

Interviewer: So we're going to start with a few demographic questions. What is your name?

Interviewee: Debra Johnson.

Interviewer: If you don't mind me asking, how old are you?

Interviewee: 47.

Interviewer: Do you have any children?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you mind giving me their ages?

Interviewee: 30 and 26.

Interviewer: How long did you live in Cleaborn Homes?

Interviewee: All my life.

Interviewer: What year did you move in?

Interviewee: I was born in 1963.

Interviewer: Okay, so from 1963 on? Okay. How did you come to live in Cleaborn Homes?

Interviewee: My mom.

Interviewer: Who lived in your Cleaborn Homes apartment with you while you lived there?

Interviewee: My mom and me and my mom and dad then my children.

Interviewer: So what was it like when you first moved in there?

Interviewee: It was great.

Interviewer: It was great? When you first moved in how did you feel about living there? So when you were – can you – obviously since you were born there it's not like you made a conscious decision to move in but when you were young, when you first started having memories how did you feel about living there?

Interviewee: Felt fine. Yeah, good. Good about it.

Interviewer: How would you say it changed while you lived there?

Interviewee: As the younger generation came up this is when a lot of violence started coming.

Interviewer: How did the physical condition of the buildings change?

Interviewee: Well they was worn down.

Interviewer: They were worn down?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was that all along or did they – were they nice at first when you were younger and then they started to wear down?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That was the case? How did your relationships with other people change while you were there?

Interviewee: It didn't change until the younger generation started to come.

Interviewer: Until the younger generation. Okay. How did your relationship with the police in the neighborhood change over time?

Interviewee: They was fine and they weren't fine because I had an accident where I come out my daughter's door and the police assaulted me because I saw one of my cousins. They were beating him with this black, long thing. And they assaulted me. Throw me to--grabbed me by my hair and throw me to the ground and wrote me a citation for a site of a riot because I was screaming and hollering, wanting folks to come out and see this.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: Yep.

Interviewer: So your relationship with the police it really – it kind of deteriorated? Or I don't want to put words in your mouth but I'm just saying –

[Crosstalk]

Interviewee: Well just – I’ll just say it. Okay, I’ll just say it. Okay, there was just an accident that happened that particular night.

Interviewer: Oh so that was a onetime accident. Other than that there was just kind of – it was okay. The relationship with the police was just okay, nothing great, nothing –

Interviewee: Yeah. Nothing great. No, no. None just so great about them. No.

Interviewer: Were there changes in the overall neighborhood that you noticed while living there like with schools or factories closing or businesses or churches or social service agencies?

Interviewee: Closing of schools.

Interviewer: There were a lot of closing of schools?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Were you ever employed while you lived at Cleaborn Homes?

Interviewee: Uh-uh.

Interviewer: Did living in Cleaborn Homes ever feel like living in a community to you?

Interviewee: Yeah, in my younger days. Yeah.

Interviewer: When would you say that changed?

Interviewee: When the new generation came.

Interviewer: What would you consider the new generation, just out of interest?

Interviewee: About 20 years ago.

Interviewer: About 20 years ago. Okay. So the new generation was like around like 1990 then?

Interviewee: Yeah, about ’99 – I’ll say ’90.

Interviewer: ’90? Okay. Were there any neighborhood traditions like festivals or block parties?

Interviewee: Yeah. We had when Ms. Eskew was living.

Interviewer: When Ms. Eskew was living?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you tell me who Ms. Eskew was?

Interviewee: She was the – she was what you call it? The over area – you know have all the like parties and block parties and stuff like that going on.

Interviewer: Was she like the social coordinator for the neighborhood or –

Interviewee: Yeah. She was something like that.

Interviewer: So was she in charge of other things or just the social –

Interviewee: She was –

Interviewer: She was in charge of everything?

Interviewee: The whole Cleaborn Homes.

Interviewer: In charge of all Cleaborn Homes? So she facilitated some block parties?

Interviewee: Yeah. We had a lot of activities going on then when she was living.

Interviewer: All right. Then that changed when she wasn't in charge?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: When was she in charge?

Interviewee: Oh I can't remember the year.

Interviewer: All right, that's fine. That's fine. Were there – who were the people you trusted in Cleaborn?

Interviewee: Well I really didn't trust – I really didn't fool with nobody, nobody but my daughter.

Interviewer: Were there people that you relied upon for support?

Interviewee: Yeah, Pastor Brother Ronnie. He my brother.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: He had – he’s the pastor of the Miracle Baptist Church up the driveway from where I stayed in the Cleaborn Homes.

Interviewer: All right. So your brother you relied on for support?

Interviewee: And my daughter.

Interviewer: And your daughter. Okay. What types of support did people offer you?

Interviewee: We didn’t get no support. You talked from my brother then?

Interviewer: From your brother, from anywhere. It sounds like –

Interviewee: They come to help me out. They come to help me out. See, I’m partially paralyzed in my hand.

Interviewer: So your brother and daughter would come help you out?

Interviewee: Mmm-hmm.

Interviewer: But from other people you really wouldn’t get any help?

Interviewee: Mmm-mmm.

Interviewer: Did you get emotional support from your brother and sister as well or just helping out because of the partial paralysis in your hand?

Interviewee: Because of my hand.

Interviewer: Just because of your hand mainly?

Interviewee: Mmm-hmm.

Interviewer: Did your brother help you financially at all?

Interviewee: Sometimes he did. Sometime I couldn’t make it. Sometimes he did. Sometime, yeah, sometimes.

Interviewer: Sometimes? Did he help when raising your daughter or transportation around the city?

Interviewee: Yeah. When my mother passed yeah he really helped me with my daughter.

- Interviewer:* When did your mother pass?
- Interviewee:* 1999.
- Interviewer:* 1999, all right. Then your brother really helped out a lot. Did you and the people in your community ever trade goods or services without using money like doing each other's hair or cooking for each other or TV repairs or car repairs?
- Interviewee:* No. My daughter did do hair.
- Interviewer:* Your daughter did do hair. Now did she do that as like a normal business where people would come in and pay cash for it or was it like if, "I'll do your hair if you could like cook me dinner," or that sort of thing like bartering?
- Interviewee:* She – she didn't too many folks' hair over there. She did a few. She didn't do too many. She didn't deal with a lot of either, over there because it always be some mess over there.
- Interviewer:* Yeah. All right. How did you get your community's news or gossip?
- Interviewee:* You can open your own window or stand on the porch.
- Interviewer:* Standing on the porch?
- Interviewee:* Yeah.
- Interviewer:* Were you overhearing it or would people come up to you and say stuff and you guys would just sit on the porch and kind of talk and discuss.
- Interviewee:* No. No. It was – mmm-mmm. I just be listening.
- Interviewer:* You could – you'd just overhear what was going on?
- Interviewee:* Mmm-hmm, yeah.
- Interviewer:* Did you and your family feel safe living there? Just elaborate on that a little bit.
- Interviewee:* Huh?
- Interviewer:* Did you and your family feel safe living there?

Interviewee: Yeah, we felt safe.

Interviewer: Can you explain that? What made you feel safe about living in Cleaborn?

Interviewee: Because I was raised there.

Interviewer: So you were kind of comfortable living there?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So it was a certain comfort factor that made it feel safe?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What kind of activities did you do as a family when your children were little and your daughter was younger?

Interviewee: Oh we used to have birthday parties and the balloons they jump up in and –

Interviewer: Oh like a bouncy house?

Interviewee: Yeah. All that, yeah. But my brother and them and my brother and my sister had to help me then.

Interviewer: They had to help you when you were trying to do stuff for your daughter's birthday?

Interviewee: When she was little.

Interviewer: When she was younger?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So I've heard by other people that living in a place like Cleaborn Homes creates a strong sense of responsibility for all the children who live there. For instance, all the mothers share the responsibility for discipline or support for all the children living there. How would you say the children of Cleaborn Homes community were raised?

Interviewee: Poor really.

- Interviewer:* Poorly? Did the adults share the responsibility for taking care of the children?
- Interviewee:* Hmm?
- Interviewer:* Did the adults in the community share the responsibility for taking care of the children?
- Interviewee:* Half of them did.
- Interviewer:* Half of them did and half of them didn't? So it was kind of a mixed bag then?
- Interviewee:* Yeah.
- Interviewer:* All right. What did you like best about living in Cleaborn Homes?
- Interviewee:* I guess because I was raised there.
- Interviewer:* So you were just kind of comfortable with it?
- Interviewee:* Comfortable where I was.
- Interviewer:* Yeah. What would you say were some of the biggest challenges of living there?
- Interviewee:* When the younger group come up and they got to all the shooting and loud music and the bumping. You know.
- Interviewer:* Yeah. So dealing with that influx of the younger generation really was difficult?
- Interviewee:* Yeah.
- Interviewer:* Who would you say the leaders in the Cleaborn Homes community were?
- Interviewee:* What do you mean by leaders?
- Interviewer:* Really you could define it anyway you want to. If somebody felt like a leader to you personally, if you thought somebody was a leader for the community like that a lot of people listened to.
- Interviewee:* Oh okay. Pastor Brother Ronnie Johnson.
- Interviewer:* Where was he the pastor at?

Interviewee: Miracle Baptist Church.

Interviewer: This is your brother, correct?

Interviewee: Brother.

Interviewer: So he was a leader in the Cleaborn Homes community?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did he live in Cleaborn?

Interviewee: Yes. He was raised there, too.

Interviewer: Raised there right along with you.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So he was a leader – would he say he was a leader for you personally or would you say he was a leader for a lot of people in the community?

Interviewee: For a lot of folk.

Interviewer: For a lot of people in the community.

Interviewee: And he still is.

Interviewer: And still is?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Just out of interest where is he living currently?

Interviewee: He live in – I don't know his address.

Interviewer: Okay. What kind of leadership did he provide?

Interviewee: He have – he feed the homeless. He clothe the homeless. He had very different activities go on at the church during the whole week and Sunday we have Sunday service.

Interviewer: All right. What kind of issues did he fight for? It sounds like he was fighting for rights of the homeless?

Interviewee: He was – he trying to get everybody to know the Lord, to be saved.

Interviewer: To be saved. To be saved by the Lord.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: How successful was he at getting or the Cleaborn Homes residents in general. So your brother as a leader or just any residents in general in getting support from Memphis Housing Authority?

Interviewee: They don't give no support.

Interviewer: They didn't give any support on issues like security or home repairs?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: No? No, support. All right. Do you feel like there were ever people who came and meddled in your community without being welcome there?

Interviewee: Say that again.

Interviewer: Do you feel like there were ever people who came into your community and meddled in it without really being welcome like researchers or preachers or housing authority leader, social service agencies?

Interviewee: Mmm-mmm.

Interviewer: No?

Interviewee: See, I ain't come out there more. Mmm-mmm.

Interviewer: Okay. So from what you know there weren't really a lot of people who were coming in who weren't welcome?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: How'd you feel when you first learn about the plan to demolish Cleaborn Homes?

Interviewee: I was sick and stressed out.

Interviewer: You were sick and stressed out?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Would you say it was stress or necessarily or sadness? What kind of made you feel sick and stressed out about it?

Interviewee: Sadness that we had to leave.

Interviewer: You were sad that you had to leave? That then created some stress?

Interviewee: Yeah. Because where I was staying in Cleaborn Homes and where I'm staying at now it's even stressful because I don't know nothing about no light bill and all that and then where I used to stay I used to could manage. I used to get a check once a month. I used to could manage – they manage my money for the month. Now it's just like they have to – my money don't stretch because they – we moved in here. It's higher utility bill – really I can't afford it but I just have to deal with it or something. Something. Yeah, but that's the only messed up thing about it. I like – well I'm trying to get to like here but the thing is this utilities. Utilities is something else.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's a lot.

Interviewee: Yeah. Then I said I don't understand how they put us and then I also pay utilities and rent with my voucher.

Interviewer: With your vouchers, section eight voucher, right?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So the payment has changed then, the way you –

Interviewee: I used to pay \$185.00 in the – no, I used to pay \$192.00 in the Cleaborn Homes. When I first moved over here they were charging me \$185.00 there because I was doing volunteer work and Brother Ronnie give me work to do, empty garbage and stuff up there. But by I stay out here he can't come and get me every day because I just used to walk up the driveway. So I wouldn't report that. So they broke my rent down to \$155.00. But my utility bill is \$200.00 and \$100.00 and some.

Interviewer: All right, so before you were just paying one fee of what, \$192.--?

Interviewee: Mmm-hmm, in the Cleaborn.

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- Interviewer:* In Cleaborn you were just paying \$192.00 and now you get your section eight voucher and you're paying lower on rent but the utility bill is a lot higher and that makes it difficult to pay?
- Interviewee:* Yeah.
- Interviewer:* Do you feel like you were given enough information and support to move away from Cleaborn? Did you feel like you knew about all this, the way the rent and the utility bill would be separate?
- Interviewee:* Yeah, I knew about the utility and all that but I ain't knew it was going to be like this though. I thought they were basing us on our income but it don't seem like it like that.
- Interviewer:* Yeah. So you didn't really have necessarily the best idea that you could have had about what to expect moving out?
- Interviewee:* Mmm-hmm.
- Interviewer:* Okay. What kind of information or support would have been helpful to have from Memphis Housing Authority?
- Interviewee:* If they could explain to us more and more – I mean better than what they did about the utility bill.
- Interviewer:* You would have liked more explanation about utilities then?
- Interviewee:* Uh-huh. Because it's kind of hard me to comprehend but I don't know. I don't know. Then I try to listen to my daughter and then – now she see. Wants me to move here.
- Interviewer:* So you were trying to listen to your daughter and what happened with her?
- Interviewee:* I was trying – I couldn't comprehend well on about the utility and I was trying to listen to her. Now she see now since we're moved out of Cleaborn Homes now she see we got the high utility bill. She got them two girls.
- Interviewer:* All right. Do you feel like you trusted the Memphis Housing Authority to take care of you and give you accurate information during the relocation process?
- Interviewee:* I thought I trusted them.
- Interviewer:* You thought you did?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: But that's changed? You don't trust them anymore?

Interviewee: They so switch and swap. They say one thing – see you can't – they say one thing and then they said one thing and then the meeting come ahold it's something else. So it's a switch/swap.

Interviewer: Are you still in contact with people who lived in Cleaborn Homes?

Interviewee: Mmm-mmm.

Interviewer: No?

Interviewee: Nobody my cousin.

Interviewer: Nobody but your cousin? How do you communicate with your cousin?

Interviewee: On the telephone.

Interviewer: Telephone?

Interviewee: When we go to church.

Interviewer: When you go to church. Do you still rely on your cousin for support?

Interviewee: Huh?

Interviewer: Do you still rely on your cousin for any support like emotional or –

Interviewee: Sometimes.

Interviewer: Sometimes? So what are your hopes for yourself and your family now that you live away from Cleaborn Homes?

Interviewee: Explain it to me.

Interviewer: So now that you're away from Cleaborn Homes what are your hopes for the future? What are your hope for going forward? What do you want to accomplish here? What are your goals for what you can do now that you're out of Cleaborn?

Interviewee: Ain't nothing I can do.

Interviewer: So you don't really have any? Do you have goals to be able to feel like you can do something there or –

Interviewee: Actually I want to go back to the Cleaborn Homes.

Interviewer: You want to go back to Cleaborn Homes? Okay.

Interviewee: But if I go back my daughter might not go back because she ain't working.

Interviewer: Because she's not working either?

Interviewee: No. My daughter ain't working but by me getting SSI – they are letting me back in.

Interviewer: Right. But they might not let her back, huh?

Interviewee: No. I have to go where my daughter and my grandchildren go.

Interviewer: Yeah, you have to stay with her.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. So have you been offered any case management to assist you in meeting that goal and maybe getting it to where your daughter could get a job so you guys could both move back to Cleaborn?

Interviewee: They said they get us a case manager but you know what? I don't trust them. I don't trust a lot of folks. See, I don't be trusting a lot of folks.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. So you wouldn't even really trust a case manager if you got one?

Interviewee: Mmm-mmm.

Interviewer: All right, has anyone from Memphis Hope ever contacted you with information about programs that might help you meet your goals?

Interviewee: They sent something in the mail but then they sent something in the mail.

Interviewer: Okay. Memphis Hope sent something in the mail?

Interviewee: HUD.

Interviewer: Huh?

Interviewee: Hope five.

Interviewer: Yeah, so Hope did send something?

Interviewee: They be sending stuff in the mail.

Interviewer: They send stuff in the mail? All right, but not an actual person doesn't actually come out and talk to you?

Interviewee: Mmm-mmm because I ain't open my door for them.

Interviewer: All right. What kind of case management would be helpful for you or do you just not want any case management at all?

Interviewee: I got case management for my mental illness.

Interviewer: Is that helpful?

Interviewee: She come and see me.

Interviewer: Okay. That's helpful? Is there any other case management that you would like?

Interviewee: I don't know I would like. I don't know.

Interviewer: You don't know?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: That's fine. That's fine. All right, well that –

[End of Audio]