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Oral History Interview with Lowell P. Beveridge

Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.032

Interview conducted by Sady Sullivan on May 23rd, 2012 in Brooklyn, New York.

SADY SULLIVAN: So we're rolling, and I will slate the interview. Today is May 23, 2012.

This is Sady Sullivan from Brooklyn Historical Society. This interview is for the Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations Oral History Project, and if you would introduce yourself to the recorder.

PETE BEVERIDGE: My name is Pete Beveridge. My real name is Lowell Pierson Beveridge, Jr. Uh, I've lived in Brooklyn since 1954.

SADY SULLIVAN: And for the archives, what's your date of birth?

PETE BEVERIDGE: [Date redacted for privacy]

SADY SULLIVAN: And where were you born?

PETE BEVERIDGE: In Newton, Massachusetts, but I didn't stay there long. I moved to New York City before I was a year old.

SADY SULLIVAN: Great, so let's start with that. Tell me about your parents and your family growing up.

PETE BEVERIDGE: My -- (cough) my -- my father was a, uh, professor at -- uh, at first at, uh, Wellesley, and then at Columbia, and he was -- uh, he was a musician. My mother was trained as a school teacher, but she -- when she got married, as was the -- the case in those days, she had to stop teaching. And, uh, so I was born in Newton, and my parents -- my parents moved to New York in, uh, 19-- in the fall of 1930 where my father started work at, uh, the faculty at Columbia University. I grew up there, uh, and -- uh, but that was only -- that was -- part of my life was in New York City, but every summer, for three months, uh, during my father's vacation, we returned back to an island off the coast of Maine where my grandfather was born, and my father, uh, and his siblings were, and spent a great deal of time. There -- there was still fam-- family land there, so we had sort of a family compound on the island where my father, and his seven siblings, and their partners, and my 16 cousins spent most of the summer. So that was a very important part of my upbringing and my education. I went to, uh, private schools in New York City,

and to -- attended Horace Mann Elementary School, which was then part of, uh, an experimental school for Columbia's Teacher's College. I had a progressive education, never learned to spell. Uh, then I went to Horace Mann School for Boys up in Riverdale for six years, uh, which is, uh, one of the so-called Ivy League Prep Schools in New York City. And, uh, from there, I went to Harvard, uh, where I studied history. Um, while I was at Harvard, I was, uh, involved in, uh, in -- in, uh, student politics, to a large extent. That was the -- the time when, uh -- well, in 1948, Henry Wallace was running on the progressive ticket on -- for -- on the -- for president, and, uh, I was very much taken by his campaign and became -- I was involved in it. And, uh, then out of that, it became -- a progressive movement was organized, and I was the head of the Young Progressives at Harvard, uh, for several years, uh, and while there, I also joined the Communist Party, and I was active in the Marxist Study group, uh, John Reed Society. Uh, I became interested in uh -- in, uh, African history, uh, which -- which became my major, and I studied, uh, later at Columbia, where I got my MA, um, mainly because, uh, my -- uh, when -- when I started studying history, I realized that, uh, there were no courses in -- in African history, or African American history being given at -- at the college level. And this, uh, [00:05:00] peaked my interest, as well as my anger, and, uh, I decided to do something about it.

SADY SULLIVAN: And where do you think that -- where did that interest come from, or where did that awareness come from?

PETE BEVERIDGE: It's -- it's hard to say, because, uh, up until -- uh, up until I went to college, I had had virtually no contact with Africans, or with people of African descent, uh, except for, uh, in a service capacity. Um, when I went to Harvard, at that time, there were four African Americans in my class of 1,000, which was about the highest percentage they'd had until that time. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And what graduating class were you?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, 1952. Uh, one of them, Jim Harkless became a good friend of mine. He was part of our Tuesday night poker group, and he was President of the Glee Club, and -- of which I was a member. And we were also in agree-- in agreement politically, although he was not active as I was, and he never actually joined any of the political

groups. Uh, (cough) but we -- uh, so I -- I guess you could say he was my first, uh, social contact. Actually, the year I went to -- the year I went to college, uh, the year before -- the summer before, I was part of a, uh, Quaker study group in Philadelphia called, uh, Interns in Industry. And (cough) they got a group of -- of college level people together for the summer to learn more about, uh, industrial relations and unions, and the idea was we would all go out and get jobs in industry in Philadelphia, and then have seminars at night. And that was a period of depression, and very few of us actually got jobs, which was an education of itself, just trying to get work, uh, in Philadelphia. Uh, I ended up, uh, with a job for Heublein, sweeping the floors in the distillery. Uh, but that was all to say that, uh, I met there, uh, Ojeamiron from Africa, uh, who, uh, for that -- for that brief period, became very -- a close friend of mine, and he, I guess, peaked my interest in Africa. Uh, it's hard to -- it's hard to pinpoint why -- why my -- why my interest went to that direction, but that's...

SADY SULLIVAN: And what was the reaction when you were -- when you wanted to major in African history at Harvard, and what was the reaction of faculty and other students?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Um, there was -- uh, the -- the -- in my -- my classmates were not particularly interested one way or the other. Uh, they -- uh, the faculty, uh, didn't -- since they didn't have anyone who knew anything about the subject, uh, were, I think, amazingly accommodating. They allowed me to declare that as my major. I should correct that. My -- my major was -- was just a -- was just history. It was not designated, but I was allowed to write my thesis, and take -- and take courses in -- uh, the only -- the only courses available were in the anthropology department, and in the -- and courses in, uh, British, uh, Colonialism industry. I took that, and I did -- and I did an independent thesis on, uh, South Africa. When I got to Columbia, uh, where I went for my MA the following -- after -- the year after I graduated, (cough) [00:10:00], uh, I -- I -- I wanted specifically to -- to, uh, specialize in African history, and they allowed me to -- to designate that as my major, but I still did my -- I still had no -- uh, no one on the faculty who -- well, no one who was competent to examine me, which was nice. Uh, but I had, uh, courses, uh, again, in anthropology and -- uh, and, uh, British Colonialism. I was fortunate that year that there was a visiting professor (cough) from South Africa, uh, by

the name of Z. K. Matthews, who later became, uh, very active in the, uh, ANC, African National Congress in South Africa. Um, he ended up being indicted as one of the -- uh, in the treason act trials after he went home. And he was a -- a very impressive instructor. His field was anthropology. (cough) And, uh, I became quite close to him that year that he was here. Um, I was with Gene Weltfish, who was a, uh, anthropologist, and was under investigation by the, uh, House un -- un-American Activities Committee. (cough) The following year she was dismissed from Columbia faculty. Uh, and I did my, uh, master's dissertation on -- again, on South Africa on the, uh -- (cough) on the, uh, development of the -- of the Constitution around -- in, uh -- when the, uh, Boers took over the control of the government. And that -- it was that year that my -- that I met my wife. Um, I became -- when I was at Columbia, I became active in the, uh, Council on African Affairs, which was a -- uh, a group organized by, uh, Doctor W. E. B. Du Bois and, uh, Paul Robeson, and headed by Alphaeus Hunton, the -- he was the executive director. And I did, uh, research and writing, uh, for their newsletter. And, uh, it was -- sometime that fall, they had a -- a-- uh, a fundraiser for a film that they were, uh, producing called *Action in South Africa*. Um, the editor of the film was my future wife, Hort-- Hortense Tee, and she was the hostess for this fundraising party they gave, and, uh, I attended, uh, the party. And even though the great Paul Robeson was at that party, I didn't -- I had eyes only for Hortense Tee.

SADY SULLIVAN: Can you describe the party, what the space was like, what were people doing?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Hortense was -- what we called Tee was living, uh, on the top floor of a four -- four -- four -- four-story walkup on 125th Street on the east side with two women room -- roommates. Uh, it was, uh, a typical Harlem, uh, tenement. Uh, I couldn't really tell much about her from that evening, since it was [00:15:00] full of people. Uh, I really can't -- I don't -- I don't remember who else was there, but -- uh, except that there was a - - that we showed -- we showed the film, and Paul was full of praise for the film, and anxious to get it -- it's got it's ways of getting it out to be shown. Uh, but the rest of the party was like any other party, a lot of drinking, and dancing, and a lot of talk. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And was it a mixed crowd?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, yes, but not very mixed. I was -- um, at that time, I had become -- as I said, become active in the council, and also in African student's group, and I began -- used to be one of the very few white faces at social gatherings, uh, and which was the case then. The -- the -- the supporters of the council, and the people who did the hard work in the office was an integrated group, one of the few places in the city where that happened at that time.

SADY SULLIVAN: Can you talk more about that? I'm interested to get into your relationship and marriage, but can you talk more about how you -- what was your process of political awareness, awareness of addressing privilege and racial justice? Tell me about your growth in that time period.

PETE BEVERIDGE: At -- um, at the time, when I looked -- when I graduated from Harvard, uh, my social circle was, uh, almost entirely white, with the exception of Jim Harkless, uh, as I said before. Um, when I went to -- when I went to Columbia the following year, uh, it -- uh, still, most of my classmates and most of my social activity at the beginning was predominantly white. There were a -- there were a few more African Americans at -- at Columbia than there were at Harvard, more in the graduate school, um, but, uh, not very many in my class. Uh, I recall, uh, only two or three, (cough), uh, so it was mainly through, uh, my interest in African history that I became involved in the African -- African American community. I became -- uh, as I said, a very -- very active African Student, uh, Association at Columbia. Uh, the -- the -- there may have been, at that time, no more than 12 or 15 African students, but, uh, that was a lot more than there were at Harvard. And so my end -- uh, my work with the Council on African Affairs brought me in touch with, uh, Alphaeus Hunton, who became sort of like my substitute -- he and his wife Dorothy became sort of my substitute parents while I was at Columbia, uh, and um, then um, other -- um, other people who were my -- my contemporaries who were working with the council, most notice -- most notably, uh, John Henrik Clarke, who went -- later became, uh, Director of African Studies at, uh, Hunter College [00:20:00] And, uh, a senior moment here. (laugh) (inaudible) So, uh, it was -- uh, my -- my -- so my introduction to the, uh, shall we say, Afro-American community was sort of through a side door, through the African -- through the African community. Interesting that my --

my -- my wife -- my -- uh, Hortense was -- was, uh, African in the sense that, uh, President Obama is. Her father was a native Liberian and married her mother, (cough) who was, uh, from -- from -- an African American whose family was from Baltimore. So she had been in there as a, um, woman had been, uh, part of the -- the African community (cough) in Harlem, and had met, uh, Kwame Nkrumah and other people of that time and stature. And she had also become -- uh, she -- she had been raised -- uh, talking about Tee now. She -- her father was not around very much while she was growing up, uh, and so she -- her mother was virtually a s -- a single parent, uh, for much of the time, and worked as a um, live-in, uh, domestic, and so Tee also was -- lived in the white community, uh, as -- as a -- uh, as a young child, so her early experience was un -- unusual. And then she -- she went to an integrated school. She ended up at -- uh, she went to Erasmus, and then to -- to George Washington Irving High School. Uh, the way they integrated schools in those days was that, uh, she -- her mother found a friend who would lie and say that Tee had lived with her in -- in the white -- in the white district, so she got to go to the -- these better high schools. And then she went -- of course, she had gone two -- two years to, uh, Hunter College, uh, so unlike many African American women of her age, she had -- had become, how shall I say, used to -- to operate -- to moving in integrated circles, which at that time was pretty much, uh, limited to, uh, leftwing circles, political leftwing circles, the -- the Communist Party and the Progressive Party, and various [inaudible] were the places where you could find, uh, inte-- integrated social situations.

SADY SULLIVAN: And so had she -- when did her mother leave Baltimore to come to New York? Had that happened before Tee was born?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Yes. Yes, she was born in New York, but lived in -- uh, her mother worked in -- uh, in Brooklyn, and also in -- um, across the -- across the river in -- uh, I'm trying to think -- in, uh, Newark.

SADY SULLIVAN: So in your book, you describe -- and so I'm wondering if we can talk about this now -- how you and Tee were growing up both in Manhattan, but...

PETE BEVERIDGE: We grew up within a mile of each other, but in very different, uh, circumstances. Uh, when I met her, her mother was living on 136th Street, [00:25:00],

uh, and that's where she had spent most of her teenage years. And then she -- and so -- and I grew up on Morningside Drive in Morningside Heights, near Columbia, so I could look out my window, and look down on Harlem, and see -- uh, see it, but I never went there. That was just not the place to go, uh, which come to think of it, made me interested in going there, and I did. When I was a teenager, on occasions, bravely wandered down there, but never making any contact, and never making any, uh, friends. Uh, I -- I was just sort of a teenager adventurer. I did it on occasions. And interestingly, when the -- by the time I was at Columbia, the FBI had become interested in my activities. One of the -- when I finally got my FBI file, one of the entries was something to the effect of he is known to make frequent trips to Harlem, uh, to associate with Negro people. This was considered something worth noting in my FBI file. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: So going back to the party where you met Tee, tell me how you guys actually met.

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, we spent a lot of time talking that evening, and, uh, it was -- had, uh, enough positive feedback to get up enough courage to call her the next day and ask her if we could have dinner together, and she accepted. And, uh, that led to more and more dates, and, uh, eventually, I moved into that apartment on 125th Street about four months later.

SADY SULLIVAN: And in that beginning of your relationship, did you guys talk about the racial difference?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, we were -- shared a common interest in Africa and African history, and in the -- in the leftwing politics, and progressive party at that time, uh, so, uh -- and -- as did most of our friends, so that was the -- uh, mainly what we talked about, and what -- and -- and our activities. Uh, that was, uh -- that was the year that the -- uh, the Rosenbergs were executed in the spring of '54, I believe, '54 or '53. I'm not sure. (cough) That was something that affected us very deeply, uh, both emotionally, and -- and politically. Uh, the feeling of people in the Communist Party and in the Progressive Party at that time was that, uh, if -- if they exec -- if the Rosenbergs could be executed, any of us could be, so it was like, uh, drawing, uh, a line. Uh, we spent, uh, many weekends traveling down to Washington to picket the White House. Uh, in fact that's -- I

guess that's the way -- that was the main, uh, component of our courtship, uh, driving, or going down on the bus, or driving in somebody's car down there, sleeping on floors, getting up. It was a 24-hour vigil we kept around the White House, four hours on, four hours off.

SADY SULLIVAN: And was that an integrated group?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Yeah, very much so, yes.

SADY SULLIVAN: So tell me more about when you -- how the decision came to move in together, for you to move in there.

PETE BEVERIDGE: [00:30:00] Uh, I was a -- uh, I was a poor struggling student at that point. Uh, I had a scholarship, but I had to earn enough money for -- I was -- I was earning my, uh, keep and, uh, my -- my room by working as a -- a housemaid for one of the faculty members, uh, who had a maid's room that I occupied. And -- uh, and I was living on -- mainly on oatmeal, and rice and beans to keep my -- my other expenses down. Tee was in the film school at that time, and working very intermittently at freelance work, so she didn't have much money. She was two months behind in rent. And, uh, before we had become a couple, I, uh, was working on my, uh, dissertation, and, uh, she had volunteered to -- uh, to type it for me, and so I had rashly said that I would pay her for typing it, but I didn't have any money to pay her. Uh, so I had, uh, two or three hundred dollars in savings bonds that my grandmother had given me, which was the last capital in my -- in the world that I had. So I cashed them in, paid off her rent. And, uh, at that -- that was just at the end of the school year, so my -- my gig for the -- where I was working for my room came to an end, so I moved in with her -- so it was -- it was more an economic decision than one of romance, but it -- it did very neatly coincide it. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And what did your friends and family think about that meeting?

PETE BEVERIDGE: By that time, I had -- my -- my -- I was not very much in communication with my family, except for my -- my, uh, parents and my younger brother -- my younger brother. My younger brother was all for it. Uh, my parents, uh, well, that's a long story. They had -- they had a lot of trouble with it, not -- not so much personally, but because of the complications -- because of the reactions of the rest of the family, you know. Uh, my friends were -- uh, there -- there was no -- there was no problem with it. In the social

group that -- that we moved in, there was no problem with that, although there were not that many interracial couples that we knew.

SADY SULLIVAN: And what kind of experience did you have just in the general public as an interracial couple at that time?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, I -- I think it had -- it -- it meant that we, uh, were quite careful where we went. Uh, it dictated our -- well, we naturally were socializing with -- with fre-- with compatible friends where -- where it wasn't any problem, uh, but, uh, I think just by -- without really talking about it, we just -- we mutually agreed that there were certain places we didn't go. And, uh -- and, uh, [00:35:00] when we were in public, uh, we, uh, just re -- refrained from showing affection, or even holding hands because of the -- the, uh, reaction we'd often got.

SADY SULLIVAN: So what kind of places would you refrain from going as a couple?

PETE BEVERIDGE: M -- mainly, uh, most of the social -- socializing with -- in, uh, each other's homes, or apartments, or, uh, meetings, or rallies, or parties.

SADY SULLIVAN: So were there -- in New York at that time, were a lot of the other places that you might go segregated?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, yeah, di-- different restaurants, or nightclubs and so on. Uh, there were many places where we would not have been welcomed, but we didn't have the money to go to those places anyway, so it was never -- the issue didn't come up.

SADY SULLIVAN: And was there -- in becoming a romantic partner with someone with different racial experiences than you, what was that learning like?

PETE BEVERIDGE: It didn't seem to make any difference. (laugh) There were -- at that -- at that time, uh, although it was common among our friends for couples to live together before they got married, it was not really a very common thing in the society as a whole, uh, so -- uh, and we felt that -- uh, that it was important for us to get married, uh, as soon as possible, uh, because -- it was of (inaudible) political reason that, uh, we wanted to show them that, uh, this was not just a -- a, uh, in -- in -- infatuation, uh, brought about -- uh, as a result of our -- our participating in integrated activities. Uh, we wanted to show that it was, uh, a permanent and positive thing. (cough) So we didn't -- in fact, we didn't get married for a year, but we did -- but it was because we -- we didn't have any money,

and we didn't have any financial resources. We didn't have a place -- real place to live, or to start a family. Uh, but we did that. We got married as soon as we -- as we could.

SADY SULLIVAN: And tell me about your family's -- your family and Tee's family's response to your decision to get married.

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, Tee didn't have much of a family. She had her mother, and she had a very younger -- uh, much younger brother. Uh, she had some cousins, a distant cousin in New York, and, uh, aunts in Philadelphia and in -- in Baltimore who were not really part of the equation at that point. Uh, when we -- when we decided to get married, the first thing -- (cough) the first person we told was Tee's mother, uh, and I had not met her until then, uh, so we had a -- a formal date for me -- for me to go and meet Tee's mother. Uh, and Tee had warned me that, uh, it wouldn't be a -- uh, a very warm welcome, and it wasn't. Uh, the first thing that [00:40:00] her mother said to me when I walked in the door was, "There are a lot of colored boys that Tee could marry. I don't know why she'd think of you." And that was pretty much the, uh, tone of our relationship for the rest of -- the rest of our life together, which was very intimate. In fact, she lived with us most of -- most of our married life, but we never developed a very close relationship. Um, T -- Tee's more distant relatives were much more welcoming. Uh, we got along fine. And they -- they visited us on occasions, and we had good relationships. Um, I -- I wanted to -- uh, to introduce Tee to my life and to my family, and I wanted to bring her up to North Haven, uh, the year before we got married to introduce her to the family. (cough) My parents, uh, said -- were very definite that that was not the thing for me to do. Uh, they were, I think, scared -- scared to tell the-- to tell the rest of the family about it, and rightfully so, because when they finally did, there was a tremendous uproar. And this is a -- a large family. My father had seven siblings, and, uh, they were the main -- the main, uh, objectors. Uh, (inaudible) -- I -- I received, uh, letters from them, all of them, which I kept, uh, the only letters I've ever received from any of them, (laugh) and they all -- they had a very articulate re -- reasons why I shouldn't go through with this marriage.

SADY SULLIVAN: And what were some of their reasons?

PETE BEVERIDGE: (laugh) Uh, that this was a -- uh, that I was infatuated, and that I would outgrow this, or that I was trying to -- just trying to make a political point, and it was not,

uh, a true, uh, romantic relationship. Uh, they all made a point that they were not personally prejudiced, but the problem was what other people would think about it. Uh, and um, I think it was the -- the -- uh, the vehemence of their response, uh, probably because, uh, of the nature of the family's, uh, situation in Maine where they all -- we all, including my father and I as -- as potential heir, owned a -- were common owners of this piece of property. So it was not just, uh, a family relationship. It was a business relationship that we were talking about, and, uh, so that made it extra complicated, I think, because there was not nowhere near that kind of rej-- reaction from my mother's family. My mother was one of three daughters -- three daughters, and her parents were still alive. Uh, no, pardon me. Her mother had recently died, but her father was still alive. And, uh, he wrote me a semisweet -- semisweet letter saying I'm an old man, and I don't know very much about these things, uh, but you're my grandson, and here's a gift for your marriage, uh, even though I don't approve of it. (laugh) Some of my cousins who are of my generation were [00:45:00] supportive of -- of me, but they -- they were teenagers at the time, and, uh, didn't have much weight in the family.

SADY SULLIVAN: And you write that they were also concerned about children.

PETE BEVERIDGE: That was one of the themes of the letters they wrote to me, um, think of the children, uh, what they -- that they will -- what an unhappy life they face, not just because they would be, uh, black, but because they would be biracial and not belong to either race, uh, and what a hor-- what a horrible thing this was. Um, I think this was -- not -- not -- I don't think this was based on any personal knowledge that they ever met about the situation, but there was, at that time, a -- uh, a novel and a movie called "Pinky", which was about a "Tragic Mulatto", and how she was rejected by both races, and it just became sort of a popular um, idea. And -- and I -- I - ironically, it turned out that Tee and I were an infertile couple, uh, so that became a moot point. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And did other people -- did friends and your political community talk about this, about people's disagreement with interracial marriage, and especially the sort of argument about the kids?

PETE BEVERIDGE: No, I wasn't aware of that in the circle that we were moving in. By that time, by the time we got married and moved out to Brooklyn, (inaudible), uh, a few inter

-- other interracial couples, uh, and, uh, within a few years, the -- uh, the Supreme Court had come down with the Brown decision about integrating public schools, and the -- and the whole uproar in, uh, New York and Brooklyn about the neighborhood schools was just -- was just buzzing. Integrated schools was very much a part of the -- uh, our political activity in the late '50s and early '60s.

SADY SULLIVAN: So tell me about that. Tell me about your wedding and move to Brooklyn.

PETE BEVERIDGE: (laugh) Uh, the, uh, year -- uh, shortly after I - I got my MA at Columbia in the spring of '53, I was drafted into the Army during the Korean War (cough) in September -- in, uh, September or October of that fall, um, which made it -- uh, we had not gotten married before -- before that, because we were still waiting for that, uh, shoe to drop. We knew it was probably going to drop, and, uh, we wanted to wait and see. That was one of the reasons we postponed getting married -- getting married. Uh, so I went to, uh, basic training, and, uh, that's -- but that's another story that, uh, I-- uh, when -- when I was drafted, one of the things that they asked, uh, that we had to do was to sign a loyalty oath, a very extensive oath, not just an oath -- but, uh -- not just the [00:50:00] Pledge of Allegiance to the country, but asking have you ever been a member of one of about 50 different organizations, and did, you know, anyone else, if not, did, you know, anyone who had been a member of these organizations, and what were their names, uh, so it was an informer clause, which I refused to sign, along with a few other people in my -- in my company. (cough) So the result of that was that, uh, the -- the army didn't know what to do with us, because they couldn't kick us out. If the other people found out that all you had to do is not sign the oath -- the oath to get out of the Army, uh, there'd be a lot of that going on, so they tried to make life as difficult for us as is possible. But they didn't want to send us overseas either, because we were presumably loyalty risks, security risks. So the good news was that I didn't get sent overseas, uh, and I spent a few months, uh, collecting garbage and stoking fires at Fort Dix. Uh, and that was when it had become apparent that I wasn't going to be shipped overseas. Um, it made sense that we had to get married, especially since, uh, if I were married, I'd be getting an extra \$40 a month from the -- from the Army. And, uh, so once again, there was a financial incentive. (laugh). So, uh, in January of '54, uh, I'd been through basic training. I got a

two-weeks leave, and we got married, uh, with the blessings of my parents, but not the rest of the family. We got married in, uh, St. Phillip's Church, which is a big Episcopal Church in, uh, Harlem. Uh, the rector at that time was Father Shelton Hale Bishop, who was, uh, a very prominent member of the Harlem community. Uh, we got -- the reason we -- he married us was that he was -- uh, my father and my mother had gotten to know him. My father was -- had, uh, by that time, become, uh, a -- an ordained minister, himself, and was teaching at the Virginia Theological Seminary, where Shelton Bishop, uh, was a frequent visitor. So, uh, this was a contribution my father made to our marriage is to introduce Shelton, who became very close to us. He was a wonderful counselor, and, uh, we became very fond of him. He retired a few years after we got married.

SADY SULLIVAN: Was there -- did he have any resistance, or did the church have any resistance?

PETE BEVERIDGE: No, he was all for it. He was -- in fact, he was the (inaudible) counsel for my parents through all of this, urging them to, uh, accept my marriage, and, uh, counseling them on how to deal with the rest of the family. There was a funny incident at the church just before we got married. Tee was late, as usual. We went -- we went into his office for the last minute paperwork that had to be done. He was filling out the forms. And he turned to me and said, "And where were you baptized?" and I told him that I had never been baptized. Uh, when I was born, my father was not a member of the church, and he and my mother had, wisely enough, decided they'd leave it up to me whether or not I should ever join the church, so they decided not -- [00:55:00] not to do that. But Shelton was, uh, rather taken back by my answer, and he explained that according to his - - vows, he was not to marry anyone that wasn't baptized. But then he thought about it for a minute and said, "The hell with it. Let's go ahead with it anyway." (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And was Tee -- did Tee grow up with a religious education?

PETE BEVERIDGE: She was -- her mother was a Baptist. Uh, she grew up in the Baptist church and was, in fact a -- taught Sunday school in the Baptist church, uh, came to hate it, mainly because of the restrictions on, uh, dancing, and singing, and having a good -- having a good time. Uh, by the time I met her, she was pretty much -- we never called

ourselves atheists, uh, but we never had a -- we never joined a church. We were never part of any formal religion.

SADY SULLIVAN: And so who was there at your wedding ceremony?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Mostly friends from -- uh, from the -- the Africa -- from my -- my -- my, uh, college friends -- uh, my -- my friends at Columbia, and people that Tee had worked with -- was working with in the film industry, some African students, and people from the Council on African Affairs. Uh, maybe about 100 people were there.

SADY SULLIVAN: And who from both of your families?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Tee's mother was there, and her, uh, cousin -- one of her cousins from Baltimore came out to be her bridesmaid. My parents and my brother were there, and that was all that was from my family. My brother's eight years younger than I was -- I am, so he was about 14-years-old at the time. Uh, and (cough) I, as his older brother, could do no wrong, so he was all for it.

SADY SULLIVAN: And so tell me about coming to Brooklyn.

PETE BEVERIDGE: After we got married, we were still living in Tee's apartment on 125th Street, uh, and um, it was not a very satisfactory arrangement. We had -- uh, we shared it with another couple who we got along with very well. They were both nurses. Um and -- uh, but it was crowded, and like most housing in that area, it was um, rundown, and poorly kept, poor security. Uh, I had actually -- we had actually been in -- invaded at one time by somebody who was -- I'm not sure what he had in mind. But anyway, he cut me up, uh, when I was chasing him out of the house. Uh, so -- and -- and we'd been broken into several times, so we decided to move. When -- uh, that was when I was -- I was still in the, uh, Army at that time, uh, so it was up to -- it was left on Tee to go looking for a place. And, uh, at that time, uh, there was no fair housing law, so it was not -- uh, there really were no places available for -- for us to move to that were [inaudible] to. We were looking for an area where we would be accepted socially as a couple. [01:00:00] And we didn't want to be a test case in a housing situation at that point in our lives. It would be too draining. In fact, there was -- there was no test case to be made, since there was no fair housing law. It was per -- perfectly legal to discriminate at that time. But we had a friend who had -- uh, had a friend who lived down in Brooklyn. Uh, she was a, uh,

hairdresser, and made -- made enough money to -- to, uh, make a down payment on a -- a brownstone out on Eastern Parkway. (cough) Eastern Parkway was -- had been a all-Jewish community, and at that point, it was b -- it was, as they say, changing. Uh, a West Indian pop -- population was moving in. And our friend was a West Indian, and she had just bought that brownstone, so she was looking for a reliable tenant, and we went out there and decided that was a good place to live. Uh, Tee had lived in Brooklyn when she was a -- as a teenager for a year or two, but I'd never been to Brooklyn, except to play football at Poly Prep. And, uh, so it was unknown territory, but it was a good move, I think, when we, uh, moved into the top floor of this brownstone, uh, paid \$125 a month. That was in 1954, which is -- you get a lot more space for a lot more...

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PETE BEVERIDGE: -- but less money than we would have, even if we'd have been able to buy -- to rent something in Harlem.

SADY SULLIVAN: And who were your neighbors in that apartment?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, there -- there was -- that was a rapidly changing situation at that point. There was a doctor and his wife who had lived there for many years who were progressives, lived down the block, and they welcomed us, and we spent (cough) quite a bit of time at their house. They moved out shortly thereafter. Their ch -- their children were grown, and they had decided that that was -- that was not a pla -- in spite of their political leanings and ideas, they would not want to be part of that changing situation.

SADY SULLIVAN: Were they part of the Jewish community that had been there?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Yes, which was sad, but they're disappearing, yeah. And, uh, I did work around the house on the outside for our landlady while I was there. And on several occasions, I'd be working outside, and the um, real estate agent would come by and try to engage me in conversation, wanted to know if I was ready to sell yet, (cough) obviously engaging in a practice which later became illegal, but, uh, at that time, there was no law against it.

SADY SULLIVAN: Can you explain that more?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Yeah. When I -- , uh, in the area like that, it was, uh -- when the real estate dealer decided that an area was ready to be -- to change from white to black, they would move in -- deliberately move in a black couple, and then go around and, uh, try to get the white neighbors to sell out at scare prices, and then buy the property, and then sell it to black people moving in at a handsome profit. It happened all -- many place in Brooklyn. After we lived there for a few years, we saved up enough money to put a down payment down on our own house on Sterling Place, uh, between Nostrand and New York Avenues, and we spent many hours renovating that ourselves, using the skills that I learned in Maine. And, uh, that was our first -- our first, uh, investment. By that time, it had become, uh, an all-black -- that area became an all-black community. One of our neighbors across the way, Mr. Owens, who worked for the sanitation department, told me that when he was a child 15 or 20 years before that, uh, his parents had worked as, uh, servants to the white people who lived in that community, and they could not walk into that community without a pass, a written pass saying that they were employed there, uh, very similar to the -- what -- what -- to South Africa, where the Africans had to carry a pass wherever they went. So just in a few -- in a few years, that community had changed completely. When we moved to Sterling Place, by that time, it was virtually an all-black community at that time that I moved in. Uh, by that time, I was sort of used to being the only white face in the community. [00:05:00] I think there was a certain amount of security for -- for me, because people as -- assumed that I was either a cop, or some representation of authority, and left me alone. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And when people did know that you and Tee were an interracial couple, what was the community response in your neighborhood?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Never was aware of any problem in that respect in that community at that time. Um, there may have -- may have been behind my back, but it never -- it never came to the fore. We -- we became -- one of the organizations that we became very active in was the Association for the Study of Negro Life in History, which had been organized by Carter G. Woodson, the national organization. And there were a lot of chapters. There were quite a few local chapters, and we had weekly -- bi -- biweekly meetings, and put on, uh, educational, uh, affairs monthly. And, uh, every year, we had a

big, uh, celebration of Negro History Week. I was the Education Director, and Tee had served as the President for some time. Um, one day, Tee had gone to a meeting which I had not been -- for some reason, I had not been able to attend, and she came home and said, "Pete, you won't -- you'll never believe this, but we -- we got talking about you at the meeting, and no one believed that you were white. They all thought you were, uh, just a light-skinned black -- black person," which I took as a compliment at that point. And maybe other people assumed the same thing.

SADY SULLIVAN: Tell me more about the social organizing and political stuff that you and Tee were involved in in Brooklyn at that time.

PETE BEVERIDGE: We were -- as I said, we were still active in the Council of African Affairs, uh, but that uh. pretty much died out after we'd been there for a few years. We -- we joined the Council -- the, uh, Association For the Study of Negro Life in History. That was, uh, an important part of our life at that time. They, uh -- in addition to (cough) educational meetings, we organized, uh, black history courses -- classes for young people in, uh -- local churches, particularly at, uh, Reverend Galamison's church, the Siloam Baptist Church. He was the leader of the, uh, parent's strike of the, uh, school system at that time.

SADY SULLIVAN: Is this East New York/Brownsville, or before?

PETE BEVERIDGE: That was before that, yeah. And, uh, what else? We organized the block party, the Block -- uh, Block Association in, uh, Sterling Place, uh, which was involved with, uh, relations with the police department and the sanitation department, and, uh, dealing with drug, uh, use issues in the -- in the community. (cough) And there was -- there was also -- that was the -- that there was organized a um -- how shall we say -- a challenge to the regular Democratic Party that -- in that area, and, uh, they elected um, Thomas R. Jones [00:10:00] to the -- uh, to the Assembly, and he later became a judge. Uh, that's where Shirley Chisholm got her start when she ran for the House of Representatives. And Major Owens got his start there, too. He went on to be -- served in Congress for 30 years or so. (laugh) So we were in on the beginning of, uh, that in that neighborhood. I'm trying to think. There weren't many white people involved in that, but -- but it was integrated.

SADY SULLIVAN: I'm interested in those kinds of conversations, or what was your way to be in groups that were, you know, primarily African ancestry led? Was there a conversation about your involvement, or did you feel -- how did you participate?

PETE BEVERIDGE: I don't think the issue ever came up. I was just accepted as one of the group. I never remember anything. Now, I don't -- I don't want to give the impression that there were never any problems, uh, and it doesn't take more than one or two incidents to, uh, make a very lasting effect. Uh, for -- for me as a white person in a black community was -- it was very different from -- from being a black person in an all-white community, uh, in the sense that, uh, although I never did, I -- I -- I always knew that I had a safe place where I could retreat to, uh, where a black person in this neighbor -- in this society doesn't have that. Um, shortly after we moved in at Eastern Parkway, there was this one incident where, uh, Tee had taken some -- a pair of shoes to be repaired at -- to the local cobbler, and when they were ready, she asked me to go by and pick them up. I went in and I gave him the ticket, and, uh, he looked. He spent a long time behind the counter, looking for the shoes, and, uh, he kept shaking his head. But I could -- they were -- the shoes were right up on a -- on a shelf there, and I could see her shoes. I recognized them. I pointed them out to him, and he said no, uh, those couldn't -- those are not -- those are not the right ones, because they belong to a nigger bitch. Um, and as I say, it only takes -- it doesn't take many incidents like that to make one always scared that something's going to come up. It's not that I was -- and the problem was not that I was offended. Um, I knew people felt that way, but I just -- what should I do now? I was -- I was tired. It was after work. I didn't feel like a confrontation, but I had to do something. I had to say something.

SADY SULLIVAN: What did you say?

PETE BEVERIDGE: I said no, that's my wife. (laugh) And he immediately fell all over himself with apologies, but, uh, the damage had been done.

SADY SULLIVAN: And what was his background, ethnic background? [00:15:00]

PETE BEVERIDGE: Italian. (inaudible) he'd been there for a long time, I guess.

SADY SULLIVAN: Were there ways in which -- because you had -- you know, with studying African history, and post-Colonialism, and political activities, were there things that you

learned from your intimate relationship about racial dynamics and racial justice that you hadn't learned in those other avenues?

PETE BEVERIDGE: You mean a personal experience, as opposed to intellectual?

SADY SULLIVAN: Mm hmm.

PETE BEVERIDGE: I think I was in a -- being -- being part of a -- of an interracial/biracial family, and later on, being a father of a black child -- my son decided he was black, he was not biracial -- uh, made me, uh, sensitive in a way that people not -- white people not in that kind of relationship would never be, or couldn't be.

SADY SULLIVAN: Can you tell me more about that?

PETE BEVERIDGE: I will explain that. (laugh) I had to -- I had to learn to think like a black person. Um, I didn't have to learn. I just -- I did learn. I mean it just became a natural thing, not just -- not only um in -- in social situations that I -- that I was involved, political situations I was involved in, but just in reading the paper, or learning about what's going on elsewhere in the country, I think of it from the point of an old black person.

SADY SULLIVAN: And how is that different?

PETE BEVERIDGE: (laugh) You want -- (laugh) you want specific examples. It's hard to explain. Keep going.

SADY SULLIVAN: OK. So tell me -- well, we can -- is there more in terms of like chronology of political things, or else I'm interested in talking about your son.

PETE BEVERIDGE: Um, as far as the -- the political involvement is concerned, it became -- uh, over time, as we got older and we became -- became more part of the community, our activities became more and more local, rather than national or internationally. They -- uh, by -- by -- in '64, we moved over to, uh, Clinton Hill [00:20:00] and bought another house there, and there was a -- there was a more integrated neighborhood. It was nearby Pratt Institute. A lot of -- a lot of graduates had never moved away, so it was a somewhat artistic, lower class area. And, uh, there was an organization called the Pratt Area Community Council, which is still very active in developing the community and working on the housing issues. And Tee became the President of that, and later became um, the Executive Secretary of the -- of the Housing Institute, um, so that was her area of activity.

And, uh, I actually became less and less involved politically, and more and more involved in my professional activities, um, except for one interesting excursion. I -- uh, I was asked by a black, uh, fraternity to become a member. They decided they wanted to integrate, so I was induct -- uh, inducted into the graduate branch of the, uh, Phi Beta Sigma, and um, for several years, I attended meetings, and we, uh, enjoyed social activities together. Uh, that never -- that never moved very far, never -- no -- I was the only white person they were ever able to recruit.

SADY SULLIVAN: Was that connected to Columbia?

PETE BEVERIDGE: No, it was community, uh, branch in [inaudible]. It was not associated with any particular, uh, college. Ed Towns was a member of that, and he got his launch into politics from -- partly from that group. (laugh) And, uh, one other group we were involved in was the, uh, the Weeksville Society, uh, which is they (inaudible) formed around the discovery of three, uh, 19th Century homes out in the Weeksville section of Brooklyn that had been part of, uh, a free black community before the Civil War. And it was -- uh, an organization was formed by these -- these houses, and over many, many years, they raised enough money to restore them, and now they're a very active, uh, organization. They are now -- the houses are available for educational purposes and so on. (cough)

SADY SULLIVAN: And what was your involvement?

PETE BEVERIDGE: With that?

SADY SULLIVAN: Yeah.

PETE BEVERIDGE: Mainly just, uh, helping them raise money, and holding fundraisers for them. And, uh, I did some research for them. And, uh, when -- uh, when Tee died, uh, there, uh, we had accumulated a very large library of black history, and I donated it to them. That's part of their library now. (cough) They're just in the process of building a big new, uh, building there for -- to contain the library of research facilities.

SADY SULLIVAN: And so were you -- at that time, was it Joan Maynard who was...

PETE BEVERIDGE: Right, yes.

SADY SULLIVAN: Can you tell me -- I never -- I didn't get to meet her, but I would have loved to. Can you tell me about her?

PETE BEVERIDGE: (laugh) Yeah, she was a wonderful person. She -- uh, she was an artist.

Uh, that's how I got to know her initially. [00:25:00] And um, I'm not really sure of the connection, but, uh, she was (inaudible). She just gave her life to this organization and became -- it was through her that it came to happen. (laugh) Uh, well actually, that (inaudible) was another part of my life. In the early 1960's, I became involved in a -- uh, in publishing *Liberator Magazine*, uh, which was -- and I -- and I was the editor of that for four or five years, from '61 to '65. Um, and that was a monthly mag -- magazine of opinion with, uh, an orientation towards what later became known as, uh, Black Nationalism. At the -- that started out as being mainly involved in presenting news about Africa, and became more -- got more involved in, uh, local national politics. Uh, I brought that up now because Joan was one of the earlier contributors to that as an artist. She did the drawings and the cartoons for us.

SADY SULLIVAN: What was your -- in terms of organizations and their political thought kind of shifting in different times, what was your experience when there was more ideas about Black Nationalism, and kind of separatism, black power, and maybe not so interested in integration? What was your experience as a white person involved with racial justice in this?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Well um, I guess the most, uh, direct involvement had to do with my, uh, role of the *Liberator* where, once again, I was about the only -- one of very few white faces involved there. Um, and it never became an issue, uh, for the first four or five years, until about '64 or so. It was a very interesting group of write -- writers we had there. None of -- none of them got paid, but they were -- and none of them were making a living from there writing, but they were, uh, people in various walks of life who were just interested in -- uh, in hav -- having a place to express their -- their views in the -- in a publication like *Liberator*. Um, and we didn't have a -- a editorial policy, or ideological position. It was just a group of people who basically agreed on the attitude and approach to national intervention. I don't hardly remember any editorial meetings where there was a disagreement, although there was not -- what we published was not -- not necessarily -- uh, we didn't have a party line, so to speak, but around '64 or '65, [00:30:00] um, with the -- uh, the growth and the power of black nationalists in the -- in

the black community, um, the -- uh, there were pressures on the -- on the *Liberator* to, uh, take a more national (inaudible). And one of the aspects of it -- of it at that time was the strain of anti-Semitism in the black community. Dan Watts, who was the ma -- minist-- was the, uh, publisher of the *Liberator* published a -- uh, an editorial which was, to my opinion, uh, anti-Semitic. And, uh, I had already -- be -- before he published this, I had already decided that I had had -- it was too much of a personal strain on me to keep up the work of the *Liberator*. I decided to resign. When it was -- when it was published, a number of other, uh, public figures who were associated with the magazine resigned, also, most notably, uh, Ossie Davis and, uh, Jimmy Baldwin. (cough) The public -- the magazine went on for another four or five years after that, uh, after I left. And I -- but I -- I wouldn't say that I left because I was forced out, or because of -- over -- over that issue. It was mainly because I was -- (laugh) I was burned out. But, uh, the two things coincided, so I guess I wouldn't have lasted much longer there.

SADY SULLIVAN: What was -- was the anti-Semitism -- was that essay -- was it about Palestine and Israel, or was it more local?

PETE BEVERIDGE: No, it was about the relationship of the -- of the black community to the Jewish, uh, emergence in (inaudible). Um, in our -- in our community, there was never -- I never, uh, felt any problem during that time. Um, I was more of a black nationalist than Tee was, interestingly. She had no use -- she had no use for them. (laugh) When my son was a teenager, he became -- he went through a Rastafarian stage where he had dreadlocks down to his waist, and was, uh, very much into, uh, Rastafarian as -- as a district, uh, religion. And, uh, that was a uh -- by that time, he -- he was on the verge of leaving home, anyway, but, uh, he and his mother never saw eye-to-eye on that.

SADY SULLIVAN: What was her opinion about that?

PETE BEVERIDGE: She was -- had been brought up with -- in the leftwing tradition of black and white together, and we shall overcome. And that was -- or, uh, she felt much stronger about that than I did for -- interestingly enough. I thought that the black nationalist was -- had -- had a role to play, that the time had come, that we had to go through -- at least through this, uh, to build up a positive attitude towards, uh, what it

meant to be black. That was why I -- why I created both, the (inaudible) and the black history, uh, movement, and the teaching kids at school. [00:35:00]

SADY SULLIVAN: And when -- so thinking about schools and about community control in schools, you'd said I didn't know about that earlier strike. Can you tell me about that and other experiences you've had in that realm in terms of African history education?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Let's see. When was that? I brought my...

SADY SULLIVAN: OK.

PETE BEVERIDGE: My -- uh, my chronology is a little -- I don't remember. I don't remember the dates the -- uh, but my involvement that I remember most vividly is that this is some time after the -- the Supreme Court ruled against segregated schools, and the city of New York was under -- was trying to come up with a -- electively coming up with a desegregation program. Uh, this was at the same time that there was an effort -- aggressive effort to, uh, have community control over the schools. The two were Galamison, at that time, was head of the parents' organization that was working for desegregated schools, and, uh, the -- uh, so -- so one of the ways to do that was to redraw the -- the boundaries for the school districts so that they would be across racial lines. The problem was that the housing was segregated, of course. So the city -- the city in effect said OK, here are the statistics. You come up with a, uh, zoning that would affect, uh, greater integration of the schools. And, uh, that's where I came in. I spent many, many hours with spreadsheets, trying to figure out (laugh) how to make a proposal that would work.

SADY SULLIVAN: In terms of in zoning chunks?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Re -- redrawing the zones for the schools here. There was a woman by the name of Annie Stein who was a very, uh, close associate of, uh, Reverend Galamison at that time, uh, also a leftwing per -- with a long history of leftwing activity, and she and I spent a lot of time on that project. This is not a political -- is not politically ac -- ac -- action. This was working behind the scenes, trying to come up with proposals.

SADY SULLIVAN: To give to the city, or to the Department of Ed?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Yeah, to give to both. It -- it turned out that that was, uh, a hopeless task, actually.

SADY SULLIVAN: Why?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Because of the housing -- housing segregation.

SADY SULLIVAN: It was the -- it was so segregated that it was hard to make integrated zones?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Yeah.

SADY SULLIVAN: Oh, that's interesting. And relatedly, you mentioned Shirley Chisholm's election, but that was -- I mean from what I know, that was the redistricting of the Congressional Districts. Did you -- were you part of that happening?

PETE BEVERIDGE: [00:40:00] Uh, yes and no. I wasn't intimately involved in the actual redrawing of the lines. I was involved in the -- with the -- uh, (cough) with the political group that -- that -- that backed her for her run, and also later, when she ran. Pardon me. She first ran for -- Congress was not her first -- I've forgotten now.

SADY SULLIVAN: Yeah, like Assembly or something? Yeah.

PETE BEVERIDGE: Yeah. When she ran for Congress, we were already moved to, uh, Crown Heights -- no, to, uh, Clinton Hill, and we had -- one of the first fundraisers for that campaign was held in our house.

SADY SULLIVAN: Oh, wow, for her Congressional campaign?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Yeah.

SADY SULLIVAN: Did you also support her presidential campaign?

PETE BEVERIDGE: We were not part of election polls (inaudible). We were always into the local politics at that time.

SADY SULLIVAN: And what kind of things were the local -- like what was the Pratt Area Community Council doing?

PETE BEVERIDGE: They all -- they had the -- uh, they organized the -- the -- the housing office, which helped tenants deal with landlords, and landlords -- and landlords deal with tenants. Um, they were involved in, uh, several housing pro -- uh, projects. Uh, it was a -- uh, de -- developing affordable housing in the -- in the community. They worked on, uh, getting a public library in that neighborhood, and they um, worked on several health fairs for them. That's -- that's all that comes to mind right now. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And was your -- both with family, friends, community, political work, was your acceptance as an interracial couple changing over time?

PETE BEVERIDGE: In that particular neighborhood, uh, we were accepted from the beginning, and it never really changed. Uh, in our professional work -- uh, work, Tee was in the film industry, and, uh, that was a pretty, uh, progressive, liberal group of people, and the -- uh, the union she belonged to, I -- I'd say, so we had a lot of friends there and did, uh, socialize with them a lot. But (cough) my professional associations were different. I was in interior design, and a lot of my clients were on Wall Street. They were insurance brokerage houses for all the -- all these firms, um, so, uh, [00:45:00] I didn't make a point of talking about my personal life with them. They wouldn't understand very well. Sometimes, when it came up when we were talking, the question came up where I lived. I would get this funny look. People would say is that a safe neighborhood, which is code for, uh, is that a white -- white neighborhood or not. Uh, so I just -- uh, I don't say -- I wouldn't say I was passing, but I just didn't bring -- bring the subject up if it wasn't necessary. My colleagues at work all knew Tee, and there was no problem there in the -- in the office.

SADY SULLIVAN: And how did you get into doing interior design?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, I had always thought I was going to be a history professor, (cough) but when I graduated, uh, that was the height of the McCarthy period, and in order to get a job as a teacher, or in a university, one had to sign one of those letter deals, which I was not, uh, in the position either legally, or -- or ideologically to do, uh, so it didn't -- uh, it looked as though the teaching profession was -- was closed to me at that point. So when I got out of the army, I just decided well, I've always liked construction and design, and, uh, I know a lot about it, and maybe that's the area to go into. So I took advantage of the G.I. Bill of Rights, and went to a three-year course at, uh, the Institute of Design and Construction here in Brooklyn, and they taught me how to draft and design. And that's how I got into the business.

SADY SULLIVAN: And did -- and this is sort of an aside, but interesting. Did you -- so was that knowledge helpful in terms of where you could choose to buy your homes and the homes that you bought?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, well yes. Uh, I bought -- bought and renovated three houses, one in, uh, Crown Heights, one at 401 Clinton Avenue, and one in, uh, Clifton Place. And each

of those was a major undertaking, which I did most of the -- uh, the construction work myself (inaudible).

SADY SULLIVAN: And did that -- was that work -- did you feel like now they're -- I don't know if it was called like the brownstoner movement at the time, but like did you feel part of like a movement in terms of that kind of renovation work?

PETE BEVERIDGE: (laugh) A lot of our neighbors had, of course, done the same thing. It was the only way that I could afford to be a homeowner, uh, at that time. And, uh, I don't think I was aware that I was part of the brownstone movement at that time. I was just reading a book about the brown -- about the brownstone movement, and it's interesting to read a history book, and find something that you were a part of, because (inaudible).
(laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: Is it Suleman Usman's book that you're reading??

PETE BEVERIDGE: Yeah, yeah.

SADY SULLIVAN: Yeah, and so does that resonate with your experiences, or not?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Not particularly. (laugh) I felt he was too much of a sociologist. I didn't -
- I was looking for more, I guess, stories. It was too general. I didn't recognize myself.

SADY SULLIVAN: I'm going to change this card out in a second, but can we talk about adopting your son, and how that came to be? OK, so let me stop this.

END OF AUDIO FILE

SADY SULLIVAN: It's like the second part of the interview, so this is Part 2 of our interview on May 23, 2012. And so where would you -- in the next about 35 minutes, what do you think we should talk about? I was interested in hearing about your son, and adopting your son and that. What would do you think we should talk about in this time?

PETE BEVERIDGE: That would be an interesting topic. There's some things -- uh, there are other people that I know that might be interested in this -- in being part of this, so if you're interested, we can talk about that. But I don't know if you want to do that on this or...

SADY SULLIVAN: Well, yeah. Actually, what's down, I think -- I mean it's up to you either way, or we can talk afterwards.

PETE BEVERIDGE: Maybe it would be better afterwards. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: Perfect. OK, so let's talk about your son.

PETE BEVERIDGE: Um, as I said earlier, it turned out that Tee I were an infertile couple when we decided to, uh, start raising a family. It took us a few years to accept that fact. Uh, reproductive technology was not as advanced back then as it is now, so the ma-- major -- the -- about the only option was, uh, adoption. Uh, it's interesting -- it was interesting that at that time in New York City, uh, adoptions were, uh, based pretty much on -- on the child's religion and race. Uh, there was a feeling that there should be, uh, as close a match as possible, but the thinking behind that is a little -- I think a little bit disturbing. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: What was the thinking behind it?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Well, the -- at that time, it was felt that, uh, there was -- there was a stigma attached to adoption, uh, so the thought was that if the child looked enough like the parents, the issue would never come up, and the child would go through life never -- sometimes, the child never knew that they were adopted. Um, the stigma at -- was mainly because, uh, it was thought that the only children that were adopted were, uh, illegitimate children, and that they were find -- feeling at that time that, uh, there might even be a um, genetic component of the -- the ill-- illegitimacy, that if your mother was that kind of woman, then maybe you were, too. And so it was mis-- misguided that you were trying to protect the child. As well as the parents, well, be that as it may. Uh, so the city ended up with, uh, a number of black Jewish children, uh, who were "unadoptable," so although many perspective adoptive parents had a prospect of long waits for -- for getting a child, uh, we were welcomed with open arms by the adoption agency as the answer to this conundrum, (laugh) so we were immediately offered a black Jewish child, and that's what you did. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And so it's interesting, because you didn't have -- neither you nor Tee had any Jewish heritage.

PETE BEVERIDGE: Right. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: But the black/white was enough to...

PETE BEVERIDGE: Trumped. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: Yeah.

PETE BEVERIDGE: This is one of the first cases where the -- where the city allowed [00:05:00] that rule to be broken, uh, just because of the special circumstances of the child. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And did you and Tee have any feelings about adoption, given what you were just describing of like the...

PETE BEVERIDGE: Any negative feelings?

SADY SULLIVAN: Yeah, yeah.

PETE BEVERIDGE: No, except that it was a disappointment, of course, that we could never produce a child. (laugh) Other than that, it was a very p -- positive experience, except for, of course, that there were some problems in bringing -- bringing Jesse up. Uh, and that had nothing to with adoption or race. It had to do with the fact that the -- the drug culture was very much alive in that community at that time, and he became a victim for part of it.

SADY SULLIVAN: And so what years in terms of -- what years...

PETE BEVERIDGE: That was -- he was born in '63, and, uh, so it was around '75 or '76. When he was barely a teenager, he got involved with drugs. (cough)

SADY SULLIVAN: And was that when -- when did you start seeing more drugs in the neighborhoods in Brooklyn?

PETE BEVERIDGE: I wasn't -- I wasn't aware of it until it -- until Jesse himself got involved. That may be partly just denial, uh, but I didn't -- I didn't move in those circles. By the time he -- by the -- by the late -- by the mid'70's, quite a few his contemporaries were involved at that time. He finally -- uh, I finally got him enrolled at Day Top, which is a therapeutic community, still active in Brooklyn. They had four or five upstate residential treatment centers. Jesse never graduated, but he did, uh, eventually get -- get clean, which was a blessing. A lot of his contemporaries didn't make it.

SADY SULLIVAN: Meaning they passed away?

PETE BEVERIDGE: They ended -- ended up in jail or dead, yeah. So that was an exciting adventure, going through that with him.

SADY SULLIVAN: And so prior to that, his early childhood, tell me about maybe some of the things that you thought about in terms of his being biracial, or now he identifies as black. But talk about his cultural.

PETE BEVERIDGE: I don't -- yes, I don't think that was -- that we were very much -- uh, I don't think that was a critical element in my -- in our bringing him up, or in his growing up, uh, except um, we -- we made the decision to send him to public -- to private school, uh, and he went to Woodward School, which was at Clinton Hill at the time. And then when he -- and then he went to Bishop Laughlin for a few years, before he got kicked out. Uh, so his class -- Woodward was fairly well integrated at that time, of course, and so was Laughlin's -- so he was not -- he probably had role [00:10:00] models, both black and white to relate to. Uh, now where he did have -- I mean he did have, uh, problems, like any child growing up, any kid had establishing his own relationship and who he was going to relate to. So one time, I remember he was coming home, my son, uh, beaten up, and I asked him what had happened. And he said, "Well, uh, us black kids had to have a fight with the white kids at school." By that time, he had decided that he was black. Another time, he came home with -- looking sort of raggedy and I asked him what had happened. And he said, "Well, uh, some black kids were making comments about my honky father," and he had confronted them on that. So it was not all -- and as I said before, it only takes one or two incidents like that. It doesn't mean that it's something he's constantly being exposed to, but it came to a head and he had to deal with it, and he did. By the time he was in tenth grade, he had been so much into the drug scene that he flunked out, and he flunked -- he repeated and he flunked out again, so they kicked him out. It was about a year-and-a-half later that he finally got clean and he went -- made a -- made a concerted effort and, uh, passed his -- his GED. And so he has a high school diploma, see, but he never went any further in school, (cough) though he did go take courses at, uh, a technical -- a good technical institute.

SADY SULLIVAN: And what was the drug scene?

PETE BEVERIDGE: What -- what -- what was he involved in?

SADY SULLIVAN: Yeah.

PETE BEVERIDGE: Most anything he could buy on the street. It was mostly street drugs and pot. He became active in the -- the legalized pot campaign, following in his father's footsteps of political activity. (laugh) The -- uh, the happy ending of the story is he is -- uh, was at -- it was just when he -- he started making a living for himself, that was just the time when computers were becoming very -- first being used -- used in the business of it, and he got a hold of one and taught himself programming, and continued with that business until now. He's very successful in part of the business community out in Phoenix. And, uh, I was talking to him just the other day. And he said, "Well, one thing about my GED, it didn't cost me any money, and I'm not still paying off my student loans the way everyone else I know is." (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: How did he choose to be out in Phoenix?

PETE BEVERIDGE: After he got married, uh, they moved out to Park Slope. Um, and he and his wife were both making good money, but the -- the housing market was such that it was they were putting all their money into -- into paying rent. They couldn't save enough money to buy a house. And um, they -- they -- he took a vacation with us up to Maine, and, uh, while they were up there, they were looking around to see how -- how much house people had up there for [00:15:00] -- that -- that was affordable. And they said well, why do we have to put up with that? (laugh) So he put his resume out on the Internet, and Phoenix is the one that came through, and they decided to move out there. (inaudible) housing. They -- they own a very nice, large house out there. They paid about half of what his stepbrothers and sisters pay here in Brooklyn for a very small apartment. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And what's his wife's background ethnicity?

PETE BEVERIDGE: She's -- uh, actually, she also comes from a biracial/interracial background, um, although her mother and father both identify as Negroes, or black. Young people don't use that term anymore. Uh, she grew up in, uh, Chicago, but -- but they moved to, uh, New York after she grew up. And that's where they met, when she was living up in Harlem.

SADY SULLIVAN: I realize when we were talking about your family in the beginning, I didn't -- tell me again about your parents' ethnicity background, family history.

PETE BEVERIDGE: My -- uh, my father's family is long-time residents of Maine, and his father was born and brought up in North Haven in Penobscot Bay, which is a community of fisher -- fishermen and farmers. (cough) His mother came from Tenants Harbor, which is a, uh, seafaring town on the coast not -- not far from there. Her parents -- her father was a sea captain. My mother's mother, uh, an Irish Protestant, grew up in southern Ireland. And my father was an Englishman from the Isle of Wight who was a professional gardener. And, uh, he met -- uh, he met my grandmother when they were both working at an estate in Ireland. She was a domestic worker there. They immigrated in 1901, when my mother was a year old, so my mother was born in Ireland, but raised here, grew up in Newburyport Massachusetts, where my grandfather was a caretaker on a large estate there.

SADY SULLIVAN: And would there have been -- either with your grandparents or with your parents, would there have been reactions to Irish marriage, Irish mixed marriage? I know that there was Protestant, not Catholic, but...

PETE BEVERIDGE: My -- my -- well, yes, the fact that I -- now I was a Protestant was the saving grace, (inaudible). I -- I asked my mother sometime about that, but I never -- I never got her to talk about it. Um, I think that -- uh, I think that the Protestant trumped the Irish in -- in -- in the sense that I grew up with a very strong, uh, anti-Catholic attitude growing up, obviously, but I guess I got it from both, from my mother's and father's family.

SADY SULLIVAN: And did you have a -- did you grow up with a particular Protestant church?

PETE BEVERIDGE: No. I -- I -- I literally grew up in the Episcopal Church, but not as a member. My father was -- his - his main duty [00:20:00] at -- at Columbia was the director of the choir at the University chapel, which was an Episcopal chapel. And I spent a lot of my early childhood there -- there, (laugh) listening to rehearsals and wandering around the (inaudible). And he joined the -- he, in fact, joined the Episcopal Church, uh, at some -- at some time when I was a teenager, but I was not really brought up with any particular religion.

SADY SULLIVAN: And was your family back -- your family that would come to Maine, would they be Episcopalian also?

PETE BEVERIDGE: No, no, they were Baptist. My grandfather got -- got kicked out of the Baptist Church for some reason, but I'm not -- still not sure, and he became a Universalist. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: And so what is your connection to Maine today?

PETE BEVERIDGE: Uh, for about -- as I said, I went -- I spent three months of the year out there every year until I was about 18. And then after I got married, I was not particularly, uh, welcome there. And, uh, there was a period of about 20 years when I never went back. Uh, as my, uh, father's siblings grew older and died off, uh, they -- my cousins in my generation were more accepting of me, and eventually, I went back there with Tee. And it was just (inaudible) several times, and I, uh, began -- began to redevelop my family ties there. (cough) Then over the past 20 years or so, I've gone back and spent um a week or two there every summer with members of the family. Right now, the -- uh, I suppose was eventually, at some point, the -- the -- the, uh, truth of -- of the -- of that particular colony, which had been involved is -- is threatened, because the people can't agree on what to do with it, and the tax burdens are becoming -- are becoming too much, and they get sold off. But -- but Jesse developed a relationship with his generation of the family, and, uh, so he has a family now. Whatever happens to the land, at least they -- uh, his generation is accepting. (laugh)

SADY SULLIVAN: Well, maybe we should end there for now, and then think about having a second interview to go into other things, and to sort of digest what we've talked about today. Does that sound...

PETE BEVERIDGE: OK.

SADY SULLIVAN: OK.

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