

Female 1: Okay, I'm pretty sure this is recording. So I'm gonna set it right there.

Jiawen Li: Is it on?

Female 1: Yes. Or you might – could actually keep it right here so that it'll pick up her voice well.

Jiawen Li: Okay, so first of all, can you tell me what is your name?

Speaker 1: **Mary Ayers.**

Jiawen Li: How old are you?

Speaker 1: 80.

Jiawen Li: Do you have any children?

Speaker 1: One.

Jiawen Li: What is the age of your children?

Male 1: 41.

Jiawen Li: And how long did you live in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Ever since '69 until –

Jiawen Li: '69 until –

Speaker 1: Until when baby?

Male 1: 2010, November 28.

Jiawen Li: And how did you come to live in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Well, they tore down downtown and I had to be out, had move out. And they said, "Well, it was a nice place," which it was. It was a nice place when I first moved there. But the end was something else. They done tore the pipes out the house. Up over there all our fixtures was up in the attic. You could hear them walking at night. They were taking the pipes, got the copper pipes and windows out of 2583 St. Paul. A pipe in there, that's where I lived. And when they pulled the hot water tank off, it blew a whole in the wall that big.

Jiawen Li: Wow.

Speaker 1: Water came in on me. And my floor you walk across just like you walking on a spring board. Now that's before I moved. And the landlady come out and said, "I'm gonna get you out Ms. Ayers. Can you see?" I said, "No, ma'am." She said, "I'm gonna get you out of here." Cause the water here in the front and here in the back. I couldn't get out the front or the back. Now that's the way it was.

Jiawen Li: I see. So who lived in your Cleaborn Homes apartment with you while you lived there?

Speaker 1: My grandson and son.

Jiawen Li: So three of you?

Speaker 1: Huh?

Jiawen Li: So three of you?

Speaker 1: Um-hmm.

Jiawen Li: And what was it like when you first moved in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Oh, it was beautiful. It was nice.

Jiawen Li: And when you first moved in, how did you feel about living there?

Speaker 1: I loved it.

Jiawen Li: You loved it?

Speaker 1: Um-hmm. I was close to the school, the kids go out the front, up the back across to Porter high school to school. And I loved that. And in 2000, oh, lord. You had to duck and go in the house because they'd shoot. They did everything. And I know I couldn't stay there when they started tearing the pipes out of the house. And I just bump up and tell her, "Don't tear no pipe towards me." "Okay, Ms. Ayers, we ain't." And when I moved that lady on the end in eight, they tore it out and got all her clothes and things, messed them up, but they paid her for them. I told her, "You ought to go when I go cause they can't keep watching these apartments and they – that's gone, that's gone." We the only ones in there then cause all of the rest of them done moved out. And they was rough on us.

Jiawen Li: So were there changes in the overall neighborhood that you noticed while you were living there?

Speaker 1: Whole many, there's a lot of – a whole lot of changes when they started mixing the developments up together, it wasn't no getting along at all.

Jiawen Li: And were you ever employed while you lived in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Um-um.

Female 1: Okay. How did you travel while you lived in Cleaborn Homes? Did you have a car or did you use the bus?

Speaker 1: The bus.

Female: Cause Cleaborn was right by a bus line, right? I think you can go onto community now.

Jiawen Li: Yeah. Did living in Cleaborn Homes ever feel like living in a community to you?

Speaker 1: Um-hmm cause we had a community center and we'd give out lunches. We'd give clothes. We'd give out commodity and that was upkeep to me, but when it closed down, I fell apart because I was used to working. And I enjoyed that. Feed the children, anybody was hungry they could by and get them something to eat. If they need clothes, they'll come by and get clothes. We didn't sell anything like the rest of them did. We gave.

Jiawen Li: Were there any neighborhood traditions like festival or anything?

Speaker 1: Beg your pardon?

Jiawen Li: Were there any neighborhood traditions in Cleaborn Homes like any festivals or block parties?

Speaker 1: Um-um, they didn't have that.

Jiawen Li: No?

Speaker 1: The lady who lived on Walnut she had a block party. That's what she did and everybody would go over there.

Jiawen Li: Who were the people you trusted in the community?

- Speaker 1:* Mercy Smith, Timothy Smith and the rest of them is dead. They gone along. Velma Blakeley.
- Jiawen Li:* So they were your neighbors?
- Speaker 1:* Um-hmm.
- Female 1:* So you would say that you trusted your neighbors?
- Speaker 1:* Um-hmm.
- Jiawen Li:* What type of support did those people offer you?
- Speaker 1:* Anything I asked them to do they did.
- Jiawen Li:* So would you say they offer emotional support, financial support?
- Speaker 1:* Um-hmm, if I needed, I'd go to them. They come to me. We just one big happy family.
- Jiawen Li:* And they even like would help you with taking care of children or –
- Speaker 1:* I didn't have none.
- Jiawen Li:* Okay. So how did you get your community's news or gossip?
- Speaker 1:* You ain't got to do nothing really but sit on a porch and listen to it. They didn't hide it. Just sit on the porch and you hear everything and anything and see anything and they did everything. You name it, they claimed it.
- Jiawen Li:* Okay. And did you and your family feel safe living there?
- Speaker 1:* Um-hmm, they didn't bother me. I never had no trouble out of the young mens cause I'd tell them, "I don't play." I'd either – mine is bigger than this. I'd either use this or I got two slugger bats on them and I ain't gonna miss you. I take them dirt and I could throw it and wouldn't miss it. All I had to do was do that and then hit you right there. If I wanted to hit you in your arm, I just mark it. And I got it. This one woman told me, "I'll get my pistol and I'll do this." I said, "Go out there to that tree." She went out there. I said, "Pull it out." She pulled it out from wherever, it went down the barrel like that. I said, "Now pull the trigger." Her old man looked at her and told her, "Don't you mess with her. Ma'am, who

learnt you how to throw a die?" I'd said the Indians and the Mexicans. "I'd say, I can take a gun and shoot that limb off up there." "You can't." I said, "Yeah, that's all I used to do. Riding and Rolling. Right long with the Indians and the Mexicans."

Jiawen Li: Okay. So what kinds of activities did you do as a family when your children were little?

Speaker 1: I worked at the community center.

Female 1: Did ya'll go the movies or I don't know, watch TV, school trips, anything like that?

Speaker 1: They went on school trips, I didn't. I can't go to the park, girl, something will get in my naval and I have a big old bladder. I didn't go to no park. They'd eat me up. But they'd go on trips and go to the park. Go to the park and just like that yard over there. You walk right through the front door, up the hill, in the park and they had everything up there because my baby he used to go up there and play soccer, football and come in broke up and bloody. He'd go right back the next day.

Jiawen Li: And how would you say the children of the Cleaborn Homes community were raised?

Speaker 1: Some were raised good and some were raised poorly, like every neighborhood.

Jiawen Li: Did the adults share responsibility of taking care of the children?

Speaker 1: Um-um.

Jiawen Li: Nope. Okay. What did you like best about living in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: The work I did and helping the people. That's what I like the most--helping those kids and the elder people. I guess that's my gift and God bless them, all of them has gone and left me. They promised they weren't gonna leave me, but they left me. I said, "Don't say that because you might have to go." And they had to go. So I just got two people's living, my grandson, son. My mother dead, my daddy dead, my oldest daughter dead, my oldest son dead. I sat right there and watched them die.

Jiawen Li: What would you say were some of the biggest challenge of living there?

Speaker 1: I don't know. Yes, I do. Keepin' the folks from coming, throwing trash in the yard. As them would come through, you know, bags of garbage. They just throw it in your yard and keep going. So the manager stopped them from coming through, make them keep the street around, go back on to business.

Jiawen Li: Who would you say were the leaders in the Cleaborn Homes community?

Speaker 1: She dead. Murdus Eskew. She died too, it went down.

Female 1: What was her name?

Speaker 1: Murdus Eskew.

Jiawen Li: What kind of leadership did she provide?

Speaker 1: She provided the best in Cleaborn Homes. She was a truant officer too. She made the kids got to school.

Jiawen Li: How successful were Cleaborn Homes residents more generally in getting support from the Memphis Housing Authority?

Speaker 1: I guess they did all right. I can't answer that for them. I know if I wanted something I would ask and I got it.

Jiawen Li: So they were pretty helpful?

Speaker 1: Um-hmm.

Jiawen Li: Do you feel like there were ever people who came and meddle in your community without being welcome there?

Speaker 1: Um-hmm. I know so. Yes, ma'am, they did.

Female 1: Can you give us some examples?

Jiawen Li: Yes, like who were those people?

Speaker 1: No, I better not do that.

Jiawen Li: How did you feel when you first learned about the plan to demolish Cleaborn Homes?

- Speaker 1:* I was happy cause I couldn't get out my back door and my front door. I was glad to move.
- Jiawen Li:* You were glad to move?
- Speaker 1:* Um-hmm.
- Jiawen Li:* Do you feel that you were given enough information and support to move away?
- Speaker 1:* Um-hmm, yeah, they were very nice.
- Jiawen Li:* Did you feel that you trusted Memphis Housing Authority to take care of your needs and give you accurate information during the relocation process?
- Speaker 1:* Um-hmm.
- Jiawen Li:* Are you still in contact with people who lived in Cleaborn Homes?
- Speaker 1:* Some of them.
- Jiawen Li:* Some of them.
- Speaker 1:* Um-hmm.
- Jiawen Li:* Did it include the people you just mentioned that you trusted?
- Speaker 1:* Um-hmm.
- Jiawen Li:* And how do you communicate with each other?
- Speaker 1:* On the phone.
- Jiawen Li:* On the phone. Do you still rely upon each other for support?
- Speaker 1:* No, they ain't got no car, I ain't got no car and they sure ain't gonna catch no bus. So we just talk to everybody on the phone.
- Jiawen Li:* What are your hopes for yourself and your family now that you live away from Cleaborn Homes?
- Speaker 1:* To have to never go back. I wasn't used to no development. I used to a house. They talk, they mad at me, some of them because I moved. I told them, I said, "I ain't going to Foote Homes. I'm not able to climb those steps anymore. I can't see and I can't pull

them.” “Well, I ain’t going. I’m gonna stay right here.” I said, “Well, that’s you.” “I can’t pay no utility bill.” I said, “You gonna do something if they tear these down.” So now they been out over there a year and they talking about getting them because they done down Cleaborn. Ain’t nothing in Cleaborn and that’s the next jump. And they got a fence already around it, ready to knock it down to the ground. “I can’t pay the utility bill.” I said, “Well, I paid it coming in and I’m gonna pay it going out. I’m gone, goodbye.”

Female 1: I think that’s the end of our questions, but I just kind of wanted to know if you had any personal stories or memories of Cleaborn Homes that you wanted to share?

Speaker 1: Not good ones.

Female 1: Not good ones?

Speaker 1: No, not good ones. It’s too much there.

Female 1: Would you say – you mentioned this at the beginning of your interview, but would you say that the neighborhood definitely changed in the almost 40 years that you were there?

Speaker 1: Yes, they did, they really changed. They changed in the ’80s. By ’89 and ’90, you couldn’t always sit on your porch that you’d get a bullet or they’d look at you when they pulling the trigger at somebody else.

Female 1: Yeah, we’ve heard that from a few people that right around that time in the ’80s. This isn’t really part of the evaluation, I just want to know, did you grow up here in Memphis?

Speaker 1: Um-um.

Female 1: Where did you grow up?

Speaker 1: In the north. I moved here in ’55. My children were raised here. But they weren’t born here. They were born in Chicago in zero weather.

Female 1: My god. Well, now you’ve got 100 degree weather.

Speaker 1: Girl, I wish I had some of it. It’s snowing up there now.

Female 1: I wish we did too, it’s way too hot this summer.

Speaker 1: I mean, I went to work walking in snow up hill.

Jiawen Li: Wow.

Speaker 1: You can't touch yourself. If your ear feels like it's gonna itch, don't touch it, you'll pull it off. We were going to work on the bus, I said, "No--" And I did and too late and he done pulled that tip out.

Female 1: Oh gosh.

Jiawen Li: Wow.

Speaker 1: I said, "Man, you can't touch yourself, too cold."

Female 1: Well, this was a great interview. Thank you so much for answering our questions and giving us all this great information.

Jiawen Li: Thank you very much.

Speaker 1: You're welcome.

Jiawen Li: Thank you.

[End of Audio]