

**ASBURY PARK AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC HERITAGE PROJECT****INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**Interviewee: Alfred Mitchell, Sr.** [AM]

**Interviewer: Melissa Keeling** [MK]

Date: June 28, 2018

Time: 8:00 P.M.

Place: Asbury Park, NJ

AM: I know too much, it can't all come out tonight.

MK: I get that, there's so much there.

AM: Right. I grew up on Union Avenue, right around the corner. Everybody talked about Cuba's, the club? Cuba's also had a confectionary store. Whatever kind of store you want to call it. That was before you got to the bar. We used to go in there all the time, because back in the day, we used to take back the bottles for the refund and we'd buy our bubblegum and our potato chips. One time, Cuba burned me with a cigar by accident, and he was so scared, but it was cool. I grew up on that street. The history of my family goes back to maybe the early 1900s. My father's aunt was one of the first teachers in Asbury Park. My father's uncle was also the principal of Bangs Avenue School, when it was segregated, like Mr. Johnson was talking about, and Mr. Parreott was talking about. When it was segregated, my father's uncle was the principal there. Throughout the years, I've learned so much about my family. When I was a little boy, living on Union Avenue, my father's uncle, who lived in D.C., he used to come to the railroad station, and ride up to Union Avenue to our house. I loved him, because he taught me how to eat cantaloupe. Years and years and years afterwards, after they all passed away, I find out that my uncle was the father of a Tuskegee Airman killed in Italy in 1943. His name was Lieutenant Paul Graham Mitchell. So my history is built up around here. There's so much other things I could talk about, but I don't think I have enough time. There's so much history that my family has in Asbury Park. Maybe, another time, we'll talk.

MK: Did you go to any of the clubs in the '60s, like the Turf or the Orchid?

AM: Well, let's see, I'm only... I just turned 70. I went to the Neptune clubs like the Redwood. Every now and then, I might have stepped inside the Orchid. But the Orchid was always crowded. Me, basically to this very day – I might not act like it – but I'm a very shy person. I went to other places. But growing up on Union Avenue, I saw all the action on Springwood Avenue. I seen what the parking lot looked like on Sunday, after everybody

had left Cuba's. The parking lot had to be cleaned up, because everybody had to go to church. All the churches are still there. Second Baptist Church was exactly in back of our house. We used to take the long way to go to church. We could have taken the short-cut, right to the back of the church, but we always took the long way around. The parking lot would be full of glass bottles from where everybody had a good time! *[laughter]* That's just one of the things, but there's so much. The history of Springwood Avenue, the part that hurt me the most was when they had the riots. I came back from South Korea in 1969, I got stationed in Fort Lewis, Washington. 1970, me and some friends were going down the highway, and across the radio – "Riot in Asbury Park..." I told my partner, "Pull the car over, I got to find out where my brother is." We're twins. I said, "I got to find out where my brother is." Pulled the car over, I called home, because of the time difference. I asked my mother, where's my brother? "Oh, he's okay, somebody just brought some deer by – venison – he's out somewhere." So I asked about the riots. She said, "It's not that bad, now." That was in July 1970. I got out of the service, October 1970. This was a weird part. When I come home, my mother wanted to go downtown. So, I figure I'll go, take her downtown, and I'll get to see the outcome from the riots. As I'm taking her to go downtown, she says, "This is where your former club member died, and we buried him yesterday." I had a club that we were in, and he stepped out in front of a train, naked, at the Springwood Avenue crossing. So, we're riding down the street, we come to Springwood Avenue, the crossing, right, and I'm saying, "This is where he died." We're sitting there, waiting for the train to come by. I look up, the train is coming, and somebody tried to go across the tracks, as the train was coming. So, my second day home, I got to see a train accident at the same spot that my former club friend was killed. That was just one of my incidents on Springwood Avenue.

MK: Thank you for your service.

AM: You might edit some of this, but everyone insisted I come in here and say something. I grew up on Union Avenue. My brother and I were born in 1948. We were the first twins born, at that time, Fitkins Hospital. We come home to Union Avenue. Being first twins in a small town, was rough because everybody knew us. *[laughter]* Okay, I'll go.

MK: Can I ask you one more question? What would you want to see [on] Springwood Avenue in the future? How would you like to see in develop? What would you like to see there? al mial mitchal m

AM: Well, they've started the new development on Springwood Avenue right now, where they have stores. I would like to see maybe more stores, more places where the people who are stuck on the west side, who don't have a driver's license, or don't drive anymore, where they can just walk to the store or go to the laundromat. Make it easier for them. That's the way Springwood Avenue used to be, because Springwood Avenue at one time, had *everything* out there.

MK: Grocery, shoe stores, meat market...

*For more info about the APAAMHP, contact Jennifer Souder - wardjennifer77@gmail.com*

AM: Everything. *Everything* was there. Right. The whole thing was right there.

MK: And the clubs, you have to have music there, right?

AM: We had the clubs, and a million liquor stores. But we don't need that many liquor stores. Springwood Avenue was like the "Main Street" of the west side. People on weekends would go out, and you could walk out and stand on Springwood Avenue and you could watch everybody coming in, walking up and down. It was a fun time. As urban renewal came along, and the riots and everything, Springwood Avenue has changed. If Springwood Avenue can get back to the part where everybody wants to come down... just to be *seen*. That was the spot where you had to be *seen* – Springwood Avenue.

MK: What was your name, one more time?

AM: My name is Alfred Mitchell, Senior.

MK: Thank you so much for coming and talking to me.

[End of Interview]

Transcribed by: Melissa Keeling, 7-17-2018

Edited by: Jennifer Souder, 8-1-2018

Reviewed by:

Edited by:

Final edit by: