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Homer Harper, 2011

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Hunter Moore: All right. We're going to start off by may I ask your name?

Speaker 1: Homer Lee Hopper.

Hunter Moore: I'm sorry, what was that?

Speaker 1: Homer Lee Hopper.

Hunter Moore: Okay, all right. And may I ask your age?

Speaker 1: Sixty-four.

Hunter Moore: Sixty-four? All right, and do you have any children?

Speaker 1: Two.

Hunter Moore: Two? And what are their ages?

Speaker 1: I got to think a minute. Born in '68 and '69, so I'm -

Hunter Moore: Forty-three and forty-two.

Speaker 1: Forty-three and forty-two.

Hunter Moore: Nice. How long did you live in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: About 20 years.

Hunter Moore: Twenty years? Do you know, do you remember what year you moved in?

Speaker 1: Well, let's see I moved in and I moved out.

Hunter Moore: Okay.

Speaker 1: I was 13 when my family got there and that was - I'm trying to remember. It's been awhile.

Hunter Moore: Okay, so you moved in when you were 13?

Speaker 1: So I was 13 and I came out when I was 20. Then I went back in '67, '68, from that time on up until lately.

Hunter Moore: Okay. And how did you come to live in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Through my sisters, which was her mother and I stayed with them.

- Hunter Moore:* Okay, all right. Who lived in the Cleaborn Home apartment with you?
- Speaker 1:* Her sister, so Donna, and myself and my sisters.
- Hunter Moore:* Is that when you were 13?
- Speaker 1:* No, this was when – it's just been recently.
- Hunter Moore:* Oh, okay. All right. And what where the Cleaborn Homes like when you first moved in?
- Speaker 1:* Well, it was pretty nice. Didn't have too much problems down there. It was okay.
- Hunter Moore:* All right, so when you first moved in the Cleaborn Homes, how did you feel about living there?
- Speaker 1:* Felt like it was a pretty good place to be because everything was all right to me and it was a pretty nice place to stay.
- Hunter Moore:* Yeah, it was a home to you probably.
- Speaker 1:* Yeah.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay. How would you say it changed, Cleaborn Homes changed while you lived there?
- Speaker 1:* Well, it was better when I first stayed there. As times go on you know, things began to change and different people coming in bringing problems. And that type of thing made it be a lot different from what it was.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay, so when you first moved in – so would you say as time went on the violence maybe increased?
- Speaker 1:* Yes, yes. That's what I'm saying.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay. And how did the physical conditions of the buildings change? Did that change at all?
- Speaker 1:* No, it pretty much stayed the same.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay. What about like the surrounding area? Did you notice like schools closing or businesses leaving or anything like that?

- Speaker 1:* Yes. In the areas by the ____ I think they closed. They did close and Owens College, they closed down.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay.
- Speaker 1:* They built on Vance, over there on Vance Avenue where the ____
_____.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay.
- Speaker 1:* Little bitty changes probably came about.
- Hunter Moore:* All right. And were you ever employed while you lived in Cleaborn Homes?
- Speaker 1:* Yes. I used to work _____ and I used to work for the Memphis Public Library.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay, and how did you get the – how did you find out about these jobs? Was it just like word of mouth or through family or friends?
- Speaker 1:* That's when I just went out looking.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay, just –
- Speaker 1:* Well, my family came down through there. My father _____ farmer, he used to be a bus driver. And my oldest brother, he used to be the manager over the janitorial. And that's what I did. I used to work and while I would get two branches. Next I worked at three branches and I run up the bay, you know? That's from four hours at night and he made it down to another. And I got on through my father.
- Hunter Moore:* All right and – I'm sorry. How did you travel to work every day?
- Speaker 1:* Oh, I had a car.
- Hunter Moore:* You had a car? Okay, and these jobs that you were discussing, were these jobs fulltime or part-time?
- Speaker 1:* They were fulltime.
- Hunter Moore:* All right. Did you have any experiences with working with the unions?

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- Speaker 1:* No.
- Hunter Moore:* All right. And how did you balance your job and taking care of household responsibilities?
- Speaker 1:* I just keep a budget up ____.
- Hunter Moore:* I'm sorry?
- Speaker 1:* I used to keep my budget and everything here and everything spaced out.
- Hunter Moore:* Yeah, okay. Did living in Cleaborn Homes ever feel like a community to you?
- Speaker 1:* Oh, yeah.
- Hunter Moore:* Can you maybe elaborate, kind of talk about what made you feel that way?
- Speaker 1:* Well, in the area that I was in, the neighbors and everything, we was pretty close to each other, looked out for each other. And –
- Hunter Moore:* Did you feel like you knew most of the people in the Cleaborn Homes?
- Speaker 1:* Yeah, I knew everyone in the area where I was.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay, so everyone – would you say that almost everyone were friends and just kind of –
- Speaker 1:* Yeah, the elder people. We all were friends.
- Hunter Moore:* And the fact that you knew everyone, do you think, is that what kind of helped to make it feel more like a community to you?
- Speaker 1:* Yeah. Like make it feel like more welcome than in the area –
- Hunter Moore:* Were there any neighborhood traditions such as like festivals or block parties?
- Speaker 1:* No. Well, we used to have them parties and get together, you know, but just if anybody would bring something. Now they don't do it like that.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay. Who were the people that you trusted?

- Speaker 1:* Well, mostly the immediate neighbors next door, all around. I [cross-talk among others in the room].
- Hunter Moore:* Okay. So just people in the neighborhood, people in the community?
- Speaker 1:* In the general area, yeah.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay. And were there people that you relied upon for support?
- Speaker 1:* Well, no, not really. I pretty much depended on myself.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay, but you didn't ask – you were dependent upon yourself. You didn't ask? You didn't need any support from anyone else?
- Speaker 1:* No.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay. Did you or anybody in the community trade services without using money such as like cutting each other's grass or cooking for each other?
- Speaker 1:* Oh, yeah. Let me see. I used to be the one doing most of the cutting, because people were older than I. So I did pretty much of them and I used to go to the store for them and things like that.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay, so you cut people's grass and go, run some errands for them?
- Speaker 1:* Yeah, and do errands for them.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay. And how did you get your community's news or gossip?
- Speaker 1:* Oh, they was all the time be communicating with each other all the time. And we'd sit out in the evening and just talk to each other.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay, so you just maybe sit down and get together and just kind of talk, you know, what's going on in the community and the neighborhood?
- Speaker 1:* Yes.
- Hunter Moore:* Okay. I've heard that living in Cleaborn Homes creates a strong sense of responsibility for the children. How would you say that the children were raised? Would you say there was a shared – that the parents shared the responsibility?

Speaker 1: They used to be – when one parent wasn't around and the next door neighbor would watch the child. You know they was just like that.

Hunter Moore: Yeah, and I've heard it from a lot of people say that, you know, if you got caught doing something the person that caught you doing something would whip you and then you got home –

Speaker 1: Yeah, once you get whipped and when the parent gets home you got whipped again.

Hunter Moore: Yeah, okay.

Speaker 1: The way it used to be back there.

Hunter Moore: Do you think that as time went on that kind of, the sharing of the responsibility of taking care of the children, do you think that kind of went away or?

Speaker 1: It kind of phased out. It wasn't quite the same as it was then.

Hunter Moore: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And then later you know it just was like it wasn't nobody really paying much attention.

Hunter Moore: Right.

Speaker 1: But early on, everybody was strict on their children and everything. One parent like I said wasn't around, when the parent did come back around, you know the parents, the neighbors would whip the children.

Hunter Moore: Right, right. Do you feel like as once you said that as time went on you said that the responsibility, that parents didn't take, just didn't share responsibility? Do you think that that violence increased as –

Speaker 1: It increased as time went on.

Hunter Moore: Okay. All right. What did you like best about living in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Well, one thing it wasn't, you didn't have to pay much rent. It was cheaper to be there and nice building and everything, but anything

that we got here was like in here. Everything was a lot cheaper then.

Hunter Moore: Right, okay. What would you say were some of the biggest challenges of living in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Trying to deal with the people in gangs. I mean that's what started the whole corrupt was, you know, that's what made it hard to stay.

Hunter Moore: Trying to avoid the gangs and stuff?

Speaker 1: Trying to avoid the gangs and dealing with parents.

Hunter Moore: Okay. All right, who would you say were some of the leaders in the Cleaborn Homes community?

Speaker 1: Okay. Well, they used to have ministers that would come in and try to keep things balanced and I guess some of the teachers. I mean they used to have Boy Scout leaders where they would try to keep the children busy.

Hunter Moore: Okay.

Speaker 1: And out of – try to convince them to stay out of trouble, but you know it's always going to be some that ain't going to go along with the program.

Hunter Moore: Okay, so Boy Scout teachers and maybe teachers and preachers would come into the community and try to keep the children –

Speaker 1: They talked to people and any – where I stayed they used to have a basement and used to just help grown-up or people to come in and talk at you and have meetings and things for about how to live and carry yourself and try to stay out of trouble. So it was okay.

Hunter Moore: All right. How successful were you or other Cleaborn Home residents in getting support from the Memphis Housing Authority?

Speaker 1: Oh, yeah, it was nice. They would come through and whatever you need if you wanted to talk with someone they would always go around and wasn't no problems with it like that. Wasn't no problem.

Hunter Moore: So would they help out on like home repairs and stuff like that? If you needed home repairs were they pretty –

Speaker 1: You could call and if you would just let them know something was wrong and they would come out and repair it.

Hunter Moore: Okay, all right. So how did you feel when you first learned about the plan to demolish the Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Well, I was almost glad it was going to happen because then again I wasn't because I know it's going to have a whole lot of people not being able to do, live right because it hurt me. But then I think about if something as bad as it has gotten to be that they should go ahead on and just go ahead on and do it because I think it was kind of better. I know they're probably going to be constructing to build houses and not be like that. So it had gotten to the point where it just almost unbearable.

Hunter Moore: Do you feel like – well, you moved out before it was demolished, right?

Speaker 1: Yeah. I moved out about like, about two years.

Hunter Moore: Before, prior to the demolition? Okay. Are you still in contact with people that lived with you in Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Well, not too much. They done moved out in the ____ and I don't know where they are now.

Hunter Moore: Right.

Speaker 1: Some of these people are over here and these – pretty much in this area, they are still here. In this Mississippi and in this area, Pony Tuck, _____. They been around here and sit around in _____ over there.

Hunter Moore: All right. What are your hopes for yourself and your family now that you've moved away from Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: I guess hoping that we can do better and I think we will.

Hunter Moore: Okay. Do you think any case management or support will be helpful for you or for people that have been moved out of Cleaborn Homes?

Speaker 1: Yes.

Hunter Moore: What kind of – can you think of what kind of support or case management would be helpful?

Speaker 1: Not really.

Hunter Moore: Not really?

Speaker 1: I need to sit down and think more about it.

Hunter Moore: Maybe like job training?

Speaker 1: Job training, well in this area they do have job – my niece know a whole lot more about it. Now she has been able to get a lot of people jobs through a lady that runs that type of plan. She helps people get jobs. Yeah, I've been about like – then she done help some of my people in here to get jobs.

Hunter Moore: Okay, all right.

Speaker 1: I pretty much need to retire. I think I done did my part.

Hunter Moore: Yeah, all right. Okay, well that's going to conclude our interview. I appreciate your time and your –

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