**Mark Souther** [00:00:01] My name is Mark Souther. Today is June the 19th, 2013. This is the Cleveland Regional Oral History Collection and I am in the home of Mr. Russell Toppin, Sr. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:00:20] No problem. Glad to do it.

**Mark Souther** [00:00:22] Would you state your full name for the record?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:00:24] Russell James Toppin, Sr.

**Mark Souther** [00:00:29] Is it okay if I shut the--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:00:30] Sure thing. Yeah. 'Cause you're gonna hear that basketball. Yeah, yeah. Close that one.

**Mark Souther** [00:00:41] Didn't notice it at first.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:00:41] Okay.

**Mark Souther** [00:00:42] Please tell me when and where you were born.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:00:48] Oh, let's see. I was born in 1940. October the 22nd at what was called Charity Hospital, which is now-- what the heck is... Uh... The hospital on the west side. What the heck is that? Where Nikki works at. Metro! Metropolitan Hospital. But back at that time, it was known as Charity Hospital. And I guess that's 'cause folks didn't have enough money to pay for me.

**Mark Souther** [00:01:24] And what neighborhood were your parents living in when you were born?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:01:29] Oh, we lived on Cedar. Let's see, right across from the Cedar YMCA. I can't remember the address. And then when my dad got drafted and ended up in World War II, we moved down to 69th and Cedar. 2210 E. 69th.

**Mark Souther** [00:01:56] When-- going back to your father, before he was in the service, I'm not sure of his age at the time that he went in there first. Yeah. What was his line of work?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:02:06] Well, he was a polisher at TRW.

**Mark Souther** [00:02:13] Where was the plant?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:02:17] The Euclid plant, I think. What is that? 200? 200 and Euclid Avenue. They've sold the plant since then. It's became Municipal Park now, but back at that time, it was Thompson Remco & Raad [Thompson Ramo Wooldridge] or better known as TRW. And he worked there for over 40 years and he retired from there.

**Mark Souther** [00:02:41] Sorry, when you say a polisher, what---?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:02:43] OK. The blades that go in an aircraft? When I get on the airplane, I hope my dad was the one to polish the damn blade and not my buddy Woody. They used to polish the blades, OK, for the jet engines. And at that time when he started, they were the props, the large propellers on aircrafts. And that's what a polisher did. Just take all the buffs out of the cracks and stuff like that. They would polish it down to that.

**Mark Souther** [00:03:15] So it's a safety issue more than---

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:03:18] No, it was production. If you're not-- not so much safety. It was actually what made the engines run, you know, the propellers turning. And in a jet engine, it was different because you had like maybe two or three hundred blades inside the jet engine. If you've ever seen a jet engine before it starts up, those are the blades that they were producing out there at that time.

**Mark Souther** [00:03:40] I see. And you've told me before about your grandfather and the cab company.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:03:47] Yeah. Thanks to you, I now know the name of it: Majestic Cab Company.

**Mark Souther** [00:03:51] And can you tell me a little bit about what you know about your grandfather, where he came from and what his parents did?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:03:58] OK. Well, I really don't know what his parents did. Because I guess I get my-- met my grandfather when I-- can't even remember in? Was back in about '43, somewhere along in there. And I remember that at one time, I found out later on that after he lost the cab company, he got beaten out of it by Yellow Cab, that he ended up in White Motors. OK, during the war. And. That's basically the best I can remember about my grandfather, except, you know, we had a great big tree out in front of the house and him and my dad cut it down. So now it's in that same house. My grandson and my son are going to have to cut down a tree in front of the house. I guess this is the Toppin history repeating itself for a minute.

**Mark Souther** [00:04:59] I want to pause for a second. Ask you to be careful about tapping on the table. It records everything.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:05:08] OK. No problem.

**Mark Souther** [00:05:08] The cab company, even though I've read some about it. I'd like to hear in your words for our recording what you know about--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:05:17] Well basically, Mark, like I was telling you, when I initially ran into you, the family never really talked a whole lot about the cab company. In fact, I found out, like I was talking to Don, that I found out more from people who would just recognize the name Toppin and would ask me, "does your grandfather own a cab company?" And I would say, yeah! But as far as-- now my dad, when he would talk about it, he said he would lean out the window and holler down from Majestic Hotel, where to go pick up the fare, OK? And at that time, the city was really totally segregated, in fact, Blacks, I don't think at that time, could even get a Yellow Cab. So my grandfather fill that void in, I guess, until Yellow Cab found out that Black folks payed and ran him out the business and that sort of did that. Is that yours or mine? That's mine. Hey Don, grab that phone over there, would you please?

**Mark Souther** [00:06:27] Want to pause?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:06:30] Yeah-- hey, Mark, like I said, you gave me more insight on the cab company than basically what the majority of the folks were that talked about it. Like I was telling you, I think I was trying to catch up with my uncle, who was one of my grandfather-- hey Don, just put it over here. --Who was a driver for him. And, you know, when you put stuff off, that's when the mess up comes in at. And I kept putting it off. In fact, my son had passed. We were going over to interview him because he was going to do it. He was up at Heights High at that time. And he was going to do it for a school project to interview Calloway Watson. Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:07:21] You mentioned the segregation, would you tell me the story again about going over to the West Side, the clubs.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:07:27] Oh, yeah. Well, basically what happened is-- now this in my dad's words, right. That they had a lot of black entertainers on the West Side. And the thing of it was that they would send one of my grandfather's cabs over to pick 'em up. And the one thing the driver had to make sure of is that he had a cap 'cause if he didn't, he's subject to get his rump whooped over there. And that was that portion of it. So that's the best part of the segregation that I really know about as far as that was concerned. You know, my own experience with segregation is something else, but that's not the portion that we're dealing with right now.

**Mark Souther** [00:08:12] We'll get to that, too. I'd like to go back and ask what your mother did?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:08:19] Oh, my mom. When she ended up-- oh well, during the war, she worked at Fisher Body. Then she left from there and she was a secretary up at a place called Outlet Furniture, which is what was up on 105 [East 105th Street]. And then she became-- she retired from Case Western Reserve University. And she was the manager at the student union at that time when she retired.

**Mark Souther** [00:08:55] Going back to where both sides of your family were from, could you say for the record, where your paternal grandfather and then also your mother's name?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:09:08] Yeah, all of them came out of Georgia. And which particular part of Georgia I'm not really familiar with. Macon, I believe has been mentioned. And I think I still got some relatives in Macon, Georgia. And that's where both of my parents' parents were basically from.

**Mark Souther** [00:09:29] To your knowledge, did the family that came from families-- the branches of your family that came from Georgia, did they all come during what we would call the Great Migration or did they come at a broader period beyond World War I or early after World War I?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:09:44] Basically, I would imagine it was the mass migration. OK, what year was the mass migration?

**Mark Souther** [00:09:53] Well, 1916 and on.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:09:56] Yeah, and that particular area, that's when they basically got here. Cause like from your research, when they open up the cab company, it was back in the '30s. And I know he had been here prior to that. So I'm pretty sure that's what it was because my grandfather, he worked at Jones and Laughlins when it was on Lakeside. Now it was actually downtown at that point in time. And then they moved out to the West Side.

**Mark Souther** [00:10:22] Now, is that the -- is that the steel company you're talking about?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:10:26] Yeah. That was Jones and Laughlin.

**Mark Souther** [00:10:29] So they were right downtown at one point?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:10:30] Yeah, at one time they were downtown.

**Mark Souther** [00:10:33] I didn't realize that.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:10:34] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:10:36] And so when you were growing up, you were in the Cedar-Central neighborhood.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:10:40] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:10:41] Did you-- what did they call it back then? The neighborhood? Did they call it that name or something else?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:10:47] No, it was just Cedar and Central. You know, I think what we mentioned when we started moving on to 105, it was then called the Gold Coast because of the amount of stuff that was up and down it, you know, the clubs that they had. Because I think what back in that time down on Cedar, you had a few bars that were noted at that time.

**Mark Souther** [00:11:12] When you were growing up in Cedar. I think you told me before that that was up until the 1950s. Yeah. But when you moved to Glenville-- do you remember the year you moved to Glenville?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:11:23] Oh, yeah. 1950.

**Mark Souther** [00:11:26] 1950?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:11:28] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:11:28] Before you moved there, do you remember any particular businesses that you used to go with, you know, maybe with your mother or father and--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:11:38] OK, well basically what was it? 4th Street was Brown Brothers, right. We all went down to Brown Brothers on Fourth Street. And Sears, Roebuck on Euclid and Carnegie. Those were the stores. In fact, my dad and my grandfather owned a grocery store down there on-- God what the heck. On 80th and 79th-- about 76 and Central.

**Mark Souther** [00:12:08] Was this your paternal grandfather?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:12:10] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:12:12] So he did that then after the cab company?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:12:15] No, this was my mom's father.

**Mark Souther** [00:12:19] Yeah, and your father?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:12:21] Yeah, and my father. It was the Toppin-Hatcher market.

**Mark Souther** [00:12:27] Toppin?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:12:28] Toppin. T-o-p-p-i-n, you know, our family last name and Hatcher.

**Mark Souther** [00:12:32] I see, yeah. Which was her--?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:12:36] Her dad. Yeah, her maiden name.

**Mark Souther** [00:12:39] And then do you remember as a kid going to any corner stores in the neighborhood?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:12:46] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:12:46] Any big ones?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:12:49] No, we kept the money in the family. Basically back then, Mark, there were no-- the only major chain back then was Save More. OK, and Save More was nothing more than a mom and pop's size store. I think Fisher Fazio, when they came in, they came up with a little bit bigger store. But basically everything then, back in the '40s and early '50s, was a little corner store. One of the things that put most of the Black merchants out of business at that time was that they weren't smart enough. To consolidate. And in fact, Save More-- that's one of the things that brought Save More about and actually end up forcing most of the smaller Black grocery stores out of business because they had a meeting at the Cedar YMCA. Now, this what my grandfather was telling me. And what happened was they were trying to get all the Black merchants together to purchase in large amounts and they couldn't get it together enough that they could fight Save More and the rest of 'em. Cause Save More, that's the way they got over. It was what, Save More? That's the one I can remember. Cause Save More put my grandad-- they put a store down on 79th and they just underbid it. White and Black merchants who were not incorporated. So that's what forced most of 'em out. Cause there was a little Jewish store right across the street from my grandfather's.

**Mark Souther** [00:14:32] It's interesting, we think a lot today about big stores like Wal-Mart and so on.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:14:37] Ain't always been there. Yeah. Nah.

**Mark Souther** [00:14:41] Long time.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:14:42] Cause the penny candy store was the biggest thing back then.

**Mark Souther** [00:14:46] What was your favorite candy? When you were growing up?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:14:49] I think jelly beans. Yeah. Till I found out Ronald Reagan liked them too. That's why I quit liking 'em! (Laughs).

**Mark Souther** [00:14:54] Going on-- from Cedar, Central to Glenville, you would have been about what? 10 years old?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:15:07] 10 years old. Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:15:09] And you lived there for how long and on what street?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:15:13] I stayed on South Boulevard on till what? I was about 18 or 20. Somewhere along in there.

**Mark Souther** [00:15:24] Were you still there when the Glenville shootout occurred or where you moved on?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:15:28] Which one? (Chuckles).

**Mark Souther** [00:15:29] The big one in '68.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:15:33] The big one in '68? No, I was no longer there. I was in East Cleveland dodging bullets from the ones they had over there, you know. (Answers ringing phone) Hello. Yeah. Hey, Robin, how are you? OK. Well, thank you. OK, yeah. Yeah, we're all over there with Tish and his wife now trying to hook up the arrangements. Yeah. Oh okay, no problem. OK. Yeah. OK, you. Oh, OK. Have yall told Aunt Nicey yet? OK, cause I know Kim was trying to keep that cause you know Aunt Peggy was due for a biopsy today and he was trying to keep that away from her. Oh nah, from Aunt Peggy cause, you know, she would call Aunt Nicey and tell her. Yeah. Right. OK. OK, OK, OK, OK, we should all be here. Well, Sherry, like I said, she's over there with Tish right now, so why don't you give a call back about 5:00 and then-- cause we'll probably all be starting to hook up around over here then. All right, take care. OK, bye now. OK. (Hangs up phone).

**Mark Souther** [00:17:22] So when you were in Glenville on South Boulevard, where are some of the places you remember going? I remember you mentioned Gordon Park and Rockefeller Park with an uncle. Can you tell me that story and then maybe some more about what you recall about your neighborhood?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:17:44] OK, well, you know, basically, I think that was the golden era of baseball. And most of the kids play baseball, now it's basketball. I remember-- the one big incident they had was in Sowinski. They ended up with a near riot there, which was which was really sort of weird because the blacks all lived on one side and you know, where Martin Luther King Drive is now? That yellow line was sort of the dividing line right there. At Sowinski, there was a park and something jumped off and all of a sudden looking up there, standing on top of the hill, looking down. And the Cleveland police came and they blocked off Liberty Boulevard and they were all standing there. And the thing that astounded me was the fact that they turned around and were facing the blacks and not looking at the whites. So that sort of let us know that, hey, which way they were going to start shooting if they start shooting. So that was the one incident there. But back at that time, the very unique part was about the entertainment. OK, I'm pretty sure you've heard the term and phrase "the chitlin circuit." Well, the portion of the chitlin circuit for Cleveland was the Euclid area on 105. The Keith Theater is where basically most of the Motown and black entertainers came through. It was one place, one show. Oh, boy, I can't think of the name of it, but it was the Keith, not the Keith. It was-- I can't think of the name of it now, but it was right there on 105 and St. Clair. And that's the first place that I saw Nat King Cole. And the Motown groups usually came through 105, either the Circle or the Keith at that time. So that was basically the real big entertainment center for Cleveland at that time. Then if you went down 55th, you had uh-- the heck we had down on 55th. Can't think of the name of some of them joints now that was down there. But that's where. The O'Jays got started at-- what was that? Gleason's? Yeah, it was Gleason's Bar at that time, down on 55th. And that's another one of the high points of entertainment. We didn't really get downtown too much because as a kid, Cleveland still at that time back in, I guess, the late '40s, I remember me and my dad-- my dad took me downtown to one of the shows and it was reminiscent of black folks in the balcony. And that was here in Cleveland. Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:20:54] So it was actually segregated

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:21:00] Yes. Yes. Somewhat. Somewhat. Not like it was when I went south, when I was in the army, they had the sign out front. I don't know whether they put us up there. My dad couldn't afford the seats down on the floor, but I remember that-- that we were sitting in the balcony.

**Mark Souther** [00:21:17] We mentioned some of the places, 105th and Euclid-- When Motown artists started coming through town, I've also heard that a lot of them went to Leo.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:21:30] Yeah! Leo, was--

**Mark Souther** [00:21:31] I was wondering-- was there a progression from one place to another?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:21:33] Yeah, it definitely--.

**Mark Souther** [00:21:36] -- they go to multiple places at the same time.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:21:38] Now, well Leo start sucking everybody up. You know, the shows had virtually-- actually I think just about just almost had stopped. Leo was, you know. Oh, I guess he had a political pool and the muscle or whatever it took to lock up that end of the industry. And that's when everybody started going down to Leo's.

**Mark Souther** [00:21:58] So that hurt 105th quite a bit?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:22:01] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:22:03] What replaced the lost business, if anything, during that time?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:22:08] Well basically they were movie theaters, so they still function as a movie theater, just, you know, on a Saturday or something like that, they would have the stage shows. So they sustained themselves by being a movie theater, not just a nightclub, you know, so that's what I guess basically kept them afloat.

**Mark Souther** [00:22:34] Beyond Leo's-- I know Leo's came from farther down the city and moved up to the-- I guess it's the Quad Hall?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:22:42] Yeah. Right there, what was-- 79th and Euclid.

**Mark Souther** [00:22:52] Did you ever go to the prior Leo's--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:22:55] Nah. No, I never got down there to the prior Leo's.

**Mark Souther** [00:23:02] But you did go to the one--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:23:03] Yeah. Everybody hit down there.

**Mark Souther** [00:23:07] What was your most memorable show at Leo's or another club?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:23:11] Basically, when I saw the Temptation for a dollar and I see what the hell it cost to see 'em now. You know, that was the most memorable one, because I think the thing that really sticks out in my mind is when they did "Ol' Man River" acappella and I actually caught him singing it-- caught him doing it on TV, and he had a heck of a-- he was a heck of a bass. And that's the one part that really sticks out.

**Mark Souther** [00:23:38] Where was that when you saw it?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:23:40] That was on-- on Euclid, and I can't really think of the name of the club now, but it was downstairs next to-- the club was next to the Greyhound bus station. It was down there on 105 and Euclid at that time. Don't know why I can't think of the name of it.

**Mark Souther** [00:23:58] Was there-- I don't know how they pronounce it. There was a H-A-D-D-A-M Hotel? Haddam or-- around that corner, I don't know if there would have been anything in that?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:24:11] No, I can't really think that it was.

**Mark Souther** [00:24:13] May not have been on the corner, but it was on the south side of the street.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:24:19] Mhm hmm. I can't really place that right now.

**Mark Souther** [00:24:21] These other places were on the north side, correct? The theaters.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:24:24] Yeah , yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:24:26] And Alhambra, too.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:24:26] Well, you had on both sides of the street. In fact, there was if you-- from 105 and Euclid, there were two shows heading west. There was the Alhambra and the Loew's State, which ended up with the minister who ended up going to jail-- I think, what the heck was his name? Styles? Reverend Styles, who was dropping chicken blood down on his white suit and cutting portions of it out to sell to the parishioners. Across the street from there was The Circle. And then further down and across 105 was the Keith and the other show that was down there was the Loew's, or something. I can't really think of the name of it now, but that's where I saw The Temptations at.

**Mark Souther** [00:25:21] How would you describe the area of the 105th area in terms of the transition to eventually, of course, Winston E. Willis bought up a whole section of that...

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:25:30] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:25:31] In the '60s, late '60s, I think or in the 60s. The transition from White ownership to Black ownership. Was that associated just with him or...

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:25:43] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:25:43] Were there Black-owned businesses in that area before?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:25:44] Nah, I think-- think that that's basically what it was cause Winston owned that whole block. In fact, he was renting-- he had a state store that was in his block. And he opened that up. You know, he had the after-hour clubs and all the rest of it. You know, from 105 all the way back down, he had it sewed up. You know. And that was basically it until they ran him off 105. You know 'cause he had the great big billboard and all that good type stuff down there.

**Mark Souther** [00:26:19] I've seen a picture of that, but can you describe it?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:26:22] I really can't. Not at this point. I just know-- what the heck was on the billboard? I think he was getting rid of somebody. I can't think who the hell he was against at that time, the governor or somebody.

**Mark Souther** [00:26:34] In one picture that was against the Cleveland Clinic, as it started to grow--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:26:43] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:26:43] You remember it had that sign?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:26:44] Oh yeah. Cause who was the crooked councilman that was down there at that point in time? (inaudible) was here 'cause who-- he hooked up, was it Boyd? I can't think of which councilman it was that was down there-- it was his district and he got hooked up with the Cleveland Clinic and was responsible for fooling a lot of people into selling their businesses to the Cleveland Clinic. In fact, I have one friend who his uncle owned The Waiters Club. And Cleveland Clinic came through and bought him on one side of the street. He found a store from across the street. He went and transferred his license across the street. Cleveland Clinic followed him over there and bought that also. Yeah. So that's basically what it was. But the killing part is working over at Case Western Reserve and saw the 40-year plan, you know, because, you know, the 40-year plan showed that they were going to suck up all of Euclid any damn way. In fact, right there at East Boulevard, going up the hill? There actually was a guard tower there. OK? In other words, if you didn't have any business coming downtown, because that was the gateway. That was the breaking point right here. You stop right here, go back, because you don't need to come over into Cleveland Clinic or any place else. So we're going to stop you here.

**Mark Souther** [00:28:17] Where was that and what period are you talking about?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:28:22] That had to be the '60s and '70s, late '60s, early '70s.

**Mark Souther** [00:28:26] On East Boulevard?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:28:28] Yeah, right there. God-- okay. I kind of think-- what is it now? Fairhill? Coming up right there at Euclid where you make that turn going up. I think that's-- what is that? Is that Fairhill?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:28:43] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:28:45] I think-- is that where-- I think they call it Stokes and then... Boulevard... and then it becomes Fairhill when you go up.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:28:50] Yeah. Well, right there where the--

**Mark Souther** [00:28:51] Was this before you go up the hill?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:28:52] Yeah. Right right there at Euclid itself. OK, where the museum is. OK, basically you take like Case Western and Western Reserve was not included in the package with Cleveland Clinic at that point, and that's where they actually supposed to been putting the guard tower at.

**Mark Souther** [00:29:11] Oh this was proposed? It was never--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:29:12] Yeah. Right. Never implemented.

**Mark Souther** [00:29:16] Where did you see the proposal or did---

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:29:18] At the Newton D. Baker Building, right there at Case Western Reserve University, in the main lobby.

**Mark Souther** [00:29:23] A picture of it?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:29:26] Yeah. Well, the plan. You know, it was on the table. And the guard tower was depicted right there.

**Mark Souther** [00:29:35] And. What was there-- was there any public explanation for it?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:29:40] Uh uh. Well, I don't think at that point in time, really the public was really into it. This was just a study, I guess, that was done by the city and the architects who actually just drew it up as to what the future of the 105-- 105 and Euclid area was going to look like. It's just before I think that the Clinic was probably implementing the take over at that time and it just took them to that long. In fact, I got the one buddy that I was telling you about. His brother still lives down there. In fact, his brother had actually put down a down payment on one of the houses down there. The new homes that were being built from scratch. And Fannie Lewis was--I think it was Fannie Lewis--was instrumental in helping beat folks out of their own property. So, yeah. And if you go down there now that-- that's all it is. You take between-- well actually. Cleveland Clinic even knocked out a couple other hospitals that were down there. There was a women's hospital. It was strictly for women on the north side of Euclid. Then, well, basically, they're just-- the old Sears Roebucks that was downtown? OK. Since you've been here, you've seen it. They've bought the Playhouse, OK? And they shifted it downtown. Why in the heck they did that I'll never understand because, like, you had adequate parking there at that-- did you ever get a chance to go into that? It was beautiful. They had the one main stage and about three other smaller stages in there. And, you know, all of a sudden, bang. We're moving downtown to the congested ass parking and nowhere near-- you can only put on the one show downtown where there they could put on a main show and have a couple of small shows with it.

**Mark Souther** [00:31:51] Tell me a little bit more, if you would, about the story about your uncle and the parks. You said that cause of the lack of air conditioning, people--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:32:03] ...Oh Okay.

**Mark Souther** [00:32:03] Sleep in the park?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:32:04] Oh, yeah, well, basically what would happen then was during the summer months when it was extremely hot and there was no air conditioning, what we all basically did was just go down into the park. You could do it with no problem. The only thing-- the only concern you had was stepping on somebody. And if you did accidentally step on somebody, all you did was "excuse me." You didn't get shot or anything like that. It was when people were really people here in the city. And they all got along. I wish you could get back to that.

**Mark Souther** [00:32:37] You mentioned waking up your uncle one time.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:32:39] Ah, yeah. My Uncle Chat-- I was at St. Thomas Aquinas and that was back in the days when you didn't eat lunch in school. You walked home or you didn't stay in school and eat. So right there at Superior-- the bridge over Superior and East Boulevard, now Martin Luther King Drive. My uncle would walk down there and he would sit on this one park bench and he would get down there and be gettin a nap. Nobody ever bothered him. And my job was at lunchtime to come down there and wake him up. Tell him "OK Unc, come on, it's time to go home." And he lived right up the hill. So that was that function that I had then.

**Mark Souther** [00:33:28] And you mentioned-- shifting gears here, to a story about-- oh I lost my thought. I'm sorry. Oh, yeah, the Skateland and Pla-Mor. Would you tell me about that again?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:33:44] OK, well, Skate-- Skateland was-- the city was actually segregated at that time. I don't think-- well, they didn't put up signs black and white, but you just knew that black folks didn't go to Skateland. White folks didn't come to Pla-Mor. And that's basically what it entailed. In fact, you know, as a kid going to Pla-Mor, I didn't think white folks could skate. Until I went to Skateland and with, you know, about this time, it had integrated and I found out that white boys could skate a little bit, you know? And that's, you know-- a lot of things were... I guess just, you knew that, hey, this is someplace that you don't go. And you know, we were all fine with it. And, you know, and that's basically what it is. I don't think it was a good thing, but, you know, at that time it was the status quo and that's, you know, you just dealt with it.

**Mark Souther** [00:34:43] Where were these two located? I think I know--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:34:47] Uh.... Once again, when you talk about the Cleveland Clinic. OK, it was across the street. Oh, I think they've got an apartment complex there now where the Skateland was. The Pla-Mor was on Cedar and the present building that occupies it now is a factory. Can't really think of the name of it again, but that's-- that's what it was. They tore it down and they built the factory right there on it.

**Mark Souther** [00:35:27] When did the Skateland start to become integrated approximately? Do you remember?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:35:30] OK, OK, I know you've heard of Alan Freed. I think the first affair that they really had at the Skateland when they turned it over was one of his coronation balls was held there. And that's the first time I really remember Blacks really going in there.

**Mark Souther** [00:35:52] And that event-- that opened it up thereafter?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:35:55] Yeah. And then shortly after that, they closed it. (Sarcastically chuckles) Yeah. And Pla-Mor-- I don't know what the heck brought Pla-Mor down. Whether it caught fire or what, I really can't recall what made the Pla-Mor close down.

**Mark Souther** [00:36:13] If you think back to the time that you observed the Euclid-E. 105th area and all the different entertainment spots there, how would you describe the degree of integration and how the racial makeup of the clientele changed? When did you start to see the changes? Did you see a transformation?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:36:39] OK yeah, basically when all the merchants were white and all the consumers were black and that was it. Then shortly after that, we started purchasing the stores and the businesses. And I guess that lasted for maybe about three or four years. And then they figured out a way to close them down and run us all out of it.

**Mark Souther** [00:37:04] So it's a very brief--.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:37:06] Very, very brief time.

**Mark Souther** [00:37:07] Of control.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:37:08] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:37:08] And can you put even rough dates on any of this within a span?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:37:18] Lemme see, it had to be in the mid-'60s, 'cause as a kid, I worked at a store named Levitt's on the corner of South Boulevard, and what happened was one of the guys, one of the kids who I grew up with worked up there also. And then when Levitt was deciding that he was getting out of the business, he turned around and sold it to the kid who worked there also.

**Mark Souther** [00:37:50] So all this was before-- Winston Willis is the exception to the rule that we just said, correct?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:37:58] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:37:58] And he managed to be the one owner who could hold on for awhile?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:38:03] Until they got tired of him and then they got rid of him. OK, all the stores and stuff that he had on 105-- I don't know which white gangster he was affiliated with. And once they pull their backing out, they ran his rump right off of that. (To someone else) That ain't Wood out there, is it? Is that Wood? Oh OK.

**Mark Souther** [00:38:26] Can you tell me about any of the other clubs, either there or any others that you remember that were either-- Oh! I'm curious before I get to that question-- when we talk about all the different businesses that brought in black entertainers, were any of these businesses Black-owned--.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:38:49] Nope.

**Mark Souther** [00:38:49] --even in the Central... Cedar-Central area?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:38:54] Not to my knowledge, 'cause there was Leo's Casino, you know, which was-- it moved down to the Euclid address later. The Corner Tavern, which was another spot, but all of them were basically white-owned. What was it? It was-- Jack's was on Cedar. It was white-owned, I think. The VFW club, I'm not really sure who in the heck ran that. It's probably a Black manager, but it was under the VFW. The Veterans of Foreign Wars, though I remember that one being there. And that's just like on 105 right now. You've got Post 315, which is the American Legion. And that's basically the only bar right now that is serving alcohol on 105. Where you had about four or five bars up and down 105 and throw in a couple of wine joints. Which is-- actually a wine joint was a place where sold wine by the shot. So which is surprising to a lot of people, especially today when you talk about they had wine bars.

**Mark Souther** [00:40:23] Very different kind of setup.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:40:26] Right.

**Mark Souther** [00:40:28] Were the-- you called them white-owned, were they-- do you know whether they were Jewish-owned?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:40:35] Jewish. Cause the pawn shop that I used to deal with-- I know he was Jewish.

**Mark Souther** [00:40:46] You left Glenville in '68, '[6]9?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:40:51] Yeah, somewhere along in there.

**Mark Souther** [00:40:53] And went to East Cleveland?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:40:53] Right.

**Mark Souther** [00:40:55] When you made that move, you mentioned to me dodging gunfire. Will you explain that--.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:41:03] Well, that was the Lakeview riots. OK, that was the one where Fred Ahmed Evans -- you remember him, don't you? Fred Ahmed Evans who ended up getting a rope-a-doped, OK? And that's what prompted that. In fact, with me being on Hower, and Lakeview being basically a couple of streets over, a couple of rounds, high-powered rounds hit the back of the building.

**Mark Souther** [00:41:31] You mean behind your house?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:41:32] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:41:35] What was the name of your street again?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:41:35] Hower. That was in East Cleveland.

**Mark Souther** [00:41:39] So just across the line from Glenville?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:41:40] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:41:41] And that's what I was actually referring to when I said the Glenville shootout. I was referring to that Fred Ahmed Evans.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:41:46] Oh, OK. Oh, OK.

**Mark Souther** [00:41:49] As opposed to the Hough riots.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:41:49] Oh, yeah. Oh, Fred was cool. In fact, I even played with Fred. He-- Fred was a bass player and that's when I was playing alto and my uncle and them had a band and he made me go and play with Fred. And that's when I had a little bit of insight on him, that he got rope-a-doped into that shootout. OK, one of the young kids he had fired off around and Fred just said, hey, I'm in the middle of it now. And that was it. Cause he was actually employed by the city of Cleveland prior to that. You know.

**Mark Souther** [00:42:29] Under Stokes.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:42:31] Yeah, yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:42:33] You say you played alto.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:42:35] Yeah, yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:42:37] You mean alto sax? Is that what you were talking about?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:42:39] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:42:39] That's what I thought. What was your band or did you play in different bands?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:42:42] Nah, basically, I played with Billy Wells for a minute and then I just gave it up. After I played down at uh -- what the heck was the name of that? One joint that got shot up. We were on the bandstand. They came in and start shootin'. Everybody duck. Everybody got ready to haul ass outta there. We was down on Wade Pak and all of a sudden they said, "here they come." And I said, "that's it. I'm through playin'. I ain't getting shot."

**Mark Souther** [00:43:09] You said, "here they come?"

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:43:09] Yeah, we thought they were coming back to shoot up again. So that's when I said, no, I don't need this.

**Mark Souther** [00:43:16] Was this related in any way to the riots we've talked about?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:43:20] Nah. Just somebody come in. A random shooting, I guess. That's all it was. But I wasn't taken no weak chances. I said, "this is it. This is it."

**Mark Souther** [00:43:31] You stayed in East Cleveland, then until?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:43:36] I was there-- I guess maybe about seven, eight years.

**Mark Souther** [00:43:43] I understand the late 60s was right in the middle of the racial shift in East Cleveland that happened pretty fast in the second half of the '60s.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:43:52] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:43:52] People talk about it just turning over overnight.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:43:54] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:43:56] What was your experience based on when you arrived and your perception of the change that you saw?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:44:01] Well, basically, I guess when I arrived, once again, the business district was white-owned. East Cleveland had one heck of a police department at that-- well a city administration was a lot different than what it is now. They had one judge up there. Who was that? Adams or Deveny? I think it was Adams. You didn't drink in East Cleveland 'cause you was going straight to jail. And basically after that, then, I think really the real spike came in-- I think the late '80s when they just start tearing everything down in East Cleveland. In fact, what was there? I think the real big turn was-- they had a shootout. And in that shootout, a minister named Reverand Small interceded and he was having some marches, and then after that they just said, "hey, to hell with it. We gonna give it to the Blacks and we outta here." And that's basically what happened.

**Mark Souther** [00:45:14] Who is this Reverend Small?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:45:16] He was a-- sort of, I guess, an outspoken minister for equal rights. Cause he was-- the thing of it was the kid who the East Cleveland police shot had some mental issues and he was addressing that. So that's what really brought that about.

**Mark Souther** [00:45:41] I think I remember you mentioning that you worked at the Home Repair Resource Center?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:45:47] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:45:47] Is that right?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:45:48] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:45:49] What did you do before that?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:45:51] Oh I was an Addressograph-Multigraph which is office reproduction machines.

**Mark Souther** [00:46:01] What period of time were you--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:46:04] Uhh, '65 to I think about '86 when they closed the plant.

**Mark Souther** [00:46:13] Is that out toward Euclid?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:46:15] Yeah, it was. Actually, it was across the street from the old Chase and Brass on-- we were on-- What the heck? Oh ok, we were on Babbit. Yeah, that's whatchamacallit.

**Mark Souther** [00:46:33] Is that Eric?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:46:33] Yeah, that's Eric.

**Mark Souther** [00:46:33] Want to pause for a second here?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:46:33] Yeah, no problem.

**Mark Souther** [00:46:33] I'm gonna stop the recording here.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:46:39] Oh okay, Mark. -- Okay.

**Mark Souther** [00:46:41] We're returning with Mr. Toppin. Tell me about the running of the-- running out of the O'Jays.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:46:52] Okay, well, that I'm not really familiar with that one there. This is something else that Mr. Gaynor could probably help you out on.

**Mark Souther** [00:47:00] OK we'll talk then about that then another time. I'll make a note of that so I remember. You were saying-- let me think now. You were at Addressograph and, and then from there did you start working at HRRC?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:47:20] No, I was basically from that point on how I ended up working with the state of Ohio and the Ohio National Guard.

**Mark Souther** [00:47:30] From there-- how'd you come to work for the Home Repair Resource Center?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:47:35] A friend of mine called and asked me if, you know, I wanted to come up there and that's when I got hooked up with them. And did, what? 17 years up there. Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:47:47] What kind of work were you doing?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:47:50] OK, well, we would give classes on the home repair issues and that was the end that I was involved with. Actually, it was a lot of financing on the other end. One end of the building was dedicated to financing and the second half was into home repairs and they would lend out/ rent out equipment at a much lower rate than some of the big box stores would do. In fact, when it initially started, if you were really depressed and didn't have any money, you could actually get the-- they would pick neighborhoods. And if it was what they considered as a depressed neighborhood, if you needed to borrow tools, you didn't have to do anything but put down a deposit and you got your deposit returned to you for ladders, snakes, any kind of tools that you basically needed for home repairs.

**Mark Souther** [00:49:02] By the time you worked there, it was no longer affiliated with Forest Hill Presbyterian or was it still?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:49:09] No. It had branched out on its own at that point in time

**Mark Souther** [00:49:14] When you were living back in East Cleveland because I know that -- See that was all through this time from the late '60s to the late '70s. Let's just go back even to Glenville, but Glenville and East Cleveland. What perception did you have of Cleveland Heights and of integration in Cleveland Heights, if any? (Toppin chuckles) Did you know people who moved into Cleveland Heights and hear any stories about how they fared?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:49:42] Oh, not really. It was a live trip because like when I decided that we were going to move into Cleveland Heights, I called my insurance agent and I just knew that moving into Cleveland Heights that I would-- they were going to reduce my auto insurance because I was moving into a much more prestigious area and she informed me-- she say "you ain't doing nothing but moving up the hill. You ain't getting no discount." So basically it's still turned out to be the steering to a certain extent. It wasn't as bad as what it had been in East Cleveland. It was certain areas that we could buy in in Cleveland Heights and certain areas that we couldn't.

**Mark Souther** [00:50:38] Even in the late '70s?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:50:40] Yeah, yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:50:42] So this is after all of the Heights Community Congress efforts?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:50:45] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:50:45] And you still experienced the steering?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:50:48] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [00:50:48] Did you personally experience the steering with your agent?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:50:51] No, not really. Not really. You know, he knew which areas to bring us into. And, you know, it was sort of undercover 'cause they asked you, "what do you want to spend?" And that's where they got you at. OK? On the other side of Coventry, down in that area and Fairmount, you know, you weren't going over there 'cause those houses were priced totally out of your range. And that's basically the way is actually called modern steering. "How much can you afford to spend? What do you want to spend?" And they take you into those neighborhoods, you know, and I think that's probably how you got hooked up, wasn't it? Yeah. So they would slip and slide you in wherever they wanted you to go at that point in time.

**Mark Souther** [00:51:43] I suppose if a house is a way out of your price range -- no matter who you were.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:51:46] Yeah, yeah. White, Black, green. Yeah, that's what it was, you know. Then the other drawback would be the finance-- the financial institution that you're gonna deal with if they really want to be bothered and take that chance on you. It's one of the things that's then screwed up home buying now.

**Mark Souther** [00:52:05] Did you remember back, even coming into, well, you were too young I guess to know unless maybe your father mentioned, you know, what it was like, but, yeah, I've just-- I've heard lots of accounts in Glenville and then later in Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights and East Cleveland of realtors, I'm sorry, not realtors. Lenders who refuse to refuse to lend money to Black buyers whoh were, you know, they they used the term invading or, you know, becoming the urban pioneers previously an all-white street or neighborhood. Did you encounter that or did your father encounter that in any of these moves?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:52:52] Yeah, well, actually, when my dad bought his house on South Boulevard, the house only cost $8,500. OK? And back at that time, the understanding was you had to make five times your note or four times your note. In other words, you supposed to be able to pay your house note with one paycheck. With my dad working at TRW, oddly enough, he was bringing home more than $55. Well he's bringing home a little less than 55 or a little more than 55. But the down payment that was required on the house on an $8,500 house, he had to have $2,000 down on the house. He went to Central National Bank and they refused to let him have it because he was $200 short. When I purchased my first home, they were telling me I didn't need anything. In fact, the realtor was going to give me the down payment. In fact, that's why some of the problems you're having with housing now exist now because you didn't have to have anything. Just move in. We're going to finance you. And when the bottom fell out, the houses fell out. But they really didn't give a darn. You know. So that's what actually, I think, in my estimation, created a lot of the blight that's going on in the city right now.

**Mark Souther** [00:54:19] When you're moved-- when you're family moved to South Boulevard and he encountered that where he was $200 short, how did he get around that ultimately? So Central National--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:54:32] Yeah, well, actually, the way he got around it was the fact that my uncle was walking down the street and he you know, I guess my dad, you know, with the long face and my Uncle James asked him he said, "what's wrong?" He said, "well, I want to buy the house, but I'm $200 short." So he said, OK. Took him back in the bank, he drawed out $200, gave it to him. He went on and he satisfied the requirement and then they let him have the house. And actually at that time his house note was only $55 a month.

**Mark Souther** [00:55:07] And was South Boulevard all-white or Jewish?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:55:11] No, we bought the last white-owned house on the street. Prior to that, it was all white.

**Mark Souther** [00:55:21] In 1950 already that street was--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:55:22] Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, basically what it was, it depended on which street you really on. If you know now that basically South Boulevard was one of the first streets in the Glenville area where they started putting in $175,000 homes. If you go on South Boulevard, and Mark if you get an opportunity, from 102nd back up to 99th, they've got about 10 or 15 homes on that street that are in that price range. So that's, you know, these sort of-- and then they stopped. So what they're doing right now is any house that is blighted, they just knocking it down. Cause quiet as kept, white folks are coming back. They're going to take 105 back over. If you look at downtown, 30th Street's where-- which were predominantly black, like the projects, they're going to leave those in, but they're going to tear them down eventually and Cleveland will become that. The first suburb that blacks were given to was East Cleveland. And if you look at East Cleveland right now, they coming back.

**Mark Souther** [00:56:51] When you were first moving on to Glenville, you had said that was -- you sort of said that was one of the first streets that integrated?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:57:00] What's that?

**Mark Souther** [00:57:00] Or that transitioned from White to Black? Is that what you meant?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:57:05] What street is that?

**Mark Souther** [00:57:08] South Boulevard?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:57:08] No, basically, it was literally... Actually like I say, we bought the last house owned by whites on South Boulevard.

**Mark Souther** [00:57:18] But the other streets were quite different?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:57:20] Yeah, well I'm not really sure 'cause I, you know, at 10 years old, I wasn't really going around soliciting neighbors to see what the heck was going on. But that's what I'm saying, at that point in time, it probably was integrated to a certain extent, but we eventually end up taking over all the streets.

**Mark Souther** [00:57:39] What do you remember in terms of, I guess another way of getting at it would be to think about your classes at school and how that changed. What period of time would you say you saw the change as you were coming through the schools?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:57:52] Well, actually, I ended up being enrolled in parochial school, OK, which was St. Thomas Aquinas. And there were only three Blacks in St. Thomas Aquinas. I happened to be the third one. I started off at, what was it? Doan or Miles Standish? I think they took me up to Doan, but Doan was full. And then Miles Standish, which was basically they were all-Black schools and like I said by me ended up being Catholic. It kicked me into that portion of it.

**Mark Souther** [00:58:33] Is your family Catholic or did you just--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:58:35] Nope, I was the only Catholic. And the way that came about was the place that my parents were renting from, one of the things that you had to do was pledge to raise your kids Catholic. That's how the three of us ended up at St. Thomas Aquinas.

**Mark Souther** [00:58:55] Where you were renting, you said, where was that?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:59:00] On Cedar.

**Mark Souther** [00:59:02] So the prior location?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:59:03] Yeah, right prior location cause that's where I entered school.

**Mark Souther** [00:59:06] If you rented a house, you had to be Catholic?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [00:59:06] Yeah. Well, if you had kids. You know, it's basically like the old doctor, that's see like-- OK, as Catholicism advanced, when I got married, I married a non-Catholic. Uh. But at that time, I had to go to the-- Oh God. The head priest, I can't think of the name of it now. This, 72 was kind of rough. But me and my wife both had to go and with her being not Catholic, we had to pledge that we would raise the kids Catholic. You know, and it was the way that Rome, I guess is still doing it today. You know, if don't be Catholic, we don't give a darn what you do as long as you come and put your money in the basket. And we're going to make sure that you and your kids and everybody else continues with that. So that's basically what that was at that point in time. So that's how we all-- the three of us ended up going to parochial school.

**Mark Souther** [01:00:18] You said you were the third black student at St. Thomas Aquinas.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:00:22] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [01:00:23] Who were the two before you and how much before you were they in terms of --

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:00:28] Let's see... In fact, my wife ended up working with Anna Smith. Her husband, David Smith, he and I lived in Mrs. Ellis' Building and he was the other one that I remember. Then Gilbert. He ended up-- he died and he ended up swallowing a fishbone or something and choking to death. And that knocked him out of the box. But I do know that Dave Smith was the one who was it was at St. Thomas Aquinas with me.

**Mark Souther** [01:01:16] Did you-- when did you start attending there? Was it still in elementary school? You mentioned Doan and Miles Standish and you went straight in from there and all the way through?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:01:28] Yeah. Well, basically what happened was when Mrs. Ellis found out I was in public school, she bitched. In fact, they told my parents when they took me over to St. Thomas Aquinas, they didn't have any room for me. And Mrs. Ellis at that time was a very, very heavy contributor to the Catholic faith. And she politely said, I'll withdraw my funding from here if you don't let him in. And that's how I ended up going there.

**Mark Souther** [01:01:56] Did it have anything to do with race or not to your knowledge?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:01:59] Yeah it did. Cause we couldn't join the Boy Scouts. I tried to get into the Cub Scouts at St. Thomas and there were not enough Blacks to make a pack. So we were denied that opportunity and that was it.

**Mark Souther** [01:02:17] It's interesting, so even though they admitted a token few students--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:02:21] You didn't get fringes.

**Mark Souther** [01:02:28] And did it change noticeably by the time you were in high school or not so much?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:02:33] Not really. Cause it was Cathedral Latin and it was still white. So it really wasn't a real vast change in there, you know.

**Mark Souther** [01:02:42] But at St. Thomas--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:02:44] Well, that was the elementary school.

**Mark Souther** [01:02:46] Oh I see.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:02:46] That was elementary. Right, right. Right. So that made it kind of different to say the least.

**Mark Souther** [01:02:57] So you spent a lot of time right in that University Circle area--.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:03:00] Right.

**Mark Souther** [01:03:00] In school. At least by Cathedral Latin, that's right there.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:03:05] So that's what that deal was.

**Mark Souther** [01:03:10] Well, I wanted to ask if there's anything else you'd like to add. I might want to come back and interview you another time. OK, you know, I know today--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:03:18] Yeah, it's kind of rough. Folks popping in and out.

**Mark Souther** [01:03:21] Yeah. I appreciate your being with me under the circumstances, OK. More than generous, really. Your time.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:03:28] Well, you know, you did me a heck of a turn.

**Mark Souther** [01:03:33] I was happy to do it.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:03:33] Yeah, and can you do me one more?

**Mark Souther** [01:03:35] Sure.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:03:36] Can you look and see when my grandfather and my dad opened the grocery store on Central? (Chuckles)

**Mark Souther** [01:03:42] When they opened the grocery store? Yeah. I sure can.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:03:42] Yeah. They might have something in the Call & Post about it. I'm trying to build a legacy for my kids and my grandkids so that I can substantiate with print.

**Mark Souther** [01:03:54] Mm hmm. And this was Toppin and Hatcher grocery store. It's in the interview, but I think-- was that-- I wrote down an address here, but I don't know if that's the one I wrote down. Tell me where it was located.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:04:12] It was on-- I really can't remember the address, but it was on 79th. Oh, like 80th and Central.

**Mark Souther** [01:04:23] Did it front on Central?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:04:26] Hmm?

**Mark Souther** [01:04:27] Did it face Central?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:04:28] Yep. The actual street was Central. And I can't think of the cross street that it was on.

**Mark Souther** [01:04:32] I can surely find that in city directory.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:04:34] OK.

**Mark Souther** [01:04:35] I can check the Call & Post too, but do you know what period of time but do know when that grocery store was opened?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:04:39] Oh that was in-- so we moved out cause we was still on 69th at that time. So it had to be around '49, somewhere in there.

**Mark Souther** [01:05:02] That it opened?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:05:02] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [01:05:03] And how long did it run before it was almost pushed out?

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:05:06] It lasted about three or four years.

**Mark Souther** [01:05:11] So maybe to '52.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:05:12] Yeah.

**Mark Souther** [01:05:15] I can surely--

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:05:16] Oh, OK, Mark. I'd appreciate it.

**Mark Souther** [01:05:19] I'll let you know.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:05:20] OK.

**Mark Souther** [01:05:20] But I think we'll conclude now 'cause I know you have other things to do and you're going to have people coming soon, but I'll probably think of other things.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:05:28] OK.

**Mark Souther** [01:05:29] If you think of other things, the next time we meet, let me know.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:05:34] Okay.

**Mark Souther** [01:05:36] But I'll go back and think some more, because I'm sure there are other things I'd like to ask.

**Russell Toppin, Sr.** [01:05:41] OK, no problem. OK, so like I say Mark-- (concludes).