

Jami King: All right. Just need to ask you to tell your name for –

Speaker-1: Antonio Harris.

Jamie King: Okay. And how old are you, Mr. Harris?

Speaker-1: Forty one.

Jamie King: And do you have any children?

Speaker-1: Yes.

Jamie King: How many?

Speaker-1: Two.

Jamie King: What are their ages?

Speaker-1: Seventeen and thirteen.

Jamie King: Okay.

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: And how long did you stay in the Cleaborn homes?

Speaker-1: From '70 to '97, 27 years.

Jamie King: Oh my gosh. You were there for a long time. So you saw a lot of what happened within that neighborhood?

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: Yeah. How did you come to live there?

Speaker-1: Me, my mom – my grandmom and my mom stayed there.

Jamie King: Okay.

Speaker-1: Yeah. I was actually born over there.

Jamie King: *[Inaudible comment]*

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: Wow. And who lived with you (and your mom did for awhile)?

Speaker-1: Me, my mom, and my brother.

Jamie King: Okay.

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: How old is your brotheor?

Speaker-1: Thirty six. Thirty six?

Jamie King: Okay. And – okay, so since you have such a great example of a long time spent there, can you talk a little bit about what it was like when you first got there, in Cleaborn homes, so I guess in the '70s, what was that like?

Speaker-1: Well, now – compared to now, it wasn't no gangs or none of that back then.

Jamie King: Okay.

Speaker-1: You know, everybody – it was just the neighborhood. It was just – there wasn't no such thing as gangs back in the '70s and the early '80s. The gangs came – really, the gangs came after we – no, they were still there – the gangs came around '91-'92, up into – yeah, but the comparison is not the same. We used to could sleep with our doors open. You can't do that.

Jamie King: No.

Speaker-1: You can't do that now. You can't do that nowhere now.

Jamie King: Right. That's true.

Speaker-1: Yeah, not nowhere over here.

Jamie King: Nowhere – anywhere I don't think, yeah.

Speaker-1: Yeah. [Laughs]

Jamie King: So how did you feel about living there when you first moved in? Did you like it?

Speaker-1: Well, like I was saying, it's different then than today. You know, back then it was cool, you just was in the projects, but now it's hard over here now. It's hard, you know.

Jamie King: Yeah, I understand. Yeah.

Speaker-1: Then plus my mom was working and, you know, when I got older I was working, too, so. You know, it was nothing like it is today.

Jamie King: So you talked a lot about how there's, like, sort of a transition that happened there, how it changed over time. Do you have any, like, specifics that you can

point to as far as, like – I mean, you know, even like in the instance of, like, the buildings, did they change when they were first constructed? Did they still have – hold that same, like – did they have the same things stop working? Did things break down over time? Was it in the same quality condition or not really?

Speaker-1: No, not really. You know, you had a maintenance man in Cleaborn. We didn't have all them, you know, like, today – like, when they changed the buildings, they went different piping and all that.

Jamie King: Right.

Speaker-1: But then back then it was a solid foundation. You know, you can – the new Cleaborn home that they had up, you could punch the wall and punch a hole in it.

Jamie King: Right.

Speaker-1: But when we stayed there it was all brick, everything was all brick, even the walls on the inside was brick, so. The construction back then was way different than it is today. Well, it's tore down now, so.

Jamie King: Yeah, but before that, yeah, I understand what you mean.

Speaker-1: Yeah. But as far as plumbing and everything else, we didn't really have no problem with none of that.

Jamie King: And so you felt like from 1970 until 1997 – is that when you said you left?

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: That you felt like it was pretty much the same throughout, the conditions maintained the same?

Speaker-1: Well, no, not through – now it's – see, they rebuilt. When did they – they rebuilt.

Jamie King: Oh, when did they do that?

Speaker-1: I think they did that in '91, something like that.

Jamie King: Okay.

Speaker-1: Yeah, they re-did it...

Jamie King: Something about the piping, that's why they rebuilt? Something about how the - ?

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: Plumbing or something was?

Speaker-1: Yeah, the re-did that, re-did all of it, yeah.

Jamie King: All of that, yeah, I heard about it. Okay. And what about the neighborhood, the businesses, schools, things like that, how did that change over time?

Speaker-1: The only – we had two black-owned stores. I think that was Willie Moore's – no, we actually had three. Well, Poor Man came later. It was Willie Moore's and there was Little Star. Little Star's up here on Lauderdale and Vance.

Jamie King: Right.

Speaker-1: But now you got the Asian – all different – it's really no black-owned stores over here, now. There's no black-owned stores over there.

Jamie King: So that's a change, for sure.

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: And the schools, were you around when they closed the elementary school?

Speaker-1: Which one? Locke?

Jamie King: Locke.

Speaker-1: I went to Locke Elementary School. I went to Locke, I went to Vance. I went to Porter. It was Porter Junior High. Porter Junior High was just seventh, eighth, and ninth graders, and then Booker T. Washington then had eleventh and twelfth. Only eleventh and twelfth graders went there. Then they changed it. Porter burned down in the back, so - so Booker T. Washington went then from ninth to twelfth. Yeah, but I went to Booker T. Washington, Vance, Alonzo Locke's, and I went to Georgia Avenue for one year, you know, because we moved, and then you know, they had a border where if you stay here you went to Vance, if you move on this side you go to Georgia. So I had to go to Georgia my sixth grade year. Yeah.

Jamie King: And while you were in Cleaborn homes, were you employed?

Speaker-1: When I got 16 I was working at the Commercial Appeal.

Jamie King: Okay, what did you do there? Just - ?

Speaker-1: In the print room. I was in the printing room.

Jamie King: All right, okay.

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: How was that job?

Speaker-1: Oh, it was great. Yeah, it was great. You know, \$160.00 check back then was a lot of money every week.

Jamie King: Yeah, yeah.

Speaker-1: Yeah, that was a lot of money, especially in the '80s. Yeah, that was a lot of money. And then, you know, things kind of –

Jamie King: How did you get to that job? Did you walk there, or take the bus?

Speaker-1: Commercial Appeal is from here to – you know where Commercial Appeal is right here on Union?

Jamie King: Uh huh.

Speaker-1: You can walk there. It won't take five minutes. It don't take five minutes.

Jamie King: And was it full time or part time?

Speaker-1: No, it was part time. We worked three or four days a week, yeah.

Jamie King: Did you join a union as part of that job, or have any experience with unions?

Speaker-1: No, I didn't.

Jamie King: And – well, I guess you didn't really have household responsibilities. That's the ____ question. Okay, so how did you feel when you first learned about the plan to demolish Cleaborn homes?

Speaker-1: Oh, we all were sad. I got bricks from my unit that I got from Cleaborn home, yeah.

Jamie King: Oh, yeah, I heard that lots of people have those bricks, yeah.

Speaker-1: Yeah, I got four of them out of my unit that we stayed in. I stayed in 583, and I stayed in 410 Lauderdale, and I stayed in 390 Lauderdale, yeah, yeah.

Male-1: I think you should ask a question about household responsibilities, cause I mean, you could've been doing stuff around the house, or like, helping raise your kids. I mean, it's still a question that you could probably ask.

Speaker-1: My responsibilities around the house were – well, back then we had grass at Cleaborn home. I would cut the yard, clean the house, but my brother had to do the dishes. Today I still don't do dishes. And dump the garbage, you know,

chores around the house.

Jamie King: So maybe like homework and some chores that you had to balance with your job, how was that?

Speaker-1: Well, homework, we basically – homework, we – see, I worked at nighttime. We worked Thursday – no, we worked Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. So in between that time, you know, we – but back then we didn't have – we had homework, but you know, I mostly did my homework at –

Jamie King: School?

Speaker-1: In what we had back then, study hall.

Jamie King: Study hall? Uh huh.

Speaker-1: Yeah, I did mine mostly in study hall, yeah.

Jamie King: But with chores and stuff, you didn't find it hard to balance that and work, or - ?

Speaker-1: No, no.

Jamie King: I mean, so when they did demolish – you moved out prior to receiving section eight vouchers and things like that, because in 1997 you moved out before they even had the plans to –

Speaker-1: Yeah, yeah.

Jamie King: Demolish it. I understand. But I mean, I'm sure you had friends and people that you still knew there. Did you - ?

Speaker-1: Well, yeah, I have plenty of family members there, aunties, cousins, yeah, a lot of them that's still now in – what they call Foote Park now. I got a lot of relatives. I think y'all probably interviewed a couple of them.

Jamie King: Is Cleaborn homes the only public housing that you've lived in, in Memphis, or have you lived elsewhere?

Speaker-1: The only one, yeah, yeah.

Jamie King: The only one? Okay. Well, you said you have family and friends that you had that lived there, so can you talk a little bit about what it was like there? Do you feel like you had a sense of community with the people who lived there with you?

Speaker-1: I basically knew everybody in the – in the projects, everybody.

Jamie King: Wow.

Speaker-1: Probably everybody that you done interviewed, I know everybody that you done interviewed.

Jamie King: So you're, like, the person who knows everybody? Yeah.
[Laughs]

Speaker-1: Yeah, I know everybody. Yeah.

Jamie King: Did you have any neighborhood traditions, like parties that you had?

Speaker-1: Well, we used to barbeque all the time, you know, and then we used to play football in the park, and when we played football – like, we used to play football against other projects, like Cleaborn home against Foote homes, Cleaborn homes against the Lemoyne Gardens, Lemoyne Terrace. That was back in the day. Now, before they tore it down, no, you couldn't dare do that now, with all the gangs and stuff.

Jamie King: Right.

Speaker-1: Yeah, no, you can't do that, you can't do that.

Jamie King: And who were the people that you trusted inside of - ?

Speaker-1: Mostly family. Mostly – I had friends coming up, like Tim and Jerry, Albert, you know, a handful of people, but mostly family, because we're a big family, yeah.

Jamie King: And what types of support would you rely on those people for?

Speaker-1: Basically moral support, you know. Yeah, they was there for everything, you know. I done seen a lot of stuff in the projects, in Cleaborn home, the transition and how it changed, and I done seen a whole lot.

Jamie King: I'm sure. Okay, well, what about, like, financial support? Did you have anyone specifically that you ever relied on for financial support, or provided financial support?

Speaker-1: No, my mom and my auntie. My mom and auntie, and step-dad, yeah.

Jamie King: This is kind of a quick question, like, do you remember people ever trading services to one another without money? So, maybe I'll cut your lawn if you'll cook me dinner, or - ?

Speaker-1: Oh, I did that all the time. I used to cut Ms. Ora grass. I just – I cut a lot of older people grass, you know, that used to babysit me and keep me when I was coming up, yeah, of course. Your mom, when I cut my mom's grass, I – Ms. Bessie, I had to cut her grass, then Ms. Ora, Ms. Buchanan. I'm talking about all these

people here. That was a chore, you know.

Jamie King: Yeah.

Speaker-1: Every Saturday or Sunday, if I didn't have to work that day, yeah, of course I had to cut their grass, yeah.

Jamie King: Yeah. I understand.

Speaker-1: With no money coming. I might get a glass of water or a drink or something, but there wasn't no money being exchanged.

Jamie King: Yeah. *[Laughs]* You just did it because you had to. That was your job, yeah.

Speaker-1: Yeah, that was my job, to cut their grass. I think I had, like – I actually had about ten yards, and I can name names all day. If you want them, I can name them.

Jamie King: *[Laughs]* We may take them from you later. So you mentioned you knew everybody in the projects, so how did you – tell me how news traveled, or gossip, how people got to know certain things that were happening?

Speaker-1: Just like the news traveled about you all.

Jamie King: Okay.

Speaker-1: Just the same way. Word of –

Jamie King: People call people and talk, yeah.

Speaker-1: Yeah, word of mouth, word of mouth, yeah.

Jamie King: Got it. One person tells another person and – do you remember anybody specifically who was the person who would tell everybody everything, or - ?

Speaker-1: No. It – you know, how if I tell you something, then you'll tell her, then you'll tell him.

Jamie King: Yeah.

Speaker-1: Well, nobody really know who started it, you know, so.

Jamie King: *[Laughs]* Yeah, it just goes around, yeah. Did you feel save while you were living there? Did that change over time?

Speaker-1: Yeah, like I was saying about the transition, you know, back then wasn't no gangs. Like I said, we used to sleep with the doors open, and – but now you can't do that. Now it's common, these kids now they hear shots they don't even duck

down because they're so used to hearing them. You know what I'm saying?

Jamie King: Right.

Speaker-1: But back then, it was none of that. It wasn't – we used to get into fights with each other, and 10 or 20 minutes later we'd be shooting basketball with each other again. You know, it wasn't I'm going in the house to get a gun or a knife to do something to you, you know. Like I said, times done changed.

Jamie King: Yeah.

Speaker-1: The new generation, that's what I call the new generation.

Jamie King: But you felt like that for the whole time that you were there, from the '70s to the '90s, like, you felt like it was all – the whole time you felt fairly safe living there?

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: Yeah, that's good. Can you mention maybe one of the biggest challenges that you had while you were living there?

Speaker-1: Drugs. That I know was a big thing, drugs, trying not to, you know, sell drugs, or do drugs, or nothing. Like, today, I don't smoke – I smoke cigarettes, that's it. I haven't smoked marijuana since '87 when I graduated. Yeah, since '87.

Jamie King: But that was a pretty big problem within Cleaborn homes as well, that there were lots of people selling drugs and - ?

Speaker-1: Yeah, yeah, there was drugs. There was a lot of drugs. You know, I remember before there was such a thing, before there was rocks there was powder. You know, now they got – I don't know nothing about that. Let's go to something else.

Jamie King: [Laughs] I know. I know, so we -- . Okay, what about the leaders in Cleaborn homes? Can you talk a little bit about that? People who you felt like were - ?

Speaker-1: Yeah, in my day it was the older people. You know, you say leaders now to these young people, it'll be – you'll be – they'll think you're talking about a leader of the gang or something. But back then it was the older people.

Jamie King: Yeah.

Speaker-1: My mom, Ms. Ora, and Ms. Buchanan, folks like that. It was, you know –

Jamie King: All those people who you were mowing their grass? Yeah.

[Laughs]

Speaker-1: Yeah, it was those people, yeah.

Jamie King: And do you feel like – I mean, as a – I guess, as an outsider's perspective, when they started to do the relocation, do you feel like people were successful in getting help from MHA?

Speaker-1: You know, help can go so far. You know, first you got to start with yourself. First you got to help yourself and you got to want help, you know. You can give me this, and I can go – you can get it, give him a \$100.00 and give me \$100.00, and he probably do this with his, this is what you do with the service that they provide you. Yeah.

Jamie King: That's true. So but you feel like those services were provided for people?

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: Yeah? They just had to make that choice?

Speaker-1: They had to make that choice.

Jamie King: What about for you, when you were in public housing, did you have services that were provided by MHA?

Speaker-1: What you mean, like, services, like - ?

Jamie King: I mean like some kind of job training, or like, help trying to find employment, or transportation, things like that, like, if you had a job could you get transportation?

Speaker-1: I – they had a summer program every summer, and I also worked at Porter Junior High School, too. That was through the summer program, yeah, far as that – but now they got STREETS and – what's the other one up here on Vance? They got them programs where they help the kids get their GED. And like I said, it's depending on, do you wanna be helped? Because now there's more help over here than there was when I was coming through the projects.

Jamie King: Yeah, okay. Do you feel like there were ever people who meddled in your community who weren't supposed to be there, maybe like preachers or researchers or people who were there who weren't from there?

Speaker-1: No, not really.

Jamie King: Not really? I'm trying to – well, I guess –

Speaker-1: I'm the type of person – we probably did have them kind of people, I'm the type of person if you ain't come from where I come from, I don't think you

can speak about it. If you ain't seen what I seen, I don't think you can speak about it. So that would be like you trying to tell me something about Cleaborn homes when you've never experienced it. You know what I'm saying?

Jamie King: Right.

Speaker-1: So yeah, we had those type of people, because I wasn't listening to them, because they didn't come up like we come up.

Jamie King: I understand. Well, maybe you can tell me a little bit about, like, you were talking about just a little bit about the drug problem that was there, and that's something that I understand – you can help me understand maybe a little bit, and more about what that was?

Speaker-1: About drugs? Okay, first there was powder. There wasn't a problem with that, but when rock was introduced it was a whole different story. You went from been selling it to – I'm talking about you'd see all kinds of things. I mean, rock was introduced over the – it tore down a lot of families, you know, rock. I remember when rocks was being rocked up in a spoon, you know. It wasn't no tube how they rock it up, you know back then. But when crack was introduced you saw a lot of people fall.

Jamie King: Can you – why would that be? Can you tell me, like, what you think that that was that was – like, how was it different, I guess, between people selling powder versus people selling rock?

Speaker-1: I don't know, rock is – I think rock is free base, but it's – you know, it does something else to them.

Jamie King: Okay.

Speaker-1: You know, they're smoking it and snorting it and shooting it, you know.

Jamie King: Yeah, ____ _ ____.

Speaker-1: You wouldn't understand.

Jamie King: I mean, I think maybe I understand a little bit, but you're helping me understand, for sure, so I appreciate it. Do you think that – like, do you think that this is still something that's problematic within the Foote homes public housing today?

Speaker-1: That's in every project.

Jamie King: Okay.

Speaker-1: That's in every project, yeah. That's in every project.

Male-1: Was rock easier to get than powder?

Speaker-1: I can't hear you.

Male-1: Was rock easier to get than powder?

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Male-1: Yeah, yeah.

Jamie King: Cheaper maybe, too?

Speaker-1: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, rock was easier, you probably step out, walk up the street and probably get you one.

Male-1: Is that because it was diluted as far as that?

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Male-1: Because they would step on it and put other stuff into it, right?

Speaker-1: No, actually, powder is what you step on.

Male-1: Oh, okay.

Speaker-1: Rock, to get a solid form out of powder, the cocaine had to be – it couldn't be cut, or it wouldn't become rock.

Male-1: Yeah, so why was rock – it was cheaper, you said earlier, right?

Jamie King: It's cooked down.

Speaker-1: It is hot.

Male-1: And so that's made it more accessible, then, right?

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Male-1: Okay.

Jamie King: Do you have maybe – away from drugs, do you have, like, a good memory that you have from Cleaborn homes that you can refer to that was, like, a good – something that you remember specifically about, that you have a happy memory associated with it?

Speaker-1: When we moved. *[Laughs]* When we moved.

Jamie King: Yeah, so it was a good – you appreciated being able to get out of Cleaborn homes?

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: But still it's sad, because you feel like you have a lot of memories that were there?

Speaker-1: Yeah, a lot of memories. Back about two weeks ago we were riding together, me and my cousin, and we just parked and just was looking around.

Jamie King: That's crazy, yeah.

Speaker-1: Yeah, a lot of memories, yeah.

Jamie King: Yeah, I'm sure.

Speaker-1: And I said – I hit him and I said, "Hey, you ready to go?" He said, "Hold up, cuz. I'm still thinking. We got a lot of memories over here." Yeah, so.

Jamie King: Do you feel like your mother and your grandmother feel the same way, that they have a lot of memories from that area, or do you think that they were also happy to kind of get out and - ?

Speaker-1: Well, my grandma – yeah, my grandma moved, and – she moved out of the projects in '89, and my mom moved, yeah, in – my mom actually moved in '88. I was still over there until '97, yeah. My mom moved in '88, right after I graduated in '87.

Jamie King: Okay.

Speaker-1: Yeah.

Jamie King: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it. And we may take a couple of names from you if you have anyone to suggest, that would be helpful.

Speaker-1: Okay.

[End of Audio]