

# Eastside Voices

An intergenerational oral history project  
Project Co-Directors Buddy Hannah and Sid Ellis  
Featuring Art by Gerald King and Conrad Kaufman





## EASTSIDE VOICES ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS NARRATIVE

When Patricia Taylor, Executive Director of the Kalamazoo Eastside Neighborhood Association, asked Sid Ellis and me to be a part of the Eastside Voices Oral History Project, we both agreed without hesitation. Why? Because we both understand the importance of oral history to both present and future generations.

After agreeing to work on this project, Sid and I wanted to establish a definition of Oral History. We didn't want to complicate our definition so we both agreed to keep the definition as simple as possible. Thus, we agreed upon the following definition:

Oral history is an interview that records a person's recollection of experiences, thoughts, and feelings about a specific event, place, or a period of time.

In our views, that's what the Eastside Voices Oral History Project is about: interviewing current and former East Side residents and capturing their recollections of experiences, thoughts, and feelings about a specific event, place or a period time.

So, our task was to interview current and former East Side residents and let them tell their stories about living on the East Side of Kalamazoo, past and present. Then we would share these interviews with the Eastside community and the Kalamazoo community as a whole.

We realize that we only tapped into a small number of these stories and that there are still many more stories that could have been told

and shared. However, we feel the ones presented here will give those of us who didn't grow up on the East Side, or never lived on the East Side, a better understanding and appreciation of what life was, and still is, for those who call themselves East Siders.

We would like to thank all the people who took the time to share their stories with us. And a special thanks goes out to Mya Boyd.

Mya Love Boyd is a 13-year-old 8th grader and attending MVCA (Michigan Charter Virtual Academy). Her passion is writing. She has written over 10 books and 50 poems. She wrote her first published book, "The Magic Book," at the age of nine. Mya also loves reading, music, and volleyball.

Mya conducted the majority of these interviews and, without her talent and commitment, we could not have interviewed as many people as we were able to. Thank you, Mya.

Now, enjoy the stories of those who participated in the Eastside Voices Oral History Project.

Co-Project Directors

*Sid Ellis*

*Buddy Hannah*

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORIES

In 2018, the Center for Community Progress invited the Kalamazoo County Land Bank to convene a delegation to travel to Macon, Georgia to share ideas about creative approaches to activating vacant spaces. The trip gave us a chance to learn from our counterparts in the South but also from each other.

One of the members of the delegation was Belinda Tate, Executive Director of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts. Belinda inspired us with her presentation on work she had been involved in while at the Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem State University. A housing development was slated for demolition and, "Pride and Dignity from the Hill: A celebration of the Historic Happy Hill Community" was initiated. This project celebrated and empowered residents to tell the 100 year history of this area via visual depictions and oral history. It was after hearing her story that the intergenerational storytelling project started to hatch.

During this time, we were partnering on the new Eastside Gateway project, the repurposing of eleven parcels that had been abandoned or vacant for more than a decade. Together, we had provided a platform for the community to define a vision for that space and we were getting ready for construction to move that vision forward. The concept included seven highly energy efficient homes and a community pocket park.

After hearing from our peers in Macon, we wondered, "How could we connect the rich history of the neighborhood with the new developments at the Eastside Gateway Project site?" Pat thought of

two local performers and storytellers - Buddy Hannah and Sid Ellis - and Kelly suggested we could showcase the stories, once uncovered, in the planned pocket park in the new Eastside Gateway project with a permanent installation. It was a wonderful way to honor and integrate the stories of the neighborhood with the upcoming new development.

With the help of another Macon delegation member - Kristen Chesak, the Executive Director of the Arts Council of Kalamazoo - we were able to secure a MAGIK (Making Arts Grow in Kalamazoo) grant from the Arts Council of Kalamazoo to get the project off the ground. The learning exchange was time well spent!

Buddy and Sid were masters at leading this project, which has produced more than we ever imagined, including the rich stories in this book. Public Media Network provided media production training for teens to work alongside the project and learn new skills, and also helped us to capture stories with digital media. And, local artists Gerald King and Conrad Kaufman created art elements to install at the pocket park and on a mural installed on a vacant property on a nearby commercial block.

We hope you enjoy this project as much as we have!

*Kelly Clarke*

Executive Director  
Kalamazoo County Land Bank

*Pat Taylor*

Executive Director,  
Eastside Neighborhood  
Association

## CLARENCE ATKINS

*Clarence Atkins is a former resident of the Eastside neighborhood. Although he no longer lives on the East Side, he still has fond memories of growing up there.*

“We moved to the East Side in the ‘50s. We lived in the 1500 block of East Michigan. I attended Roosevelt Elementary school where, by the way, I set a track record for the fastest time on an indoor elevated track. Wasn’t nothing special about the track other than you had to walk up some stairs to get to it. That record stood until they tore down the school. From there I attended Northeastern Junior High, both on the East Side of Kalamazoo. Since there was no high school on the East Side, I attended Kalamazoo Central.”

“I can honestly say that my growing up on the East Side were good years. I had lots of friends and we spent a lot of time playing in some woods that were close to our house and just having fun.”

“And all the adults looked out for each other and each other’s kids. We were a close knit community. If you got in trouble with an adult you may get one or two whippings before you got home. Back then adults had the okay to discipline each other’s kids. I can remember one time I got in trouble - can’t remember exactly what it was I did - but I got a whipping by the adult and when I got home my mother found out and I got a whipping by her. Then a neighbor stopped by and told her some more stuff about what I did that she didn’t know about and I got another whipping. That’s just the way it was back then. Everybody looked out for everybody and everybody’s kids. It taught me to respect and appreciate adults. It showed me how important it is to have

respect and give respect for the people you are around and for people in general.”



When asked about race relationships during that time on the East Side, Clarence had this to say.

“It was kind of a mixed bag on the East Side in the ‘50s. There was some racial tension but as a child I wasn’t really impacted with a lot of race issues, or maybe I was just protected from them. It wasn’t until late junior high school that I started to understand some of the race issues. And then in high school race became more and more of an issue. But before that I really didn’t feel first-hand racism in my own environment, nor was I mistreated directly. I kind of grew up happy, kind of unaware of race issues until, as I said, late junior high and more in high school. It was basically good times during my childhood.”

Even though he is no longer an East Side resident, he is well aware of the changes that have taken place on the East Side over the years,



## DENNIS JOHNSON

“I’ve seen the changes to the East Side over the years, and until recently most of the changes have not been good. Growing up, the East Side was a vibrant community. Over the years some of that was lost. One of the most drastic changes to the East Side has been the loss of businesses, especially Black-owned businesses.”

When I was growing up on the East Side there were all kinds of businesses: Sutherland Paper Co., Marathon Oil Company, Hearty Hamburgers, The Dairy Queen and many other businesses. And there were Black-owned business as well. My father, John Atkins, Sr., owned the Eastside Grocery, a store he opened up somewhere around 1964 or maybe a little bit earlier. There was a restaurant close by our house. I can’t remember the name of it, but it was owned by Blacks. So, as I said, there were thriving businesses on the East Side, both Black and White. But people began to move away from the East Side - especially Whites - and many of the businesses began to close.”

“All this started happening around the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, and when businesses close, especially the ones that employ people, people start to move, looking for work elsewhere. A lot of houses were torn down as well. All of this led to some drastic changes on the East Side.”

“But recently, there seems to be a focus on revitalizing the East Side. New homes are being built, a few new businesses have opened, and work is being done to try and make the East Side the vibrant community it once was, which is good. This is good to see. All in all, I still have fond memories of growing up on the East Side.”

*Dennis Johnson was born in Borgess Hospital sixty-eight years ago. He lived on the East Side for 18 years. Sixteen of those years were spent living on Riverview Drive, and the last two years he lived on Gull Road. No longer a resident of the East Side, he can still recall fond memories of growing up there.*

“I have fond memories of Roosevelt Elementary School, the teachers, people I went to school with - all fond memories. Everybody knew everybody, kids and adults. I also remember there were a lot of activities, a lot of things to do. Seems like there was something to do every day. I can remember riding my bike up and down Hotop Street, Bridge Street, and Sherwood Street hills. It felt like every kid in the neighborhood had a bike. We use to skid our bike and end up in the middle of Riverview Drive. I wouldn’t recommend that today.”

“Another favorite thing to do was to go swimming in Deak’s Pond, which was a very popular place. We use to also go fishing in Spring Valley Park. I had about as many White friends as I had Black friends. We all played together. We would sit on each other’s porch and eat popcorn and popsicles together. But I’m talking about the ‘50s and early ‘60s.”

“I also remember that in the summer time we would go to movies in the park. That’s what they called it: movies in the park. They would show movies in Verburg Park. The park is still there. It was and still is located at the intersection of North Street and Gull Road. It was kind of unique because it kind of bridged the North Side and East Side. So when they showed movies you would have kids from both the North

Side and East Side coming together. They would set up a big screen and a projector and we would eat popcorn and watch movies. It was a fun time for everybody.”

When asked about businesses on the East Side, Dennis said there were lots of businesses, but one that stood out for him was the Pacific Club.

“The Pacific Club, later called the Pacific Inn which everybody mostly called The P I Club, was located at the intersection of East Michigan and Riverview Drive. I used to work there as a young person. I washed dishes, bussed tables, parked cars and other things. I had a great time doing that. The Pacific Club was a private dinner and dance club. It was started by an African American man named Council Hawes. When he got out of the Air Force in the ‘50s, Council Hawes had a dream. He believed that White people and Black people could come live in harmony sharing and doing like things together. So he opened up the Pacific Club. At one time it was believed that he had close to 3000 members. Of course, it was predominantly White, but there were Black members as well. Council believed that Whites and Blacks could come together without issues, and it worked.”

“Oh, and I have to mention Hearty Hamburgers that used to be on East Michigan. Had some of the best hamburgers in town. And Hearty Hamburgers had the Whopper long before Burger King.”

Like so many young people growing up on the East Side during his childhood, there is one person who stood out above the rest: Mrs. Alma Powell.

“I spent a great deal of time at the East Side branch library where Mrs.

Alma Powell was a Librarian. I was either reading, checking out books or listening to her tell stories. She was a great storyteller. I can remember children, Black and White, sitting around on the floor in a circle while she told stories. We would all meet there on certain days and at certain times to listen to stories by Mrs. Powell. She stayed right around the corner from us, and our back yards backed up to each other. If ever there was a celebrity in our neighborhood, it was Mrs. Powell.”

No longer a resident of the East Side, Dennis is well aware of the changes that have taken place on the East Side since the days of his youth.

“The area I grew up in is more commercialized now, not the type of neighborhood I grew up in. Some areas have gone down some, but on the positive side I see this project that you all are doing, and the new Gateway housing development there on East Michigan and Phelps, as being a step in the right direction to bringing the East Side back.”

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## CARL ROBERTS

*A sense of community is what seventy-two-year-old former East Side resident Carl Roberts remembers about growing up on the East Side of Kalamazoo.*

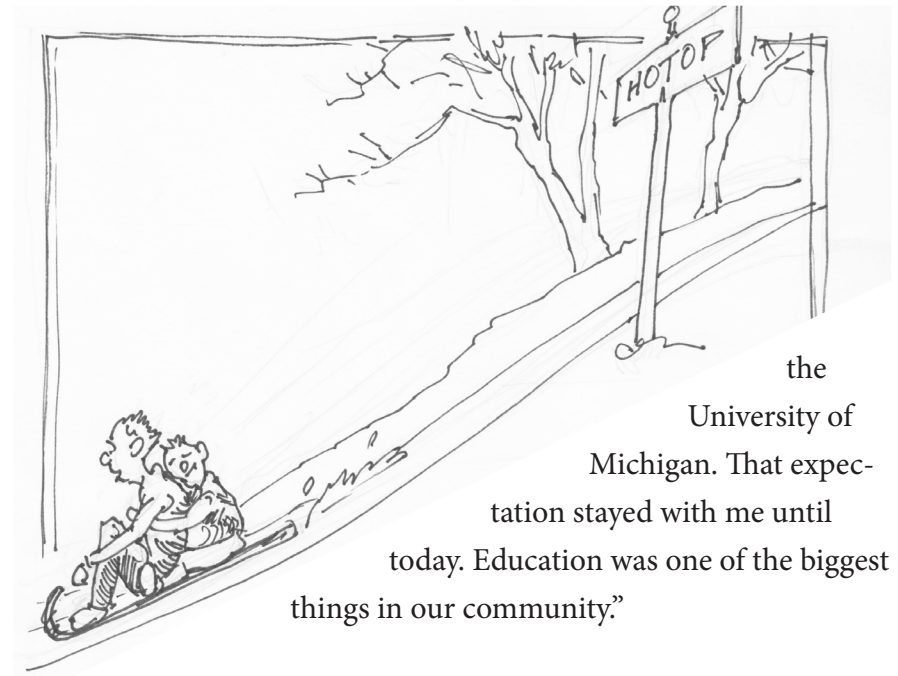
“I grew up on Hotop Street on the East Side of Kalamazoo. I spent the first 21 years of my life living on the East Side and I feel like it was one



of the best places to grow up at the time. There were always plenty of activities for the kids and everyone took care of everyone. Some of my favorite activities included coaster carting, sledding, playing football and baseball. In the summer we would go coaster carting down the hill, and in the winter we would go sledding down the hill. I'm proud to say that I had the fastest coaster cart on the East Side."

"We also played in what we called the small woods and the big woods. The woods were a favorite place to play, mostly in the small woods. The woods were located between Hotop and Bridge Streets and the big woods were between Bridge Street and Gull Road. We played Cowboys and Indians, war games, stuff like that. I attended school at Roosevelt Elementary and we would also play baseball on the playgrounds. I also remember playing baseball on an area by Mr. Neil Davises' house. Mr. Davis would organize the softball and baseball game and all the kids would come and play. Mr. Davis brought the community together by getting everyone to play a friendly game of baseball."

"Mr. Davis and his wife, Mrs. Gracie Davis, were among the many adults we looked up to, and were role models for the kids. Another person we all looked up to was Mrs. Alma Powell. She was the librarian at the library on the East Side. She and my mother were friends and would often walk together to the store and argue about who was the shortest. Mrs. Powell was a little bit taller than my mother and you could see this so I don't know why they argued about it. I admired Mrs. Powell because she instilled a love for books and learning in us, and you were expected to do good in school, and everyone helped you do good in so many ways. That expectation stayed with me all through elementary, junior high, high school and my graduation from



the University of Michigan. That expectation stayed with me until today. Education was one of the biggest things in our community."

Like so many of his friends during that time, Carl's world was basically the immediate area in which he lived.

"I lived on Hotop and that area was fairly integrated. Probably more Blacks than Whites, but we never really had a problem. I remember one White family that moved here from somewhere in Indiana. They moved into the neighborhood and they had somewhat of a problem with people of color, but eventually they fit in as well. Now, from Fairbanks Street heading East it was less integrated, and as we got older and started leaving our immediate area we came in contact with kids from a whole different culture and different background, and began to notice there were race issues."

Mr. Roberts says although he still has good memories of growing on the East Side, he is little disappointed when he drives down East Main Street now.

“I’m both saddened and disappointed when I drive down East Main Street because what I remember East Main being is not the same. East Main was a very thriving area. It’s hard to see what it is now. There were grocery stores, pharmacies, clothing stores, a gas station, and other types of businesses - many of which I can’t recall the names, but I do remember seeing the businesses. A lot of them don’t exist anymore. Also, the area where I grew up has changed. The woods are gone. So many of the things I remember are gone. But for the first 21 years of my life, the East Side was one of the best places to grow up.”

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### DANIEL SULLIVAN

*“The East Side was a great place to grow up in,” so echoes the words of Daniel Sullivan, 69, and a current resident of Richland, Michigan.*

“As a kid growing up on the East Side of Kalamazoo, I remember it being a great place for kids. Kids felt safe. It was a fun time. I loved playing baseball and football during the summer when school was out. “

“I went to St. Mary’s Catholic School, and during the summer we would play ball at the school or at Rockwell Park. I lived at 613 Southworth Street. It was a small neighborhood and we only lived about a block away from almost everything we needed: grocery store, drug store, and barbershop, pretty much everything a kid needed. I can remember Doorn’s Department Store, a little five and dime store called Belisle, Miller’s Market, Marty’s Market, Triestram’s Drug Store, and

Huff’s Grocery Store which set right in the middle of a neighborhood. Almost everything we needed was close by.”

Just like his young African American counter parts, Dan’s experiences with other kids of color were mostly confined to his immediate area.

“I delivered papers, and I delivered down on East Michigan where most of the Black people lived at the bottom of East Michigan and on Riverview. I never had any trouble with Black kids. I went to St. Mary’s Catholic School and I really didn’t began to interact with Black kids until I got to Kalamazoo Central High School. For me, I didn’t really know much about race relations in the early to mid-‘60s because even though the East Side was heavy populated, it was to some degree pretty much segregated.”

The first Black person I came in contact with was Mrs. Alma Powell, who was a librarian at the East Side Library. She would read stories at the library and we all would sit around a listen to her. She was an amazing woman and she had an impact on all the kids’ lives.”

Although he’s not a resident of the East Side anymore, Daniel has seen the changes to the East Side since the days of his childhood.

“The East Side looks more dilapidated in many places. There is not as many businesses as there were when I was growing up, and you don’t seem to see as many kids outside playing like when we were kids. There are some homes that are kept up, and a few bright spots here and there. But I still have good memories of the East Side. For me, the East Side was a good place to grow up in.”



## JAMES "JIMMY" JACKSON

*James "Jimmy" Jackson has lived on the East Side all of 57 years and is actively involved in the community, serving as the newly elected Vice President of the Eastside Neighborhood Association.*

"I've lived on the East Side all my life, you might say. I grew up on the property where the new homes that's part of the Eastside Gateway project is located: 1519 and 1521 East Michigan. I watched them tear down my mother's old house to make way for the new development they are doing in that area. A lot of good memories on that spot. My mother's house was kind of like that neighborhood spot for the kids. All the kid in the neighborhood came there, many of them would spend the night. My mother always had activities for us to do, games to play, stuff like that."

"I went to school at Roosevelt Elementary school, K-6 grades. That was another place for fun activities, baseball, football, karate and other activities."

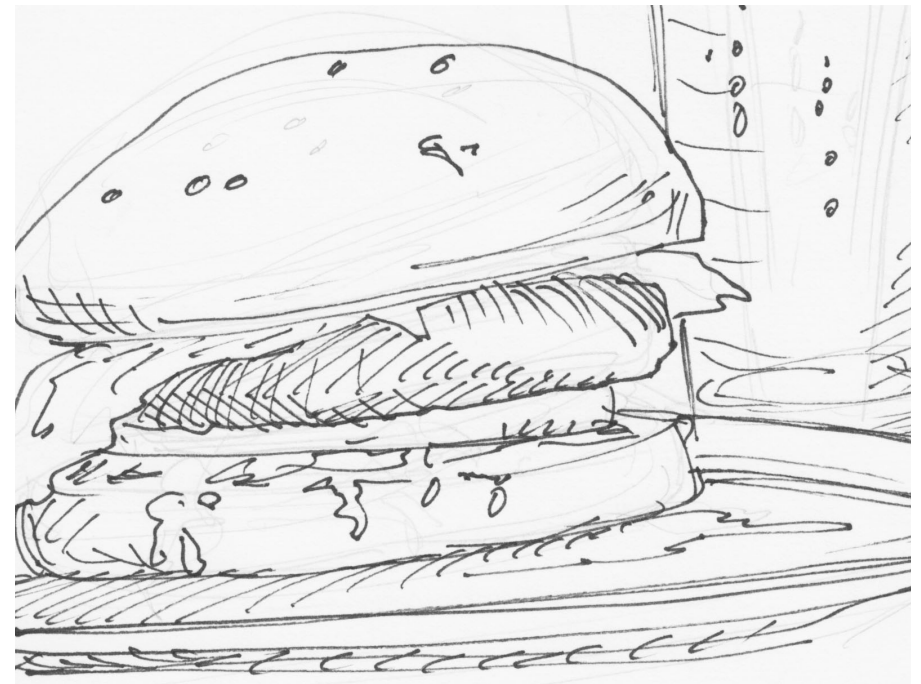
"The East Side was a good place to live back then. We didn't have all the stuff going on back then in the neighborhood like we do now. You know, the drugs and violence and stuff. We could go play outside, go to the park, walk down to Hearty Hamburgers, the Dairy Queen, wherever. The neighborhood was a carefree zone - no worries - just a good time back then."

When asked about race relations during that time, James expressed what so many others East Siders expressed.

"There was not a color barrier. Some of my best friends were of another color. Everybody was in the neighborhood together. Don't get me wrong, there was racism in the city but a lot the neighborhoods all stuck together. A lot of that was due to the fact that people had to live and survive in their neighborhoods, so most people stuck together. You had a few discrepancies but the good outweighed the bad."

When it came to business on the East Side, James admitted that he couldn't remember them all, but did name a few.

"I can especially remember some of the businesses like the Ace Hardware Store, Hearty Hamburgers - best burgers in town - the Dairy Queen, Clark Gas Station , Kentucky Fried Chicken - oh - and the laundromat right next to the Dairy Queen. Some of my relatives



worked there and I would go there just about every week to do my laundry. And then Mr. Fred Carver had a welding company right there on the corner of Phelps and East Michigan. He was the first Black man that I knew of to have his own welding business back then. He built his business and his house there on that property. My dad also helped build Faith Temple Church of God and Christ there on East Michigan back in 1971, somewhere around there. We also had a Teen Center there on East Main. Lots of activities for the kids in the neighborhood. We don't have stuff like that anymore for the youth in the neighborhood."

Having lived on the East Side for his entire life, James has seen the changes that have taken place on the East Side, good and bad.

"You started seeing changes when some of the older generation started moving out, and a lot of the business moved out. A new generation moved in and things changed. Some of the houses went down for whatever reason. There became less activities for our youth, and people seemed to lose a lot of the feeling we had for each other and our neighborhood. You know that old saying, it takes a village to raise a child? Well, we seem to have lost some of that. Back when I was growing up, everyone looked out for each other and their children, but that seems to be missing today."

"The East Side still needs a lot more attention. A lot more developing. There is still a lot that needs to be done. I do see some good things happening though. The Eastside Gateway project is drawing attention to the East Side and getting a lot of support. That's a good thing. You have people on the East Side who have, and still are, working to make the East Side better. I can't name everybody, but people like Mrs. Eva

Ozier, who retired from the Kalamazoo County Commission, has worked hard to help improve the East Side. Mrs. Maggie Bodly, who helped start the Eastside Neighborhood Association, and continues to work with us. Mrs. Jeanette Tarver, who worked tirelessly with our Eastside Fresh Food Initiative, and many others who have an investment in the East Side."

I was recently elected Vice President of the Board of Directors for the Eastside Neighborhood Association and, along with our President, April, we're gonna be working on a lot of projects, trying to make things happen to make the East Side better."

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### **JAMES C. PALMORE**

*Over the course of his 75 years of living, you might say that James C. Palmore has had an on-and-off relationship with the East Side.*

"I came to live on the East Side in 1948, somewhere around there. I think I was around four years old. Around 1972, I moved from the East Side, only to return in 1985, and I've been living on the East Side ever since. My art studio is in the house that I grew up in."

"I went to elementary school at Roosevelt Elementary School, then to Northeastern Junior High and then on to old Kalamazoo Central, the one on Westnedge. Growing up on the East Side was a fun time, especially being a boy because we lived close to the Kalamazoo River, and we would go fishing."



“We were also close to the switching yard where they worked on trains and the trains came in and out. It was exciting to see all that. Back then they had the old steam engine trains, and you could see the smoke coming out of them and their wheels spinning as they were starting to move. It was fun to watch. But one of the most exciting places to play was what we called, “the woods”. This wooded area was right there by my back yard and we loved to play there. There were a lot of trees, some of them fruit trees: pears, peach, apple and other kinds. There were also a lot of Black berries, blue berries and other kinds of berries that we use to eat.”

“There was also a hill that we use to slide down on cardboard in the summer and go sledging in winter. We cleared out a spot at the bottom of the hill and played baseball and football there. I never experienced being bored. Still don’t. We also played in the Morris Rose junk yard and another one next to it. We would get in the old junked cars and pretend we were driving.”

Like so many African American kids living on the East Side in their close-knit neighborhoods, James says he never personally experienced racism at an early age.

“I personally never had a problem with race. I heard about certain incidents and some of my friends talked about being treated differently in class than some of the other kids. It wasn’t until I got older that I could see some things that disturbed me. But as a kid, nothing really stood out.”

When asked about some of his memories of the East Side growing up James had this to say:

“My memory is not as sharp as it once was, but I do remember a lot of the thriving businesses on the East Side. Of course, there was Hearty Hamburgers, where a lot of the people who work for the railroad would come to eat breakfast and lunch. And then there were other businesses - I can’t remember all the names - but there was a gas station, some kind of party store, there was Doorn’s Clothing store, a Town and Country Food store, Bellisle Drug store, a five and dime store, and I remember Triestram’s Drug store, and next to that was a bakery.”

“I can remember us walking up from my neighborhood on East Michigan on our way to school at Northeastern. My friends and I would stop at this bakery. It may have been on Hazard Street, but anyway, we would stop at the bakery and buy doughnuts. My friends would have their doughnuts eaten up before we had gone a half a block, but I would always take my last bite just as I was walking into the school many blocks away from the bakery. I was a slow eater.”

Having spent so many years on the East Side, James has seen a lot of changes.

“One of the first changes was the disappearing of many of the businesses on the East Side. There’s not as many thriving businesses as there once was, especially when you drive down East Michigan and East Main. And housing is different. Back when I was growing up there were more family homes, not as many rentals as you have now.”

“But on the other hand, you can see some positive changes. Habitat for Humanity has built some new homes on the East Side, you have a few of the new tiny homes that were built, and then you have the new

energy efficient homes that they recently built down on Phelps and East Michigan. I'm hoping that things are changing for the better. The thing about change is, it takes time. Some of the things that are happening now will take time."

"I still have fond memories of growing up on the East Side. There was a pear tree close to our house and my mother would gather up the fallen pears and make pear preserves. All the families up and down our part of East Michigan would do that. And at Christmas time she would open up a jar of those preserves and man, you talk about something good. That still brings back good memories."

"And I still have memories of some of the people who touched my life and I still have respect for today. People like Mrs. Eva Ozier, Mrs. Grace Davis who was the daughter of Mrs. Alma Powell, Mr. Fred Carver, Mr. John Atkins, Mr. Triestram who own Triestram's Drug store and many others. Like I said in the beginning, the East Side was a good place to grow up and an exciting place to be as a boy."

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## KEVIN FORD

*It's been twenty years since Kevin Ford lived on the East Side and yet he still has fond memories of his youth growing up on the East Side.*

"I lived on the East Side from 1980 to 1994. We lived in an apartment complex at 1091 Bridge Street, so the better part of my youth was spent on the East Side. I went to Northeastern Elementary School,

K-6 grade, and those were some of the fondest memories of my childhood. Back then you didn't just sit up in the house, we played outside. When you went outside, you didn't run in and out of the house. We pretty much stayed outside until the street lights came on. I enjoyed going outside playing with my friends and hanging out. When I learned how to ride a bike that was like putting a cherry on top. It gave me more freedom. I became more mobile."

"My years in elementary school are some of my fondest memories. Just being in the neighborhood, riding our bikes and stuff like that. I also played Rocket Football and I had a friend who lived on Humphrey Street, and I would ride my bike over to his house and we would then ride up to Northeastern to play Rocket Football."

"Growing up I wasn't too much aware of racism. At Northeastern there were Black and White kids. I hung out with some White kids at school, but when I got back to 1091 Bridge Street there were nothing but Black kids. As a kid I wasn't aware of racism as I am now as an adult. It wasn't until I became an adult that I learned about demographic and racism and how that plays out."

Like so many other former East Siders, Kevin has seen the East Side change over the years and has mixed emotions about the changes.

"In my professional role with the City of Kalamazoo, I can say that as far as demographic and social economics the East Side hasn't changed that much since I grew up there. The East Side still pretty much has the second highest concentration of African Americans in Kalamazoo. There is still a lot of low-income people living on the East Side."



## **AILENE (LIND) BUCHTRUP**

“Even though some of the businesses still remain from my childhood, a lot of them are gone. The McDonald’s and Lee’s Famous Chicken are still there, but places like the Rib Cage, and the Fish Shanty are gone. Right there where the Walgreens is on the corner of Riverview and Gull there used to be a flower store there. I think it was called Parchment Flowers, and on the corner of Bridge and Riverview there used to be a house that was a bait and tackle shop.”

“Also there used to be a gas station there on Riverview where there is a little car dealership now. And right there where the old Thirteen and a Half use to be, a Metro PCS store is there now. Well that used to be a little video store. I remember my family had a Beta Cassette player because VHS was the rage at that time and we use to go to that little video store and rent movies.”

“I think though that there are people who want to see the East Side change for the better and there are people working on projects that are geared toward making that happen. I myself, in my professional role, am trying to help create more opportunities for people on all sides of the city including the East Side”.

“I’m forty-four years old and have not lived on the East Side for twenty years, but many of my fondest memories as a kid are all on the East Side.”

*Now fifty-eight years old, and no longer an East Side resident, Ailene (Lind) Buchtrup spent the better part of her youth growing up on the East Side.*

“From the time I was four years old until I was 16, we lived on the East Side on Fairbanks Court. I went to Roosevelt Elementary School and then on to Northeastern Junior High before going on to Kalamazoo Central. I liked growing up on the East Side; it was a neighborhood. I had lots of friends and the older people looked out for us. I had a diverse group of friends. We played with each other and went to each other’s houses. Fairbanks Court was kind of a happening place. We played in the streets, rode our bikes, played at the park and were pulled by a rope on our skate boards.”

“Fairbanks Street was predominantly White, but all us kids played together. Before the race riots in the late ‘60s I had a number of Black friends. But for a short time the race riots changed all that. We couldn’t be friends and that was sad because one of my best friends was Black and used to come over to my house all the time, and that just stopped. It was a sad time.”

“When busing started we had more White kids who came to Roosevelt from further up East Main Street. When about four or five buses pulled up to the school, I had never seen so many White kids. I had been in a more mixed classroom and that just felt normal to me.”

Ailene spoke of some of the businesses that used to be on the East Side and provided us with a list of close to 100 business that were doing business on the East Side.

“There were so many businesses on the East Side. I have a list for you, but I can just name a few. There was Doorn’s Department Store there on East Main. You could buy clothing, bedding, all kinds of stuff. Not only did the people on the East Side shop there, but people came from other parts of the city to shop there. It was a big department store. In that same area you had Triestram’s Drug Store and the Eastside Branch Library next to that. You had a barber shop, a soda fountain and the In Between Inn that had a big sign that said, “EAT”. Everyone knew that’s where you could get a big greasy hamburger.”

“We had two major grocery stores on East Main: Harding’s that’s still there, and Town and Country which is no longer there. Further up East Main you had the Eastwood Plaza that had a five and dime store, a bakery and other businesses in it. Not to mention the little Mom and Pop stores scattered about the neighborhoods. Oh, and at the bottom of the hill of East Main you had the Dairy Queen where we spent a lot of money on ice cream, when we had it, and you also had Hearty Hamburger. At one time East Main may have had more business on it than Gull Road.”

Like so many other East Siders who no longer live on the East Side, Ailene has seen the changes come to the neighborhood of her youth.

“A lot of things started to change when Meijer opened on Gull Road. A lot of the Mom and Pop businesses started closing because people started going to Meijer. They closed and demolished some of the schools and churches that were the hub of the community for a lot of activities. Also you saw a lot of the business and money going toward the North Side and they needed the money and they had been neglected for a long time.”

“But I do see a renewed focus on the East Side with projects like the Eastside Gateway and also with the media coverage that Second Wave Media has done stories on people and places on the East Side. I guess a plea to the people in charge is: it’s time to bring some money and business back to the East Side. But it’s also up to the East Side residents to take care of your property. Property value means a lot when business is looking to move into an area or neighborhood.”

Along with the good memories of growing up on the East Side, Ailene also has fond memories of some of the people who lived on the East Side.

“One of the people I remember the most was Wally Davises’ mother. I can’t recall her name right now; we all called her Mrs. Davis. She use to babysit for a lot of us kids. But Mrs. Davis was well connected to a lot of the churches and community leaders. Everybody just knew her. And of course our teachers and ministers. A lot of the teachers and ministers lived on the East Side. One of my favorite people in the neighborhood was Myron Cobbs. We called him “Mighty” because he was so strong. He was a good athlete and he sang in the choir. He was about three or four years older than me. His family lived on Fairbanks, I think. All the kids looked up to Myron. When he came around we would all stop whatever we were doing and flock to Myron.”

Ailene is quick to point out that once an East Sider, always an East Sider.

“There was a group of people who all went to Roosevelt as a Junior High School. They were a little older than me, they started the

Eastside School Reunion about 36 years ago. I got involved because I thought I might see some of my old friends. I got involved with the planning committee and suggested why not open it up to all the people who attended all the schools on the East Side. Once we did that we started getting more people attending and now we have anywhere from 150 to 280 people attending. We're East Siders and we are a very proud and cohesive group of people. I no longer live on the East Side but I will always be an East Sider."

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### MICHAEL SEALS

*Fifty-eight-year-old Michael Seals didn't grow up on the East Side but he has lived on the East Side and found a way to give back to the East Side neighborhood.*

"When I got out of the Navy my mother was living on the East Side. She had had a Habitat for Humanity house built right next door to the Eastside Neighborhood Association building. I wanted to be close to her, so I moved to the East Side and lived on Sherwood Street for seven years. This was in 1990 and I soon became involved with the Eastside Neighborhood Association as a board member. I wanted to give back to the community in some way and becoming a board member gave me that opportunity."

"It was there that I met people like Eva Ozier, who had been with the Association since its institution in 1976, and who was an active and committed member of the East Side community. I also met Doris

Jackson, another committed and involved member of the community, along with Maggie Bodly who served on the Association's board for well over twenty years before retiring. They were dedicated and committed to the community and that is where I got my dedication and commitment from."



"Off-and-on over the years I have served as the Association's Board President and Treasurer. I am still a board member. Whenever they call, I answer and always come back. Being on the board has provided me with the opportunity to be involved with programs and projects that has help improve the East Side community in a positive way."

"One of the first projects was to ensure that the Association's building got into the hands of the Association so as to give the people in the East Side community a sense of ownership. Give them something that they could feel responsible for. Another long ongoing project is the Building Blocks project. The Building Blocks project has resulted in a lot of improvement to homes and property throughout the neighborhoods, which in turn brought about a lot of beautification to the neighborhoods."



As a board member for the Eastside Neighborhood Association, Mike has seen a lot of changes take place on the East Side.

“Things have changed on the East Side. Not all good but not all bad. There was a massive exit of businesses and people in the ‘80s and it has taken a while to overcome that. We had a large renter population, but this is turning into more home ownership now and there was a lot of promises made to, and for, the East Side that never happened.”

“But there are projects coming to the East Side that will have a positive effect on the East Side. There are people showing interest in the East Side. We’re not seeing just commitments anymore, we’re seeing action; and action speaks louder than words.”

“We’re also seeing more people willing to get involved. We’re seeing more people willing to come sit on our board who in the past didn’t want to get involved and now they are getting involved. They can see we are trying to make a difference on the East Side and they want to be a part of that. I feel we are in a much better place now than we were some time back. The Eastside Neighborhood Association is here to do the work to make the East Side community better, and we’re working hard to do that.”

“One thing I always liked when I was living on the East Side was, there is a lot of culture on the East Side. You have a lot of people from different backgrounds. You have more of a mixed community, a good community.”

## MAGNOLIA BODLY

*Magnolia Bodly came to live on the East Side when she was 13 years old. Now at the age of eighty-three, she has no intentions of leaving the East Side.*

“I was 13 years old when we moved from down South to the East Side of Kalamazoo. We lived in the 1600 block of East Michigan. I had never seen snow or gone to a mixed school. I had always gone to a Black school, but I had no problem adjusting. Some of our neighbors were White. It was a close-knit neighborhood, people cared about each other. My brother and I had no problems at school. We had both Black and White friends.”

“There wasn’t too many girls in my neighborhood at the time I was growing up. This was back in 1949, so I played with my brother and his friends a lot. I liked that there were a lot of stores. A lot of corner grocery stores, and you could run in and get candy and pop. There were all kinds of businesses: gas stations, drug stores, laundromats, hardware store and Celestine - I can’t think of her last name right now, but she had a beauty shop and her brother owned the Pacific Inn Club. East Main used to be a vibrant street. I also enjoyed going to the library. Mrs. Gwen Tulk was the librarian. She’s still living. She is around 101 or 102 in age now.”

Having been such a long-time resident of the East Side, Magnolia has seen many changes take place to her beloved East Side.

“A lot of the businesses moved out and a lot of the businesses we have now are in the Kalamazoo Township. Sometimes people link the

Township and Kalamazoo City together but they are not the same and that is where a lot of the businesses are, in the Township. We have some businesses on Riverview who have taken an interest in the neighborhoods, but some of them don't. They're getting our money, but they do nothing for the East Side. They should be taking part in the East Side. They're here doing business. I know they don't live on the East Side, but they are doing business here. East Side people go to their business. They're taking our money, why can't they think, "What can I do to help the East Side neighborhoods?"

"I love the East Side. Been in the same house for 50 and a half years". When asked about some community leaders who grew up on the East Side or were long time residents, Magnolia mentioned people like James Palmore, Eric Cunningham, Eric Wimbley and Eva Ozier, just to name a few. One name so proudly mentioned was her son, The Honorable Bobby Hopewell, the former mayor of the city of Kalamazoo and a product of the East Side.

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### PATRESE GRIFFIN

*At several points throughout her thirty-eight years of living, Patrese Griffin has lived on the East Side.*

"My grandparents lived on the East Side. My grandfather, Sam Brooks, still lives on the East Side. My grandfather grew his business as a landlord on the East Side and he never moved from the East Side. He has stayed over here. I've lived on the East Side, for the most part,

throughout my childhood. I can remember Hotop; that was the first time I lived on the East Side. I was in elementary school. I grew up right around the corner from the Co-op and the neighborhood was like a village. Everyone knew each other and looked out for the kids, and we respected the older folks. I had a ball living on the East Side."



When asked about people who lived on the East Side who may have had an influence on her, Patrese had this to say:

"My grandparents had a big influence on my life, of course. That's how I got to the East Side. There were so many people I encountered growing up in the East Side that I still have a relationship with today. There wasn't just one person or a certain group of people. There were lots of people living on the East Side who had an impact on my life. I still maintain a relationship with many of them. And there are people that lived in the neighborhood that you never forget like Eastside Bo. Mention the name Eastside Bo to a certain age group and they automatically know who you're talking about. If you grew up on the East Side, you knew Eastside Bo. He was just one of those people in the neighborhood that everybody knew."

“Living on the East Side, I got to see Black business owners and Black homeowners. I saw a mixture of Black folks at different stages in their lives doing different positive things, and it made you feel like, hey, I can do that, and you didn’t have to leave your neighborhood to see this.”

Just like many other former East Side residents, Patrese has kept her eye on the changes that have taken place on the East Side since her childhood days.

“I guess one of the biggest changes is the disappearing of a lot of the businesses that used to be on the East Side. I can remember the Kentucky Fried Chicken place that use to be on Riverview. We used to go there and get those little double sandwiches they had. And then there was the Rib Cage that was there on Riverview and, of course, the Fish Shanty. Those are all gone now. And you had the Dairy Queen at the bottom of East Main and I think there was some kind of pet store right behind it. I can remember seeing some kind of bird in the window of the store. But all that is vacant now.”

“And further up East Main in the area by East Main Food and Beverage there were stores in that area, but that area is mostly vacant now. Business just seem to taper off and you didn’t see these businesses anymore. Once a lot of these businesses closed it became sort of like a ghost town around here.”

“Now we are starting to see thing on the upswing in the Riverview area, we still need a grocery store in that area. The East Side is a special place that sometimes gets overlooked. You have the municipalities, the township and the city. There is that division there. And of

course you have the residents who care little about that, they just want to have a good quality of life. But I’m thankful for the folks who have stayed on the East Side and are working to help the East Side come back to what it used to be.”

“The East Side is a wonderful place. It’s rich in history and many of the families who live on the East Side have lived here for a long time. People take pride in living on the East Side. For me, even today, I don’t live on the East Side, my heart is still here on the East Side”.

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**PATRICIA LYKE TOWNSEND**  
**SCOTT G. LYKE**

*Sister and brother, Patricia Lyke Townsend and Scott G. Lyke grew up on the East Side of Kalamazoo. Both no longer live on the East Side, but Patricia is quick to point out that she still sort of lives on the East Side.*

“I’m still kind of on the East Side because I live in the Mt. Olivet Street area. But we grew up on the East Side. I spent the first two and a half years of my life living at 2233 Lincoln Ave. That’s where my grandpa and uncle lived and my mother and father lived with them for a while until they bought their own home on the East Side.”

“I like living on the East Side. I like the fact that all kids played together and all the parents were concerned about us. Every day of the year we played outside. My mother was big on kids having outdoor time. Parents were big believers in kids getting fresh air, even in the winter



time. We would be outside for a little while on our sleds. We did kid stuff. We built forts and climbed trees. Just kids having fun.”

Scott says although he is not currently a resident of the East Side, he still has fond memories of growing up on the East Side.

“We all had our clique of kids. It was like every three or four blocks we had a group of kids, say up around Chrysler Street and East Main all the way down to the Dairy Queen. We had fun but I can remember we had to be in before the street lights came on. We could ride our bikes on the sidewalk; there wasn’t a problem between people walking and us riding our bikes. It was just a real relaxed time period.”

Patricia remembers it being a close-knit neighborhood that carried over into her adult life.

“When my father passed it was winter time, and there is still three older widow ladies living in our old neighborhood who knew him. They couldn’t get out for his funeral so we had the hearse go by their houses so they could pay their last respect. They never forgot him and we never forgot them. That’s how close-knit of a neighborhood we were, and still care for each other.”

“When I was about 10 or 11 years old, we had a mother and daughter who just happened to be Black move into our neighborhood. They were our first Black neighbors. There never was any problems in our neighborhood about them being Black. Henrietta was the mother’s name and she was like a second mother to me. She used to say, and I quote, ‘You know what would make America better for all of us is when I’m not your Black neighbor, I’m just your neighbor. We have

to get rid of all this Black, White, or whatever color and just be neighbors. Just be Americans.’”



“I always kept that in mind, and I always tell people I had a great neighbor who just happened to be Black.”

Scott felt the same way.

“Henrietta was a mother figure to me. I would go over to see her all the time. She was our neighbor, simple as that.”

While talking about the schools he went to, Scott also mentioned some of the businesses that used to be on the East Side.

I went to Wilson School, Barbour Hall, and St. Mary’s. I remember

some of the businesses that used to be on the East Side like Hoff's Grocery Store, Paul's Barber Shop, National Foods Store, Eastside Cleaners, Stone's Pharmacy and the Green Front Tavern."

Both Scott and Patricia agree that there have been many changes to the East Side over the years. Patricia says she feels optimistic.

"The East Side had beautiful neighborhoods. You could walk anywhere you wanted to and you felt safe letting your kids play outside. Now you see some of the same fear about letting your kids play outside that you see in some of the bigger cities."

Neighborhoods have to get a mix of people who want to fight for their streets. They have to care. It takes someone to care and it will spread. Everybody will care about their neighborhood. The East Side is a main artery to downtown for people coming off the highway. People should be able to come off of Sprinkle Road, come down East Main Street and stop off and have something to eat, or shop."

"I feel optimistic and I'm glad to see that there are some kind of planning stages going on for the East Side. There is some focus on the East Side"

Scott simply said:

"Bring the '60s back. Those were some good times."

## JOHN "JACK" CASEY

*The childhood of John "Jack" Casey's sixty-eight years of life was spent on the East Side of Kalamazoo, and he still speaks fondly of that time in his life.*

"My parents came to the East Side in 1954, I believe, and for a little while they lived on Horace Street before moving to Fairbanks, where we lived until around 1989. Living on the East Side and on Fairbanks was community. We were a close neighborhood. My mother taught school at St. Mary's from around 1955 to 1975, which was right around the corner on Charlotte Street. I attended St. Mary's so I didn't dare to do anything to embarrass her or our family."

"Everyone looked out for each other and their kids. I remember I got sick at school and was sent home. Well, my brother was supposed to take me home but when we got close to the house he decided to go somewhere else, and since we were close to home he asked if I could make it home from where we were, being as though we were that close. So I headed home but took a wrong turn even though I was so close and I ended up on another street around the corner. One of the ladies in the neighborhood, Mrs. Verity, saw me and knew I was lost and took me home."

"Another time when I was going to Mass - I was an Alter Boy and Mass was at six in the morning and I would have to leave a little early like maybe 5:45 to get there. Well, some dogs attacked me, so the next time I had to go for Mass, Mr. Zook, another gentlemen in the neighborhood, came with me and brought his baseball bat. That was how people in the neighborhood cared for each other and us kids."

“We kids used to do what kids do: play baseball, football, and basketball. The Parks Department also ran a summer program for us kids during the summer. They had a swimming pool up at Rockwell Park and on hot summer days we would go swimming.”

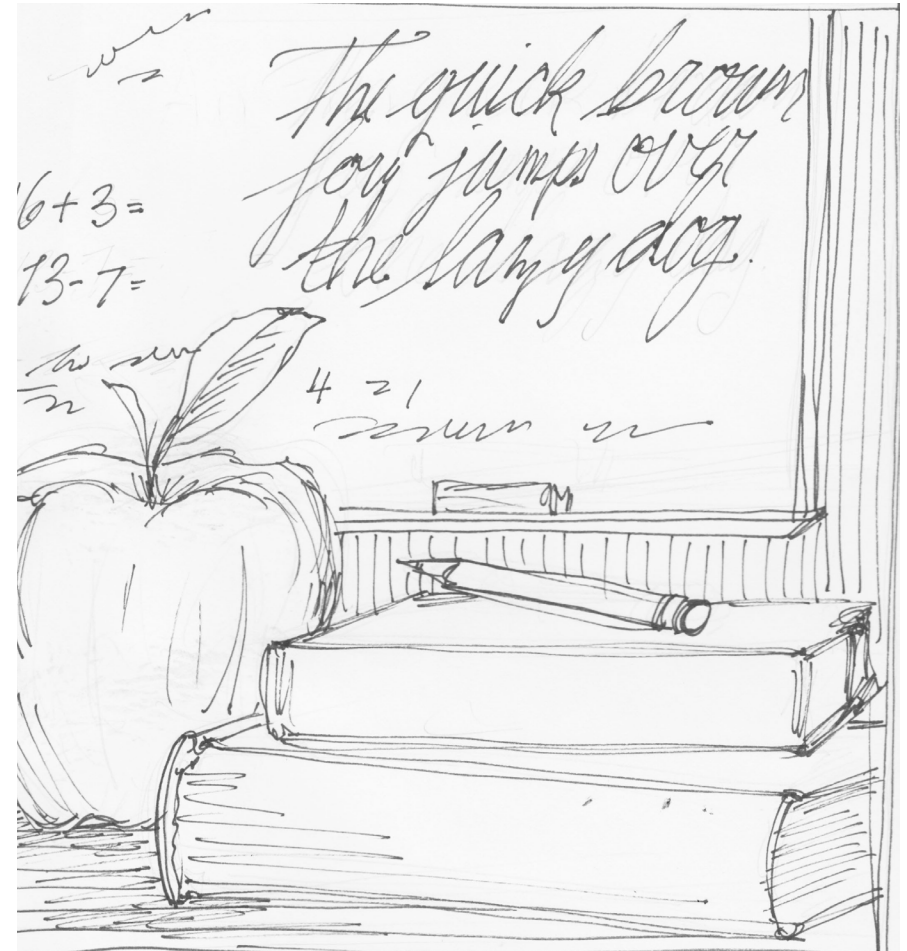
When we asked Jack about race relations, he had this to say:

“In the Fairbanks neighborhood we didn’t have any African Americans; it was all White, mostly Polish. It was a more mixed neighborhood down around Sherwood, Hotop, Bridge Street and that area. I had a paper route and use to deliver newspapers in that area and I can’t remember ever having any problems. Like I said earlier, I went to St. Mary Catholic School and we didn’t have any Black students there; pretty much all White, mostly Polish. About the only African American we came in contact with was a lady by the name of Grace Davis, who did some sewing for my mother. Plus, like all other kids, we stayed mostly in our neighborhood.”

Like so many former East Side residents, John has seen the change to the East Side and is not happy with what he has seen.

“When I was growing up the East Side was thriving with businesses. We had businesses like B & D Super Market, Burger Chef where I worked during the summer, Miller’s Market, shoe shops, gas stations, all kinds of businesses. One business that was unique to the East Side was Bob’s Auto Sales, owned by Bob Hallam. He sold Amiphicars for the few years they were on the market.”

“But then businesses started closing and things started changing. Along with the loss of so many business, there also seems to be a



loss of feeling safe. Growing up everyone felt safe in their neighborhoods. That seems not so much the case now.”

“However, there are signs of things changing for the better. I was glad to see them build the new Eastside Library Branch. I use to spend a lot of time in the old branch that was located next Triestran’s City Drug Store. It was there at that branch that I met Lonna Chapman, Barbara Allen, and Pat Feehan, three ladies who inspired me to seek higher education. They were truly an inspiration.”



When asked if he had any other East Side stories to share with us, Jack shared this:

“Well, I remember one of the biggest unified gathering we ever had was when we got together and marched on City Hall to protest the sludge pits and awful smell coming from them. We had about a couple of thousand people come together and march right down to City Hall. That was East Side unity.”

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**JOSEPHINE CARVER WIMBLEY, FRED CARVER JR,  
AND SYLVESTER CARVER**

*While seated around the kitchen table in a house on the East Side that their father - Mr. Fred Carver Sr. - built, Josephine and her brothers Fred and Sylvester shared some of their memories of growing up on the East Side and the pride they still have in their father's business he started on the East Side.*

**JOSEPHINE:** “My brothers are no longer residents of the East Side, but I still live on the East Side. I've lived on the East Side from the 8th grade on up. I attended Northeastern Junior High School. I looked at the East Side as a village. We knew everybody up and down East Michigan. I felt safe. We were living in an era where all you had to do was just lock your screen door. I felt safe and comfortable during that time.”

**FRED:** “I no longer live on the East Side, but most of my childhood was spent on the East Side right here in this area. We lived at 208

Phelps. I went to Roosevelt Elementary and Northeastern There was a lot of guys my age and we spent a lot of time playing football, basketball, baseball, anything you could name. It was fun because I had a lot of guys my age and our neighborhood was pretty much all Black.”

**JOSEPHINE:** “And when we were growing up there were all kind of fruit trees. Pears, apple, all kinds of fruits, cherries, grapes and we loved them.”

**SYLVESTER:** “Like my brother Fred, I no longer live on the East Side. We moved from the North Side to the East Side and I went to Roosevelt Elementary and Northeastern Jr. High. Like Josie said, I liked the village concept, we were all in the village. We all knew each other and everybody looked out for each other. The parents all were the same, looked out for all the kids and if you did something wrong you would get a whipping by one of the parents and then another whipping when you got home and all the while they were whipping you they were talking to you, telling you about everything you done wrong. You found out about everything you done with that one whipping.”

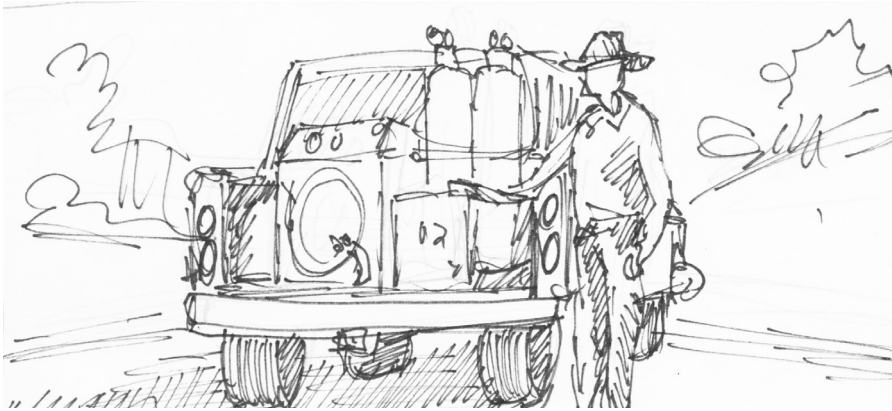
Before the Carver siblings could talk about any of the businesses they remembered being on the East Side, they had to first talk about their father's business.

**SYLVESTER:** “Our father owned Carver Welding, a welding business. He was one of the best welders that people were talking about. He could weld anything. He could weld the perfect frame. He could weld a frame that nobody else would touch.”

**FRED:** “He had a portable welding business. Had everything on the back of his truck. As far as I know there were only two Black men who

had a portable welding business in Kalamazoo. Mr. Mitchell was the other one. Mr. Mitchell was the first and my dad was the second.

**JOSEPHINE:** “My father bought a home next door here on Phelps, and he built this house that I now live in. He was a self-taught man with a lot of compassion for other people. He was about making money, but he was a very compassionate man.”



When asked about businesses that they remember on the East Side, all the siblings and Sylvester’s wife Herberta began to throw out names:

“There were several gas stations on the East Side. The Eastside Laundry. Eastmain Cleaners, which was Black owned. There may even have been a Black-owned gas station on Horace Street. Mitchell’s Welding Company on Riverview. There was a foundry, Triestram’s Drug Store, the Dairy Queen, just to name a few.”

When it comes to changes they have seen over the years to the East Side, the siblings had various opinions.

**SYLVESTER:** “Some things have changed for the better. A lot of the roads that used to be dirt are now paved. There has been some posi-

tive changes since my childhood.”

**FRED:** “I think those new homes that they have built here on the corner of Phelps and East Michigan has helped bring property value up, and that is a good thing.”

**JOSEPHINE:** “The neighborhood has changed a lot. A lot of the houses that were once owned by Blacks have been bought by Whites when they go up for sale. There are not as many Blacks in the neighborhood as there was when I was growing up. It’s a lot more of a mixed neighborhood. And a lot of the Black owned businesses are no longer in business. In fact a lot of the businesses period are no longer in business.”

**SYLVESTER:** “I think things are getting better on the East Side. With the new homes they are building, its growing.”

**FRED:** “With the new homes they are building, it will have people moving in and with new homes and people coming to the East Side, neighborhoods will prosper.”

**JOSEPHINE:** “My daughter just sold her house and is building a new house. With all the new homes being built, it will bring property values up and maybe bring more business to the East Side.”

Josephine, Fred, Sylvester, his wife Herberta, and some of the Carver’s grandchildren wanted to make sure that people be reminded of Mr. Carver’s welding business slogan which was, “Nothing too big. Nothing too small. We weld it all.”

