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## Byron, Cyril

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Transcriber: Danielle Lund

Dr. Brian Purnell (BP): Alright, today is October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006. I'm in the home of Dr. Cyril Byron,

7 - -

Dr. Cyril O. Byron (CB): 7 - -

BP: Oh, I'm sorry. 7-8-1-1 Liberty Road in Baltimore, Maryland. Dr. Byron thank you for participating. If you could please spell - - say and spell your first and last name.

Dr. Cyril O. Byron (CB): Dr. Cyril O. Byron Senior. Cyril, C-y-r-i-l; Byron, B-y-r-o-n. See.

BP: And what is your date of birth Doctor?

CB: April 15, 1920.

BP: Now you were born in the Bronx. Correct?

CB: Yes.

BP: At Lincoln Hospital?

CB: Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx.

BP: Where were your - - what were your parents' names, and where were they born?

CB: My father's name was Cyril, but I'm not - - Junior. My mother's name was Blanche, Blanche Williamson Byron. My father's name was Cyril Melborne Byron, and they were born in the West Indies - - Jamaica. My father was born in Port Antonio and my mother was born in Manchania.

BP: Do you know what years they were born?

CB: Yes. My father was in 1902. My mother was 1898.

BP: And when did they come to the United States?

CB: My father worked on a ship, so the exact date of when they came to the United States is a little fuzzy, but it had to be in the early part of the 1900s. I would say about nine - - yes, the

early part, but it should be about 19 - - 18, 19, because I was born in 1920. It was about 1919, yes, that they came to the United States. It might've been before that, because I have two older sisters and an older brother, and they were also born in the Bronx. So, it might've been 1910. Let's say that to cover all of their being in the Bronx.

BP: And your father worked on a ship?

CB: Yes, he was a cook on the ship, and in fact one of his jobs was - - if you recall Marcus Garvey's ship, he was the chief chef on Marcus Garvey's ship.

BP: Really?

CB: Yes.

BP: On the - - on the Black Star Line.

CB: The Black Star Line, yes.

BP: Oh, wow.

CB: Yes. That's all why we're in the Bronx. I was very - - I was a youngster then, but that's what he did, because when I - - my early memories of the Bronx is when we were on Brook Avenue. Now before that, the family had lived on 61<sup>st</sup> Street, Central Park West. There was a community there of West Indian immigrants. I can't remember the name of it, but around 61<sup>st</sup> Street, but my first recollection of the Bronx was on Brook Avenue, which was - - the only thing I remember correct like - - it was a Sheffield Farms Milk Company was right across the street, and so on my way to school and coming back from school, sometime we go talk to the drivers and they give us some milk, but that - - that was my early recollection. I went to elementary school, in the Bronx, P.S. 35. That was over on Morris Avenue, in the Bronx. [Laughs] And I remember this, I had some tough days. There was only one or two blacks in the class, and the teacher couldn't or wouldn't say Cyril. She would say, "Cereal," and for those of us my age

would know that around that time, Cyril - - from Cyril - - Cereal, they - - kids used to call me Farina. Farina with the little black, from our gang comedy, from the movies. So when the white kids call me Farina, or Cereal, we had to go outside and fight, and I - - I was not a quiet - - I was basically a quiet fellow, but when you got to calling me Cereal and Farina, I would go outside and fight - - challenge them anyway. And one day, while in the Bronx, I came home from school with my clothes torn and crying to go to bed - - my uncle was there, and it was Uncle Joe Panton, who had just come from the West Indies - - he had been back and forth - - and he said to my mother, "Why you keep beating him?" Because, you know, several times I had gotten beat for this, for fighting. "Why don't we just call him Billy, because he cried like a Billy Goat when he was a baby." So that's how Billy stuck with the family. The families like calling me Billy. Very few people outside of my family did that, but very few knew how my name was Cyril, and not William, from Billy, so that's how Billy got stuck, and in my early recollections of my not liking the name Cyril, because I had to fight, so if somebody would ask me my name when I was a kid, "Yeah, my name's Billy." Because that's what everybody calls me, see. So, then when I got - - left P.S. 35, in the Bronx, we moved from Brook Avenue to Third Avenue. Now that was at what they called the railway flat because the railway train that ran up Third was right outside of my window. So, there I went to - - to school. It was elementary school. I can't remember the name of it, but we used to live near St. Paul's Place on Third Avenue, and Crotona Park was about four blocks from where I lived, so we used to go to Crotona Park all the time and play. I didn't have much trouble playing with the kids, with the white kids, because I was a pretty good athlete I would say. You see and it was longer - - and it was so funny, as long as I hit the ball and ran fast I was accepted. As now, kids go in there, if you can - - you can do those kind of things, you'll alright with them. They're not going to take you to their house - - those are kind of

things that we did, and I spent many years there. Then from there we moved to Jackson Avenue. We were superintendents, and in that block there were about four black families, but all were superintendents of the big apartment houses. Now we had a five story house that we had to take care of, pulling garbage in the dumbwaiters and shoving this coal for the freezers and picking out the ash cans, so that the men come pick up the ash - - the ashes and the - - get the garbage out so the garbage men could pick it up, and we learned to do - - we had to do those kind of things, and I at that time just did it, and I developed muscle, and became muscular, so the younger boys around me, my age, weren't as built as I was, because I did pull garbage cans and develop muscles, and they were asking me, "Were you pumping iron?" and I didn't know what pumping iron meant, so of course [Laughs] I did, but I was able to get along - - as I said, get along that way. Then from Jackson Street - - Jackson Avenue rather - - we moved to Duklin - - oh no, not Duklin - - Dawson Street, and that's where I did most of my actually teenage growing, because I went to school at a junior high school - - no I went to elementary school first - - was P.S. 23, and when I graduated from P.S. 23, I went to a junior high school, P.S. 52, and that was off of Dawson Street. But as I said before, growing up, I played mostly with white kids, because that's all around me at that time, then when I moved to Dawson Street, we had one block of about twenty, thirty houses all black. No - - no whites lived on that block, but across the street, there were apartment houses - - Stebbins Avenue ran into that Street - - they were all white. Only blacks in that - - those apartment houses were the janitors - - or what are they - - maintenance superintendents - - they didn't want to be called janitors, so they were called maintenance superintendents.

BP: I want to, if you don't mind, back up - -

CB: Sure.

BP: - - a little bit. Your father was a cook on a ship. Did your mother work?

CB: Yes. My mother worked - - did housework. I'm sorry. I did skip that.

BP: That's okay.

CB: Yes, of course, she worked for - - two or three prominent families in New York. The Flaglers were one family, and there was another one the - - the Schneiders? Because many times - - in fact the first pair of ice skates that I owned were given to me by a young son of the Flaglers. They were the kinds with the long blades on them and these - - I tried them and broke - - almost broke my neck, so I still don't ice skate till today.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: But that's what - - she did a lot of housework. She did nothing else, but go to these houses and we'd meet at the station sometimes and walk her home, and when my father was working, I'd meet him at the subway station, bring home food, he'd go to his next job. He used to work two jobs. One following each other, and I would pick him up, meet him at the subway, and that's when I was on Dawson Street. We had to - - I had to walk about five blocks through Prospect Avenue, where the subway stopped, and he'd come to the entrance there, and I'd take the package and take it home, he'd go to the next job.

BP: What were his two job - - did he stop working, I guess as a - - as a cook on the - -

CB: No. He cooked - - he worked at the hotel, Cellar Lodge Hotels downtown, and incidentally he won in one of the competitions - - downtown hotel, in one of the large hotels, he won a baking prize, decorating cakes - - baking, decorating cakes - - he won first prize, several times for his baking and decorating cakes. In fact, we had a catering service in the Bronx which grew to be one of the largest black owned catering services in the Bronx.

BP: This was - - it was called Byron - -

CB: Byron Caterers, yes. And it was a family affair, [Laughs] because my father did the cooking, my mother did preparation of foods, and when I got big enough I became a waiter. And when I was in college I'd come home and I was a maitre d' so to speak, and whenever we had an affair - - everybody, aunts worked, my uncles - - two of my uncles were chefs - - three - - Uncle Joe Panton was and Uncle Richard Byron, my father's brother was a chef - - called my nephews, not my nephews, but my cousins became chefs. My - - I remember my brother-in-law, my older sister Alma's husband, Sonny - - Daniel Pressy was his name - - he was a chef. So, everything we did was a family affair. And one year, a couple of my friends from Morgan, when I was in Morgan was in New York, and I saw them - - I - - they were attending NYU in the summer, and I saw them, and I said, "Well do you guys want to make some money?" "Oh yes." We hired three or four of them. We happened to have a five hundred seat banquet that time, and so we hired a couple of them and we all had a good time, and every summer they came up, they asked me - - "Hey, man, what you, what you got? What you got? What you got?" [Laughter] But then that was cut off because I had to leave and go to Harvard. I'm skipping too far ahead.

BP: That's okay. Wherever you - -

CB: But going back to the Bronx, we had our gangs. Many times there - - they had gang fights. And fortunately there was no shooting, but we - - we walked down the street and everything, and there were certain blocks we couldn't walk, and when I was on Dawson Street, the street right behind that - - that was Tinton Avenue? We dared not walk down that. Now this is the street right behind me. Behind Dawson Street. A lot of Irish and Italians, but in high school - - going - - let me skip - - no not skipping, I'll go back to it. We had our gangs, and we used to fight, but it was nothing as vicious as they're doing now. See one of the biggest fights I had was some guys came around - - now I say around, because on the corner was - - on, this is on Dawson Street - -

was a Jewish restaurant, and we used to eat nothing but the hot dogs, and the knishes, and the - -  
what do you call it - - what kind of sandwich is one of those - - hot corn beef?

BP: Oh, the reubens?

CB: The reub - - no, it wasn't no. See, reubens wasn't that time. It was just the hot corn beef  
and what's the other one - - the meat began with a "P."

BP: Pastrami.

CB: Pastrami, yes. And of course you had your cheese, you see. So we would go to the corner  
and buy those, but I - - I was brought up mainly - - and if you talked about being brought up with  
Jew kids who - - at high school, there were ninety-seven - - seven percent of the kids at Morris  
High School were Jews. In my high school graduation class of the three hundred and eighty-  
four, eighty-five kids that graduated, only twelve were black. The rest were Jews. These - - I  
grew up with them, and got along with them. I didn't have any problems with them, as long as I  
played ball and [Laughs] - - didn't have any hard time - - that all - - that's all we did, you see, so  
- - I know I'm skipping around because these things come to me as I think about them, but in - -  
in our gang we had tight knit gangs. We played basketball as a team. I remember our team was  
called Sepian Big 5. We played basketball all over the city. We played stickball all over the  
city. And they didn't come to our block, we went to their block, and we used to go up the St. - -  
what - - St. Nicholas Plaza, up there by the Polo Ground. We had some big games up there. In  
fact, I [Indecipherable] where Willie Mays used to come out a couple days and watch sometimes,  
and of course, we always tried to hit, out-hit with him, which we could with a stick, playing  
stickball, see, but otherwise we recognize him as this big news dude. But in those days, you did  
the things you had to do, and, [Telephone interruption] and - - oh.

BP: Stop this?

CB: Yes, please.

[Tape stops and restarts]

BP: - - the ball and whatnot, so - -

CB: Yes, oh and we're talking about over on Dawson Street, but my father owned the grocery store there on Dawson Street. He stopped working, cooking, so he owned a grocery store, and we had good times with that - - good time for me, because we had - - used to have to go down to meat market which was a little further south than we were living and [Laughs] we went there one day, and, and in those days - - the German owned meat markets - - so we went in there one day and we're buying some pork chops, the long loin pork chops, rib pork chops, and this German was saying to the other German what - - what did the swastika mean with the niggers - - on it? And my father just stood there and so my father said to the fellow who was waiting on him what he wanted, so he translated this to the other fellow who was going to get the meat, and he said to the man, we'll give him grade two, and the man didn't answer. He - - when he came back my father was speaking fluent German, fluent. The fellow dropped the meat on the floor, on, on the ground. He stopped and he stared and he said something to him, one fellow and the other guy stood up there laughing because he knew my father could speak German, the first man we spoke to, but the second guy didn't. See, and after he dropped the meat, he picked it up, wiped it off, and put it over there or something - - the one the guy was supposed to give, and I just stood there going, Papa get him, you know, after they're laughing, because I didn't know what they were talking about, but he did, and he spoke German fluently.

BP: How did he learn German?

CB: On the boats.

BP: On the boats.

CB: Yes, on the boats.

BP: Listen, I'm curious. Was your father and your mother, were they followers of Marcus Garvey, or - -

CB: Yes, very - - my mother was. Staunch follower - - oh, we used to give - - have clothes every year to take back to the West Indies, and my mother every year, for years, used to take the girls. She was supposed to take the family, but I wouldn't go, because I hated water. I wouldn't fly. I wouldn't go on a ship. And that's because years before that, when I was living in the Bronx, a fellow by the name of Ken Jackson was - - I was a young man - - used to take us up to swim. He threw us in the Bronx River, and then teach us how to swim. One of the fellows walked down the pier and fell in the water, while he was talking to her she fell. Kenneth went in to get this kid, and another man went in to get this kid. The man and this kid got - - Kenneth drowned. Now that's the guy that was teaching us how to swim. He never came up. Right then, I wouldn't go - - I wouldn't hardly take a bath [Laughs]. That's the truth. I did not like that much water around me, and it was years and years before I would go on a boat ride. I wouldn't even go to Pen - - Pelham Bay Park. When I was living on Dawson Street, my family would go to Pelham Bay and Rockaway. I wouldn't go. I never learned how to swim to - - in fact to the day - - I do not learn - - know how to swim, because it was too much water around me. And it wasn't until - - oh, I married - - for quite a while, before I went on a cruise. My wife says, why didn't come out and go out on the - - I - - I don't want all that water. I - - only time I got on a ship, during over there when - - when Uncle Sam send me over seas. [Laughter] Then I was a man then, because I had been drafted in the army, and to go overseas, but I wouldn't go on no kind of boat, no, no. With all that water, no, and when I finally did go, I had to have an outside cabin, and my wife couldn't understand that. Me neither, but I wanted to see the water.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: Oh boy.

BP: So, your - - your father worked two different jobs when you were younger. He was a - - a cook in restaurants downtown - -

CB: Yes.

BP: - - and hotels?

CB: Yes.

BP: And what was his second job?

CB: His second job was - - was a cook at a smaller place in the evening.

BP: And when - - when did he - - when he became a superintendent on Jackson Avenue - -

CB: Yes, one of the janitors, superintendent.

BP: - - you took care of the buildings.

CB: My brother and I.

BP: How - - and your father too?

CB: Well, my father was short, and what was called in the day five by five, see, but he didn't do much lifting, but he did a lot of pointing, [Laughter] see.

BP: Did he still work as a cook when - -

CB: Yes.

BP: - - when you guys were the sup - -

CB: Oh yes.

BP: Okay.

CB: He used to work as a cook, yes. Yes, my brother and I would, would take all, all of them - - like shoveling the - - we did all that, we did. And sometimes my cousin would come over and help us.

BP: What is your brother's name?

CB: Vernon. He passed away seven years ago. Vernon. My - - my family as I said before was six children.

BP: Two boys and four girls.

CB: Two boys and four girls. The girls - - I'm going at the top - - Alma was the eldest girl; then my brother Vernon was the eldest boy; then Blanche, my sister, was the second sister so to speak; then me; then two sisters afterwards, Gladys and Grace - - Grace is the only living other member besides me in the family. See, so there was six of us. Now, Alma went to Walton High School which was the all girls school. Blanche did the same thing, all girls school. Vernon went to Textile - - it was an all boys school. I was next in line, I went to Court School. Gladys went to Walton all girls school. Grace went to Walton all girls school, but when it - - I think I was - - yes, I was the first one to leave home and go to college. Blanche went to college, Hunter College, right there in New York, so she took part time working full schedules. She worked part time. She became a nurse. She worked at Lincoln Hospital for years. Alma worked for the federal government. Vernon worked for the Department of Transportation. He was a - - a what do you call - - collector in a booth, a booth. That's what he did. Blanche as I said was a nurse.

BP: Did she go to the Lincoln School of Nursing?

CB: Yes. She went to and graduated from the Lincoln School of Nursing, and she played basketball for the girls' team. Yes, she was a pretty good athlete. And then Gracie was as I said, was the youngest - - she taught for a while.

BP: Growing up in the Bronx, did you - - your family attend a particular church?

CB: Yes. Oh my goodness yes. St. David's Episcopal - -

BP: Episcopal.

CB: - - Church, which is in the Bronx, 162<sup>nd</sup> Street, first off Second Street, on Melrose Avenue.

Yes, we had Reverend Best was our pastor in those years, and that's where I became an acolyte for about three weeks. The only trouble was to be an acolyte was you had to be there Sunday mornings, see, and the whole service, but that's my stickball time. [Laughter] We played our games of stickball, you know, on Sundays see, so I would get - - I'd go to church and set up the candles and everything like that, then while service was going on I'm - - got to go, and soon as service over, I change my clothes and run across around the corner get on the - - on - - on the what do you call it - - the trolley cars. I wouldn't even wait for the family to leave, because, you know, they - - they'd want to sit and talk and do this. I'd jump on the trolley car and go on to the stickball game. Sometimes I go West - - up to St. Nicholas Place where they playing, or going back to Duk - - Dawson Street, where they were playing, and I had to go, so I decided, after a whipping or two that [Laughs] I wouldn't go to be an acolyte anymore, because it interferes - - I know, I'm - - I'm going to hell anyway so - -

BP: [Laughs]

CB: - - it interfered with my stickball, see, and - -

BP: Would you catch a whipping because you left - -

CB: Yes.

BP: - - because you left church early?

CB: Yes, yes. I wasn't going to wait for the family to go.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: Because usually after church, they had a coffee and you know, get together and talk. I - - I didn't spend that time see - - because we used to go to church with my brother. Boy, he was a staunch - - oh man he was - - you were supposed to be at church at ten o'clock, he was there ten minutes to ten.

BP: Vernon.

CB: Vernon, yes. Oh man he'd get - - get sick of me, you know because I don't rush fast enough for him, see, so. I used to get in - - we used to get in some tussles at home. He'd want me to do something and I'd figure I was big as he was - - he - - he won most of the time because he was bigger than me, but we - - we'd have our discussions. But then I - - I decided that there's no use in me not doing what I was supposed to do, you know. And sometimes I'd wake up on Sunday morning - - to mom - - I don't feel well, you know, then Mom would say well you stay in the house. Well I'll feel better later. No, [Laughs] no. No. She took me right - - you know she forced me to go to church a couple times which I - - I did.

BP: Was St. David's predominantly West - -

CB: Black.

BP: - - Indian, or was it - -

CB: No, black, no. It was - - I would say quite a few West Indians, but a lot of people were there, and when I said it was not West Indians, because usually they came out of one area. A lot of people that were in St. David's were from Harlem, came from - - who had been in the Bronx and moved back - - down - - moved down, and still came up to the church. But most of the people in St. David's were Bronxites. See, lived in the Bronx and they were Episcopalians - - Episcopalians I should say, and that's where we grew up - - go - - we'd go on the bus outings, and if they're going to Rockaway, I wouldn't go.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: I didn't like the water. I would annoy me sit out there on the beach, and there's nothing going on, and when the kids, my kids were growing up, my wife would say, we're going to have to take them out and learn how to - - I took them to the "Y" to learn how to swim. Took them right down to the "Y," taught them how - - I didn't teach them, but somebody taught them how to swim. Didn't go. When we had to go to the beach, okay, I go to the beach and I walk in the water up to my knees and that's as far as - - but Pa we going - - No. As far as you can go.

[Laughs] I drew the line right there. And they'd splash around in the water, and the guard, I - - I'm telling you I just - - just hated water.

BP: What - - did your parents ever mention why they moved to the Bronx initially before you were born?

CB: Well the one - - one time - - one time I heard them talking about it and it was just a matter of fact that living down on 61<sup>st</sup> Street, where they were living, there were a lot of arguments and discussions about - - there were not - - no fights, but people being - - do mean things to each other, and that was because some were from the - - from the island - - this island, or some were from that island, see, and they had those kind of discussions going on. And I do know one time - - my father never fought anybody - - he was short and he didn't fight anybody - - he just, being a chef and all that, he - - axes, these hatchets around [Laughs] and knives, and he carried his knives back and forth to work in a bag - - well not like that, but a bag, and each knife was wrapped, and then took a towel and wrapped them all, so when he took the towel and did like that, five or six knives fell out, so this man was arguing with him as I understand, and he - - in the hallway of the building where they live was a - - like a little table, and this man was arguing with my mother about something and my father had just come home at that time, and this man

was telling mom what he was going to do, and my father just walked over to the table - - just emptied the knives on the table. See, and the man saw those knives and left, without my father putting a hand on him. The next week or so, the police came to arrest my father, wondering why did he try to cut the man, and father - - my father, well he didn't try to - - and pick knives? No he didn't - - he didn't - - Mr. Byron didn't pick up a knife. He said, well this man said that he, but he didn't. All he did was empty the knives out on our table. See, and you know you look at a knife that big [Laughs] - - all different size knives, so the argument stopped, so I think after that my father decided we were going to move, so that's when we - - and then I - - I came along about that time too because that's when we were in the Bronx - -

BP: And you - -

CB: - - on Brook Avenue.

BP: - - you moved. [Siren] What - - what were the reasons for moving several times in the Bronx, the first from Brook - - Brook Avenue, and then you moved to Third Avenue and then you moved to Jackson Avenue and then you moved to Dawson Street.

CB: I think it might have been jobs and other members of the family, now with the cousins and - - and uncles and things like that and some people who are with us now. I remember we moved to Third Avenue - - there was an uncle, my mother's sister live across - - in the same building but this - - this apartment next to us became vacant, see, so that she told my mother, my mother says okay, well, my mother - - I - - they decided to move, because the apartment was vacant right across the hall from her sister, so family gathering. And then we moved to Jackson Avenue - - oh, was a matter of getting a place to live and don't have to pay rent, but you had - -

BP: Oh, because - -

CB: - - But you had to work there. You know you had to do all the cleaning.

BP: As the superin - - as the super?

CB: As the superintendent, yes. So, yes, my brother and I were big enough then to do most - - most what we done - - and I could do a lot because I was growing up see. I was in my early teens, you see, and it had to be done.

BP: And, but you spent most of your time on Dawson Street as a teenager, as a young man?

CB: Most of it was on Dawson Street, yes. Because when we were living on Jackson Avenue, I was still in elementary school, and yes, of course, when I moved to Dawson, you know, I was still in elementary school, but when I moved to Dawson Street, I was like in fifth or sixth grade, getting ready to move into junior high school, see. And of course its junior high - - at Dawson Street I went to 52. That was the junior high school, so therefore was yes, in that transitional area there if you want to call it that, see.

BP: So growing up, you - - you were friends with white students, white children as well as black students?

CB: Yes. Oh yes. Yes.

BP: But white kids wouldn't invite you to their home?

CB: No. Not too many of them. One or two of them did when I was in high school now there was a fellow that invited me to his house, but [Laughs] - - I have to laugh at this - - in high school, at Morris High School, there were two blacks on the basketball team. One fellow named Levi Bough. He was a black Jew, and he took the holidays when they took. He spoke - - what do you call it, Yiddish, or Jewish, whatever you want to - - he spoke it, you see. Now his people were black, but they were also black Jews. He wore the yarmulke. He wore that too. Now his - - being a black Jew - - one of the white kids on the basketball team would invite him to the house. See, on Jewish holidays, he - - they would invite Levi to the house. Well, they never

invited me but that's alright. Well Le - - one of the girls, Jewish girls, one was this fellow's sister liked Levi. See and the papa didn't want none of that business going on, so he refused to let Levi come to the house anymore. But the next sister - - I don't know how it happened, but - - told the - - her brother that they would have a party, but they wasn't going to tell papa, but you invite Levi and Duk, the two blacks on the team and all the team to come. You see by inviting all the team, you couldn't just not - - leave us out, see. And that's how I got into the white folks house. And in fact, his sister became my girlfriend. You know, it was a holding hand kind of girlfriend, wasn't any love kind. And I asked her brother if I could take her downtown on 125<sup>th</sup> Street down in Harlem, and walk down the street with her on my arm. Are you kidding? See, that go there, when you walk around with a white you were something, you were something.

BP: Interesting.

CB: Oh yes. You had a white girl on your arm, and I used to walk up 125<sup>th</sup> Street get off the subway on Lenox Avenue, walk from 125<sup>th</sup> Street to Seventh, walk up Seventh on 35<sup>th</sup> Street, then walk past the "Y", the YMCA, right there, and always with one of my boys would be around there, because I used to go down the "Y" all the time to play ball. Hey Byron! - - How you doing, and keep on going. Just had to be seen. Then - - then we'd walk back down to the subway, get on the subway car and back to the Bronx. Or some Sundays, we'd get on the bus, Levi and his girlfriend, me and this white girl. We'd get on the bus and ride down Seventh Avenue.

BP: And they - -

CB: Open air.

BP: - - were sisters right?

CB: Yes, they were sisters. Open air, see. And that's how we got away with it, because it's two sisters would go out, see, and meet us see. Now the brother knew, but you tell that to the father, he'd have a fit.

BP: So the father never knew?

CB: I don't think he did. I don't. Of course it didn't last that long anyway, but, but we did a little see because after basketball season, you know, it was all over. But I'm sliding - - I - - it was just, we went out with them. We went to the movie, and we didn't - - there was no, no one ha - - heavy, no stuff, but when get - - walk down, walk in Harlem you see, you had to walk on 125<sup>th</sup> Street and you had to walk on 135<sup>th</sup> Street because that's where you saw your friends, and you go about your business there. But otherwise yes, most of my friends were white. The long lasting friends were black, but you see when - - during school time, when I all during school, there was a few blacks on the track team when I was on the track team. There was only two of us on the basketball team, and the funny thing, when Levi left school, I left school, we never went together. He went home, and I went home, but on the track team now, there were a couple of good guys - - when I say good guys - - guys that I would see before. There were about eight of us on the track team. Quite a few was on the track team. Yes.

BP: How was your experience in public school growing up, and especially in Morris High School?

CB: After I got over - - out of elementary school, growing up in other schools was not bad. You see, the kids were older and there were more of us. Now, when I went to junior high school, where I was the one of two or the only one in the class, there were maybe about three or four or five of us - - "us" meaning blacks, in the class, and there were more blacks in junior high school than there were in elementary school and then still more blacks in senior high school than there

was - - so therefore, you - - you had a few more of us around, where they, they the whites understood us more, you see, when there's only one or two they, they'd have nothing to do with you, you see, when there're five or six in a class, then you - - you get more noticeable, you see, and then you had more friends. When I say friends, Tom Jones and - - would have his friends over here, white friends and Bill and Frank would have his friends over here, so you got more white friends. You kind of spread out, you see. But when we ate [Laughs] in the cafeteria, we ate together, they ate together, you see. And once and a while we'd integrate, but most of the time it was all the blacks here, and all the whites there, and nobody could help understand that. Even when I was at NYU, working on my master's. We go to the cafeteria, you go in the cafeteria, we - - everybody sat where they wanted to, you get your tray and go down and say look over there. There are three blacks over there. Go over there. See, but nobody said anything if I didn't. Once and a while a white would come over there at your table and he sat - - he just sat down or black would be over there on that table, but most of the time, you found the blacks together. All the time, and we - - we could never say why, but that's what we did, everywhere we went. We look for a black or blacks, and then we go there. Even at the beach. When we - - when I know we - - once and a while we go up to Pelham Bay, that bus out into Pelham Bay. We look for other black churches that had there groups there. Other black churches we - - Rockaway - - look for other black churches, and always was a group here and a group there and a group over there, you see, so it didn't make any difference.

BP: So was this because there was tension or animosity from whites?

CB: I - - I honestly I couldn't tell you that. Now, let me tell you why. Because it happened all the time, and you, we didn't have that much animosity. You see many times we go to a place and - - for example, down at NYU, we all sat together.

BP: This was in the 1940s?

CB: In the '40s. Yes. It, it - - no, wait a minute now. I'm sorry. It was later than that.

BP: 1950s?

CB: Yes, but it wasn't a matter of being - - any animosity going in between us. We just did it, you see. Because those same white folks we didn't eat lunch with we'd go to class with. You see, I remember times I'd go eat between classes and about five blacks over here. I'd go over there, I'd make a new one to go over there, and got up so to go to class. The white fellow was sitting here. We'd go to class. See, but there wasn't no animosity. I don't think it was, because just it was kind of a - - well, I'm free now. Free. I'll go talk to John, because I know John, see.

BP: I understand.

CB: See, I might have come out of class with the white boy, but when I get in the cafeteria, I go over there and sit. It wasn't - - not that I didn't like him.

BP: So, aside from when you were a child, and there was the teasing, over your name and the fighting, were there ever any other instances of conflict that you experienced growing up in the Bronx as an African American?

CB: Yes, yes, yes. In stores, - - I remember one incident - - several of them, but one was - - was so funny. We used to go to the movies, the Blenheim movies - - that's when I was living on Dawson Street.

BP: What was the name of the movie?

CB: Blenheim.

BP: Blenheim.

CB: I know Saturday, you know, everyone goes to the movies. Cowboys, and so forth and so on. Right next to the store, right next to the movie, was a five and ten. We had learned that if

we go to the five and ten and buy our candies, it's cheaper than buying it in the movie. So about four of us decide that morning, about ten, eleven o'clock, because that's when the cowboys come on, we went into the five and ten to buy candies, so we bought our candies and we're on the way out - - the police would stop us. And the lady yelled, "One of them did it!" This is a white lady who lost her pocketbook, who put her pocketbook down some place, and she called the police and right away, since she saw us, we were the ones that stole the pocketbook. So the officer says, "Which one of them did it?" - - "I don't know, all them niggers look alike." Those were her exact words. Not all those blacks, all those black Americans. All those niggers look alike - - what she said. The officer says, "Where you guys going?" We said, going to the movies. He said go ahead, go. It was a white officer. He said go, go on to the movies. Just about that time, one of the sales person, was further over, yelling to the lady, "This your pocketbook?" She go, "Oh, yes." Did she say I'm sorry? Not to us - - to the officer - - no. She went and got her pocket book and went on about her business, see. That's one incident. The other incident was - - well I can't, I won't go into that one because it - - it could've been true or not. Well anyway, we could take it out later on if you want to. When I was a traffic officer, they asked for blood donations.

BP: This is in the nineteen - -

CB: Forties. Late Forties, [Crosstalk] late Forties about 1948, '49.

BP: '48. You worked as a police officer from '48 to '52.

CB: That's right. I was a traffic officer for the Port - - New York Authority. They asked for blood donors, and I went down and donated blood. They took my blood, and they called - - they called me back, said there was no donation. They said, no we can't take your blood, your blood

pressure's too high. So I went on home. There were two other fellows, black officers that went down - -

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

BP: Okay continue, so they're both - - their names were Brown?

CB: Yes, Brown brothers, they're brothers, and both of them had the same - - came back with the same thing. They - - they took a blood pressure, and said their blood pressure was high so therefore they wouldn't take the blood. And I went over and told my mother that and she said well, let's go to the doctor. And she took me to the doctor, and he said, blood pressure looks alright, nothing wrong with that. And nothing was said - - now, what I thought, you know, they're wasting my time, but, but then again, and then after a lot of little things that - - you go into the store to buy something and then, a policeman would walk behind you, you know, the store guard would not come right up to your face, but he's right there looking, see. Looking behind you, and then if you go to the counter, the lady would wait on the whites that were there, and then kind of bring the other white behind you up to the counter, see, and then you'd wait. So, you'd just stay there and wait, and she got around to waiting on you.

BP: But were there, you know, stores or restaurants that - - in the Bronx where African Americans wouldn't go because of - -

CB: Yes. There were drug stores. Downtown, clothing stores.

BP: In Manhattan?

CB: In Manhattan.

BP: Yes.

CB: You could go, but you couldn't try on anything. It was some of the big stores. Other stores, we just wouldn't go in. Now, Macy's and Gimbel's, and the stores downtown, you see,

you could go in and buy what you want, take it home, try it, and bring it back. You see in Baltimore, oh well I wouldn't even go there. But yes, and big restaurants downtown, like on 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. We couldn't go in. Going to tell you, no, we're - - we're filled up. You have a reservation? No. You can't come, unless you have a reservation. It was - - that time, when I got a few dollars in my pocket, I might want to take my girlfriend downtown. Oh no. Oh no, no. You don't go down there. There was one right on - - cheesecake place. What's the most famous for its cheesecake?

BP: In - -

CB: In Harlem. No, no. In Manhattan. Oh it was a big restaurant. Famous for its cheesecake.

BP: I can only think of the one in Brooklyn, Junior's.

CB: No, this would've been downtown. Well, anyway, you couldn't go in there. See, so - -

BP: When did you - - when did your family start the catering service?

CB: They started the catering service - - I know I'm getting this wrong but - - before I went to college, and I went to college in '40, 1940. So, it must have been in the Thirties.

BP: Did you graduate from Morris in 1930 - -

CB: '40.

BP: Oh, 1940.

CB: I went to - - when I graduated Morris, I went right to Morgan. So, it was at Morris that I remember working with this catering service, so it had to be in the Thirties.

BP: So, what - - what kind of - - of functions, parties did the Byron catering - -

CB: Weddings, banquets, dinners, anything that we needed a caterer.

BP: And was it mostly African American clients or - -

CB: Mostly African American clients, yes, yes.

BP: You said, but one point they had a five hundred seat banquet.

CB: Yes - -

BP: Where was - -

CB: This - - Masonic Lodge on a hundred - - oh boy, where - - St. Nicholas Avenue on 163<sup>rd</sup> Street, there's a Masonic temple there.

BP: So it was in Manhattan?

CB: In Manhattan, yes. Yes, Manhattan. I'm trying to think of the name of the temple.

Masonic temple, was on the hill, and they had a big, potentate banquet, let's call it that way.

They had about five hundred people, and we worked like dogs at that one, but had to get five hundred people fed.

BP: Wow, and so it was a - - it was - - it was all family, all the Byron family men.

CB: Oh no, no, no. We had a whole lot of other people in there. Byron family basically, but we filled in with other, you know people like - - these are times that the guys from school.

BP: Right - -

CB: Yes.

BP: - - but your - - your father and uncles were the owners?

CB: Father, uncles, mother, sisters, brothers, everybody worked, because at that time - - now my father would also get cooks from his job, see, and bring them up there.

BP: When did the catering company finish?

CB: Well we had, we had the business up until let me say, up until '48, '49, '50 - - '52, and I moved to Baltimore in '53, they were still catering. So it had to be late Fifties, early Sixties, because my father had a store when I moved to the Bronx - - I was living on - - I got married by then and had a kid. I was living on Stebbins Avenue and just below down Steb - - on Stebbins

was this store that my father had because when he moved from Dawson Street, I went into the army, when I came back from the army, they had moved to Prospect Avenue, and that was on Prospect and 165<sup>th</sup> Street. So when I came back from the army, I went back - - right back to school, and got married when I came back from overseas, and when I came - - when I graduated that I had - - I got to get my family, and we moved to Stebbins Avenue, which was right around the corner. I hate to keep moving my hand like that, but - -

BP: That's okay.

CB: - - that's a habit I've got into. And below that, where we were living on Stebbins Avenue, below that, there was a store that my father had for his catering business, but it was then we said - - were laughing because if you were sitting in the store and somebody walked by whether he knew them or not, he would talk to them, and don't let it look like a man that was hungry. He'd feed them. I've seen times he'd tell me to go to the store, across the street was a grocery store, and buy a dozen eggs, because this man that be walking by told me he was hungry. I go buy a dozen eggs, bring them back to the catering store, my father would cook him some bacon and eggs, cook him all half a dozen, cook at least half a dozen eggs, and couple a - - and sit there and feed the man.

BP: He must've a good reputation.

CB: He did. Oh man. Anybody, walked up and down that street knew Mr. Byron, and these kids, when they got out of hand, the other kids said, no, you don't mess with Mr. Byron.

BP: Where was the store?

CB: Stebbins Avenue.

BP: And 165<sup>th</sup> - -

CB: Street. Yes. And in front of the store, the big open space, and just below the store, the block or so away was a high school, and those kids come out that high school, they didn't mess with Mr. Byron. The policemen would come into the store, and sit in front of the store. And they weren't asked. They just - - they just did it. See and then, then the older folks would walk by, these bigger boys would walk by and see these kids, and they say, you don't bother Mr. Byron, now you take that stuff across the street. And they would go across the street. They, no, didn't bother Mr. Byron.

BP: Why did he eventually sell the business?

CB: I think it got too much for him in terms of he began getting older see and then he was having trouble getting his workers, you see. Now his brother would come in, and my other uncle would come, but then others that he was not working with regularly. Say, "Yeah, yeah, I'll be there Pops," but they'd never show up, see, things like that. And then I wasn't there to take care of the waiters, because I was in school, see.

BP: Did - - did your family - - were they - - was politics important to them?

CB: Yes, yes. And I understand that they knew the vote. They would vote. They would discuss who they were going to vote for, but it was - - it wasn't a big thing, big thing meaning we weren't, well let's all get together and hold these, these signs up you see. My sister would. My mother would, would not, if had to do with West Indies, yes my mother, yes indeed. She'd go down to the West Indies for Marcus - - now what's his name - - Manley. When Manley was down there running, she'd go. Of course she couldn't under - - she couldn't understand why they wouldn't vote for him, and they wanted to get somebody else in there, and she went down there and actually, when, around - - talk up for Manley.

BP: Manley. He was running in Jamaica?

CB: In Jamaica, yes. Oh no - - in Jamaica yes, yes. Oh yes.

BP: What kind of lessons did your parents instill to you and your brothers and sisters? I mean they - - they seem like they were very - - hardworking, but also entrepreneurial.

CB: Yes. Well the lessons they taught us honestly were - - first of all, what, one thing, you treat people like people. Treat them like you wanted to be treated. Be careful what you do or what you say. Make your word your bond, see, and above all else, have integrity, and one of the things he taught me, which I've always said was, don't resent anything you can't prevent, and it took me a long while to understand what he was talking about. Racism. I resented it like him, although I couldn't prevent it, but I wouldn't let it eat me. You see I wouldn't let it eat me up. I - - I'd tackle and throw it as far as I can, but then, I let it go. Prime example, when I was in the army overseas, the British soldiers and some of the Italian soldiers, would say why are you over here fighting for freedom, and you don't have it back home. Does that make sense to you? I guess it does, because that's back home. You see, I got to the point where certain things I knew I could not do back home, so I wouldn't do them. I didn't like not being able to do them, but I wouldn't do them, you see. That's where I couldn't prevent what they're doing to me, so I didn't - - so I wouldn't resent them. I'd hate it, like - - I know it sound like I'm talking double talk, but it was a matter which don't let that - - what they're not letting me stop me, see, I'd find some way to go around it, or some other way, some other thing to do, and the other thing was that, that I'd learn after getting whipped a couple times. [Laughs] I laugh because I hit my sister once, and my father whipped me for days. You don't put your hand on a female. And all she did was walk across the floor on my paper, and I told her, I was reading the paper, laying on the floor - - why don't you stop running on - - and when she walked by, just did like that. That's all I did, and she cried like, I don't know what, and ran down to her grandmother - - my brother hit me grandma.

And all they ask me was did you hit her? I said yes I was trying to - - Did you hit her? I said yes, because I was trying to - - Go get the strap, see, then I went and got the wrong one.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: I got the little thin one they used to work around - - wrap around your books [Laughter] - - the books. Woo-Wee!

BP: [Laughs]

CB: That was the wrong thing to do.

BP: So you - - I guess maybe - - perhaps maybe we can speak a bit about your - - your experience in the army and - -

CB: Oh, oh. [Crosstalk]

BP: - - how you came to serve with the Tuskegee Airmen.

CB: Yes, I - - I - - that - -

BP: You were - -

CB: - - again. I was at school.

BP: You were at Morgan - - [Crosstalk]

CB: I was at Morgan and my sophomore year - - just beginning my junior year - - just finished my sophomore year, and I got the letter - - I was away on a basketball trip with the team. We left Friday, Saturday - - got back Sunday.

BP: So you were an athlete. You played football, basketball and ran track.

CB: Basketball and track. Yes.

BP: You must have been, you know - -

CB: I was pretty good. I got major letters from each one of them. So, I stayed in school because of the fact in - - in those days when you got an athletic scholarship, you played all the sports. You didn't just play one, and you didn't play - - we didn't play football one sided.

BP: You played both sided.

CB: Both sides. Both sides of the ball. So when you lost it to the other team, then you became a - - I was defensive halfback on defense, and quarterback on offense, so we all had - - had our spots. But these are things you had to do. And I said about the army - - now I was drafted into the army, and I was - - didn't want to go south, so when the draft board in New York - - I said well maybe they'll keep me up this way - - they sent me to Upton, New York for training, and when my training was over, where they sent me, Tuskegee, Alabama.

BP: What - - where is Upton, New York?

CB: It's up - - up around Nyack and way up around that way.

BP: Okay, okay.

CB: And they sent me to Tuskegee - - assigned me to the 99 Fighter Squadron. That was the first black Air Force group, which was started in 1941. And it was 1942 that I [Indecipherable] was assigned to it. And went down to Tuskegee, spent a good part of '42, the other part of - - April of '43 they sent us overseas to North Africa, then we went to Sicily - - in other words, I was not a pilot. I was a ground crewman. A crewman was one of eight to ten men that took care of the airplane. Our motto was, "We keep them flying". I was a gunner, an armorer as they called it. I had to make sure the guns were ready for - - to be put in the plane - - clean them, dress them up, put the bullets in, put them back in the airplane, so they're ready to go. That's before they transferred me over to headquarters, but that's what I first did. And - - and while down in Tuskegee, we had the same kind of thing. We couldn't go into the movie. We - - if we

wanted to go to the movie about ten or twelve altogether - - we take a truckload into the movie -  
- we got to the movie and sat in - - in the truck outside of the movie, where the white folks went  
in, one fellow from the truck bought the tickets. We couldn't go in to buy the tickets. We had to  
give him the money - - he'd go buy the tickets. So he might've had to buy ten, twelve, fifteen  
tickets at a time. Got out the truck and walked up the side of the building, up some metal stairs  
to the balcony, went in the door and that's how we saw the movie. We had to sit there till they  
cleaned out the bottom part, and I used - - now that I used to be bitter about, because I am in  
uniform, fighting for these people, and I've got to sit upstairs. I can't go in the movies when  
they go in. I've got to wait till they go in, and then wait till they come out, but then again I  
remember, couldn't prevent it - - why resent it? You know, nothing you could do about it. Only  
thing you can do about it is not go to the movies, then who is that hurting? See. I know some of  
the guys say, man you're crazy - - you just - - you just don't have enough guts for nothing - - I  
say, well if that takes guts, not going to the movie when I can go to the movie and sit upstairs,  
then I don't have any guts. See. Oh, I used to get in a lot of arguments with - - not only white  
folks with it, but the black brothers, see, but the again those two who lived in Georgia, this was  
nothing to them. This - - they went to - - this was their everyday living so to speak, see. But it  
had some guys who - - in fact most of the fellows in that outfit was from New York and New  
Jersey, and they had some tough times adjusting, you see. Well yes, we all had our tough times  
adjusting. The pilots couldn't go certain places. These were the officers, couldn't go certain  
places. Again it's the kind of thing you do - - and now overseas - - you'd be surprised. Some  
places we were treated - - we were treated like kings. Except some places we were treated like  
dogs. We - - we ran into a situation in Naples. They had a Red Cross building that we used to  
go to. And we came out of the building, and these little kids were running around, asking for

candy, chewing gum, something like that. We say sure, we give it to them. And then they run around behind us. So we say - - well that - - we thought we were gone - - that they were gone. So one day we did this, and then a - - what they would call a policeman over there - - well anyway - - he was standing next to me, perhaps I'd given these kids some candies and he had a baton - - Shoe, shoe, go, go, go, go - - and then I turned and I saw him, but at first I didn't. I said, why you chasing me. He said, you don't know why they walk by you like that - - I said no. Well, they were told that black soldier had tails. I said what! He said, yes, that's what they were told, that black soldiers have tails. I say where they hear this from. White soldiers. I said, oh know you're kidding. And then, we went into the Red Cross, and asked the people in there. They said, oh yes. Many of them think that all your black soldiers have tails. I said mm, there again. What can I do about it? They're told a lie, and the kids don't know any better, so they were running by looking for the tails, see.

BP: What were experiences like with other white American soldiers overseas?

CB: It wasn't bad. Wasn't bad. I mean, they - - they didn't resent us in any way, except we had a basketball tournament, and the 99<sup>th</sup> took second place - - [Telephone interruption] Excuse me. Hello.

[Tape stops and restarts]

CB: Well a lot of expenses in terms of - -

BP: You said - - you were about - - just to talk about a basketball tournament I think.

CB: Oh, oh yes. We was just - - basketball tournament, but anyway, we took second in - - in the final tournament, and three of us from - - three blacks and seven whites made this all star team. Fortunately, I was one of them, and we threw from place to place, and played basketball for four months. That's all we did.

BP: In Europe?

CB: In Europe.

BP: Wow.

CB: Mostly in Italy - -

BP: What was the name - -

CB: - - and some France.

BP: - - what was the name of the team, or of the - -

CB: The 18<sup>th</sup> - - ah, wait a minute, what was it - - 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force Fighter Group, Command, Team, and there were, as I said ten of us. Three blacks, because they had to all - - all had to come from our team, but we had a good time now. There for a while, we didn't have nothing to play basketball, but we went to different parts of Italy, in fact, I went to Rome twice and saw two popes, but I don't know what their numbers were, but I saw two of them, and then we went to Venice. I can't remember - - did we play in southern France's airport or not. But we had a good time.

BP: And Italians, you know, were they - - aside from the little kids, with what they heard from other white soldiers - - were the Italian people friendly?

CB: Yes, yes. One of the things - - I had an experience, I don't think people - - that I saw my brother over in Italy.

BP: Oh, it was Vernon?

CB: Vernon.

BP: He served as well?

CB: Yes. He was in the engineering group. And I got a letter again from home, and then on this letter, said he had transferred overseas, and he had an APO. Now the APO is just like your zip

code here, so his first three digits matched my three digits, which told me that he had to be in that area, so I went down - - downstairs to the intelligence office - - downstairs in the building to the intelligence officer, and had him find out where he was. He did. He was twenty-two and a half miles from where I was.

BP: And you visited?

CB: Yes I did. I got the jeep the next morning, and went to visit him. When I pulled up in the area where he was, the guard on the - - on [Laughs] - - on the gate said, Byron where you going - - what you doing in - -

BP: [Laughs]

CB: - - You're not Byron. I said yes, I'm Byron, but I'm - - that's my brother. He said, you know, you two look alike.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: He says if I'd notice the uniforms [Telephone rings] then I'd know you weren't - - Excuse me.

[Tape stops and restarts]

CB: Oh, so I went - - I went to his at - - where he was - - his area, and the fellow said you're not Byron, so anyway, he took me to my brother's tent. My brother wasn't there. His tent mate was there, and he said to his tent mate, "You know this guy?" He said, that - - that's - - no it's not.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: No, yes, and then he looked at my uniform, because I was in tan. He said you sure look like his brother. You must be from this 99<sup>th</sup> [Indecipherable]. He's does nothing but talk about you all the time. I said well yes, that's where I'm from. And he says wait a minute. Come on, come on, come on. My brother was in the mess hall. My brother weighed about three hundred and

twenty pounds and always ate. [Laughter] Got to the mess hall, and my brother was standing with his back, where we were coming in, so they say wait a minute. So we walked around in front of my brother, the table he was sitting, and said didn't you say something about you had a brother down in the ninety - - Yeah, my brother down in the 99<sup>th</sup>. He's with those guys, over with the pilots and blah, blah, blah, blah. He said well that look like the guy over there. And he jumped up out of his - - the bench he was sitting on, and you should've seen two big fat men, standing up there crying.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: He was weighing about 320. I was weighing about 215.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: Hugging each other. It was just beautiful. It was just beautiful, and I spent that day with him, because he took me this place, and he took me that place, and he had to show me off to everybody that was there. And I got back to camp the next day. That's late that night, and everything was fine. I don't care what they did to men. [Laughs] You know, the war was - - biological sense, the war was over. But it wasn't till later on that it was over that I got back - - came back home.

BP: So you were mostly in - - in Italy and North Africa?

CB: North Africa, and Sicily in Italy. Yes, I didn't get to southern France. What bothers me is they went - - flew back - - they flew to Germany and all that, and there they - - they recorded a record of flying over two hundred missions. That's escorting bombers to and from Germany, without losing a bomber, genuine aircraft. So I had [Indecipherable] the plane, because they were losing forty and fifty percent of bombs on bomb runs - - the bombers were going out with twenty-four coming back with twelve. You see because the escorts - - the five escorts that they

had would go looking - - would go fight the Germans, try to shoot down the German planes going to become aces, but Colonel Davis told his group, our group that your job is to escort these planes till they do their dropping bombs. Now if you wanted to go fly and fight - - fight the Germans, you go some place else, but this group is going to escort the bombers, and they were known as the Red Tails. It got all over then. If you run on a bomber run, get the Red Tails to escort you. So, when that big push to bomb Germany - - after bombing Germany, the commander of the bomber group said who - - he wants the Red Tails to escort his planes to Germany. And they said well you can't have - - well then we not going. We want the Red Tails, because they did what they were supposed to do. Stayed with the planes, and escorted them. Didn't lose one in two hundred off [Indecipherable]. Now [Indecipherable] are over and back. Didn't lose a plane. So much so that about two years ago, I spoke at a football banquet. I was a football person once anyway. And one of the fellows got - - after I spoke came up to me and said, I'm so happy to meet you, because of you I'm here today, and this was a white fellow. And all these folks standing around me - - everybody got quiet. Here let me explain. My father talks about your Red Tails. My father was a bomber there, and they was taught how they were supposed to look for you, for the Red Tails, to escort them - - they knew they had a chance coming back, and he was one of those bombers that got it back, and here I am today to talk about it. I said well, I will pass that on to the other fellows, [Indecipherable] the fliers. And he said well I'm just happy to meet you, and I heard so much about you - - meaning the Red Tails. I was glad I'm - - now I go tell them I met one - - see, so what you're telling me is true [Laughs] - - but those are the kind of things that you feel proud of, you know.

BP: What - - you moved back to the Bronx, yes, after the service, or after you graduated from Morgan State?

CB: Yes. Now we're back to the Bronx, then came down here.

BP: 1953.

CB: '53. And got married in '45. That's when I came back from overseas. We flew back. I was brought back - - I was one of the - - the group that came back with Colonel Davis to train other men to go over to the European Theatre. I mean the Eastern Theatre, the Japanese, but the war ended, so in August of '45, I got out late August '45, went back to college September '45. I got married in June, July of '45. I got back home June the 10<sup>th</sup>, got married July 10<sup>th</sup>, and then when I finished that, then I went back to school to finish up.

BP: How did you meet your wife?

CB: On - - while I was on the campus.

BP: At Morgan - - oh, she was a student at Morgan.

CB: She was a student at the same time I was. We were both freshmen at the same time. They - - the February of '40, they introduced all freshmen, and she stood up and said she was from a name - - she was from Harlem, New York. That was New York, New York, and I got up and said I was from Bronx, New York, and then you - - when you - - you know, just getting together and you look around and you say, well check them out, so you can find out who people are, and we - - we got along pretty well. We loved to dance with each other, and at first she - - she didn't like me, because she thought I was one of those New York slickers, see. I mean, I had kind of a swagger with me you know [Laughs] - - but we - - we started going out together, and I left to go overseas, and she waited till I got back home - - got back over and I stayed, and she stayed to finish, and when I got back home, we eloped and went to Atlantic City.

BP: [Laughs]

CB: Because we planned - - I remember I told her I was going to go down there Atlantic City because a lot of the fellows that came before me came to Atlantic City, and we said okay, here we go. Got down - - on our way to Atlantic City - - this is just - - I said you know one thing, we ought to get married. She say you crazy, you can't - - I've got two cents worth a mind. I said, why not? They'll marry us - - I said me as a soldier, they'll marry us in two - - couple of days. Well, now here your father and your mother are caterers, and they've been looking forward to having a big wedding. Aaah, we - - can have one when we come back. We went up to Hotel Dennis at that time in Atlantic City to sign up the papers - - got married.

BP: How long did you stay married?

CB: Forty-two and a half years. Then she had a stroke in 1988, and four days after the stroke she passed. There's a picture of her there. There's one on that side too. On that same side of the picture are my sons, her and my two boys. Our two boys rather, on that side. And the picture there, you saw the younger one was an Unsung Hero for the high schools of Maryland. He won the award for Unsung Hero.

BP: Any memories from the Bronx that your - - you know, growing up in the Bronx as a young man, living there, after you first got married that stick out in your mind as being particularly formative for you and your family or - -

CB: Well, a few memories. One - - one of them was every Thanksgiving, we had our family get together, and every year at Thanksgiving, everybody got together, so you got to see everybody, and you got to talk with everybody, and find out everything. And we learned to get along with people. Not only relatives, but people, and we trained the boys that way. See, both of them became athletes, but Cyril went to Howard and he got a scholarship to go to Howard. Jeffrey didn't play sports in college, but he played tennis on the outside. Jeffrey was the one - - on your

-- on your right, up -- Cyril's the one up on top, see. He's now -- a math teacher, he -- in

Baltimore. And Cyril is a CEO in Washington. So, they're doing fine. We've been blessed.

We were blessed. I'm telling you. To go through what we've gone through, we've been blessed.

BP: Alright, thank you Dr. Byron.

CB: Oh, it's a pleasure, it's a pleasure. If I think of anything else, I'll put it on email.

BP: Okay.

CB: Trust me.

BP: Thank you.

CB: And if you think of any --

[END OF INTERVIEW]