the time?

Ron Raybuck: Well yeah. There were kids everywhere and we'd just play all the time especially in the summer. I don't recall it being this hot [laughter]. I guess it's because back when I was a kid there – air conditioners were still a rarity and we didn't have one for years.

[0:04:00] All we had was an attic fan and when you'd go to bed at night you would just raise your window and let the cool air come in from the outside. But like I say we used to play. I can remember the train on the **Vollintine** – the tracks that well have since been pulled up but I can remember the train would come by twice a day and stop at Sear's building. He would always go – well from my house I

was just three houses off the – at Tutwiler and Dickinson’s where the tracks were. Many a day I’d go down there and take pennies and – real copper pennies and put them on the train track [laughs] and watch them get smashed.

Bryson Whitney: About how many times a day did the train run?

Ron Raybuck: Twice. Once in the morning around – between – I can’t actually recall.

[0:05:00] It was about somewhere between 9:00 and 10:00 and then in the late afternoon about 5:00 or 5:30. Then I think eventually they just cut down to once a day. It was in the mornings and I –

[Crosstalk]

Max Hardy: What was the Sear’s building like then because it’s abandoned now?

Ron Raybuck: The Sear’s building was really – it was neat. I remember one of our biggest things as a kid was we would ride our bikes over there and the biggest thing was riding the escalators from downstairs to upstairs. But it was always just full of people. The parking garage and they had the cleaners in there and the different services. You would catch the elevator and walk under the – I think there was a tunnel that you could walk under. I may be mistaken.

[0:06:00] Kind of like the old Gull Smith’s – well now I take that back. It was Gull Smith’s downtown where you could park and you’d walk under the street to get into the building.

Bryson Whitney: When the Sear’s building was popular over in Midtown did people – was the Gull Smith’s building still used downtown or was those two –

[Crosstalk]

Ron Raybuck: Yeah. There was Gull Smith’s, Lowenstein’s and Gerber’s were the three large retailers downtown and then Sear’s was in Midtown.

Bryson Whitney: Was there like – did the Midtown residents tend to use the Sear’s building more often or did it not matter much?

Ron Raybuck: Yeah. Yeah, probably so. A lot of times you didn’t go downtown except for something special. Go to a movie or Britling’s Cafeteria

or – well at Christmastime you'd still go to Sear's but Christmastime everybody would go downtown.

[0:07:00]

Max Hardy: So you say you're growing up in Evergreen on Dickinson Street and your parents both work at the GE plant on Riverside. Are there any thing – are there any other memories that you have just about your home life at that time that just stand out?

Ron Raybuck: Well nothing that stands out. It's nothing that I could actually recall off the top of my head. I wished I'd have been thinking about this and I could have had more for you.

Max Hardy: Don't worry about it. Let me talk about school. What school did you attend, elementary school?

Ron Raybuck: My 1st grade I went to **Gordon** which is – I'm thinking it's **Chelsea** – I think it's on Chelsea.

[0:08:00]

It's near Chelsea and **Breedlove** and that was in the 1st grade. Actually I lived on **Jackson** and **Bellevue** and there's a gas station there now where I used to live. There was no interstate going through there at that time. There was a shopping center right there at the interchange at Jackson and Bellevue. It was a shopping center.

Bryson Whitney: Do you remember the name of that shopping center?

Ron Raybuck: I do not.

Bryson Whitney: What was it, like a place to buy clothes or was it more of a general store you think?

Ron Raybuck: Well it was a grocery store and they had like a dry cleaners, **Spic and Span** I think it was called. There was a thing called, for whatever reason I still remember it, it was called **Seebo** Pizza and it was a little pizza place and it was just real small.

[0:09:00]

A pizza place back in the '50s was highly unusual. You just never saw them. You'd have never thought of Pizza Hut or Domino's or anything like that. It was just this kind of odd – thinking back on it it was kind of odd to have a pizza place in the '50s. There was one on Summer Avenue called **Pat's** and that was the only other one I ever knew of was Pat's Pizza. He closed down. I think he's opened back up somewhere in off of **Summer** and **National**.

- Max Hardy:* That's really interesting because my earliest memories is just like the interstate always being there pretty much and so knowing there was a store there it's –
- Ron Raybuck:* I can remember once though getting hit *[laughs]* in the head by the door. Being the little kid that I was before – this was before I was even in the 1st grade we're over there and my big idea was to try and hold on to the door handle of the automatic door and then get your foot on where the glass meets the middle.
- [0:10:00]* There was this little ridge about like that and I could get my foot on there and try and ride that door. Well that grand escapade didn't work and it popped me in the head *[laughs]*.
- Bryson Whitney:* So what – and you said you only attended Gordon till 1st grade?
- Ron Raybuck:* Mmm-hmm.
- Bryson Whitney:* Then you all – is that when you all moved to Evergreen?
- Ron Raybuck:* Yeah. That's when we moved over to Dickinson.
- Bryson Whitney:* Then you started to attend **Snowden**?
- Ron Raybuck:* Mmm-hmm, Snowden.
- Bryson Whitney:* How long did you attend Snowden?
- Ron Raybuck:* Eight years.
- Bryson Whitney:* Eight years?
- Ron Raybuck:* Mmm-hmm, till the 9th grade.
- Bryson Whitney:* Okay, so it was a junior high?
- Ron Raybuck:* Yeah, it was a junior high.
- Bryson Whitney:* What was Snowden like at this time because that's something that we're really interested in?
- [0:11:00]* Was it integrated? Was it all Evergreen students or were there students from outside the neighborhood?

Ron Raybuck: No, it was all localized. There was a really big – well it was all white and it was just – it was a local community school. We had a big Jewish population here in Midtown. I don't know if you know **Baron Hirsch** Synagogue which used to be at Vollintine and Evergreen. That was Baron Hirsch Synagogue and Jewish people, a lot of Jewish people went to Snowden. Then onto **Central**.

[0:12:00]

Bryson Whitney: So did you enjoy your time at Snowden or what was that like?

Ron Raybuck: Yes, I did. It was – Snowden was a good school and I guess it's like all schools. When you think about your teachers they were always 100 years old. When you're that young they're always 100. I did enjoy Snowden. It was good. I remember doing the Christmas pageants every year. You get out a lot – well back then the only times you ever got out of school was Christmas, Thanksgiving and you got a fair day and then you got a half a day for the circus. To me that was it. There were no spring breaks. You went to school. No spring breaks at all.

[0:13:00]

Bryson Whitney: Maybe you can talk more about any of your teachers or your classmates that you remember at that point in time. Does anybody stick out in your head? Anybody that you –

Ron Raybuck: Yeah. Well one of my classmates still attends my church, **Wendell Stellitz**. He goes to – and well **Tracy Crenshaw**. Both of them go to my church and –

Bryson Whitney: If you don't mind me asking which church is that?

Ron Raybuck: Trinity.

Bryson Whitney: Trinity?

Ron Raybuck: Trinity Methodist right around the corner.

Bryson Whitney: Would you happen know Ms. **Francis Brown**? Francis Brown?

Ron Raybuck: I do.

Bryson Whitney: We interviewed her last week.

Ron Raybuck: Did you really?

Bryson Whitney: Yes, sir.

Ron Raybuck: Yeah, Francis. She's a good woman.

Bryson Whitney: Well you mentioned the Christmas pageant. Were there any other annual events or activities you took part in, any sports or any clubs?

Ron Raybuck: No. Oh and they used to show movies on Fridays.

[0:14:00]

Bryson Whitney: At Snowden?

Ron Raybuck: At Snowden. They would – like they would take a Friday afternoon and show a full length movie and that was my first time I ever saw *Miracle on 34th Street* was during that time. I can remember – the only two movies I remember from there is *Miracle on 34th Street* and *Tarzan's New York City Adventure*. But they cut those out. Somebody started raising Cain about the kids not studying. So they eventually quit showing movies on the weekends – I mean on the – I don't know if they did every Friday but it was at least once or twice a month.

Bryson Whitney: That's interesting. But I was interested in asking you this. You know when you're just driving by Snowden today does it visibly look different than it did when you were attending school?

[0:15:00] Have they added on any buildings or does it look about the same?

Ron Raybuck: From the front it still looks the same. They have added buildings in the back and over across from **Eclectic** Café in the parking lot there there used to be a janitor's house and that's where the janitor lived, the custodian who took care of the school property and the maintenance. He lived right there on campus.

Bryson Whitney: Do you remember his name?

Ron Raybuck: Mr. **Carter**.

Bryson Whitney: Mr. Carter.

Ron Raybuck: His son – he had two sons and I can't remember but one. It was **Jack**. Jack Carter was his son and I can't remember his other son. I think he was younger but Jack was more my age.

Bryson Whitney: Did he attend the school as well?

Ron Raybuck: Mmm-hmm.

Bryson Whitney: Okay. That's all very interesting. It's not even **any better**. I wouldn't have ever known that.

[0:16:00]

Max Hardy: What was the city like at that point in Evergreen? What was the feel of it? Can you summarize that at all?

Ron Raybuck: Well it was like you didn't – crime was just almost non-existent. No crime. You could leave your bicycle laying out in the yard at night and you wouldn't – except there was sometimes stuff would get stolen but as a rule. Break ins were unheard of. It was just a – it was peaceful. It was a peaceful city; well to me it was as a child. My parents might have a different view of that.

Bryson Whitney: Were there any influences, any memories that influenced you later on in life, anything that happened that have influenced you today that you can think of?

[0:17:00]

Ron Raybuck: No. I mean I'm sure there are but nothing I could think of right off the top of my head.

Bryson Whitney: If you don't mind me asking so after you moving out of this elementary school period what were your teenage years like in Memphis in Evergreen?

Ron Raybuck: I won't say they were wild but it was dang close *[laughter]*.

Bryson Whitney: Are you still living on Dickinson at this point?

Ron Raybuck: No. I live on Avalon which is a block over.

Bryson Whitney: What was that address? Do you remember?

Ron Raybuck: On Avalon?

Bryson Whitney: Yes, sir.

Ron Raybuck: 444. When you went to – well when I went – most, 99 percent of everybody who graduated from Snowden went to Central but I chose to go to **Tech** because it was a technical school.

[0:18:00] Like I was saying earlier off camera that Tech was the one school in town that had no boundaries. I mean if you lived in the school district that's where you went to school but you did not need to transfer out to go to Tech. So a lot of people would go to Tech from all over the city and I wouldn't call them roughnecks but they would be getting close to. It was not a rough school. Don't get me wrong. It was just an assortment of characters I guess would be a good way to put it. They were all good people but I'm sure like every other high school wild *[laughs]*.

[0:19:00]

Bryson Whitney: Now was that diversity of – the student population sounds really diverse. Is that something that really made you want to go to school or was it your parents' background in the kind of technical field that influenced you to go there?

Ron Raybuck: No. That's just where I wanted to go. There was no influence. I just – that's where I chose to go.

Bryson Whitney: So what kinds of things did you study at Tech?

Ron Raybuck: Electronics. That was my major. They had printing. They had a print shop there. They had auto repair, cosmetology. I think they even had machine shop. Like I say it was like a trade high school.

[0:20:00]

Bryson Whitney: Now is Tech look the same?

Ron Raybuck: Memphis Tech.

Bryson Whitney: Does that building look the same physically as it _____
_____?

[Crosstalk]

Ron Raybuck: From the front it does. Now when you get around to the side it's a lot different. They've added on some things.

- Bryson Whitney:* So you mentioned your – these years were a little wild. Do you have any memories of growing up during this period? Anything stands out in your head?
- Ron Raybuck:* There was **Dyer** – I would like to remember Dyer’s Hamburgers which there’s an auto parts place that sits there now on Cleveland and it used to be Dyer’s Hamburgers. I don’t know if you all know the story behind Dyer’s or not.
- [0:21:00] This guy would take a golf ball size of hamburger meat and he had these white marble counters and he would take his spatula and he had an old wooden mallet or a rubber mallet and he would hold that spatula down and he would, boom. He would pound that hamburger patty and it would flatten it out about like that and I mean it was almost paper thin where you could hold it up and read the newspaper through it almost *[laughter]*. Then he would throw it in this huge vat of grease and it would sink. When it was cooked it would rise back to the top. Then he would take the bun and while – it’s great for your arteries. Then while the bun – he would turn it over and the bun would get soaked in grease. Then the only way you could get them dressed was pickle, onion, mustard, salt and pepper and nothing else. I mean there were no tomatoes, no lettuce, nothing but pickle, onion and mustard. That was it.
- [0:22:00] He sold beer there as well. So I’ll just let that go *[laughs]*.
- Bryson Whitney:* That was on Cleveland?
- Ron Raybuck:* Mmm-hmm.
- Bryson Whitney:* Okay. I guess that was this place where a lot of kids your age would hang out a lot?
- Ron Raybuck:* Well yeah. See, well yeah, a lot of times you could go – you could leave campus and go to lunch back in those days. You could do things like – I mean I’m not saying anybody go over there and buy them a beer if you could but you just had to know certain people. But you could go over there for lunch and get you a hamburger and a Coke and then go back over to the school. There used to be a Shoney’s up here where Home Depot and that parking lot is at Madison – I mean at Poplar and Avalon. There was a Shoney’s there where the – I think it’s Rent-A-Center. That was Shoney’s restaurant.
- [0:23:00] We used to go down there and you could always get on Tuesdays you could get a Shoney’s Big Boy buy one and get one free. So

we'd always go down there on Tuesdays and get two hamburger – two big old Shoney Big Boys.

Bryson Whitney: Did you walk to school or drive to school?

Ron Raybuck: Walked and then later on you could drive but I didn't have a license. I didn't get a license until I was probably out of school.

Bryson Whitney: You mentioned that instead of going to Central, the neighborhood school you chose to go to Tech. Was the neighborhood in any type of transition? Was Evergreen or the city in notable transition or any changes being made?

[0:24:00]

Ron Raybuck: Willy – I'm thinking it's Willy Walker and if you see this Willy, my apologies – he was the – I'm thinking he was the first black man to be admitted, to be integrated into the school system. He happened to be in my radio and TV class.

Bryson Whitney: What year was this?

Ron Raybuck: This was I'm thinking 1965 and I'm thinking it was Willy Walker and like I say if it wasn't Walker I apologize to him but I'm pretty certain that it was Willy Walker. But he was in our class. I can remember a lot of – I don't know how you would put this.

[0:25:00]

Like people being on edge I guess would be a good way to put it. It was – there was not a physical barrier but you could just tell things were not the same like being in an all white school. I mean when Willy came in it was just – it's like everybody just – when he would walk into the room a lot of people would hush and everybody would just quit talking. I know it had to make him feel extremely uncomfortable.

Max Hardy: Do you think he –

[Crosstalk]

Ron Raybuck: I –

Max Hardy: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Ron Raybuck: I can remember one of our co-students coming by and the thing – Willy would always – in most classes he would always come in after everybody else was seated and a lot of times he would leave –

and at the end of the day he would leave school before everybody else would.

[0:26:00]

I can remember in my radio and TV class that somebody had gotten up and like I say there was no air conditioning and you just had the windows open for ventilation. But I can remember somebody walking by and I – to this day I still remember his name but I won't repeat it but I can remember him picking up Willy's books and throwing them out the window. I thought that was sad.

Bryson Whitney:

Was this integration something that was also happening in your neighborhood that you – was that noticeable at all?

[0:27:00]

Ron Raybuck:

No. I don't recall when – I probably wasn't here or wasn't aware but when I went to the Army. I think probably when I went to the Army it was more when the integration shift took place. We actually got another student in I think the year after Willy. I think his name was **Titus Steel** and he came in. Those were the only two black men in the school while I was there. After I left I don't know.

Max Hardy:

Well I'd like to talk about your post high school years a little bit now.

[0:28:00]

You mentioned that you joined the Army. What were your motivations to do that? What prodded you into the Army?

Ron Raybuck:

What prodded me into the Army? That would have been Vietnam, sir.

Max Hardy:

Okay, there it is.

Ron Raybuck:

The great motivator. Actually I had been going to the Univer – Memphis State University at the time and I had gotten a different from the Army and actually had been called in for my physical and I got deferred – well they drafted me and I got deferred the day before I was due to go in for induction. I got a deferment in the mail. It seemed like it was a day and that could have been a longer period but it seemed like it was the day before.

[0:29:00]

I was going to school and me and my buddies we'd just rather than take a chance on getting drafted and knowing what you're going to do go on and join for the extra year and pick a field that you

wanted to do. So that's what we did. We went on and then quit school and just joined the Army.

Max Hardy: So where were you stationed initially and what was that like?

Ron Raybuck: I went to basic training at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky and I stayed there eight weeks. Then came home on leave and then went to Ft. Gordon, Georgia Signal Corp Training, telephone repair and switchboard operator and pole climber and that was it.

Bryson Whitney: Did you know anyone else while you were stationed there that was from Memphis at all?

Ron Raybuck: Mmm-hmm.

[0:30:00] Me and two of my friends went through basic training and went to Ft. Gordon, all three of us. We stayed together for six or eight months.

Max Hardy: What were their names?

Ron Raybuck: **Sonny Harper** and **Jerry Houston**.

Bryson Whitney: Were there a lot of Memphis guys being drafted? Some of them just went into the Army or was it –

Ron Raybuck: Oh yeah. It was – the war was raging. Yeah. People getting drafted all the time.

Max Hardy: At what point were you – did you move out of the country? Where were you stationed?

Ron Raybuck: Sonny and Jerry went to Germany in – when we got our orders they went to Germany and it was – I would say we went in in June of 1967 and we got out in – actually I got a little bit before June of '70.

[0:31:00] But they went straight to Germany and Jerry never left Germany. He stayed in Germany for two and a half years which I thought was kind of odd with the war going. Sonny went over there and then he transferred to Vietnam. I went straight to Vietnam after school, after Signal Corp school. I went – I landed in February of 1968 and that was when the big Tet Offensive had just kicked off. It was raging. I wouldn't say it was my finest memory but it was my welcome to Vietnam memory.

[0:32:00] I was standing on the tarmac after the plane had landed and I can remember the sirens going off and they were attacking the air base at **Tan Son Nhut** in Saigon. I could hear – I can still hear the sergeants hollering, “Drop” – well in nicer words, “Drop your duffle bags [laughs] and get in the bunker.” I had just gotten to the bunker and an explosion from 122 round mortar hit real close to where we were. I mean it was so loud and so forceful that it knocked me down. It knocked me to my knees and other people as well. We were all sitting in there and then when it was over some sergeant come walking in.

[0:33:00] He had a piece of shrapnel about that long that he says, “Looky here.” It quieted down after that for a little bit.

Max Hardy: What was it like being so far away from just what you knew to be home?

Ron Raybuck: Well it was an eye opener. It was my first time I’d ever been away from home for that long a period of time. I knew it was hot. Lord have mercy. You think it’s hot here. It was hot over there, Vietnam. It’s nothing, 120, 125 degrees during the day. It was just nothing. Monsoon, when it comes in – I can’t remember when monsoon was. Well I think I was getting ready to rotate out. So it would have had to have been probably in the spring but 80 degrees and you had your sleeves – 80, 85 degrees you had your sleeves on your shirt rolled down because you were cold.

[0:34:00] It would rain; I mean just rain constantly, just a pounding rain. But I wandered off. I forgot what you even asked me now.

Max Hardy: I don’t know. Just –

Bryson Whitney: So what were your views of the world overall when you’re in Vietnam? Were you upset by it? Did you agree with the movement in there?

Ron Raybuck: No, I wasn’t upset.

[0:35:00] No, I couldn’t say I got upset about it. I just knew that we were helping someone who needed help just as we’re doing today.

Max Hardy: What motivated you to keep fighting or keep working?

Ron Raybuck: Over there?

Max Hardy: Yeah.

Ron Raybuck: Well actually knowing that you only had a year [laughs].

Max Hardy: Okay.

Ron Raybuck: You do a day to day thing and when you worked you worked 12 hours a day, 12 on and 12 off.

Max Hardy: So at what point did you transfer to Germany?

Ron Raybuck: The strangest thing. I had six months left in the service, six months and why in the world they ship me to Germany I'll never understand it but I went. I went to a little town called Heilbronn which is just right out – I think it's maybe 40 miles, 50 miles from Stuttgart.

[0:36:00] They lost my duffle bag on the way over to Germany and I had to – all I had was the pair of khakis that I flew over there in. I didn't even have clothes for about two or three weeks and I had one pair of khakis and I would have to wash them at night after they'd get ripe. I'd have to wash them and dry them. Then they issued me new clothes. When I was due to get out of the Army my duffle bag, original duffle bag after they had reissued me all these clothes my original duffle bag shows up a week before I'm due to rotate out. It took six months to find me, my duffle bag to catch up with me which –

[0:37:00]

Bryson Whitney: What kind of work were you doing in Germany?

[Crosstalk]

Ron Raybuck: In Germany?

Bryson Whitney: Yes, sir.

Ron Raybuck: It was switchboard repair and field phone repair. There was a little **bitty**, it's called a TA 312 and it was a big old block telephone. It was about like that and it was about that tall and it had two posts on the top and you take your wires and you press down and they would open up and you'd stick the wires in there and you'd let off and then the wires would stay connected. Then you had a little hand crank on this side. You'd do that and it would crank it and you could send the signal down. You could talk to somebody through the switchboard.

Bryson Whitney: Did your time at Tech in high school did that really help you move – transition smoothly into your job _____ ?

[Crosstalk]

Ron Raybuck: No.

Bryson Whitney: Not really?

[0:38:00]

Max Hardy: So there is some fairly significant developments at home when you were abroad and I'm curious to hear your reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King in your home city when you were abroad and how that made you feel. If – how – what was your initial reaction?

Ron Raybuck: Well actually it's one of those things. You think you know where you were when Elvis died and I remember where I was when Martin Luther King died. I was sitting in the back of a truck in Vietnam when we heard the news. I just – when I found out and I said, "It happened in Memphis," I just thought, "My goodness. This is terrible news. It's sad. This is terrible." I just – I actually just started thinking about all the people and what was going to happen to this city after that happened.

[0:39:00] I can remember when I came home I think it was the first year anniversary after he was assassinated that they had a curfew going in the city and I can't remember how long. I'm thinking at least it may have been a week but after 7:00 while it was still a little bit daylight you were off the road. You were not to be caught on the street by the police. You'd probably go to do some jail time. They wouldn't tolerate anybody being out on the streets.

Max Hardy: Did you see or hear about the sanitation workers' strike when you were in Vietnam? Did that –

Ron Raybuck: Beforehand?

Max Hardy: Mmm-hmm.

Ron Raybuck: No.

Max Hardy: So that wasn't really publicized to you guys?

- Ron Raybuck:* No.
- [0:40:00] I didn't think I was getting like the hometown newspaper at the time so – unless my parents would – so they may have in a letter indicated the sanitation strike was going but I didn't hear about it beforehand.
- Max Hardy:* What about President Kennedy when he was assassinated? What kind of reaction did you or your peers have?
- Ron Raybuck:* There's another where you knew exactly where you were. I was in **Tech as** in a – well actually our teacher had called in sick that day so we were in the chemistry lab of all places doing nothing [laughs]. But I remember that well.
- [0:41:00] I thought that that was extremely sad. He – I'm thinking he was a good president at the time. He was probably being a democrat looking back on it now knowing how, well, democrats are today Kennedy would probably have been classified as a Republican [laughs] to me. He was the last of the – I don't know what kind – conservative democrat I guess would be a good classification for him.
- Max Hardy:* So what was your relationships like with people of color in the military? You mentioned that was a significant exposure for you to integration.
- [0:42:00] What was that kind of relationship like?
- Ron Raybuck:* I had no problem at all. I mean I got along good. I mean I'm an easy going type of guy. I can get along with just about anybody but I had no problems at all. There were some people that tried to go out of their way to stir things up and that's black and white. They would do their best to be hateful. That's sad.
- Max Hardy:* Do you have any specific examples of that kind of –
- Ron Raybuck:* No except for the guy that did the – threw Willy's books out at Tech.
- [0:43:00] I can remember a friend of mine over in Germany and there were – he was – we were at – he had told me that in his barracks he was rooming with three blacks and he was the only white in the room. They would all congregate into his room and he said that many a night – not many a night but he said on certain occasions they would get in there and one of them would say, "Let's go

downtown and fire up some **chups**,” meaning, “Let’s go downtown and whip some white boys.”

Max Hardy: Oh wow.

Ron Raybuck: That’s something I’ll always remember somebody saying that.

Max Hardy: Wow. So coming back to Memphis when you returned what was your initial reaction and did you notice any significant changes, any minor changes?

[0:44:00]

Ron Raybuck: You know I don’t recall – I don’t know if there was a lot of – well I take that back. I could tell there was a migration shift out east. Midtown was kind of being left as a little pocket. I could see it when I came back. After three years I could tell there was a population shift moving out east. I can remember when they built Clark Tower which is earlier.

[0:45:00] This is back in the – I can’t – I think it was like the mid-60s. That used to be a cotton field before they put Clark Towers in.

Max Hardy: Where is Clark Towers?

Ron Raybuck: At – I’m thinking 5050 Poplar right there at – well you know where **Houston’s** is?

Max Hardy: Uh-huh.

Ron Raybuck: Right – the big buildings there.

Max Hardy: Okay. So those were cotton fields?

Ron Raybuck: Yeah. They did.

Bryson Whitney: So those were the big new suburbs at the time when you got back?

Ron Raybuck: Yeah. That was **Gump** moving out east. That’s where everybody was going. That was called out east at that time.

Max Hardy: I’m sure. So when you were a kid that wasn’t really developed as much?

Ron Raybuck: Mmm-mmm.

Max Hardy: Not any of that going on? Okay. Oh go ahead.

Bryson Whitney: I was wondering, did Evergreen or the Midtown was it still a place where a lot of families were living like school age children maybe or had that whole situation changed where more families moving out east and Evergreen changed in that aspect?

[0:46:00]

Ron Raybuck: Oh yeah. Family. It was still thriving. It was still a nice little area. Sear's was still going but I guess you could see that Sear's was in decline by that time in the '70s and that's a shame because that is such a pretty building. It probably costs way more to get that thing repaired and up to code than I guess remove all the asbestos out of it.

Max Hardy: So you didn't really notice any kind of big changes in Evergreen specifically when you got back, just – what was it like coming back home?

[0:47:00] Did you live at home with your parents? Did you move out?

Ron Raybuck: I did. I moved back with – I moved in with my parents. I probably – I stayed – I moved – I stayed at home for probably three or four years and then moved out.

Bryson Whitney: Where did you move to at this point?

Ron Raybuck: Boy, over on Clark Place. I used to have an apartment – two apartment – well I lived on one side of the street and on the other side of the street over on Clark Place right off of Poplar at Avalon about two blocks west. I lived over there in apartments for years. They were nice. I liked – Clark Place was a good street back in those days and that – it looks like it's fallen into a little bit of decay in the apartment buildings.

[0:48:00]

Bryson Whitney: I find it interesting the more people we talk to that grew up in and around this neighborhood tend to stay near the neighborhood because – as they get older and move around. Is this just because you just are so fond of the neighborhood or was housing just easier to find around here?

Ron Raybuck: No but you are right. I don't know what it is. I don't know what the physical attraction is to Midtown but I love it. I don't ever

want to leave it and you're correct that most everybody lives – you live here and you're going to die here in Midtown.

[0:49:00]

Like the bumper sticker says, "Midtown is Memphis."

Max Hardy:

What's your relationship with Overton Park when you're growing up, when you got back? Did you have any connection to it? Did you use it or not so much?

Ron Raybuck:

Oh yeah. We used to ride bicycles over there all the time. That was the big thing. As a matter of fact one of the girls that went to Snowden with us her father, they lived on the golf course where the club house is and she – he was – he took care of the – he was the golf club manager or the golf course **owner part** manager and that's where she lived. They lived in the club house. We used to go over to Rainbow Lake and catch tadpoles quite a bit which I hadn't been over to the park in years.

[0:50:00]

I'm thinking Rainbow Lake is no longer there or they're putting it back. I can't remember what the deal is with Rainbow.

Bryson Whitney:

It's changed a lot.

Ron Raybuck:

I can remember going to the zoo. The zoo used to be free all the time. Something else is when I was a kid – you know when I told you there was no air conditioning growing up on Dickinson when I would go to bed at night and sometimes late at night like 12:00 or 1:00 in the morning or 2:00 when everything gets real still I could hear the lions roaring in the zoo at my house in the summertime when you'd have your windows up. It would always amaze me. My goodness.

Bryson Whitney:

[Mumbles] Well I guess what was your – you were living on Clark Place.

[0:51:00]

What was your occupation?

Ron Raybuck:

I worked at a typewriter company downtown.

Bryson Whitney:

Do you know what street that was on?

Ron Raybuck:

2nd Street. It was right across the street from Peabody Hotel and it's – it used to be the Bigfoot Lodge. I don't know what it's called now.

Bryson Whitney:

It's like _____.

[Crosstalk]

Ron Raybuck: Yeah, exactly. That's where it was.

Bryson Whitney: That was a typewriter place?

Ron Raybuck: Yeah.

Bryson Whitney: That's mostly restaurants now up and down that.

Ron Raybuck: Yep, it is. It was – there's a dental supply place, too across the alley from us. On the other side of us was Memphis Cap. I think Memphis Cap or Memphis Hat. They made hats of all kinds.

[0:52:00] I even worked over there for a little bit on Saturdays.

Max Hardy: Did – what was downtown like at that point? Was it a – there are a lot of tourists there now walking around. Was it kind of a hustling, bustling kind of place or did that also experience a move eastward?

Ron Raybuck: Yeah. Downtown was kind of – yeah, it was in a regression I guess you would call it. It was – people were not coming down there as much. Gull Smith's was closing and Gerber's had closed and Lowenstein's closed down and not there's an apartment building there. I don't even know what's at Gull Smith's anymore. I remember when they tore up Main Street and put in the Mid America Mall. When I was working downtown they were doing it back in the – I guess it was mid-70s and I used to have a ton of pictures.

[0:53:00] I don't know what's happened to them now. I regret losing those because I had pictures of dirt on Main Street, you know.

Bryson Whitney: What's your opinion of that change? They called – I guess wanted to redevelop the area. What was your thinking of like how they changed **that meant** Main Street?

[Crosstalk]

Ron Raybuck: When they put the mall in?

Bryson Whitney: Mmm-hmm.

Ron Raybuck: Well I had mixed feelings about it. I liked the way downtown was with the street and traffic but then again the pedestrian mall was

nice. You can just walk up and down the street. Then years later they come and put the trolleys in after that. So who knows what's going to be next.

Bryson Whitney: Was Midtown becoming more of like a commercialized area or was the residential feel still intact because I know the businesses _____ moving out of downtown?

[0:54:00] Were any of them moving in and relocating into the Midtown area?

Ron Raybuck: No. It was still – Midtown was still Midtown. Matter of fact they had – everything was still kind of the same. I don't recall seeing a big shift in Midtown. I know Kroger's at Poplar and Cleveland they used to be across the street where the Walgreen's is and Monk who is an old – he was always 100 years old. He always sold newspapers. He got killed by a hit and run driver and they never found out who did it. But Monk, I can remember him always selling newspapers and I always thought that it was really strange that you would see him up there at Kroger's and he always wore sweaters.

[0:55:00] It didn't matter if it was 100 degrees in the summertime. He had a sweater on. He would get up there and he would fix – he'd go in the store and buy him some bologna, some mayonnaise and a loaf of white bread and come out and sit down right out in front of Kroger and make him sandwiches [laughs].

Max Hardy: Are you or were you married at this point? Did you –

Ron Raybuck: No. I was not married at this point.

Max Hardy: Did you – were you dating? Were you looking for to be married?

Ron Raybuck: I didn't get married till later in life. I don't know why.

[0:56:00] I just didn't. I wasn't really looking. I was as some people might say it was immaterial. I don't know [laughs]. But no. I didn't get married until the late '70s.

Max Hardy: During this period had – in the wake of the late '60s and the different strikes we had here in Memphis and the assassination had – socially had anything improved or relations between vice and vice? Did that improve? Was there less tension in the city in the late '70s? Did you notice anything like that?

- Ron Raybuck:* No. I've always thought the tension has always been there and I think the tension is still here. I don't know.
- [0:57:00] I don't know how you can correct it. I'm sure it can be corrected but I don't know how to go about doing that. But I do think tension is still here.
- Bryson Whitney:* With you having seen more and experienced more than someone of the age of myself and Max do you have any advice that you would maybe offer younger generations on maybe possibly improving that as we move forward into the 21st century and to the future?
- Ron Raybuck:* Only thing I can say is be courteous and smile.
- Bryson Whitney:* Yes, sir.
- Ron Raybuck:* Oh and yes, sir and yes, ma'am doesn't hurt a bit either [laughs].
- Bryson Whitney:* That's great. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you'd like to add?
- [0:58:00] Any other stories or memories?
- Ron Raybuck:* No. I'm probably good. I have more stories but I'm – I can tell you the one about me and the gang walking under the drainage ditch from the zoo to the creek that run – well on Dickinson Street there's a creek that runs down through there. When I was a kid I can remember when it would just – after a torrential rain the water would be all the way up to the top of it, to the street level. It's a good I guess 15 feet, maybe 20. No, I don't think it's 20 feet. That's my childhood mind makes things bigger than they are. But I can remember us starting over here somewhere under Snowden School's campus back where **Dino's** Grill is.
- [0:59:00] You can get into the drainage ditch and it's all underground. We had flashlights and we walked all the way over to the – up into the zoo. Strangest things. We saw half a car under there when we did it. I've always wondered how in the world did a half a car get under there.
- Bryson Whitney:* That's a funny story.
- Max Hardy:* So did you actually sneak into the zoo from there?
- Ron Raybuck:* Well we got into Overton Park. We didn't get into the zoo but we came up into the park and were somewhere over by the golf

course. We never did that again. Parents never knew it either
[laughs].

Bryson Whitney: Didn't want them to know anything.

[1:00:00]

Max Hardy: Well are there any other stories you'd like to tell us or –

Ron Raybuck: No. I think that's probably all I can remember. Well I do remember one other thing. There was a lumber yard where – it was on Avalon at Tutwiler where the – **Woodmont** Towers that is now a retirement home on Parkway, North Parkway. That used to be the **Blackwell's**. They lived in that big plot of land right – I don't know how many houses on either side. Maybe they took three houses out and built Woodmont Towers there. But there's – on Avalon there's a thing called Woodmont Terrace and it's a little, bitty two-store building but that used to be a lumber yard right there. I think it was called Smith Brother's Lumber.

[1:01:00] They – I can remember riding our bicycles down through there one day and of course you know how kids are. You know, always riding with no hands. We were flying down through there and I was doing no hands and I hit something in the road. I don't know what it was but what it did it just turned my front wheel like that and I went flying over the front. I don't know how in the world it kept from killing me but – I can remember all the men coming out of the lumber yard company going, "Are you all right?" I said, "Yeah. I think so." But I didn't get hurt. I just got a couple of scrapes but maybe I wasn't going as fast as I thought I was. I can remember the Cross Town Theater going in there.

Bryson Whitney: Where was that?

[1:02:00]

Bryson Whitney: Where was that located?

Ron Raybuck: It is where Jehovah's Witness – the hall is at Watkins and Overton Park Street now. Just kind of caddy corner from the Auto Zone. It used to be the Cross Town Theater.

Bryson Whitney: Did you go there a lot?

Ron Raybuck: Mmm-hmm, I did.

Bryson Whitney: Was that a place where a lot of neighborhood kids went to go see movies and stuff?

Ron Raybuck: Yes, they did. Uh-huh. They showed more – they showed a lot of kids’ movies during the summer. That’s where all the teenagers went. We used to go to the **Mention** over on – at Cooper and Union which is now the – what a little – no. They moved across the street to the new building but that was the Mention.

[Crosstalk]

Bryson Whitney: _____ . Play – now it’s like the play _____ .

Ron Raybuck: The play – yeah, the playhouse now.

Bryson Whitney: That’s good. Well great.

[1:03:00] Well thank you for participating in the Crossroads to Freedom Project. Your interview will be available on our Website, CrossroadsToFreedom.org after it has been processed by our staff. This is Max Hardy and Bryson Whitney with Mr. Ronald W. Raybuck on July 20, 2010. Thank you.

Ron Raybuck: Thank you.

[End of Audio]