**William Merriman** [00:00:10] [Silence for 10 seconds before audio commences] ... and you know, he helps you work through the crisis of the day for her. And one of our closing comments is that's the fourth time it's happened to me this summer. The radiator hasn't been demolished. C.J. will get behind the wheel, turn the ignition and barrel off down the street. Wait a minute. That's the fourth time this has happened to you this summer. What are you rushing off to? And he's going [makes a sound]. But you have to just go slowly to see where you're going sometimes and she was going too fast. And then another encounter with a runaway, a young woman running away from something, looking for a sense of family. And there he is. And they spend the night huddled around a campfire and has been, you know [unintelligble]... It's awesome. It's a little story. There's a gem. It's always just a gem.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:01:04] Yeah, I will. I will definitely look this up. [laughs] Oh, but I think I met that woman who hit the deer [unintelligable – Merriman laughs] in one summer. Like literally! She was the woman driving in front of me when I was driving through upstate New York and I hit a deer. And I was all, you know, upset. And she's like, don't worry, honey. I've done it like four times this year already. And it was only like June.

**William Merriman** [00:01:29] Yeah, the season is young.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:01:32] Yes. Okay. You ready? Okay. I'm gonna get started.

**William Merriman** [00:01:39] Okay.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:01:40] This is Emma Yanoshik-Wing interviewing Bill Merriman and it is November 18, 2005. Can you tell me about where you were born? The city in the neighborhood.

**William Merriman** [00:01:52] I was born December 6, 1943. Yeah, on the southwest side of Chicago in Little Company of Mary Hospital. My parents lived in a Polish Irish Lithuanian neighborhood southwest of the Stockyards. And my dad was working for a trucking company at the time. My mom, except for working for the telephone company briefly after high school, never worked. She just raised myself and my sister. And my earliest recollection is the street light. The light from the street light coming in my bedroom window and this sense of peace and quiet. I mustn't have been more than 18 months, less than two years old at the time. It's just an eerie sense of peace, of light coming through the darkness and everything being all right. So I grew up on the southwest side. From there, we went to a neighborhood that was basically working-class pre- and post-World War II housing. And I left there in 1965. When I was about to be drafted, I joined the Army and when I got out of the army and had a chance to travel around, my parents were in an inner-ring suburb of Chicago, also on the southwest side, called Evergreen Park, living on Lawndale Avenue. And Lawndale is famous as being the birthplace and neighborhood of the Unabomber. It's a very conservative neighborhood on the southwest side, similar to perhaps to parts of Parma, Ohio.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:03:31] Now, when did you move to Cleveland and how did you make that move?

**William Merriman** [00:03:36] I went to John Carroll briefly prior to going through the Army. I wasn't a successful student. After I came out of the Army, I tried to go back into school again unsuccessfully at John Carroll University, getting by on monthly checks because of the G.I. Bill, paid for tuition, room and board, and some living expenses. That was in 1969. I started volunteering at St. Patrick's Parish, living at 38th and Whitman doing open gym and tutoring and so forth, stopped going to school and just began to get deeper and deeper into the neighborhood and more involved in volunteer services mixing with the people. I must say that this is in response, not just to accidentally ending up in that neighborhood or it's being coincidental, but it was a response to having been abroad for three and a half years. No, Yeah. Three and a half years when I was in the army in Ethiopia and Eritrea and traveling around for half a year after that in East Africa and in India, mostly usually hitchhiking, getting by on a dollar a day or less. Perhaps it was in response to having seen the other side of the coin for such a long period of time and seeing the real condition of the world that I was able to connect in a very personal way with this neighborhood and the people and their circumstances.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:05:14] So even though you were going to John Carroll. You always kind of lived on the near west side. Or did you.

**William Merriman** [00:05:22] Yeah. Yeah, since 1969, I have not lived anywhere else. It seems like a short while ago.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:05:29] And what street exactly do you live on?

**William Merriman** [00:05:30] I live on Church Avenue, which is off of Detroit. It's right off of well, at the end of Church Avenue is the home of St. John's Episcopal Church building, put up in 1836. It's the oldest church in Cuyahoga County. And along with other churches, it was the terminus of the Underground Railroad where slaves escaping from Virginia and from Kentucky crossed the river and came up to the Great Lakes region from Oberlin going northwest to the Detroit River area or directly north towards Cleveland or in some cases towards Buffalo to cross over there. Those who are coming into Cleveland would touch base at St. John's Episcopal, also Second Presbyterian, which doesn't exist anymore. Twenty-ninth and Detroit, right off Church Avenue. But if a person were to be out on Detroit Avenue in the mid or late '50s, early '60s, there would have been this scurrying about in the shadows as people were pouring in from the south are lining up for passage by boat over the over the lake to Ontario. I mentioned second Presbyterian because the tradition is that they took one of the ropes from the carillon from the bell tower and hung it on the outside of the tower so that if anyone saw a bounty hunter in the community, you could ring that particular bell alarming the neighborhood to the presence of bounty hunters. And they would be sure to get everyone else, get everyone undercover. If a bounty hunter, were able to capture somebody, they would take that runaway slave to the court and get documents allowing them to transport this slave back to to you know Kentucky or Virginia. I'm told that the last person to be taken prior to the firing on Fort Sumter was a woman caught on Church Avenue, the very last one prior to the beginning of the Civil War was actually a woman caught on Church Avenue. So it's a narrow street. Most of the housing on Detroit Avenue was originally an Indian trail connecting the end of the Cuyahoga River with Fort Detroit on the Detroit River. An old beach line raised up high that allowed the the Native Americans to run out of dry-shod. And then as Europeans came and they use the same trails to get to Fort Detroit. And then it became a stagecoach route and an interurban railroad line went on that same beach line. And sometimes you find highways and expressways going along the same way. So it's hard. But right off of that was a very modest street, church avenue. Working-class cottages. And one of the things that we've managed to do is help save the last of the housing on our block. We've my wife and I've fixed up three houses, built a new house, and had a hand in saving half a dozen others on the street from being torn down. So the whole thing might have looked like a parking lot. Such as you see. Between 25th and 29th Street, a lot of parking lots down there.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:09:02] Was that kind of outside of working at St. Pat's. One of your first I guess endeavors in community activism was working to preserve...

**William Merriman** [00:09:13] Housing. When we first married, we didn't have much money. Bob began actually moved out of his place. He was running for 50 bucks a month and he left some of his furniture in the place. We didn't have much of an income like I had indicated. I was going to school on the G.I. Bill and I was tutoring a little bit, but we were getting by on very, very little. I think we resonated with those who were severely marginalized in terms of housing opportunities and so forth, and coming out of Chicago. It broke my heart to see all of the beautiful housing stock being torched, being abandoned, being bulldozed, being burned. And I was involved directly with with others in boarding up some of the vacant properties. I tried to save the big houses that were on Clinton Avenue. And with almost without an exception, they were all the ones that are gone are gone because I just couldn't keep the boards on the doors and the windows. But on Church Avenue, I managed to keep the plywood up until people were found to express an interest. One fellow was moving out of the neighborhood and he was ready to give us a house for 10,000 dollars. I found out a man and woman and their two children who needed a house for custom 10,000 dollars and I just paired them up. Another young man soon to be married was looking for a house, and I plugged him into a house. It was going to be vacated. I boarded up a couple houses myself. Another house I could have, you know, we could have left to be bulldozed, was saved because of our intervention. And then we fixed up a house for ourselves. We've got a refugee family living there now, a family of a eleven. Another four suite is the headquarters of the Jesuit volunteer community for their Cleveland experience. And there is a single mom and her two kids and another house still. So we kind of have helped, along with others, stabilize affordable housing on one street. And, when I say I mean my wife, too, because without her support and her patience with me, none of this could have happened. She could have left me, I guess, a time ago. But I was part of Near West Housing Partners, which 25, 30 to 25 years ago or more was involved in stabilizing housing, boarding-up vacant properties, getting them rehabbed. I was first rehabbing going on in our neighborhood. Women's Transitional Housing on 25th Street was one of our projects. It's a former motel best known for lunchtime rendezvous with men and women from the offices downtown. And at night there's quite a bit of prostitution involving children going on down there. So with once pressure was you know put on that place, the Sisters of St. Joseph expressed interest in securing the building, and it was turned into a long-term residence for women who had been in shelters. The Miller building at 32nd and Lorain, which is paired with the Gordon Square and the 3607 Clinton building, was first saved from demolition by our group that jumped in and bought it up at an auction, keeping it from demolition. She spent a number of housing-related things that I've been involved in, along with other good people in the community. 3607 Clinton building was had 23 units and about. Three or four years ago, the for sale sign was stuck in front of the building and I quickly pulled together some resources, including Tony Schuerger, the pastor at St. Malach's, who came or came up with fifty thousand dollars as a loan to secure a promissory note so that it could be kept off of the open market and preserved for affordable housing. And this is real. You know, I was very fortunate that we're able to do that when the county nursing home closed, it was initially at 32nd and Franklin. The history of that location, 32nd and Franklin across from the old YMCA building, there were two framed buildings a hundred and fifty years ago that were developed as the German Women's Hospital, which eventually became known as Fairview Park Hospital. And and then the county nursing home took over that site. When Fairview Hospital moved to Kamm's Corners and Metro finally took over the county nursing home and prepared the site for demolition, our block club jumped in and requested that we be able to work with the developer to develop 40 units of affordable housing at that site, which we did. Of the 40 two and three bedroom apartments, probably 80 percent of them are affordable and the remainder are market rate. I just say it's been the neighbors and the has been an opportunity for me to kind of let some of my interest and my gifts, so to speak, you know, come to the surface. If I'd been in some other place, maybe I'd just be reading a lot of books. But in this neighborhood, seems like it all makes sense. I like your smile. [laughs]

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:14:33] Thanks. You mentioned the old YMCA building.

**William Merriman** [00:14:37] Yes.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:14:38] Can you tell me a little bit about that? Is that. Is that still there?

**William Merriman** [00:14:44] Yeah. Still there. Still there.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:14:46] But its no longer a YMCA correct?

**William Merriman** [00:14:47] No about 10, 15 years ago there were four Pick n Pay grocery stores on the Near West Side. And I was reading a Crain's Cleveland Business publication and they reprinted some data indicating that Pick n Pay was told that each of the four profitable stores could provide a greater cash flow if one by one they were closed, forcing people to enter the remaining store. You lower overhead that way. And sure enough, they did that until finally they were there were two over on Clark, there was one on Lorain-Fulton, and there's one at 65th and Franklin. And one by one, they closed these stores, forcing the community to find transportation to go to the remaining store. And finally, the remaining store was closed. That model of you know lowering overhead cost and placing the onus of transporting upon the consumer rather than the provider so that the people are going to the big box store, in a sense, to get the groceries from the warehouse rather than the warehouse bringing the groceries into the community, that model was assumed by the YMCA. They tried to shut down that Y maybe five years previously and the chairman of the board at the time wasn't able to do the dirty deed. So the local board of the YMCA brought in a new man from Chicago, a hitman who is a street fighter and really bright guy. A lot of guts, a lot of raw knuckles, a lot of savvy. And Glenn, Glenn I forget what his last name is. But basically the flagship Y down on Prospect Avenue was hurting real bad. They didn't have enough membership. They didn't have enough cash flow to cover the costs of overhead. And so they decided to close two local Ys that were in effect competing for a limited market. And so they closed West Side Y. And I don't know whatever happened to Glenville and also the Brookside or the Brooklyn Y at 25th and Denison and, you know, is very, very vulnerable. It's the same model used elsewhere. And that is so contrary to that, the tradition of what the Y is all about. At that site in 1901, 1903 was a mansion. The Wilson Mansion was the name. Mr. Wilson seeing the large numbers of kids wandering the streets without education, with nothing but time and trouble on their hands, donated his mansion for the care of young, young boys in the neighborhood. And after two years, the mansion was torn down, replaced with the current structure. The wealthy of the community donated the money, and there was no national organization. There was no, no, no, no big united way. Anything like the people did it themselves because it's the right thing to do. And in terms of times changing it's too much bottom line now the like I say the downtown Y wanted that membership and so they pulled the plug on the west side Y in spite of the fact that the somewhat old at this outdated building and needed it a lot of repair, but they didn't give us a chance. They just told they gave us a date. So this is when it's closing. And instead of closing, at the end of the day, they actually came in at midnight the day before and slapped locks on everything. It was the same kind of dirty stuff they do in corporate America. And that's the kind of people that they get nowadays to do the dirty stuff. They could get street fighters. It's quite a lesson.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:18:28] Now, there was some discussion about Detroit Shoreway actually purchasing the Y.

**William Merriman** [00:18:33] Or collaborating with Ohio City.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:18:36] Okay.

**William Merriman** [00:18:36] Because it's in the OCNW service area and you won't find one local to my corporation interfering or competing or being active in an adjacent area. And OCNW will, you know, will I think state full confidence that, you know, they do collaborate with Detroit Shoreway, that there isn't any kind of tension between the organizations that they collaborate and that they're willing to do so. There may be some, you know, some scuttlebutt or rumor or even misinformation and maybe some truth to some of the above. I don't know. But I think in order for these things to succeed, there has to be collaboration. The 3607 Clinton building is managed by Tremont West Development Corporation because Ohio City Near West doesn't have staff to do that. We are when the Fairview Gardens 55-plus senior housing building was put together, OCNW was a local developer, but Detroit Shoreway did the social services component because Ohio City Near West doesn't do that. So whenever they do things well, you get a lot more points if you do it with fellow players.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:19:52] Now at what point the Ohio City and Detroit Shoreway CDCs were actually one unit. Is that correct or...

**William Merriman** [00:19:57] I don't recall that. No. No, I don't. Ohio City Near West, we've had a block club—it was the Church-Clinton Block Club—going back into the early '70s, and in the mid-'70s the Ohio City Block Club Organization proposed spending some federal dollars on decorative street lamps and benches or something like that. And a number of the people in the longstanding block clubs said that that may not be the best use of those federal dollars. We talked about developing infrastructure and services for the needy. And then the Ohio City and that block club organization was called Near West Neighbors in Action. Perhaps 15 years ago, the Ohio City Block Club people resurrected with Helen Spaeth, the councilperson, and there was a shotgun wedding between Ohio City Development and Near West Neighbors to form Ohio City Near West Development Corporation. At that time, I don't think there was a relationship with Detroit Shoreway. Detroit Shoreway, as I recall, came out of I think a couple activities, a very couple, a very important couple of people. Father Frascati of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Ray Pianka in their development of Villa Mercedes and the housing back here behind us. And Ray Pianka and block club people working on specific projects and a small scale like the big umbrella development corporations, I don't think were, you know, I don't think they were interacting because they were based on... There were small, more limited activities going on. And there wasn't the one large scale stuff happening. I don't know if they were coordinating too much. There used to be more block clubs or more development corporations, if I'm not mistaken, at one point and they used... the organizers and social activists used to huddle. The organizers were frequently funded through the I guess it was... I think they get a lot... They had a lot of funding through the church and the city and others, and the organizers tended to huddle and probably find agendas among themselves that weren't always, you know, they didn't always share with the neighborhood people what their goals were, that the organizers' goals were. So there was a little bit of tension there. So, yeah, there was some there is some communication, but it wasn't as open. And it wasn't that on the on the on the administrative level at the time. Maybe it was maybe on a lower level.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:23:02] But what years were was this kind of happening?

**William Merriman** [00:23:08] I mean, 20, 25 years ago, I think, on the activist level dealing with poverty issues. There was a lot of collaboration at that time. When the development dollars started coming in at Enterprise Foundation, and then they said, I'm sorry, I can't think of, you know, the sources of the, you know, this funding. Then you ended up having admin, you know, local development corporation administration capable of moving a lot of dollars around and locating major developers. I don't think at that time the money was interested in these neighborhoods all that much. It was more like addressing the safety concerns and school concerns in the community. That's where the neighborhood organizations were. And in controlling blight, abandonment of housing or restoring housing, renovating housing, not in the fashion that we see more recently along Detroit, Bridge, and Franklin. But on the side streets, keeping arson down. Issues like that. And it's only the past 10 years, I think, that we've seen this big upswing in major development.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:24:35] Can you explain to me about the block clubs and your involvement?

**William Merriman** [00:24:44] I think that from looking at it, from my experience, it takes an awful lot to raise a family in an urban environment like this. And if you don't have a family, if you're single or a couple, there are a lot of rewards. Living in the city and there are a lot of tensions on my street, for example. We deal with drugs and prostitution every night. And you need to have something to counterbalance that. The. And we've met and I talk about 30 years ago. The arson, for example, and how we had come out in the morning and find the hoods up on the cars and all the batteries gone, or tires slashed. The presence of crime has always been a challenge in the neighborhood. One of the consistent reasons for having a block club is support you get for one another. Personal support and the ability to go to the police or the Board of Education as necessary or any public authority and, you know, deal with this in a political way, exerting pressure to get more protection or more services. That includes the schools and the recreation department. I remember back around 1971 or '72. The community wanted a recreation center, didn't have one around here. And we organized a meeting at the old William Dean Howells Junior High School and Margaret McCaffery, the councilwoman, was invited to speak and she hemmed and hawed. And at the end of this presentation in an auditorium, she presented the community with a basketball and a basketball hoop. And that's how she responded to our needs for a recreation center. Later on, we were it was suggested that maybe our recreation center might involve purchasing a Hungarian social club that was about to be vacated. And that could be our recreation center.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:26:58] Where was that?

**William Merriman** [00:26:58] Around 40th and Lorain on the south side of the street. There's a convenience store set way back with it's now a child care. And Bodnar Funeral Home is on the corner as well as on the southeast corner of 41st and Lorain. And I use the Turners Hall, which mysteriously burned. So instead of being sold to the city for a recreation center, the Turners Association collected a big insurance package and were able to build a new facility using the funds from the fire. When it turned out, actually, you know, one of the bad things turned out to be an asset to the neighborhood. When I-90 went through and took out so much of the housing from the community, the plan involved an enormous opening at 65th and Lorain and I don't know if we ever thought twice about why so much land was torn down for that section of I-90, around 65th Street. They didn't have to tear down as much as they did, but they did. And there was all of this space without any explanation. And then one Monday morning we woke up and the explanation was on the front page of the newspaper. There was going to be an interchange at 65th and Lorain with a connecting expressway from 65th and Lorain to 45th and Detroit, roughly where the Harp Restaurant is east of Max S. Hayes High School, and the community wasn't told about it. And by then, our our trust in state government and the administrators and the transportation people had been totally poisoned. And there was you know the march on Columbus began. In the end, the state had to withdraw their plans for bulldozing right through St. Stephen's Church and stuff like that. They were they just saw this as open land and they withdrew. They withdrew the that leg of the interstate. Then having that open land available, the community, people like Glenn Fisher went to the city and said, now that we have the land, we have a place for you to put up the recreation center. And that's how Zone Recreation Center came to be. It was provided through a, you know, maybe a a good outcome coming out of a bad situation that we lost a lot of housing and businesses. This is because of the interstate demolition, but they have provided us with an opportunity to develop local recreation. So there was good evidence named after Mike Zone from this neighborhood. He and his wife and now his son have done well by the community.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:29:49] What year 90 put in?

**William Merriman** [00:29:52] They were taking down housing in the late '60s. And I'm not sure when they ended up, you know, pouring concrete late '60s to late '70s. It took a long time. It took a long time. And the firetrucks would be over along those streets almost every night putting out another house. Kids would go over there and torch house after house after house. And when they ran out of houses, the kids came over to this neighborhood and looking looking for empty houses and started burning those houses.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:30:24] You had mentioned the March on Columbus and that was to.

**William Merriman** [00:30:31] Well, yeah, I. Yeah. In this case, when I say march maybe. You know, they they put pressure on the Transportation Department to abandon that using our own local political resources, our city council people and Mary Rose Oakar and in Washington and others would have banded together to present a broad spectrum, an alliance opposed to demolishing anymore of the near west side Columbus, you know the Department of Transportation using federal dollars. I think you know ridden roughshod over urban areas. And now, you know, I was talking with Nancy McCormack you know and she referred to Tim Walters, who's going down to Columbus almost every other week dealing with utility rates and and other services and funding for so, you know, for the poor and the needy, the elderly.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:31:39] Another successful fight against the interchange, but was there an active, I guess, community action against the highway.

**William Merriman** [00:31:49] Itself?

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:31:50] Going through

**William Merriman** [00:31:50] Initially, I wasn't here then. I came in '69 and the demolition was well underway. And the buying out of properties. Yeah, you did. Yeah. I don't know how much of Cuyahoga County and Lorain County was built up at that point, but it precipitated along with the busing, school busing. It just resulted in emptying out maybe 40 percent of the neighborhoods in the presence of the interstate gave people an opportunity to relocate in Westlake and North Olmstead and beyond and still come back in to go to work downtown while there were still jobs downtown and in the steel mills. And then you had the busing situation prompted even more people to abandon the city, especially the west side.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:32:48] When was the busing?

**William Merriman** [00:32:51] Mid-'70s. Mid-'70s. Yeah. I mean, when did it begin? Perhaps '77 like the legal procedure started before then, and then it was enacted later in the '70s, as I recall. And people who had the means did the unfortunate thing about this neighborhood as it was so heavily integrated already. The Near West Side has always had at least some African American population, Native American population, Southeast Asian population, Hispanic population, what's known as Ohio City, Detroit Shoreway probably was already a model community. And the kids went together to the same schools. Not always, you know, not always totally integrated. But there was a greater presence then than there was ever at any time thereafter in terms of integration, economically and racially, culturally. But with the the you know, when these families saw their kids getting on a school bus and heading off to the east side, many of them sold their homes and relocated outside of the city school district were resulting in what may be one of the good outcomes as that is they abandoned neighborhoods, they created housing opportunities for African American families to relocate from the east side. So actually, the neighborhood became heavily integrated because of those conditions.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:34:27] Do you know up until what year busing was still used? Still heard.

**William Merriman** [00:34:35] So they used. I think maybe you should ask the people down at Cleveland State that question. Yeah. We still have busing but the cost of busing has forced the Board of Education to reduce the number of kids who can have access to a bus. Kids who are 5 years old going to kindergarten through high school. Kids have to walk up to two miles to get to a public school now. And the more the Board of Education's budget is cut back, the more reason they find to pretty much withdraw the buses. So economic conditions have brought an end of busing as much as political conditions, perhaps. You know, I it's hard to say. I don't know what's happening elsewhere around the city. But on the Near West Side, pretty much kids who are going to the schools live within two miles of the schools are attending. The exception being in some schools have been closed because adjacent public housing projects have been emptied out, through because of renovation, Hope 6 program, whatever. And when those public schools closed, the kids are are they they try to keep the kids intact. And so they will bus those kids into you know the same school if possible. Or maybe the school is being torn down and being replaced; those kids will end up on a school bus. So those buses are being used to maybe keep some of the classes that have been together for years intact in another school until something more permanent you know is arrived at with replacement housing or a new school building back in the old neighborhood. They still do have buses, but the act of it is driven down by economics. And I think maybe the you know that the courts have found that Cleveland is no longer the segregated community that it was in the '60s. So much attention was given by Paul Briggs, the head of the Board of Education in the '60s to architecture and these beautiful buildings—he thought they were beautiful and innovative—were frequently nailing down intact white communities. And I don't think he was necessarily providing the same quality buildings to black neighborhoods. The white neighborhoods were getting better buildings and they were being placed in order to pull together white students from white neighborhoods and they tended to keep racially diverse communities from mingling in the same building. So he was kind of cementing that the integrated communities together when he was the head of the Board of Education. He was kind of a shining knight with his new buildings, but actually was doing a great disservice to the city of Cleveland and he's personally responsible for much of the loss that the city has suffered when you consider the white flight, you know, to the suburbs.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:37:42] What were some of the buildings that came about during his...

**William Merriman** [00:37:43] His tenure? There's a funny one on Fulton and Walton, Walton School. And at that time, they there was the open classroom model presented where you just had flexible space. And in that that school, you walked down a corridor with a courtyard on one side and they have flexible partitions for classroom walls. And you can move these partitions around to make a variety of config classroom configurations. While currently you had to walk through one classroom to get to another classroom its just a jumble. And I think they look forward to demolishing that school some time as a total failure, a waste of money, just a big waste of money. Another similar school was the old Hicks School [at] 24th and Bridge Avenue, which was demolished. Same open classroom configuration with a large central library, administrative space and I think kindergarten or something like that done on the same level as just very noisy. Hard to control poor learning environments. So I don't know if it was... He made a lot of money for the architecture and construction firms, but he really didn't provide the kind of resources that kids needed at that time. At the same time Urban Community School was being founded, there were three Catholic schools—Pat's, Malachi's, and Wendelin's—that were terminated by the Diocese and they used old buildings, outmoded, obsolete architecture, but with the same concept of open classroom learning at your own level, non-gradedness. And that school just opened a brand new building at Lorain Avenue at 49th, totally successful. And they were reading the same books, they were going to the same experts. This multi, multibillion dollar construction program by the Board of Education was a failure. And the shoestring budget used by Urban Community School was a total success.

**Mark Tebeau** [00:39:50] I'm going to interrupt only because I am going to leave in a second so when I have to leave don't take that as an indication that I am...

**William Merriman** [00:39:58] I know you're bored.

**Mark Tebeau** [00:39:59] Bored or but.

**William Merriman** [00:40:00] More important things to do.

**Mark Tebeau** [00:40:02] But I wanted to ask one question before I left, and that is this need you talk about the neighborhood you get a sense of the neighborhood that was once here, so if you can think of for us for the tape five buildings five structures that you miss. And you can remember maybe not even five. Three just a couple of places that are gone.

**William Merriman** [00:40:24] For the sake for the sake of architecture or?

**Mark Tebeau** [00:40:28] For the sake of anything. Actually it could be architecture, could be a function of community. A building that you just saw disappear. Why wouldn't it be great to have it back? Either because it's such an event, so integral to the community, making it so beautiful. You know, the criteria entirely

**William Merriman** [00:40:46] Including the YMCA. The buildings still there but the function is gone.

**Mark Tebeau** [00:40:49] Right. And just tell us the story. Something about that building and what its meaning is.

**William Merriman** [00:40:57] Yeah, as long as we're mentioning the Y and I did give some lead in about this Wilson family, donating a very significant mansion for the good of the people and then that the bean counters downtown on Prospect Avenue shutting that program down for their own benefit. You know, I don't know what's gonna happen. I mean, that's is very much a live issue. The YMCA has to maintain the structure through this coming winter season. There are developers lined up to check the site, which includes two parking lots, surface-level parking lots. And you turn it into upscale housing.

**Mark Tebeau** [00:41:40] And where is this site?

**William Merriman** [00:41:41] 3200 Franklin. And there's you know, it seems like some of the upscale housing has hit a ceiling. Right around the corner there are a series of townhouses going for between half to three quarters of a million dollars. And the only two units that are sold are occupied by the co-investors in the original project. No buyers have come in. There is a limit to how much a person can charge for housing in the neighborhood. My concern and I don't know who the best person or what the best developer is for a site like that. My value for the neighborhood is Ohio City, I am not talking Detroit Shoreway. Ohio City was a city and cities like with the river down the middle like Buda and Pest, and Minneapolis and St. Paul, and St. Joseph and Benton Harbor, East [and] West St. Louis. They have their own legs to stand on or they did. And Ohio City used to have light industry, commerce, shipping, people living in tarpaper shacks and even the Hanna family had a mansion at 25th and Franklin at one time. Churches, schools, libraries, the whole thing. I think the past of Ohio City was remarkable because they did well by one another. I think the future in the future Ohio City can be proud of itself if it continues to offer a place for all people. For the professionals. For the teachers. Blue-collar workers. And for people who are just arriving on our shores from West Africa and from or from elsewhere. This is where the Native Americans first came when Eisenhower shut down the reservations. They came to St. John's Church at 26th and Church to try a new way of life, and the community was there to support them. When this neighborhood stops attending to the needs of all people and when we stop finding a way for all people to better relate to one another, reach out and help one another forward, then we're not the same community anymore. And I think the YMCA building at 32nd and Franklin emblemizes that risk and that challenge that you know we continue to think of the diversity of the neighborhood racially, economically, culturally, because we enrich one another. We both gain to to move forward with our lives as we reach out to somebody unlike ourselves and get to trust and care about one another. So I think that would be the first building I can think of. There were there was when it was still open until a few years ago, a couple of years ago. And less than that, there were guys coming down from Lakewood there were guys come old-timers coming down, driving half an hour to play racquetball together because they played back racquetball together in the same courts since they were teenagers. And now these guys are retired. It was a building that served the community and helped maintain community. It built community, the community. There were a couple community rooms. They were used by the block club for meetings, is used for a yoga group that was comprised of young and old men, women, teenagers, professional people, people on welfare. And not only did they care for themselves individually, but they developed relationships with one another. So if there's a future for the building, we hope that whatever developer we have, we will have continued use of those community areas. Another building across the street is what is vantage place for originally the YWCA. It was used after the YW moved out by the humility of Mary nuns who used it as an educational training center. And then it was used for assisted living. And now it's used for people who have emotional problems, most of whom are former veterans and the presence of those vulnerable people in the neighborhood is really important to who we are. Again, we've got room in our community for people who are marginalized. I'm still thinking I'm a deacon at St. Patrick's Church on Bridge Avenue. When I first came into the neighborhood, I lived in a house, the former cook's house on that property, that was available to college students who wanted to serve the neighborhood and take some courses in urban studies, sociology, political science, economics and so forth. At the same time, and I didn't do that for much longer, but I liked the practicum quite a bit of, you know, learning on-site, so to speak, not in the classroom, but learning among the people in St. Pat's continues to serve that need. It's the site of the Catholic Worker House, young people who share the old convent space with people who are emotionally ill and homeless and so forth. We've got an AA and groups at the site, hot meals programs Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays down the street, a food pantry. And we'll try to build a congregation that is pretty cross-sectional from all time families that have been in the community for many generations, as well as the refugee people who have arrived from Africa. You get folks who are in the city administration and various departments, as well as people who are out of work and looking for work. People who are mentally ill and physically challenged are all part of that congregation. So St. Pat's Is just one of many, many churches in the neighborhood that serve as boat anchors to the community. Without places like St. Pat's and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the Detroit Shoreway area, these little pockets of housing would have been gone. The religious communities or the communities of people who have some kind of a spiritual spirituality, some kind of a faith life, who hang in there and who can weather this storm and find some reason to stay put in spite of everything that wants to push them on. But they stay put and sacrifice and give themselves. All of that's because of the churches, I think, more than any other thing. There are other factors, but the churches are probably one of the most powerful things that keep the neighborhood glued together. The West Side Market is obviously one of the the boat anchors of the neighborhood where people from all walks of life gather together regularly to meet their needs. I don't know, St. John's Church down the street from me, 26th and Church. The weekend services draw less than 15 people. And that's sad. There's a new clergy person down there, a woman who's going to be ordained and an Episcopal priest. And she's looking for a reason for that church's being there. And she wants to commit to find that reason to serve the neighborhood. The street I live on Church Avenue 29th to 32nd little cottages that were probably built, land included for five hundred dollars are are hanging in there. And perhaps they would give a visitor to the community a feel of what the neighborhood must have looked like in the 1840s and 1850s. Right behind that are the quarter-million-dollar and half-million-dollar townhouses, but for at least one, say, one short stroll down one street, you can still feel the presence of the poor and the simple and the hard-working blue-collar people that walk the streets a long time ago. And I hope that is travelers coming up from Zoar Village on the [Ohio] Canal Corridor and cutting westwards to Edgewater Park will wait a little while and look out over Whiskey Island at roughly 29th to 32nd and Detroit Avenue and appreciate the presence of the water and the sunset and the ships and and turn around and see the modest housing and perhaps be refreshed that amidst all of the high price development, there's something very simple that's still here and something very quiet and something very hospitable, something that is there for the common person who doesn't have to spend a lot of money to appreciate the day and the time. I could talk about something in every block, but I thought maybe I gave them a couple examples.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:51:03] Yes definitely. Just kind of a just a question about St. Pat's, is that the church that has the beams in it that were...

**William Merriman** [00:51:16] That lie?

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:51:17] Oh, it's not true.

**William Merriman** [00:51:19] No, of course not! It's Irish. [laughs]

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:51:22] Well. [laughs]

**William Merriman** [00:51:23] It's a bunch of baloney. [laughs]

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:51:25] Okay. [laughs] I was wondering.

**William Merriman** [00:51:30] Yeah. The first Catholic... There used to be a priest coming up from Columbus on a horse and they would have their services in people's homes. And then they they built a wooden structure down on Columbus Road. And in 1852, that church was going to be closed. They put up a church on the east side, which became St. John's Cathedral at 9th and Superior and on the west side, a little brick building on Whitman Avenue, which needed to be replaced within less than 20 years by a stone building on Bridge Avenue and 18th. They laid the cornerstone for that in 1871. Actually, the people did want to move up there. They wanted to stay in their little tarpaper shacks down along the river. But the bishop said, you got to get out of your slum and join the rest of the world. So they were forced to move into a Protestant neighborhood first in the brick building, and then they had the cornerstone laid down for the big church. 1871 was the beginning of a worldwide financial panic. And most of the parishioners, I think, were out of work and they weren't able to pay somebody to continue with the construction. So they found a quarry in Sandusky County and the owners said you can have as much limestone as you can cut. And they went to the funeral director McGorray's and McGorray let them have freight wagons and horses and mules and they got some tents and some flour and so forth. And these gangs of unemployed workers, ditch diggers and longshoremen would go for a week at a time to Sandusky County cut stone bring it back and throw up the walls at St. Pat's put up a roof. To hold the roof up they wanted to get some columns and they were always looking for a way to get something free or close to free. Cleveland used to be one of the largest shipbuilding cities in the United States, pre-Civil War. No, this is '71. So it's post-Civil War and a lot of these sailing ships were being replaced with steam. So it was in the legend. The lie was that the Irish immigrants went all the way back to Boston Harbor. And as the old Cunard sailing ships were being dismantled, the very ships that they had sailed in as they came over from Ireland, they would buy the masts and then they would transport those masts to Cleveland to hold up the roof of St. Patrick's Church, which is a bunch of poppycock. I mean, because half a mile away in the Cleveland Harbor, sailing ships were being dismantled as they were being replaced by steamships and there were masts all over the place for the taking. And, you know, I think it's probably true that the roof is held up by old ships' masts, because the price is right. But I don't think they had to go more than half a mile to get those masts. You got to watch out what they tell you [laughs] with these Irish stories!

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:54:30] I am going to kind of. Where did you. What did you do for your occupation?

**William Merriman** [00:54:32] I was a letter carrier.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:54:34] In your neighborhood?

**William Merriman** [00:54:35] Yes. Yeah.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [00:54:36] Can you describe your route to me or which areas it covered?

**William Merriman** [00:54:39] Perhaps for five years I worked out of Station A, 66th and Lorain from 58th and Franklin to 45th and Turn Avenue down by the railroad tracks south of Lorain Avenue. And from there I went into the very neighborhood where I live from 25th and Detroit to 45th and Franklin. And so for a total of roughly 25 years I was serving my neighbors and friends, which was a real privilege. It was like being the the hometown mailman. Yeah, I knew people on these streets even before I was the letter carrier and I knew them even more intimately having become their letter carrier. It wasn't a matter of just stuffing mailboxes, but I was able to talk to people, get to know people, help people find jobs, help people find housing, educational opportunities. Maybe one extreme example, there was a man on 45th south of Lorain an older retired man who had all kinds of stories about who he was, where he had come from, how he had grown up in Akron and come to Cleveland to go to St. Ignatius College when it was a college. And. And I don't know what to make of the guy in the end. He had fabricated such a history about himself. But. I was asking a neighbor. This is a frame house that had maybe three or four mailboxes. I asked a neighbor why, you know. You know, something about his name was Bill. And she said, well, she was worried about Bill because his mail was piled up. And I said, no, his mailbox is empty. And she said, oh, no, I've been taking his mail inside and putting it by his door. And now there's a little pile of it. And so I became worried. And I went to the landlord and got the key and went in and found Bill dead in bed. And, you know, it was the kind of a relationship with a person that I think Bill could have laid there for a long, long time. But the landlord gave me the key and we called the coroners and again, connected with St. Pat's. We had a funeral service for Bill and found him a burial plot in a Catholic cemetery and contacted he had mentioned Detroit, contacted the sheriff's department in Detroit and actually connected with his family that he had lost contact with in terms of where it would have what had happened to him and that he was safely buried. It's a privilege to be in a place where, you know, you can just tell people that way. That's a sad one, perhaps. But, you know, there are a lot other examples that are more fun in the same area, going by a businessman who was upset about something. Has he just lost his secretary receptionist. And within five minutes, they ran into a Puerto Rican woman who was looking for a job and she didn't know how to use a computer, but she could kind of type. So I sent her down to see Tony and Tony hired her. And this woman became an office manager in a matter of a couple of years and began a career. And unfortunately, our society doesn't have people out on the street because it isn't really that hard to do to connect people. But the way we live our lives with all of our running around and lack of local services and so forth, it's something that's missing and something that we... It's hard to replace that person to person contact because I don't know. The personal contact that the way we relate to and help one another gives us plenty of reason for staying connected to the city and to neighborhoods like this. We have to have direct face to face contact with one another. You know, there's always somebody who would rather just stay inside and watch television. And it's a neighborhood for that, too. But without the people connected with one another, more so than out in the suburbs, I I was delivering mail on a Saturday summertime and was there was a business and Detroit that had bought a property in the back. They were going gonna tear down the house and they were told so that they could use the backyard for parking. And they were told that they couldn't use the back yard for parking unless they fixed up the house on the front of the lot. So they fixed up the house. And on a Saturday afternoon, I ran into the controller of the business looking at the building, it just paid to get fixed up. And we started talking and a nosy neighbor came over. We spent about 20 minutes, Jim Mahone and myself and this guy from Conveyor Caster just talking about whatever leaning against the fence. This guy was in his mid or late 70s and he said, well, gentlemen, I must say that I have never done this before in my life. I've never sat and lean. I've never leaned against a fence and just spent all this valuable time just talking to people. And he says, I live out in Bay Village and I don't know. And I've lived there for 25 years and I have never seen or talked to a single one of my neighbors. And he said this has been one of the most pleasurable experiences of my life. This man was terminally ill, too, and was dead in a couple of months. And he spent his whole life and never leaned against the fence and talked to somebody. That happens in neighbors like this all the time. If we let it, that's why we need neighbors like this.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:00:28] Do you stop and talk with your current mail carrier?

**William Merriman** [01:00:32] I do. Jennifer's a very private person and I try to turn her on to the neighborhood. I try to get her caught up in opportunities for her to get to know people. And it works both ways. When we access one another, both of us gain. Relationships are always mutual, and so on occasion, it seems like one person is being helpful to the other, then actually it's it's actually both people are growing. That's what we're here for, I think we are meant to be, you know, community and and maybe one of the functions for neighbors like Detroit Shoreway, Ohio City, and Fleet Avenue Slavic Village is. We do this for the whole the broader community. If there are neighborhoods that don't have this going on. We do it for them until finally, you know, the wisdom of what goes on here as well as the wisdom of what goes on there, maybe rubs off on one another. But I think we do this for all of us.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:01:50] I'm just kind of a question about the boundaries between Ohio City and Detroit Shoreway. Do you. Do you think that the boundaries are just kind of mainly political? Do you actually...

**William Merriman** [01:02:05] Good question. Good question. I mean, I really feel 45th Street. I get down to 45th Street. That's also a postal boundary. One side of 45th is 13. The other side is 02. And I don't know what it feels like for somebody living, say, around 47th or 48th Street. There are people at 48th, well 47th Street, who feel more a part of Ohio City than Detroit Shoreway. And I'm sure the opposite is true that some people around 45th might feel closer to Detroit Shoreway. I don't know any, but it's an artificial thing. I was telling Nancy McCormack that our Block Club was involved in a Detroit Avenue planning process and because we received support from the councilperson and his support was very essential, our planning process went only from 25th to 45th. Frankly, that's an arbitrary boundary because the success of, you know, this whole development along Detroit Avenue demands that both Ohio City and Detroit Shoreway collaborate and develop some joint planning. I actually did talk with Matt Zone a few years ago and we changed the zoning for an old gas station on the southwest corner of 45th and Detroit so that it couldn't be developed as a car lot, a used car lot, knowing that if it were—and I actually know a business that was prepared to go in there—if that had happened, it would have been detrimental to both communities. So we have to collaborate. We have to have contact, leadership from Mike Tillman Townhouses and leadership from Franklin Clinton has to get in touch somehow to communicate, share with one another what our challenges are, what our successes, what what our agendas are, and get to know one another personally to help one another. Just to know one another, you know, as neighbors. So I think these two blocks, these two neighborhood neighborhoods, and I don't know maybe for Detroit Shoreway, maybe it's more important that they get over to Cudell. I don't know. But we have to communicate better. And I think maybe there was... You kind of questioned earlier, you know, what was going on between Detroit Shoreway and Ohio City in terms of the way and so forth. I think we have to improve our communication and our trust and our appreciation for one another. There is no room for jealousy or suspicion or competitiveness. And Matt Zone is a great, great sensitive player. I mean, he is very much appreciated in the Ohio City area. We're very fortunate to have him on our team, on our side and in city council because he serves all of us very well. And Jeff Ramsey, I mean, he's got a lot of clout. He's got. Yeah I don't know. People really respect him. So. But we don't know who the shakers and movers are with Detroit Shoreway. We don't know who the board members are. And that's unfortunate.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:05:45] Can you tell me and you have touched a little bit upon this, but what characteristics do you think there are that make the Near West Side being both of these neighborhoods so distinct as a part of Cleveland? Do you. Well, I guess I should ask you first do you think that they are distinct?

**William Merriman** [01:06:02] From Broadway and Tremont and St. Clair-Superior and Slavic Village?

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:06:11] What makes it so unique? In this...

**William Merriman** [01:06:14] I think some of it is accidental. The lake is so much a part of these two neighborhoods. It's an asset. It's a presence that the other communities do not have. There isn't a neighborhood on the East Side that has the lakefront. Maybe Collinwood in a sense, but that's not the same. The lake is at the end of long streets. Here, you're right up on top of it. The presence of downtown, as is in the connectedness to downtown, the continuum to downtown, along the lakefront. It's like an access. There's downtown as a hub and then the spine is the lake. And then those two neighborhoods just build out from that spine. And that's. And yet that's accidental. And yet, because of the presence of... I grew up in Chicago on the Southwest Side. I think I was 14 before I saw the lake regularly. I look out my living room window and I see the lake umpteen times a day, and it has an effect on me. I just love it. It's just, you know, it's like you looking out on the Pacific or something. It's not exactly the same, but it's a piece of the action and the sunsets over the water. It's a spiritual kind of a thing. The other neighborhoods don't have that. They've got architecture. They've got the people. They've got the whatever. So much of it is commercial activity. Now that you see in Tremont and in the art colony developing there, and both of these neighborhoods have a lot of very creative people, too. And so that's an important part of it. The ethnic traditions, the variety of languages, the aesthetic, the churches, the social halls, the presence of, continued presence, of numbers of elderly people who have other memories, other other histories enriching our our community. I think these two neighborhoods are, I think, still ahead of the others in resources. I think the lakefront and like I said there, that the core, the city core and the spine of the lakefront and the water and all of it have a lot to do with it. And some of the beautiful architecture... I grew up in Chicago. Brick architecture is a big part of my growing up and there are a good number of masonry structures, the West Side Market, our little downtown along 25th, which is going to grow some more. The busyness... We don't have University Circle. We don't have the huge crowds around Euclid and Mayfield or you know around the universities. We don't have the museums and all of that sort of a thing. But we can go there and it's only 20 minutes away. And and so that's part of our experience too. I think these two neighborhoods are are really very special, I really do, and yet we're also somehow related to what's happening in Stockyards and Clark Metro. We've got to be concerned about deterioration and investment and accomplishments over there. We were not going to make it on our own. We we can't fool ourselves into thinking that the investment and the successes of Detroit Shoreway and Ohio City stand alone and that we're not impacted by the growing number of vacant structures along Denison and Storer Avenue and elsewhere. And we've got to be excited as you see new housing coming up in the Cedar-Central area. I mean, this is just fascinating and it's encouraging to see that other neighborhoods are investing in their communities as well.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:10:22] What's the Stockyards community or area?

**William Merriman** [01:10:22] The original Stockyards was along 63rd, 65th, 67th, Clark to the south to Storer Avenue. And currently there's still a lot of empty brick structures where they used to slaughter slaughter cows. There's a Kmart over there that's doing very poorly. But it's also you know, there's a major interstate and an intersection over there and some major manufacturing going on over there. There's a lot of jobs over there. Most of the housing stock is very modest. And increasingly, there is an increasing number of vacant homes in that neighborhood. I think it's you know, it's an area of promise and yet it's also a neighborhood that needs a lot of support and a lot of strong political leadership and support by the whole city. I remember the cows running, coming out of the trucks and the trains and everything. And I even remember there was a Jewish slaughterhouse and it's off of Clark, maybe 69th or 71st or something like that going south and Clark and the trucks would come in and the rabbis with the heavy coats and the brimmed hats would be leading the cows out of their trucks and slaughtering them kosher-style back there. It's the last of the slaughterhouses really where they killed live cows. That was in the... Around 1980. I think they were still slaughtering there.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:11:58] Is. Maybe it's not really within either Ohio City or Detroit Shoreway, but like Whiskey Island and Edgewater is that kind of just an autonomous little unit or does that fall like. Do you guys... are you involved in the debate over the usage of Whiskey Island?

**William Merriman** [01:12:30] The first. The first petitions were circulated by my block club.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:12:32] Oh really?

**William Merriman** [01:12:33] Yeah, and they were presented to our block club meeting at the YMCA and then Ted's Tackle at 45th and Franklin took a stack of them to be filled out there. We look out over Whiskey Island and yet it's seen as part of this Ward 14. I've always been fascinated, I went out in Whiskey Island in an old Volkswagen in 1971 with my... '72... With my wife. We were expecting and it was a middle of early January storm and we bounced around on Whiskey Island when it was full of rutted roads and kind of a dump and went on the car and the breakwall out to the lighthouse at the head of the river. And there was an enormous swell that came up in the lake. It literally lifted the car up in the water and carried it backwards, not sideways, but fortunately backwards and set us down on the pavement again. [laughs] We all could have drowned that night! It was a Sunday night. So I threw it into reverse and backed out off of the breakwall. And the next morning, my son Christopher was born. [laughs] I think he got scared out. But I've always... I mean, we look out over Whiskey Island and I've seen it go through a lot of changes. The salt mine's been there forever and the ore docks have grown significantly. I certainly hoped that there would be a park there someday. And I'm glad that we have as much park as we have. I wish we might have had more, but I also know that the economic future of Cleveland depends on shipping. In the lakefront planning process, part of my input was that it would be good if there might be as much access, public access to areas where people can actually intermingle with the shipping that you could get close to the ships, that you could drive up close enough to the piles of iron ore and the stone. If you go down onto Loop Avenue in the Lakeview projects between the lower housing units, you can see these enormous cones of crushed stone and sand and so forth. And they're monumental. It's like visiting the pyramids and they are so immensely massive and so huge that I feel it's an aesthetic and kind of a philosophical or a religious experience to see this these pyramids that way, you know, a million pounds or something tonnes or whatever is they're just there. They're there. And you just look at them and they're incredible. Just incredible. I think we need more access to to the shipping. I'm not... I'm for mixing and mingling the natural and the commercial and the transportation. I went to a lakefront planning process and I spoke with an executive representing the shipping industry in Cleveland. And he was saying that the economics of their remaining on Whiskey Island and in the Lower Cuyahoga were such that they could very easily find it more efficient to unload in Ashtabula or somewhere else. Ashtabula charges less per ton than we do in Cleveland. And I don't want to lose that. I don't want to lose the ships. I'm very romantic about hearing the first ore boat in the spring and, you know, to see the ships. I mean, hardly a day goes by but I see a ship coming and going from Whiskey Island or from the river is when Anita Nonneman chose the location for the Bop Stop she did and went after enormous investment, pulled that package together, a jazz club on Detroit Avenue. She said, I was expressing my excitement and so forth and she said, come on down here, I want to show you something. And we went into the building past the bar, into the end of the building, closest to the Shoreway and the lake. And she said, look out there and from, with a music background behind us, there was the onrushing of the Shoreway traffic. There were the trains coming and going between New York and Chicago. There were the ships in the harbor. There was the offloading of iron ore. There were airplanes circling above in the music of the of the jazz club was reflected in the music of the environment. There were the streaming lights and cars and tons of materials and the sunsets and the waves of the lake and everything. The endless wind out of the northwest. It's all just a beautiful concert. That's Whiskey Island. That's the park. It's the port. It's the sand. It's walking on the brick wall, especially when the waves are dashing and you wonder if you're going get soaked. It's the last sailboats of the season slipping in just as it starts to get dark. And maybe it's the last time they'll be out until next spring. It's a fantastic experience. It's amazing that it's not more crowded.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:18:33] You can almost hear the music as you were describing it.

**William Merriman** [01:18:35] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:18:41] I want to ask you a couple of questions about the Detroit Shoreway neighborhood specifically. Do you have any memories of I guess Detroit Avenue and specifically, did you ever come to Gordon Square when it was full of stores?

**William Merriman** [01:18:58] No, I didn't. No, no, no. It was it was. To a great extent, vacant when I went upstairs about twenty-five years ago or more, and Ray Pianka had an office for the Detroit Shoreway at the nascent Detroit Shoreway Development Corporation on the corner there. And there wasn't anything happening up there. There wasn't anything. You know, I was just so, so challenging. It must have been so challenging for him. You know, there's a lot so much crumbling plaster, peeling paint, and lack of interest in the neighborhood on the part of most people. Some of the old time, even these little streets behind us. 67th some 69th. Yeah, we're crumbling. The the Italians were older there there was wasn't it wasn't clear that there was much of a future in the neighborhood. But he was up there doing what he felt he had to do. I saw him. You know, there are those people like that who are visionary and giving and professionally competent, who, you know, I think were responsible. The Zones, you know? You know, who are not prepared to let go. Who were sure that with a little more effort and a little more commitment and a little more, you know, encouragement of others, the community could move forward and realize its potential of being a good little community, a little town to settle down or invest in. But I you know, looking up and down the street, back in the '70s, I don't think any of these stores were empty. Maybe the small businesses were more successful, but the suburban malls weren't really going full blast yet. And people jump on those interstates and go out to Crocker Park and places like that to do their serious shopping all the way out on the 480. But then I think that's, you know, that's inevitable, I guess. But that's not all of the retail trade and that's not all of the culture. A lot of it can't be replicated in, you know, a big box store or a Crocker Park. And the development of this Oriental Plaza down the street, I think is an indication or the, if you know Paine Avenue where Dave's store is and then the Oriental Market that was developed kind of across the street at the back of that old dairy building and it's huge. You know, there are niches that the big box stores can't compete with the specialty things, the Oriental foods. There's a little Puerto Rican store at Chatham and Lorain or Fulton that sells Caribbean. I mean, it was put into serve the Puerto Rican people. Then they started serving the Costa Ricans and Hondurans, and then somebody realized that so much of the Caribbean food was actually African food. And then African people started coming. You know, you don't you don't find that out in the suburbs. You find it here. And then you even realize that suburban people coming in from the suburbs to get these things because they can't get them on, you know, at the big stores. I don't know. I don't know. Detroit Avenue....

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:22:54] You had mentioned the condensing I guess of of the grocery stores within the neighborhood. Is that I mean something you have seen or been seeing in in the time you have been living on the Near West Side? A lot of stores leaving.

**William Merriman** [01:23:10] Yeah. There aren't as many grocery stores there are only two. Right? Two major ones, there's Finast and Giant Eagle. Those are those are the big chains. And then you have your local Dave's and you know, maybe those like what's the little one down the street on Detroit Avenue Save a Lot and places like that. But there used to be IGA. And you know, the Rini Arrigo. You know, there used to be so many so many smaller scale grocery stores available and in other businesses, too. Furniture stores on Detroit Avenue one one one woman, her husband ran the business. No. Her husband actually told me this. He said back in the old days, the salespeople that came by from the manufacturers selling furnishings to the retail stores would spend an entire day on Lorain Avenue from 25th to 65th. Every one of the manufacturers. So there were there were repeat salesmen out on that street from the manufacturers putting in an eight hour day for that one strip manufacturer after manufacturer after manufacturer. I don't think there's a single furniture store left on Lorain Avenue. And I did. There used to be one right next door to us. That's gone. All of these things are have been consolidated. There aren't families that have built up large furniture stores or even like Levy or as family businesses like that, where they have two or three or four furniture stores. They're almost all gone now. Something is going to replace that. Not everyone's I mean, people are. One of my boys included drives all the way to Pittsburgh, to. What's the name of the various...

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:25:15] IKEA?

**William Merriman** [01:25:16] IKEA. See? Yeah. Wow, that's a long ways to go! Long ways to go to get a piece of furniture. Well, you're buying it. You're driving all the way to their warehouse and saving them the transportation cost. You're saving them the overhead. You're saving them the labor. Yeah, it's gonna be a little cheaper. But you've just spent an eight hour a day at twenty dollars worth of gasoline. That's well. I don't know. There used to be. You speak. Tailors and shoe makers and dairies and breweries in every neighborhood. Now they're all gone. They're all gone. There is a man still in business next to Station A post office on Lorain Avenue. I wonder if you lost your is that battery or?

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:26:03] Nope.

**William Merriman** [01:26:03] We're good?

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:26:03] It's good, yeah.

**William Merriman** [01:26:03] Ah, yeah, it's the lights. The man has... He's in a trailer now instead of a storefront, and he's Vladi. His name is, I guess, Vladimir. Polish guy. And he's he's. I asked him if it if it's a good business for two for an apprenticeship to come. And he says it's not just a dying business; it's a dead business?

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:26:32] What does he do. I am sorry I missed it.

**William Merriman** [01:26:32] He repairs shoes, repairs purses, repairs leather coats. And people now just throw things away. They use it for a season and then pitch it. They get rid of it. Nobody seems to take care of stuff anymore. These these little businesses are vanishing. And, you know, it's unfortunate. I think there are maybe part of the culture of neighbors like this, tremont is, you know, some people are into very personalized type of, you know, furnishings, maybe simpler or refurbished clothing that's, you know, in shoes and so forth. The coffee shops are part of their culture. I think people are do value the personal touch. And it is not all about, you know, what's for cheap out at the big box store. So this is part of a culture that's developing and being rediscovered in neighborhoods like this. And it's not just experienced on the local retail, but it's experienced even in transportation. One of the values of the choice to live in a neighborhood like this is you can jump on the bus. I just drove by and you don't have to have two cars in your household. Maybe it's enough to have just one car or if you have two cars, not they have to drive it all the time because you could get on a bicycle or you can walk. It's it's. There's a shift in the choices people make and how to live together, that it's not all about commuting, but not having to go anywhere. Do what you have to do. But finding what you have to do where you're already at.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:28:11] Can you think of any events or maybe festivals or celebrations that have really have in the past or still go on that really draw the community together at this?

**William Merriman** [01:28:25] The only one that I'm personally involved in, in 1972 we had a kind of a harvest moon party in our backyard and a bunch of young people got together and brought a bunch of beer and a bunch of food and so forth. And the next year we did it again and the next year we did it again. It goes back to 1972 and is still going on. It's called the "Harvest Moon Potluck." We ran out of open spaces that initially it could be in the backyard and then we needed another backyard and another one in the street and some empty lots where housing had been torn down. But then when those empty lots were built up with new housing and the streets became a little dangerous, we moved it over to Fairview Park on 38th Street this past fall. We brought it back to Church Avenue and we closed the street down. So I think that's probably, you know, one example of what you're talking about that I can relate to is that these, you know, annual gatherings of people who have found something special on the Near West Side is is a celebration of the Near West Side. One of my goals in helping organize that is I try to identify a variety of people, not people that are all friends with one another, but people who don't know one another. People... I try to bring folks together that are who might be total strangers, but folks who might make a new acquaintance. That's part of the culture of the neighborhood. Another project I worked on was founding of the Kentucky Garden at 38th and Franklin with Betty Meyer and Phyllis Bambeck. It was part of a neighborhood park, half of which was closed off, possibly for a World War II victory garden, and simultaneously with the Board of Education as a project to teach horticulture to kids, and around in the late '70s, 1980 or so, the Board of Education closed it down. They couldn't afford the budget for it anymore, and a few of us jumped in before it was used for other purposes and got permission from the city since it's city property and the Board of Education that the community take over this 2.2-acre tract. It's got a fence around it, barbed wire top, and the old field house of the original park is inside the enclosure and we continue to develop it not with paid staff from the Board of Education with but with volunteer hours and part of the gardeners. And after about ten years or so, I backed out. But Phyllis Bambeck still runs it or coordinates it. The most valuable crop that's raised here are new relationships. Beyond the common factor is everyone in there is like, you know, likes gardening, but they come from all walks of life. And so it's it's a tool of of enhancing communication and appreciation for different people, whether you're Appalachian or Mexican-American or Puerto Rican or Vietnamese or a lawyer from, you know, from wherever or Jones Day or whatever. They all have something in common and they get to be friends and to maybe develop better community so it's a sense of community development project.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:32:18] I keep looking at the machine–.

**William Merriman** [01:32:18] Yeah.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:32:18] –as it starts counting down. When it gets. We have four minutes left.

**William Merriman** [01:32:18] Okay.

[01:32:18] Is there anything else you would like to add?

**William Merriman** [01:32:29] I think for me there is no other life for me to live and experience like I do right now. There's nowhere else to go. After... I found out that when my wife and I first settled on Church Avenue, my mother and dad would drive in from Chicago and they're not well off, but they had grown up in the inner city and poverty and so forth. And I found my mother referring to our house, which was part of which was originally a log cabin, referring to our house as our starter house, as though I was going to better myself over time, like other people do and from the very beginning there has never been a plan B. This is my life. This is who I am, where I'm at, and there's nowhere else to go. I know that, you know, I see other people looking at the housing and the neighborhood in a different way, that maybe there's this is a way to do a flip on a house to get something for a hundred thousand and sell it for two thousand or something like that. I don't understand it. I think they're missing something really important. I don't condemn or criticize. I I think it's here. I don't think one necessarily has to go somewhere else else. The kids that our two boys grew up with continue to live in the neighborhood. There's only one fellow who's in Vermont. He's into alternate materials architecture and other ones in New York, New Jersey. He's at a computer or something. Their friends all still live here. This is life. And so you just immerse yourself in it, lose yourself in it, surrender to it and give, you know. So this is the world coming back from three and a half years overseas and literally stepping over people who are dying. This is my answer to the question that was raised, a question without words, is care for one another, give to one another, get to know, you know, support one another the best you can. Thank you very much.

**Emma Yanoshik-Wing** [01:34:40] No, thank you.

**William Merriman** [01:34:42] I wish you well.