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Karl Anderson interview, 04 March 2003

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Subject: Karl Anderson
Interviewer: Ellen Anderson
Cleveland, Ohio
4 March 2003

Ellen Anderson: Please state your name and spell it for me.

Karl Anderson: My name is Karl Anderson. K-a-r-l A-n-d-e-r-s-o-n.

EA: How are you connected to Tremont?

KA: Well, when I started to go to junior high, I went to Lincoln High school. It was a six year school. I worked for the department of recreation and worked at Lincoln Park, which is part of Tremont, probably for about six, seven years. Involved in the swimming pool, working there during summer seasons. Of course, was not able to do it while going to school or college.

EA: So are your parents or relatives in Tremont?

KA: I did not live in the area. My parents were not originally from there, the Tremont area. Also to add I belonged to a club at the Merrick House which is a Tremont area facility. There were many clubs of young people that were formed there at the Merrick House, more of a community house. We had a sports group or sports players, we had a club.

EA: What were your first memories of Tremont?

KA: Well, my first impression as a kid was it was a rough area, a rough area to live and work in and it, the kids that came from that area were kind of tough kids and known for fighting and getting into trouble and yet after I worked there for a while I got to know those who were in the area and it worked out really fine. There were times where I witnessed lets say fights or squabbles, whatever you want to call it but, overall it was pretty good. Let's say, how would you put it, a mixed crowd of kids, they weren't the rich kids the were just the good moderate, everyday kids, down to the kids that lived in the projects.

EA: Now were there a lot of ethnic groups?

KA: Yes, there were. Now going back to Lincoln High School our principal would take a survey of people living in the area and our high school always had the most countries represented. A lot of European countries were from the Tremont area and- -

EA: Do you remember which ones, can you name them?

KA: Oh, a lot of Polish kids, Ukrainian kids, Hungarian, when these DP's come from these places they settled in this area to. They settled there because other people from there were there to. They were people of the same nationality so people who wanted to come over. Those were tough times. At the time we did not have many Blacks that lived in Tremont, just a few, not many Spanish speaking people it was more of a European ethnic background of kids.

EA: Can you tell me the year that you are talking about, around?

KA: OK, I am talking about I would say 1954 to about 1961.

EA: OK, would you say this was a good place to live, work or go to school or –

KA: It was, it was, it was a good place. Some kids had it tougher then others, it was an old neighborhood, there was a project area that was run by the government.

EA: Was it government housing?

KA: Yes, government housing, government project.

EA: OK.

KA: Yes, when I speak of the government project, that is housing.

EA: Right.

KA: But many of the homes were old, old homes I couldn't even say when they were built. Probably back in the early 1900's.

EA: OK, you would think WWI probably?

KA: Yes, yes. And the majority of the kids went to a large elementary school called Tremont school, which I don't know if it is still there or not. It may still be there but, it housed a great deal of kids, grades one through sixth.

EA: Do you think it was the only elementary school and that is why it was so big?

KA: To my knowledge it was, it covered the entire area there and that is a large area. And of course there were Catholic schools in the area to as well. So, as well as religion is concerned, there was a diversity of religion you know.

EA: Alright, so now you were a teenager going to Lincoln High School. What were your memories about teenagers having fun in Tremont? Like in High School, what did they do?

KA: That's a good question. You know I really don't know how to answer that.

Karl Anderson

EA: OK, do you remember them going to socials of any kind? Proms?

KA: Oh yes, yes. There were two centers or community centers. One was the Merrick House and the other was the Bath House where they had basketball courts in the back of it and the Bath House which I would say was for the older people that had houses that were so old that they did not have places to clean up so therefore they had a male and female area that they could go take a shower, showers. They called it the Bath House but I never saw a bathtub in there. I know there were showers.

EA: Did you ever go in there?

KA: Yes, I did. I, working at the swimming pool I had to, had a chance to go across from the swimming pool. Now of course that is closed and the city has sold it off. But, that was quite a gathering place and the Merrick was quite a gathering place.

EA: Now the Merrick was, they had what, basketball games or - -

KA: They had a basketball court and had club facilities.

EA: Could they have a party there?

KA: Not too much, not that I know of anyway.

EA: Do you remember parties going on in the area at all?

KA: Oh boy, not too much, no.

EA: OK, do you remember, if not parties, did teenagers listen to any type of music that they liked a lot? Bands?

KA: No, I really couldn't. No, I don't, no. I can't recall anything of that kind. See outside of the summertime I was not involved.

EA: What about movies, so you remember going to the movies?

KA: There were several movie houses but, I never attended them.

EA: Do you remember popular movies? Did you go to any movies.

KA: (laughs) No, not much. My parents were very religious and did not permit me to go to any movies.

EA: OK< so you would say the popular places were the ones you just named?

Karl Anderson

KA: Yes, and the Tremont Bowl Diamonds which is down in the lower part of the, near Clark Bridge.

EA: now what is that?

KA: Baseball diamond.

EA: Oh, baseball diamond. Yes, was baseball popular then?

KA: Yes, it was yeah.

EA: Would you say baseball was more popular than basketball.

KA: Oh, I think all sports were popular. Not much soccer or at least I didn't see it but, baseball, basketball, football were the major ones.

EA: Did Lincoln have teams at this time?

KA: Oh yes, not good teams but, they had teams.

EA: Teams in all of these sports.

KA: Yes.

EA: do you remember the name of the teams, the mascot?

KA: Well, we were called the Lincoln Presidents and we really didn't have a mascot.
(Laughter)

EA: Did you participate on any of the teams?

KA: Yes, I played three sports. I was probably a six letter winner.

EA: What sports did you play?

KA: I played basketball, baseball and football. I was fortunate enough to get a scholarship grant/aid to go to college. So that is why I ended up as I did a teacher in public schools.

EA: OK. How did you end up in Tremont? You didn't live there. How did you end up in their schools? How did that happen?

Karl Anderson

KA: That is a good question. That, Tremont was a different city ward we went by wards. I was in ward nine and Tremont was in ward seven. And I was a good friend of the councilman and the councilman was able to recommend me for a job within the ward and usually the councilman within the ward - - But, we didn't have many places in my ward where we could work so that is where I was able to work in the Tremont area.

EA: And go to school?

KA: Yes, well Lincoln was then in my district.

EA: DID you have siblings, a sister or brother that did this to, or other relatives?

KA: No, I didn't. I had a brother but, he was eleven years older than me, so he was out of the picture by the time I became a teenager.

EA: OK, Now did you date when you were in high school? Was there dating then?

KA: I myself did not. I'll be honest I did not date that much. I didn't have any girlfriends.

EA: Did other teenagers date?

KA: Yes, they did, yes.

EA: What age would you say that kind of activity took place?

KA: Oh, I would say ninth grade yeah. Not as early as it does now. (laughter)

EA: Yeah, now was there any interracial dating or did most just stick to their own kind?

KA: Yes, we did not have many Blacks at Lincoln High School like I said before and not many Blacks in the area and it was a predominately ninety-eight percent white school and majority ethnic.

EA: Would the different ethnic teens date each other?

KA: Yes, sure.

EA: And what about religious, would a Protestant date a Catholic?

KA: Good question. I really wouldn't know.

EA: Alright, ok. Where there phrases like boyfriend/girlfriend?

KA: Yeah, and going steady and all of that.

EA: What was going steady, what did that mean?

KA: I guess it meant to wear a charm or something of each others, you are really making me reminisce here. (laughter)

EA: OK, talking about sports was there any sporting events that you remember being big or popular?

KA: Not really. Not at that period of time. We didn't have really good sports teams.

EA: At Lincoln?

KA: Yes, at Lincoln.

EA: Now what about professional sports do you remember –

KA: of course the Brown's were big and the Indians were big, the Kettlers didn't come along till the seventy's.

EA: Did teenagers or your group fellow the teams like the Browns, the Indians? Did they talk about them?

KA: Many of the playgrounds- - Well, like with the Indians they would open the bleachers and field and call Saturday, Ladies Day and if you wanted to get in you could bring your kids and pay fifty cents and they would fill up the bleachers. You know that was when I was in the teens or so. The Browns were the same way. I think it was seventy-five cents to sit in the bleaches. From where I lived, I could take a bus for a nickel each way and sit in the bleaches. And you know it has changed drastically since those days.

EA: Did you go?

KA: Oh yes, I did go. I went with friends.

EA: Now you said it cost one nickel to go from Tremont to downtown by bus.

KA: Yes, that was my bus.

EA: Do you remember any other costs of things? Like how much did it cost for a hot dog?

KA: Very reasonable, like ten cents for a hot dog.

Karl Anderson

EA: How much did it cost to get into the game?

KA: Seventy-five, fifty cents.

EA: Wow is that right. Were those games well attended?

KA: Pretty well attended yes, yes.

EA: But, it wasn't a big thing for you to get on a bus by yourself or with friends to go down, how old were you?

KA: I would say seventh, eighth grade, twelve thirteen.

EA: What about drug use, was there a lot of drug use?

KA: I think the biggest thing was glue sniffing. I think that was about it.

EA: What about alcohol?

KA: Alcohol, yes, it was available. I didn't run with that kind of a crowd so I really don't know anything about that.

EA: But you would say it was used?

KA: Yes, but, not to the extent that it is used today.

EA: So you would definitely say that there is a big change from this to now?

KA: Oh yes, there is more to do now and kids these days get into more trouble.

EA: A kid in trouble then what would you say they get in trouble doing? Was it more devilish type trouble?

KA: Yes, mischievous.

EA: Was it criminal, shoplifting, stealing or - -

KA: I would say it would be petty. Petty thief and things of that sort. We didn't have any at that time, weapons or things of that sort. If we did have a weapon, it was used for hunting, hunting purposes. Like, I can't say anymore.

EA: Did you hunt?

KA: Oh yes.

Karl Anderson

EA: Where did you hunt?

KA: Where I live near the zoo there was a railway that went thru there, a big field and we went down to that area to hunt.

EA: What did you hunt?

KA: Rabbit, pheasant.

EA: So this was a wooded area then.

KA: Yes.

EA: The area that you used to hunt in, what does it look like now?

KA: Good question. I would say it is not developed. It is a valley that extends, if anything it would be industry down there of some kind or some kind of a truck depot of some sort.

EA: Now, you said you worked in Tremont in the pools.

KA: Yes.

EA: Was there one pool in Tremont or others?

KA: There was just one and it was located in Lincoln Park. It was a shallow pool only four feet deep but, it was very large. We could get approximately one hundred and fifty, two hundred kids in there.

EA: Did you usually have that many?

KA: Ye, yes it was well attended.

EA: How much did it cost to get in?

KA: It did not cost anything.

EA: So it was an open pool to whoever wanted to come.

KA: Yes.

EA: Did you have to be a resident of Tremont to use the pool?

KA: No requirements.

EA: No requirements. So they just walked in and got in the pool?

Karl Anderson

KA: Yes, free, had free learn to swim nine to twelve in the morning, then we would close for a short time and then be open from one o'clock to nine pm. And they would, the only thing they would do is a body check as the kids walked in, so they did not have any open sores or anything of that sort. And they would swim for approximately forty-five, fifty minutes and then take a ten minute break each hour. And it was well protected and well guarded and - -

EA: What about after hours? Did you have children who sneaked into the pool?

KA: Yes, but we did not worry about that. The only thing we worried about was in the morning whether someone had thrown a bottle over and hit the deck and broke up. We would have to make sure everything was cleaned up but, basically it was the care and watching the kids. We really did not have any accidents.

EA: Do you mind me asking if you remember how much you got paid?

KA: Oh, I think it was ninety cents an hour. And then I got a promotion and it was one dollar and fifty a hour.

EA: OK, was that your money to spend?

KA: Yes, money to save.

EA: I am going to go back to the social aspect. Especially in this day and age we have a lot of unwed mothers and children in trouble. Did you see any of that or experience any of that?

KA: Very little. In fact, we didn't see it in school.

EA: So you would never see a pregnant girl in your school?

KA: Oh no. Because I think they were taken care of, placed in homes till their baby was born or, families, families were more involved than that. It was very, very - - It was uncommon. We just did not see it.

EA: Were there early marriages? Anything like that?

KA :Not really, no. Usually they waited till they were out of high school. In fact, I just went to a funeral where two of my classmates, they married one year out of high school. I graduated in 1957, and they got married in 1958 and she just passed away at age sixty-three, So that probably ten to fifteen percent of the kids in my class got married about a year after they graduated.

EA: They had children soon after they married?

Karl Anderson

KA: Usually, yes.

EA: What about going to college, did any of the children go to school after high school?

KA: The percentage from our school is very low. Very low, who went to college, ten percent or so.

EA: So what did most of them do?

KA: Most went out in the working world, and the working field and of course there was a lot of opportunity at that time. The steel mills were close, telephone company and the utility company hired a lot of kids. I guess there was opportunity available.

EA: What about the women ? Did they also work or did they get married, stay home?

KA: I would say they did.

EA: They worked?

KA: As secretaries or I really can't think.

EA: That's OK take your time.

KA: I don't , outside of my friends a few went to college or went into the work force.

EA: But the majority went into the work force.

KA: Yes, yes.

EA: Would you say most stayed in the Tremont area or leave the area?

KA: I would say ninety-nine of them, the kids that were able to get out on their own got out of the area.

EA: Is that right! Why do you think that is?

KA: Because of the opportunity of a newer more open area in the suburbs because the suburbs were becoming very large. In fact, parents were moving as well. I would say between sixth grade and twelfth grade, fifty percent of the kids transferred to Parma or Berea or some suburban school on the West side.

EA: Can you describe what the neighborhood looks like what a street in Tremont looks like, describe a house?

Karl Anderson

KA: That's a tough question because there are a lot of older homes, many are multi-family. There is some redevelopment in the area. There are some people who try and open up a business, such as restaurants, coffee shops, some unique places but, it does not have the flavor it had years ago.

EA: When you say flavor, what do you mean flavor ?

KA: Well, there is just a different, you know, well- -

EA: Like a friendly feeling, a neighborhood feeling?

KA: That's a good way to put it, a neighborhood feeling.

EA: People cared.

KA: Yes, they did.

EA: People took care of their property?

KA: At that time they did yes, but I think those who live there now take care of their property as well. I don't get down there to that area very much.

EA: I was going to ask if you got back to that area much?

KA: No, not too often. I have some friends who have a barbershop there and I stopped in only once and I would say if I go back , I go back to ride around and to look at things and see how things were or go with someone who did live there and they can point out, "oh that is where I lived, that is where my house was and it is not there now. But basically a lot is missing but a lot is still there.

EA: There was a lot of highways that went thru Tremont. Do you remember anything about that?

KA: The main highway was I-71 and no I take that back 90 also went thru there, kind of a crisscross going thru. It took up a lot of homes I-71 took up a lot of homes.

EA: Do you remember it being a big, affecting Tremont?

KA: Oh, I don't know I really don't know because it happened when I wasn't living there. I don't know what the effect was not living there. I'm sure some were pushed out and I'm sure a lot of people were pushed back into the neighborhood.

EA: The look of it though, I mean did it change the "feel" like you said before. Highways have a tendency to divide.

Karl Anderson

KA: I am sure it did divide the area, I am sure it did. But again I can't give any personal feelings about it.

EA: Well, what can you say are the better memories you have about Tremont?

KA: Outside of working there, I was involved in a community club, having friends there, going to school there, playing sports in the area. That is all I can say about that.

EA: Your friends that you still have there do they talk about Tremont, about the changes of Tremont?

KA: They talk about the past. I did take a friend down there for a meeting and we drove around and looked around. Some of the churches are still standing there. The spirals, the orthodox, I guess you know the orthodox Byzantine churches that have the cylindrical spires and old Pilgrim church and old Lincoln Park, you know.

EA: Were you affiliated with any of these churches?

KA: No, no.

EA: But four friends were?

KA: Yes, but the churches that branched out to the suburbs, they also branched out there.

EA: So if you had to name two churches off the top of your head, that stand out as the main, big, churches what would they be?

KA: Pilgrim church is definitely one and I would say Augustine, a Catholic church. That is still pretty active. They feed the poor and they help people. They have a help/reach program there. So that church is still very active.

EA: So you said that you are a part of a group that meets.

KA: At the Merrick house.

EA: What kind of group is that, can you explain that to me?

KA: Oh well, I guess at the time going to the high school there were a lot of clubs that did things together. At the time our club was made up of guys that were interested in basketball and then we would go on overnights on weekends at Metro parks or somewhere together.

EA: Sort of like the boy scouts or something similar?

KA: No, well more like a fraternity or something like that. Just guys that hung around together and the girls did the same thing. The girls had clubs, social clubs. We called them social clubs but, it would be similar to the YMCA.

EA: So even though you didn't live in Tremont you still associated with these clubs?

KA: Yeah, because of these guys I played sports with I would come over.

EA: So you were still participating even though you were not living in the same area.

KA: Yes, right.

EA: Are there any other historical points when you think of Tremont that need to be known or be remembered about Tremont?

KA: Not that I can think of off hand.

EA: now I know you talked about there in the middle fifty's. That was right after Korea (war). Did you see any affects of the war remember anything?

KA :No. I did not.

EA: You said you had a brother eleven years older than you, was he involved?

KA: No. I do remember now that I did have one classmate that was killed in Vietnam, but that was about it.

EA: Just one?

KA: Just one, that was about it.

EA: That was in 1969,1962?

KA: Sixty-one.

EA: He was involved in combat and killed ?

KA: yes.

EA: Would you go back to live in Tremont?

Karl Anderson

KA: No, I don't think so, no. And I never had any intent to. I would not live there. I would live somewhere else.

EA: Why?

KA: It would be a step down.

EA: OK.

KA: Living in a - - I shouldn't say better but an upgrade neighborhood and that is how I grew up and I wouldn't - -

EA: Do you remember when Stokes became Mayor of Cleveland?

KA: Yes, yes.

EA: Do you remember any impact of that? An African American becoming mayor of Cleveland?

KA: It didn't bother me at the time. I never meet him, but - -

EA: Do you remember any one politician that cause a political impact in your mind?

KA: Dennis Kucinich. He began as a councilman in that particular area that is where his roots are.

EA: Do you know him? Have you meet him?

KA: I have met him a couple of times. He's a great politician, but that is as far as I can take it.

EA: Was he embraced by Tremont because he was from Tremont?

KA: Yes, he started there and became Mayor of Cleveland. His other political aspirations have developed from that so I don't think he will ever become President of the United States. (laughter) You have this on tape.

EA; So, he was well liked in Tremont, were there any who did not like him?

KA: Oh, I'm pretty sure but, he had a strong following yeah. Kucinich, good ethnic name.

EA: Right, right. Any other politicians that stand out in your memory during that time?

Karl Anderson

KA: Gee, I don't know. Of course Mayor Celebrezzi and a few others but, once I got out of college I was not that involved in politics, so- -

EA: Did you marry someone from the neighborhood?

KA: No, no. I married a fellow teacher.

EA: We are about done, anything else you would like to add?

KA: No, (laughter). Nothing else I can think of.

EA: Anything else about memories as a teenager. Outside of sports did you do anything else socially?

KA: Not in that area, no.

EA: So if you wanted to catch up with anyone there where would you have gone?

KA: Either the Merrick House or the Bath House.

EA: That Bath House is where you would clean?

KA: Yes, but they had the basketball in the back.

EA: Oh yes, ok.

KA: People would also gather in the evening and play cards.

EA: Did they have concerts there?

KA: I don't recall. I don't recall at all, but I know there was a lot of card playing.

EA: what about chess?

KA: A few, but mostly cards?

EA: do you remember any different types of languages being spoken there?

KA: The kids spoke English. They were good English speaking kids.

EA: So you didn't hear a lot of accents?

KA: No, the only ones we heard with the accents were displaced persons that came over in the early fifty's, mid sixty's. We called them DP'S.

EA: OK, that was displaced person.

KA: Yes, mostly from Hungary and that area. The Ukraine, places, where the Second World War had moved them. The US took over quite a few of those people. They were the ones who would speak in their native tongues because they weren't good in English, but they also stuck very close together.

EA: Were they cliques, would you say?

KA: No, they just stuck together.

EA: Did all the groups stick together?

KA: No, there was a good mix.

EA: So there was no real type of overt racism?

KA: No, there really wasn't.

EA: And most people were on the same economic level as well?

KA: Right and most of the people their parents worked in the steel mills or down in the flats where the work was.

EA: What kind of work places were in Tremont?

KA: Well, in Tremont, not that much. It would be down in the valley in the areas that had the steel mills and industrial type of work.

EA: And you would say most of the parents worked there?

KA: yes.

EA: Would you say there were a lot of stay at home Moms as well?

KA: Yes, mothers did not work as much. Fathers were the bread winners.

EA: Did students go home for lunch?

KA: good question. Some did, some didn't.

EA: Well I'd like to thank you. Is there anything else you think will be interesting to add.

Karl Anderson

KA: No, not that I can think of. Just that I am involved in Lincoln Old Sports which started in 1950 and I am on this committee where we have an evening of dinner and socializing and it is a unique group and the last year we have at least three hundred, four hundred guys show up.

EA: Wow and these are people from Tremont.

KA: Yes, people from the area and the group grew from eight, twelve guys and kept growing. I happened to be on that committee that is active in keeping them together.

EA: And you are getting younger men to join?

KA: Yes. In 1971, they tone down the old Lincoln High School and we are hoping that, I think as you get older you get more interested in getting involved in a group like this.

EA: So what else do they do besides meeting at this dinner.

KA: That's it, every two years.

EA: So every two years they meet at this dinner.

KA: That's it. One dinner.

EA: No other activity outside of that?

KA: No, we have a historian and he sets up his display in one room and we have dinner in the dinning hall in a place in Broadview Heights called St Michael's Woodside. And guys just come and meet new friends and see old friends. Its quite nice. It is a very nice time.

EA: OK.

TAPE ENDS

Subject states he has no more to say.

INTERVIEW ENDS