

## Introduction to Interview

Pearl City is an African American Community located in Boca Raton between Northeast Tenth Street to north of Glades Road between Dixie and Federal Highways. Today, Pearl City is one of Boca Raton's designated historic districts.

This interview is one in a series conducted from 1984-85 by sociologist Dr. Arthur Evans of Florida Atlantic University. The information gathered from these interviews was used for the compilation of "Pearl City, An Analysis of the Folk History" by Sharon Wells, *The Spanish River Papers, v. XV (1986-87)* and the book *Pearl City, Florida: A Black Community Remembers*, by Dr. Arthur S. Evans, Jr. and David Lee (1990).

For additional information concerning Pearl City go to the Boca Raton Historical Society's website, [www.bocahistory.org](http://www.bocahistory.org), select the Boca Raton's History page, then select Spanish River, Vol. 15.

### **Q. J. (Bud) Jackson**

Interview on Pearl City: 1984 – 85

### **Biography:**

Originally from Mariana in north Florida, Bud's father came to Boca Raton seeking work in early 1925. There was a boom going on in south Florida, but it was not in Boca Raton; the money to be made was in Miami. The elder Jackson worked in Miami for close to a year, then sent for his family and settled with them in Boca Raton. He had been a farmer in Mariana, and went to work for Burt Raulerson, plowing on his green bean farm in the area of town where Florida Atlantic University is now located.

When Burt gave up farming Mr. Jackson found work as a caretaker (what we would call today a gardener or lawn maintenance person), for John B. Nelson working five or six days a week maintaining an estate up on the beach just north of Palmetto Park Road.

## Q. J. (Bud) Jackson

I: Mr. O. J? Oh, it's Q. J.

BJ: Q. J., they call me Bud.

I: Q. J. Jackson, better known as Bud Jackson. I noticed this 4<sup>th</sup> here.

BJ: This is NW 22<sup>nd</sup> Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

I: Mr. Jackson, how long have you been in Boca Raton?

BJ: I've been here now for 59 years.

I: Fifty-nine years.

BJ: That's since 1925.

I: It's my understanding that your dad and mother came to Boca Raton?

BJ: That's right. They came . . . first of all, he came here first. The first of 1925 from Marianna, Florida, and that's what we call north Florida. And then, of course, one year later he sent for his family and we came down.

I: Do you remember why he came to Florida? What made it attractive and all?

BJ: Well, it was attractive because there was a boom in Florida. In talking about the boom meant making a whole lot of money here. So when he first came down, the money was centered around Miami at that time. Because this city, Boca Raton, you could say, nobody was here in a sense. So he went to Miami and spent a year.

I: Now when he was in Miami, did the family come down and join him in Miami or did they wait for him to move to another place?

BJ: He stayed in Miami that year and came here to Boca Raton, and we joined him here in Boca Raton. And that was the end of 1925.

I: Now what made Boca Raton so attractive to him? Why would he come to Boca Raton? Why didn't he go to . . . say, Delray or to Deerfield or to Pompano or to other places like that? Why?

BJ: Well, first of all he was a farming boy, I guess . . . a farming man when he came here; and Boca Raton had small farms. They didn't have large farms at that time, they had small

farms and it weren't a city; and, of course, he didn't come from a city. In my mind I would think it would be too large of a city for him, and he wasn't used to that type of place. He came from a farm area around here in Florida, and when he got here he went to Miami because of the boom. But, then when he got there, he found that it was too large of a city for him.

Then he sort of drifted back this way towards Boca Raton looking for a place to bring the family. And he felt like a smaller place where he could make a living would be the best place to bring them . . . which would be compared practically to the place that he just left in Marianna. So, I think that's why he picked Boca Raton. And once he was here he started to do farm work for different types of peoples like Burt Roloson [Raulerson], one of the old time whites of Boca Raton.

I: Burt Roloson?

BJ: Burt Roloson, Roloson, Roloson. I think it's R-O-L-O-S-O-N, something like that.

I: Now where was his farm?

BJ: It was somewhat where FAU is at now, Florida Atlantic University. It just might have been just a little north, but in that vicinity . . . in that field.

I: What did they grow out there on that farm?

BJ: Well at that time they were growing beans and ah, mostly beans. I think they mighta had another crop but I don't recall exactly what it was now. He also had an orange grove there. But more it was beans, because my father he could plow and he started to plow for Burt Roloson at that time. He had a good job with him; of course it didn't last very long.

I: What happened to Roloson, did he die or something?

BJ: No, he sort of got away from the farming life here in Boca; and I think, at least I know he moved away from here. Now where'd he go, I don't recall. But, anyway, my father got away from farming with Burt Roloson; and then he went to work, let's see, what they call at that time . . . a caretaker. And that is what we would call today a gardener or a lawn maintenance person at different estates on the beach.

I: On the beach?

BJ: On the beach.

I: Did he work with a crew of men or did he do it by himself?

BJ: No, he did it all alone. It was a five days or six days a week job . . . just maintainin' what

they called an estate. I don't know, it must have been [ ? ] wide; or, it could have been a block wide and practically a block long, you might say. And, of course, these peoples were rich people and had their own secretaries in their homes, and chauffeurs; you name it. And that was a seven day job there. Paid them good money compared to what money was back in those days.

I: So, would you say he was paid more money than he would if he had worked in a place like Butts Farm or somethin' like that, doing his gardening for about the same?

BJ: Well, definitely. He made enough money that during the depression we never even thought of it.

I: Really?

BJ: We didn't even know what the depression was, as kids I'm sure; and I don't think he knew a whole lots about it because in 1930 he purchased a 1930 Chevrolet. So, that wasn't too much depression. Not back in that time, no; and that's because of the peoples he worked for. Like at that time, John B. Nelson was the rich fellow at that time. He owned a lot of property here in Boca Raton and Hardy [Harley] Gates was one of the real estate guys that worked for Nelson. So my dad was very well associated with him; so he did good.

I: Now, when your father came to Boca Raton, it's my understanding, that your family first lived in a place called Sugar Hill. Is that right?

BJ: Well, if you want to call it that. We actually came to what we call Sugar Hill in 1928. We came to a place they call, there was a fellow here by the name of Holin; I'm not sure I'm pronouncing that right. I'm just pronouncing it the way I heard it, Holin Farm [Holiness Farm]. They had a farm north of Florida Atlantic University; It was the furthest up. You had Roloson north and, of course, Holin was the furthest north; and at that end we lived in a house there, and then . . .

I: Now, could you describe that house? What would a house look like then, compared to . . . ?

BJ: No comparison; rooms very small, had an outhouse, small kitchen . . .

I: See, I didn't want to tell you this . . . that you're talking to a city boy from Baltimore. So, I have no knowledge or anything. The average person doesn't; so, I was trying to get to that so that we could go into detail. Even some things that are obvious to the average farm person who was back there; but to a person like me, we don't. So just let me ask you some questions that may sound dumb; how did you take a bath?

BJ: In a tin tub, we called it; #2 tin tub. We'd draw water from a pump from the outside and heat it on the stove, a wood stove, and pour it into the tub along with the other cold water

and that's the way you took your bath. And, you washed your face in what we called a wash pan. And that's a small bowl concern made out of tin or some type of metal with a diameter of about 12 inches. It could come a little smaller and that's how you washed your face, if you were just washing your face. But if you were taking a bath, you did it in a tub; what we called a tin tub. And they had numbers, #2, #1, #3. The larger the number, the larger the tub. Most times we took a bath in a #2 tub. And then, once you're through that was thrown out and somebody else would take another bath.

I: How did you do the cooking?

BJ: We cooked on a wooden stove and you gathered your wood from the wood stack because you were living right in the woods. Houses were very scattered and you just go out and get pine wood and you would cut it up with an axe and make a fire in the wood stove; and that's the way you cooked. And, of course, you had what they called the old irons that you put on the stove; and you heated your irons and that's the way you ironed.

I: Did the heat from the stove also keep the house warm in the wintertime too?

BJ: Definitely. We warmed up with that many times. Wait until the stove get real hot and then open the oven door and from the side the heat would come out; and that was a lot of the heat right there . . . a lot of heat.

Of course in 1927, approximately '27, is when we came to Sugar Hill; it's what I call the real Sugar Hill. And that's just west of 22<sup>nd</sup> Street here, or either we're on Sugar Hill now. West or either east there was families that lived across the canal; frankly speaking, the guy next door lived across there. I came up with him, but he's older than I am; he's 65 right now. But he's my next door neighbor.

I: Is he also black?

BJ: Yes, he's also black. Most of the folks that live over here is black. There were some whites over here.

I: This was the woods?

BJ: This was the woods.

I: This was way out there somewhere?

BJ: Yes, we were way out. See, the white section of Boca Raton started around Palmetto Park Road and came as far, maybe, as 7<sup>th</sup> Street. And that was the end of this small area. But Sugar Hill was from Glades Road to approximately 20<sup>th</sup> Street; that's definitely Sugar Hill. Anything else, well, they could call it Sugar Hill; that was Sugar Hill. From Glades Road . . . that didn't have a name at that time.

- I:** Well, how many people we talking about here? I mean, on Sugar Hill when you were coming up a young boy?
- BJ:** We're not talking about very many. Well, not many families you're talking about now. We had the Fountains, you had the Colliers, Tom Williams, the Heck Family, the Jackson family, the Griffin family, and maybe about four or five more families. About eleven families.
- I:** You didn't own the land, did you?
- BJ:** No, we didn't own the land.
- I:** So how'd you get on it?
- BJ:** Okay, in 1927 my father just moved into a house that was built by someone sometime long ago. And during 1928 the hurricane, of course, flipped that over; and we went next door to this young man's family, which was the Fountains. We lived very close to them like I'm living here now, and the hurricane got so rough until their house started to rip apart. And we came out of that house and came down to this canal just across it, it was practically flooded; and then we went to the cemetery which was along NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Glades Road. That was the Boca Raton Cemetery where the water plant is; and from there to the jail house for protection.
- I:** Where was the jail house?
- BJ:** The jail house was at NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and about 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. And also the water plant, okay? That's where we went. Everybody from Pearl City and Sugar Hill was there.
- I:** Now the Pearl City homes, were they also destroyed?
- BJ:** Well, no, not all of 'em. Some of 'em turned over I'm sure; and some were burst up, I'm sure of that too. But speaking of my brother being born on Sugar Hill, this time we came to Glades Road and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. After the hurricane . . . there was a house there and we moved in there; and there in 1932 my brother was born.
- I:** Maybe that's why he smiles every time . . .
- BJ:** Yeah, he don't remember the other parts of the Sugar Hill, see. And, of course, we moved from there in 19 . . . approximately . . . 37, and he was about five years old. So that's all he'd seen, from a year to five years of age. So, that was Sugar Hill and it gets its name from because the sand was real white and sandy like sugar, and it was a hill here where it was. So they called it Sugar Hill because of that white sand lookin' like sugar. I don't know who named it.

- I:** Are you saying you moved out of Sugar Hill because of the hurricane; is that right?
- BJ:** No, we moved from one part of Sugar Hill to where he was born because of the hurricane. The reason we moved from Sugar Hill was because of the air base coming in.
- I:** Oh, you were kind of forced out.
- BJ:** You had to go; you didn't own anything here. And as far as we were concerned, we was called squatters. Anyone that took up property and didn't pay for it, even built a home there or a house there and didn't own anything, was a squatter. And you'll read that in that paper over there of the squatters. And you'll read about quite a few squatters, because I think from there to 51<sup>st</sup> street was some more squatters. And just as many squatters were there as it was Sugar Hill and Pearl City combined. Of course the folks in Pearl City owned that land but that far\_\_\_\_\_.
- I:** How were you notified that you had to go? Did someone knock on your door and told you, or did they send letters or something? Do you recall?
- BJ:** I don't recall exactly if we were notified with some type of paper, memorandum or something; but we knew in time. We knew quite some time that we had to go, six months or eight months, whatever it was, that we had to leave. We didn't have to rush out. My father had time; he had purchased property in Pearl City anyway, so he had time to build a home in Pearl City and move out. Nobody was really rushed out; they was given plenty, plenty of time to leave. So that was, of course, when the base came in, the army base.
- I:** So then they said, "You gotta go", and as soon as your father heard of that he went over to Pearl City . . .
- BJ:** . . . and started to build.
- I:** Bought some property.
- BJ:** He had bought it already. Property was very cheap, \$75.00 a lot. And he bought the lot for \$75.00. And that was right where "Tom's" is now, Tom's barbecue place at. Just south of Tom's there, the parking lot. That's where he first built a house.
- I:** Now, what was your father's name?
- BJ:** Same as mine. I have the same name, only I'm the junior. Q.J. Jackson.
- I:** And your mother, what type of work did she do?
- BJ:** Well she picked beans. At first . . . see, at this particular time Butts' Farm wasn't here. I'm talking now before . . . they didn't have those large farms where peoples lived, and all like

- that. See, they lived on Butts' Farm. He had what we called a quarters, and peoples lived there.
- I:** What kind of condition?
- BJ:** Very good condition. They had their own stores out there, they had their own church, they had nice clean buildings and they picked beans during the winter months. And during the summer months there was nothing to do. But they didn't have to worry, I don't think, too much about living; because, the stores were there and they were going to be there year 'round and they could always eat. My mother, she picked beans there too, and then after around March or April the bean season was over and that was the end.
- I:** How do you pick beans? Some people say you get on your knees . . . is that right?
- BJ:** That's one way of pickin' 'em.
- I:** 'Cause I got a bad back.
- BJ:** I don't bend over myself too much to pick beans and I got away from the bean field pretty young, I guess. I got away. I was working at the club here in 1939; I was . . . I guess in the end of '38 when I was 13 years old, because I didn't care for the farm anyway. And, of course, we didn't live on the farm either. If you lived on the farm you went out there to pick beans on the farm. You either got on your knees or bent over; take your choice. Most folk got on their knees. They crawled . . . what they called crawled . . . on their knees and what we called a hamper, bean hamper.
- I:** How many people would be out there every day pickin' beans? Would there be different sections of people picked there or . . . how would that work?
- BJ:** Yeah, they were in sections. Beans was planted daily for a long time; now, of course, you pick 'em for a long time. I guess in three months beans are ready to pick, so they would start pickin' beans just before Christmas. So you could figure back from that point. Two or three months before that point that they planted them, but then once you start to pick you didn't stop picking until March or April. And that was every day, all day because they planted beans every day, all day. And so, you had some beans comin' up, beans bloomin', beans with small beans on it, beans with larger beans, and beans ready to pick at all times.
- I:** I heard you hated beans when you were growing up?
- BJ:** Yeah, I was 10 or 11 years old. That's where I farmed and you had no responsibilities in a sense; so it didn't make any difference as long as it was in the farms. There were a lot of other kids around picking and playing around and things like that. But, as you grow up you



- had to work harder, especially when you didn't live there. See, people that lived there, I guess they was somewhat satisfied with it.
- I:** And I suspect you went to Roadman Elementary?
- BJ:** I went to Roadman one year. I went to the first elementary they had which was, I think, they called it Boca Raton Elementary. They had two schools here, one for blacks and one for whites.
- I:** What was the white school called?
- BJ:** That's a good one. Basically, the same thing I guess.
- I:** Boca High?
- BJ:** Yeah, I guess, something like that. We had one here in the black section and they had one downtown in the white section. And at the age of 14 I just gave up school.
- I:** So you just quit school?
- BJ:** Yeah, I quit. Then at the age of 16 or 17 I went up to Massachusetts. Most young guys down here migrated north; what we called north. There's two terms . . . north or south. We went north, so I stayed in Massachusetts. Then I enlisted in the army at the age of 18 and stayed in Bristol County until I went into the service. I came back home just before I went in the service.
- I:** That was when?
- BJ:** That was back in 1943.
- I:** 1943. So you had been gone for a . . .
- BJ:** About a year and half. Not too long.
- I:** Now I wanted to ask you about, why did you go north? Was there just nothing to do in Boca Raton? You didn't see any chance for being successful in a place like this; you got tired of being here?
- BJ:** No, I don't think so. We, as southerners, always heard of the north being different, that there was integration in the north. The term integration . . . you wouldn't even mention that word back in that time when you refer to people. They say, in the north you are referred to as one. And, I think it was every young man's dream. In fact, it was every young woman's dream, but most of the men had the best chance to leave home and they went just to see that.

I: Did you find that true?

BJ: I find that somewhat true. I had to use the word somewhat.

I: Somewhat?

BJ: Yeah, it was basically what it is now.

I: A lot of people now say that the south is a lot better than the north. I don't know, but a lot of scholars are saying that the south has made some really significant changes. Now the north has gotten [ ? ], even places like the Boston area.

BJ: Well, I think the south caught up with the north in one day. So the north wasn't too far ahead of us anyway. That's what I can say.

I: As a young man, what was there to do? Like your son's age, what would you do for recreation or other than work and so forth? What would you do?

BJ: There was no recreation here with the exception of the beach. We went swimming, we fished, we played sand lot ball.

I: You played sand lot ball?

BJ: Yes.

I: Mr. James mentioned that they had a baseball team. A black baseball team here. Who did you play against?

BJ: Different towns. Deerfield, Delray, Boynton.

I: Did you have uniforms?

BJ: Uniforms, yeah.

I: What position did you play?

BJ: I started playing short stop and ended up at first base.

I: Short stop is a tough position.

BJ: . . . tough position; I was very young then. I was very young, around 14 years old trying to play along with men 25 or 26 years away. And they put me at short for some reason, I guess. They thought I was pretty fast in picking the ball up, and from that I went to first base to play ball because my arm got to be bad and I couldn't pick up and deliver to first.

**I:** Now on the day of the games, did a lot of people in the community come out to watch?

**BJ:** The community turned out. They would tie on to the game and then after the game there was a lot of fun.

**I:** Like what?

**BJ:** Recreation, at these different places. Dancin'. . .

**I:** Oh, dances?

**BJ:** Dances, what have you. That would be all planned before we . . .

**I:** So you mean if you played Delray, the Boca community would come and people from the Delray community would come and there would be a big . . .

**BJ:** Not necessarily a planned dance; it's just that someone would have them anyways. Once leavin' there you had to have somewhere to go, so you went to these places for recreation. That was it.

**I:** Well, where was the ball field?

**BJ:** Second Avenue and around Seventh Street; between the railroad track and Second Avenue . . . around Seventh Street. The ball field was there. We would walk down Dixie Highway from Pearl City south, cross over the railroad track west to the ball field.

**I:** I guess everybody was looking forward to that day, since there wasn't very much to do anyways.

**BJ:** Wasn't nothing else to do . . . play ball on Sundays. That's when we'd play ball, on Sunday. Haven't played any other day; most folks had something else to do.

**I:** What was the name of the team?

**BJ:** We had so many names, I guess. Amos would come up with mostly some of his, I guess; the Boca Raton Giants or the Red Socks or something like that. We had all kinds of names; most of the time we'd think in terms of Boca Raton playing Delray.

**I:** That was the main thing?

**BJ:** Yeah, that was the main thing, Boca Raton playing Delray. But we did have names. Later years they did come up with those names. At that time I was through with it.

- I:** In Pearl City were the streets always called what they're called? See, I \_\_\_\_\_ about names and I see some named Sapphire Street, Ruby Street and that was back in about 1914, a fellow named Max. Do you remember \_\_\_\_\_?
- BJ:** I don't recall any street names in Pearl City at first.
- I:** None at all?
- BJ:** None at all. They came later . . . later. It was nothing but sand roads. Some of the old timers startin' to haul in some palms from coconut trees to put in the roads to keep the cars from boggin' up in sand when they go through. But it wasn't asphalt or nothing. From Dixie to Federal wasn't no asphalt; it was all sand.
- I:** Do you remember when they put that asphalt down?
- BJ:** Oh, definitely . . . definitely. I don't know if I can recall the year, but that was . . . must have come when I was a young man in my twenties or twenty-one, somethin' like that.
- I:** Now you mentioned that you worked at the Boca Raton Hotel and Club?
- BJ:** Yes.
- I:** What did you do down there?
- BJ:** Uh, they had dishwashers, and that's it. It was a big thing in Boca Raton, last about three or four months . . . every year. Boca Raton Club was known all over the world, practically, by any person that had any type of money. There the blacks caddied. They had what they called caddying; long in that time they carried bags for the golfers. They made their money that way.
- The Club naturally had a big kitchen there, and they hired a lot of guys who worked in the kitchen and the pantry. They hired laborer support; they would do the cleaning. They gave them their own living quarters there. In my time we were paid \$30 a month. That was a \$1 a day.
- I:** Could blacks be waiters and waitresses down there?
- BJ:** No. No, no. I was the first black bus boy.
- I:** You know, Mr. Jackson, I've been thinking about this; about me being at the University and having a little money. I've been able to go to restaurants and so forth that a lot of poor people can't go to. But, I've never in the whole south Florida, very seldom have I ever seen a black waitress . . . other than places like Denny's or Morrison's. Today they tip and

- things like that, but when you start talking about places like \_\_\_\_\_ or some of these fancier restaurants who charge \$12 or \$13 a meal and so forth, you don't see any blacks.
- BJ:** I don't know why. It's a funny thing . . . I never thought of it too much. Naturally, in the days of segregation I guess you couldn't have it.
- I:** They had bus boys though.
- BJ:** Yeah, they had bus boys. Bus boys wore the white outfit with black bow ties and black shoes. That's what I wore at the Boca Raton Club when I was 14 years of age. Of course, I was the first one wearin' it. You didn't see but one around there with that on, and that was me. And there was another black kid that had it on; I can't remember his name. It might be David Williams. And that was the only two I recall being there back in our days. Now, of course, you've got bus boys, I guess, anywhere you might see a bus boy. In Delray they had black waiters, mostly men.
- I:** They did?
- BJ:** Sure.
- I:** Where?
- BJ:** The Arcade [Arcade Tap Room] or something, they called it. They had a lot of black waiters at the Bayou here in Boca Raton.
- I:** Yeah, I remember that because in the newspapers, they would advertise "Coming to the Bayou, all black servers".
- BJ:** That's right. There was all those black suits or what have you; there was a lot of black waiters there and Delray had them too. But you didn't have too many in Boca Raton because you didn't have too many restaurants in Boca Raton, too much.
- I:** So, would you say most of your activity was taken up in, ah . . .
- BJ:** The women did maid work as time went on, and that wasn't every day; that might have been one day a week. And during the winter they'd pick beans. If they didn't do that, they didn't do anything. And, of course, the men they picked beans as well as the women, and did farm work; and that was just about everything for them until later years when they started the construction. I was grown then. At that time I was about my son's age . . . Abe, 21, 22 years old; I started construction work.
- I:** All right. Were there any black owned businesses in Pearl City? Did blacks own any businesses that they operated?

**BJ:** Well, we had the grocery stores.

**I:** Do you remember the name of that store?

**BJ:** Well, we didn't have 'em by names; just who owned the store. We called it by the person's name. Powell had a grocery store; Doc Powell we called him. Willie Wright had a grocery store. Mrs. Miller was the first grocery store I knew in Pearl City.

**I:** Mrs. Miller?

**BJ:** Mrs. Miller.

**I:** Where was her store?

**BJ:** It was right on 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Dixie.

**I:** What did she sell?

**BJ:** Meal, flour, can goods, sugar, candy, sodas; stuff like that, you know. No big deal. No big deal. Always some type of little store that you could always go to and get something. Most folks wouldn't buy what they called their week supply of groceries at that time from there. It was the handy store like Seven Eleven and Cumberland Farms is now. You wouldn't go there for your week supply of groceries, you would go to Kwik Check and these other places. But you might go to Cumberland Farms to get some milk or something.

**I:** When you had to shop big, where would you go?

**BJ:** We'd go to Delray or Ft. Lauderdale.

**I:** Ft. Lauderdale, would you catch a bus?

**BJ:** No, we'd drive the car.

**I:** You had a car then?

**BJ:** Yeah. Delray had A&P, Piggly Wiggly . . . Table Supply might have been in Delray; I know it's in Ft. Lauderdale. My daddy used to shop at Table Supply. That was the name of the big stores; supermarkets as of that day. It still would be very small compared to today; but back in that day they were the larger stores.

**I:** Now when you lived in Pearl City, was that also like a farm too . . . where people were raising their animals in Pearl City back then?

**BJ:** No, not really. They had pigs. The Spains had one cow, that was the only cow there; and I recall one horse and I guess Sam William had that one. And then they raised ducks and chickens, maybe a couple of hogs around Pearl City; but that's it as far as farm life is concerned.

**I:** I guess there wasn't any problem with food or anything for most people? They weren't hungry or anything because they had a lot of food?

**BJ:** No, they weren't hungry. They had food.

**I:** Some people talked about something called turning a turtle.

**BJ:** Oh yeah. That was a part of living too.

**I:** How would you do that?

**BJ:** Now it's gonna sound funny coming from me who never turned a turtle in my life but I was always a part of it; I was around it. So they would go to the beach in the afternoon, at night rather.

**I:** About what time would they go?

**BJ:** A good time would be 8:00, maybe; at dark, and they'd just sit around and wait for the turtles to come out.

**I:** Come out of the water?

**BJ:** Come out the water and lay their eggs. They came out to lay their eggs. Most times they let them lay their eggs, but when they attempted to go back they would flip 'em over. Drag 'em up a bank, put 'em on a truck; bring 'em to Pearl City, bring 'em to Deerfield, bring 'em to Delray. Everybody was catching 'em, whatever town it was that they was catchin' 'em in and then they would butcher that turtle that night . . . and that was good meat.

**I:** Have you ever eaten turtle?

**BJ:** I've eaten turtle very much.

**I:** How did they cook that?

**BJ:** You'd cook turtle steaks just like you would cook any other steak.

**I:** Would you fry it?

**BJ:** Fry it, stew it. In fact, back in that time everybody had a little hand grinder; and see, you could take that turtle meat, turtle steaks, and grind it up through the grinders and it's just like if you had hamburger or ground beef. And you would fix patties that way.

**I:** How much meat would be on that thing?

**BJ:** I don't know that. A turtle may weigh sometimes two tons, I guess, almost. At least a ton, some 1500 or 900; and, of course, the most meat you had there was two front legs, two hind legs, wasn't too much meat in the center. That's one of the types of meat.

Now my father on Sugar Hill, he'd kill rabbits and catch fish from the canal . . . catch cat fish and catch soft back turtles. We called them soft shell turtles. That's what we had mostly, and fish. The big turtles . . . I never turned one and I doubt if Amos ever turned one of those either.

**I:** Ms. Martin, when I interviewed her, she mentioned something about them going down to the canal and get an alligator.

**BJ:** I don't know anything about that.

**I:** You didn't eat alligator meat?

**BJ:** No, I never have in my life.

**I:** She said they had alligator and something about . . . she said that people had sheds back then with smoke where they would store the meat or something.

**BJ:** Well, her uncle had a shed like that. You didn't have too many folks with a shed, though. He would salt the fish, salt fish down, and, I guess he smoked it. I never seen a smoke house in my life. I've heard of them there in Alabama, but this part of Florida is so different from up there. I never seen anything like a smoke house. I never seen but one hospital in my whole life.

I never seen a cow killed or butchered, so this part of Florida is a little bit different. This alligator, I don't know. Maybe she knows something I don't know. Because, like I said, she lived in Pearl City and I lived in Sugar Hill for about 12 years. So there was a difference; there was a difference in between those 12 years. There are certain things went on over there that I probably don't know anything about.

**I:** They say at the Wright's place that they had some type of juke box in there where you could dance or something?

**BJ:** Oh yeah; yeah, definitely. All the places had that that sold beer and wine. But we



would say "Let's go to Spain's; let's go to Willie Wright's place." That's all you were saying. There were no signs up saying "This is Spains or Wrights", or nothing like that. This was Pearl City.

Frankly, you had more places in the past than you have there now. One of the places they had . . . there was Jimmy Goddard's place once upon a time and there was Penn Jenkins, and there was Jay Byrd (nickname of Clarence Hill) and there was Lee Spain and there was Dolphus. All sold beer and wine and they all had juke boxes. See, they had five places from 15<sup>th</sup> Terrace to 10<sup>th</sup> right on Dixie Highway, that you could go in and dance and do what you want. Today you got one.

I: What about the importance of the church? I take it that you are also a member of Ebenezer?

BJ: Yes.

I: The importance of the church in terms of holding not only the family together but the community together . . . did you think that was a very important force then?

BJ: Yeah. I would think of Pearl City as a family because it was so small that everybody knew each other. I guess at one time there might have been just the one church; I recall two. Ebenezer was the Baptist Church, and the Methodist Church is still there. That's AME Methodist on 11<sup>th</sup> Street. We didn't have but two churches, Ebenezer and AME Methodist, so it was community wide thing. You had more Baptists there than anything. So it was a family concern.

I: Did they have at the church, dinners and that kind of thing? Not necessarily to sell them, but the people would come and eat dinner; stay long after the service just to talk, especially back before they had television and that kind of thing . . . just to socialize? Or did they just come to the service and leave, or what?

BJ: I think most of them just came to the service and left. Of course, at that time we used to raise money for the church. We used to have what you called box parties. I don't know whether you would have known about that in Baltimore or not; but, ladies would fix boxes of food, [ ? ], fried chicken, you name it; and the men, of course, would buy it.

I: But would you know whose box you were buying?

BJ: It didn't matter.

I: Oh, it didn't matter.

BJ: You would buy a box and that money was used for raising money for the church . . . box party they used to call it. So that was one of the means of raising money then. Weren't many peoples here.

- I:** How about the relations that you would have with the white community? What would you say about that? How did blacks and whites get along? Was it tension or did people just accept the fact that there was discrimination? Was anybody ever abused or anything?
- BJ:** I think of Boca Raton as being one of the best sections in the south, in my day of coming down. From what I heard about it, it was a section; I thought of Boca as the best because there was no trouble here. I mean, when I say no trouble we knew it was segregation, we knew that; we knew where we would go and where we didn't go, and as long as that went on, then that was the end of it. There was no trouble.
- I:** How did you have to, back then before the Civil Rights Bill, how did you have to speak to whites? Was it yes sir, no sir, that kind of thing? Or was it like you can speak to whites today, yes, no? Or did you have to show more respect back then, for a black then?
- BJ:** In the south, anywhere in the south you had to say, "Yes sir." I don't care where you were, "yes sir", "no sir", that was south. But if you were in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama or Texas; I thought it was the same thing in Baltimore.
- I:** No.
- BJ:** It should have been, because Maryland was a southern state too.
- I:** See, it was split. The eastern shore was like that, but Baltimore wasn't.
- BJ:** My brother went to Maryland when he was young and couldn't see much difference when he got there.
- I:** You know Mr. Carswell?
- BJ:** Yeah.
- I:** He mentions that one time there was this guy who was the police chief named Brownie, or Brown, or something.
- BJ:** Chief Brown.
- I:** Chief Brown. Some black soldier came up to him and didn't take his hat off, and he hit the guy with a stick or something like that. And then I've often asked other people about Chief Brown . . . I get two views. Some people say he was terrible and other people say, "Well, he wasn't that bad." Or some people say, "Well, he was bad at first and then he changed; he became better."
- BJ:** I'm sure you've heard of Derrick Hoffman?

I: Yeah. Longshoreman?

BJ: Yeah. I think like he does and I guess I think different from a lot of peoples. Hoffman has always had his own way of thinking.

I: He died a few years ago, didn't he?

BJ: Yeah, I think so. I don't think of Brown as being a terrible man . . . I don't. He lived with the day that he lived in, and as time progressed he progressed along with time. He always did what he had to do to maintain his job. In the south, and I don't care where you went; again, you name all the states, it was "Yes sir" or "No sir". And you had to have great respect for the police officers. That was anywhere, not just Boca Raton; that was anywhere.

I got along fine with him, very fine with him; up until the very end when I came into manhood, he and I were very good friends. But in the days of segregation, you know, you knew what to expect. You know we, as peoples, got to learn what to expect.

I: I guess you're saying that's just the way it was. He wasn't a bad man, but it was just the way it was.

BJ: If I wasn't allowed at a certain place, then he would enforce that law. That's just the way it was. If I did something that I wasn't supposed to do according to the law of the land, then he would enforce that law. What I saw was a law man in the state that I live within . . . the state that I live within. That he would enforce it, and he didn't care what he did to enforce it. He had to do it. I've heard of a lot of things, but I've never seen it. As this hat you're talkin' about he knocked off the soldier's head, I heard about it. I have my own truth about it myself.

I: Somebody else say that some soldier beat him up and then he changed.

BJ: I would doubt that very seriously. I doubt that very seriously, I doubt that.

I: When you bought this house . . . how long have you been here?

BJ: Already 14 years now.

I: Fourteen years?

BJ: Uh huh.

I: Were there any problems getting in here?

BJ: No, no problem at all.

I: Nobody did anything to you?

BJ: No, got along real fine.

I: I talked to, you might know her, she's come a lot later than you. Ms. Molly Rich; you ever heard of her?

BJ: Yeah, I know Molly, very well.

I: She said when she had her home next to Ms. Carswell, somebody had written nigger all inside the house and everything. I didn't know if you . . .

BJ: Well see, she built that house. They built that and I bought this built by a contractor much later. I had no problem at all. And I guess, again, I was the first black in Pearl City to own a home.

I: Nobody had any problems in terms of people selling to you, deeds or anything like that?

BJ: Nothing at all.

I: That is interesting because I'm getting several views because some people say it was so hard after the army moved out to get decent land.

BJ: Wait a minute now. We're talking a long time difference in 14 years, see. When I left here around '47 or something, or '48 . . . I moved here in '71. That's different then. You're talking about the days of segregation and I'm talking about the days of integration. There was no trouble at all living in here.

I: But in the '40s you probably couldn't move here?

BJ: No, I couldn't move here; it was simple as that. Couldn't have bought here . . . probably wouldn't have wanted to.

I: You didn't think?

BJ: No, I doubt it. I doubt that seriously unless there was a lot of blacks living here, you know.

I: In other words, there's safety in numbers?

BJ: Yeah.

I: When somebody would die, somebody said someone named Coleman handled things in West Palm.

**BJ:** Yeah, he was the mortician. That was who mostly handled all bodies in Pearl City. At that time you had none in Delray, none in Boynton. The closest north was Coleman, that's West Palm Beach; and, I guess the closest south was Freedman and that's around Ft. Lauderdale. And by some means they got contact with Coleman and stuck with him.

**I:** Now when somebody would die, would people go over and . . . In Baltimore what they would do when somebody would die, somebody would go around and collect money from other people to give the family some money or something like that. Did they do anything like that . . . in case of death?

**BJ:** I guess I don't recall any of it. The first I ever noticed was my dad in 1956. I was working on Palmetto Park Road and Federal Highway and it was a bar there; I was working in that bar in 1956. I had been working for these people since 1946 when I was \_\_\_\_\_. My dad died in '56 and I noticed the large container behind the bar filling up with money, but I didn't know what it was or what it was all about.

Then after the death and after my father was buried, Bob, that's the guy I worked for, said, "Bud, give this to your mother." And I thanked him for it and all that and I gave it to her. And that's the first I ever thought of money being collected. I really did. Maybe it was going on before, you know; of course, I went in the service and was away from home.

**I:** Did you ever go up to the hospital for the blacks up there? What was it called?

**BJ:** Pine Ridge?

**I:** Pine Ridge. Did you ever go up there for anything?

**BJ:** Yeah, my first kid was born at Pine Ridge. Pine Ridge Hospital. Too, the third kid was born in Pine Ridge Hospital in West Palm Beach.

**I:** Is it still there?

**BJ:** I would think it was still there. I'm not sure.

**I:** Was all it black then?

**BJ:** All black.

**I:** Even black doctors?

**BJ:** No.

**I:** White doctors.

**BJ:** I'm sure black doctors, if they were around, could have worked in there but there were only white doctors and my wife was [ ? ]. That was in 1947.

**I:** If you were courting, where would you take your wife, or fiancée? What would a couple do in Boca Raton back in your courting days? Where would you go?

**BJ:** Now you're talking about in 1943, in that time. Well, we would go to places like Boynton, West Palm Beach to . . . it's still there, the Sunset Lake.

**I:** The what?

**BJ:** Sunset Auditorium. It's on 8<sup>th</sup> and Rosemary; same building, two stories. Of course, they keep renovating it. They had in Boynton . . . probably didn't have any place in Boynton at that time, but they had a place in Palm Beach that they called Cracker Johnson; that was a bar. Then they had Chester's; Palm Beach was a pretty good size town though. They had some nice places then.

So we went there, and from there to Ft. Lauderdale. And, of course, Deerfield had some beer and wine joints. That's what we would do. If they were a very good church going lady, then you just didn't go there, you know.

**I:** I'm just trying to figure out what would a person do. There really wasn't nothing to do.

**BJ:** There was no basketball, there was no football, there was no recreation centers, there was no swimming pools. Nothing.

**I:** I guess the boys could go in these places freely, but the mothers and fathers would probably watch the girls closer than they would watch the boys.

**BJ:** Oh, definitely. The girls were always watched. We had back in that time what we called good girls.

**I:** What do you think of black youth today? I interviewed Mr. Spain yesterday; what's his first name?

**BJ:** Not Lee, but, uh . . . George?

**I:** George Spain and I just had to stroll on 15<sup>th</sup> Terrace and the young boys . . . I was talking to him and he said that most of these kids had dropped out of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and so forth. For the most part, so many people kind of get stuck in black youth, you know. These black kids, you know, they're not advancing. I just wanted to know.

**BJ:** Well, that's a problem all over the United States. You got that, I don't care what state you go to now; to New York, California, Florida, Georgia, Alabama or Mississippi . . . you'll find that.

I get into a lot of debates with people like George and different ones; even my brother, we get into debates. I don't see a whole lot's different in young folks today; that's my way of thinkin'. It's out there; they got more to do than we had. We couldn't get marijuana, heroine and cocaine and they know it; they hear from it. Those come out of Columbia. They coming out now, but they wasn't coming out in those days.

So what could we get back in those days? You got moonshine and whiskey; we got that, don't think we didn't. We got what we could get, and this is what I'm looking at. We got what we could get; now the young folks are getting what they can get. That's all it is, and if it's more peoples then you got more dirt. That's a fact.

Pearl City was so small to when you get close to start talking about Pearl City they say, "Well, when we were growing up, Jack, we didn't do this." You always had one doing something . . . always. And you will find that in all cities. You always had one or two doing something according to the population of the city. We didn't do here what they did in Boston.

I: I agree with you, but at the same time, we've got a problem.

BJ: We definitely got a problem.

I: If you look at the people that come from Pearl City . . . come out of Pearl City . . . why have these people been successful? And not only have they been . . . but their children have been successful. What I'm trying to ask is, "What was going on? What was going on in your families that may not be going on with these younger families today? Or, maybe, there's no difference at all?"

BJ: [ ? ] There is a possibility that it's the parents; there is a possibility. I would hate to say that it is definitely the parents. Now don't get me wrong. You can have the best parents in the world and you'll always end up having a skinned rabbit in the group. For instance, some of the worst kids . . .

I: . . . their father is a minister once you know them.

BJ: Yeah. Theirs turn out to be the worst kids.

I: My father's a minister; I want you to know that. (Laughter)

BJ: Now don't get me wrong; what I'm saying is they would have those types of kids even if they were a minister. What I'm saying is that I've seen some terrible kids. You see some that have terrible kids and you see some with good kids. But, sometimes the parents have a lot to do with it . . . sometimes.

I: What do you mean? They didn't try?

**BJ:** Their teaching.

**I:** They're not teaching their kids right?

**BJ:** The teaching and the love of a home can have a lot to do with the growing up of the kids. And it might not work out for all, but it will work out for the majority of them.

**I:** It's like telling a kid not to smoke, and they smoke themselves. You have to set the example yourself.

**BJ:** You have to set the example, and make sure they don't smoke in their home. Once you give in to a person to do anything, they will continue to do worse.

Now I'm a father of eight kids, and there's a young man here, about 28 or 27 that's one of my oldest two. And I can tell them right now, "Tomorrow, Carl, why don't you mow the yard for me?" "Yes sir", and it's all over with. And I never beat him in my life; never did nothing wrong, did all good for him.

Patricia, she's my daughter \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ boy; he's the baby, he's 24; I don't have any trouble out of him. My oldest son is Phillip; he's 37, but if I tell him to mow the yard, he'll mow it. I didn't beat him to make him do that.

But that's one thing I'm attempting right now; anyone ask me if drinking is wrong, I'll tell them that's it's best not to drink. I don't care if you got the money. If you can ever stay away from it, don't touch it. You got to keep teaching this and instilling this in kids' heads, "That's not good"; and they might say, "Why are you drinking it?" Then try and tell them why you're drinking it. For everything you do, there's a reason, you know. So tell them the reason you're drinking it. And if you had to do it again you wouldn't do it that way. But you got people today justify wrong; trying to take wrong and justify it to be right. A lot of parents do that, you know.

**I:** Yeah.

**BJ:** They go in night clubs and want to stay out to two o'clock in the morning, and I'd say, "Don't tell their kids, don't stay out." How can they? And if they get drunk, they go and tell their kids, "Don't drink." Well, I'd tell me don't drink if I did drink. So you got to teach; if you don't teach from the beginning enough, they'll go astray.

**I:** Well, anyway, I'm through with my interview unless you want to say anything else or if you think I may have left something out.

**BJ:** No.

**I:** I certainly want to thank you for your cooperation.