Interview with Ed Fishel, April 6, 2007

Interviewed by Nyasha Chikowore and Maria Paoletti

Nyasha: What was your situation in the ‘60s? How old were you, where did you live, go to school, work, et cetera?

Ed Fishel: Well, “the ‘60s” is a big term. Do you want to narrow it down a little bit? Are you talking about the time of the riots?

Nyasha: Okay, we could—

Ed Fishel: Really, you’re talking about the late ‘60s.

Maria: Give or take a year or two.

Ed Fishel: Yeah. Okay, late ‘60s. It really makes a huge difference. I want to be very precise. My situation in the late ‘60s is that I had transferred from Western Maryland College, where I was pre-med, to Loyola College, where I was restarting my entire college career. I became an English major, for want of a better major. I became extremely interested in politics and political action, and I was in my late teens, it would be about, approximately eighteen or nineteen. And I was a student at Loyola College, right up the street here.

And I was, like so many others at that point, trying to find my way, because society at that time was ablaze in revolution in a lot of different ways. And, I’m sure

you're going to hear this over and over, but at that time, we had the issues of dramatic changes in our culture. We were the rock 'n' roll generation, and our parents literally believed that rock 'n' roll was the music of the devil (I came from a conservative background).

We had the sexual revolution, which was spurred largely by the arrival of the birth control pill, and women, for the first time, had rights—control—over their own bodies. So all the rules about sex and relationships between men and women were in play.

We were having the revolution over race, because all of a sudden, people who had come back from the Korean War and World War II had said, "Hey, I served this country, I deserve full rights, too," and a lot of us were coming—we were that first generation of white people who had black students in the same classroom, and it was increasingly absolutely no big deal to us. 'Cause it was, like, *normal*, okay? But for our *parents*…they just couldn't get it. The gap between us and our parents became enormous. And certainly, that was the case in my own family.

And then, the last thing was, we had this horrible war in Vietnam. And it's not the same. There are parallels between what's happening today in Iraq, but it's not the same, because back then we had the draft. And every young man—and I was one of the people whose military records were burned by the Catonsville Nine. That doesn't mean anything to you today, but believe me, they were *famous* in their day, because they went into the post office in Catonsville, and they burned all the draft records, including mine.

Nyasha: What were they called?

Ed Fishel: The Catonsville Nine, and they were led by Philip Berrigan, and a woman who—a *nun*—who eventually became his wife. If you do a computer search, you know, a Google search, and just say, "Catonsville Nine," you'll…they were totally sincere, committed Catholic priests and nuns, and followers, who took their beliefs and 100 percent put them into practice. Regrettably, they had copies of my draft record, and everybody else, but that was just incredible. It was huge. So you can sort of see, the world was ablaze in revolution in a lot of different ways. You know, people demanding rights that had never been told before. So my place in all that was trying to find my way.

Nyasha: So you were at Loyola as a student, and how old were you?

Ed Fishel: It would be my late teens. I was eighteen or nineteen.

Nyasha: So where did you live at that time?

Ed Fishel: My physical address was at home, which is Arbutus, with my parents, but for all practical—Loyola didn't have dorms back then; it was a commuter school—but for all practical purposes, every waking hour was spent on campus.

Nyasha: And did you have a job?

Ed Fishel: Yeah. I had always been pre-med, so I always had jobs working as male scrub nurses in hospitals, starting when I was sixteen. And just to give you a sense of the era, the time and so forth, I secretly owned a motorcycle that my parents didn't know about. I kept it stored on campus.

Nyasha: So what hospital were you working at, or were you just at several?

Ed Fishel: No, at *that* particular time, I would have been working at St. Agnes. But I started when I was fifteen. I have an uncle who was a chief of surgery in Delaware, so I started when I was fifteen, and he trained me at being an operating room technician. And then was I was sixteen, which is when I was old enough to start getting a paying job, I started working at Lutheran, over here, which is a hospital in West Baltimore, and I did that for two years, and then, very quickly, my mother, who was the supervisor of nursing at St. Agnes, introduced me to the right people, and I started working there. So I was making a lot of money working on weekends, and all during the summer, you know, as a scrub nurse.

Nyasha: So were you born in Arbutus?

Ed Fishel: No, I was born at Maryland General Hospital, right down the street here. And I was raised in my first three years in the shadow of Johns Hopkins. My parents lived here in the city. But in 1949, we moved to a house in Arbutus, and that's really where my

entire upbringing was, which was, just to paint you a picture: conservative, white, quintessential suburban, largely Protestant. And bigoted as hell.

Nyasha: So, I guess most of the things—daily activities, as far as shopping and stuff—was in Arbutus, if you weren't at school?

Ed Fishel: Arbutus, Catonsville. That sort of thing.

Nyasha: So before the riots, what kinds of interactions did you have with people of other races?

Ed Fishel: *None.* I was…my parents…let me tell you up front right now. My parents and I had a huge split, which I'm not sure, even to this day, has ever fully healed. When I said "revolution," I mean *complete*. To the point of not talking to each other. To the point of being semi-disowned. That sort of stuff. My parents, like all of the parents where we were raised…try to think of *Leave It to Beaver*, only worse. It's *Leave It to Beaver*, deluded, we moved out here to move away from our "problems," and I want you to understand: the "problems" go way beyond just simply skin color. The problems also have to do with Jews, *Catholics*…I horrified my parents when I was in the third grade and I came home and that cute little red-headed Catholic girl—I had a wonderful classmate by the name of Sharon Cabey—and one day I was walking her home and she gave me a kiss on the cheek, you know? And my parents just went ballistic. Now, to this day, Sharon and I are still friends. *[Laughs]* She lives close to me, ironically. But that

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will begin to give you some sense of the…what's the word I'm looking for? The *attitudes*. Jews were bad people, Catholics were bad people. If you weren't white, if you weren't a WASP, you really didn't belong out there, and that's why they were living there. So, consequently, I had no experience, or exposure to *any* of those things until I went to Western Maryland College. And that was the beginning of the revolution inside of me. It was the beginning of the changeover.

Maria: So did you not go to an integrated high school?

Ed Fishel: They kept it very low-key. We actually did have—in Arbutus, there's a little community out there called Crowdentown, which is a little community of African American people who are direct descendants of freed slaves, who live in a very insular life, and they did not really interact with city black people. They were…above that. So, consequently, their children and we all played baseball together and went to schools together, and we never saw them as being black people. They were not different from us. We even had one kid who was very fair-skinned, very light-skinned, who was in the third or fourth grade with us, and they just kept it a massive secret that this kid had black parents. We didn't know. If it makes any sense to you—and I don't want this to make sense to you; it didn't make sense to me—but if you can conceptualize that *they're* okay, because they're not really black, even though they looked just like you *[indicating Nyasha]*. But they're not those people from the city, you know? There was that sort of thing going on. So, you said integrated school; yeah, it was an integrated school, but it wasn't *those people from the city* who were going to our school. So I didn't get any

exposure to Jews, some Catholics, and blacks until I went away to college. And then it was this massive culture clash. That was the beginning of the revolution within me, that turned me into the social activist that I became for the rest of my life.

Nyasha: So can you describe the racial mood in Baltimore before the riots?

Ed Fishel: Like everybody else, I watched WJZ's dance show in the afternoon.

Nyasha: Do you remember what that was called?

Ed Fishel: Oh, God, they just made a musical about it; my God, it's famous. And I'm momentarily…I want to say the Jimmy Dean show—*Buddy Deane Show*! *Buddy Deane Show*. There's a musical that's been all over Broadway, about this. And this musical actually captures what was going on back then.

Maria: It's not *Hairspray*, is it?

Ed Fishel: Yeah, that's it. It's *Hairspray*.

Maria: The John Waters movie—they call it *The Corny Collins Show* on there, but it's the same thing—

Ed Fishel: That was *The Buddy Deane Show*. It really was *The Buddy Deane Show*. It totally captures—there was a sort of, almost a collective amnesia about the social tensions in Baltimore. There was a process back then called "block busting," and it was what was driving city dwellers—*white* city dwellers—out into the suburbs. What would happen is that a real estate agent would sell a house on a block to a very respectable African American family, and because of the paranoia, you know, of white people, within three weeks, that block would turn. One family would move in, and within no time at all—I gotta tell you, this is embarrassing to tell this stuff to you, but this is the reality of what it was back then. But it was not on the radar. It was not visible. It was not until John F. Kennedy got elected, and we started to see the social revolution going on in the country, that we started to even hear about these issues. And where I was, I might as well have been in Mongolia, because Arbutus was like another world.

Nyasha: And what do you remember about the assassination of Martin Luther King?

Ed Fishel: It was part of a troika of killings that ripped the gut out of people like me, and my generation. First we had the killing of President Kennedy, and as horrible as it is for me to admit, there was a whole lot of white people, conservative white people, who rejoiced in that. Because…he posed a threat. I look back on that now, because my parents were among those who said, "Well, he got his!" And it really took the next three days of national attention to the funeral for us as a country to finally realize the horror of what had just transpired. So, *that* was horrible, and then in what seems like to me quick

succession—I know it wasn't, but it *seems* like it was in quick succession—we lost Bobby, and we lost Martin. And there was a famous folk music song, um…

Maria: "Abraham, Martin & John?"

Ed Fishel: Yeah. It was like an anthem, it so much captured the spirit. By the time that Dr. King—there's one thing you have to remember; it's that Dr. King, at that point, was more than just a civil rights leader. He was every bit as much, if not *more*, a threat to the establishment at that time, because he was an anti-war leader. So you had these two movements that were going on in the country at the same time, and believe me, civil rights was a big deal. It *was* a big deal. But the truth is, there's a whole lot more white families with their children, with their *sons* being threatened by the prospect of going off to war, so that if you try to measure which movement is the one that's the dominant one, the anti-war movement is the one. As much as Dr. King was a leader over here, he was losing his position of leadership to much more radical leaders that were coming along, H. Rap Brown and a bunch of people who sort of said, "You're an old man, your way isn't working anymore, we need more radical approaches." So he actually, at that time, became much more identified—at least in my mind, but I think a lot of other minds as well—became much more identified as being one of our prominent anti-war leaders, so when he was assassinated, there was no reason to automatically assume he was assassinated because he was black. He could just as easily been assassinated because he was an anti-war leader. Does that make sense to you? And that's something that's really important to remember about him, is that he was all about peace.

Nyasha: Do you remember when you first heard about it or when you saw it on the news?

Ed Fishel: You know the old question of, can you remember the day and time, and date and so forth, and no, I can't remember that specifically. I was obviously in college at that point, and I had already metamorphosized [*sic*] into the student rebel activist person that I was eventually going to become, and I just kind of remember that we were all glued to the TV. The second thing that happened, though, after we were glued to the TV, is there was sort of like this lag period, that there was—you know, he was killed, and then we were trying to get some information, and then you started—the riots didn't all, like, pop up at once. It was sort of like, it was like, a fire here, and then a fire there, and the powers that be at that time just didn't know how to respond. I still remember vividly that in DC, the DC fires started a number of days before Baltimore. I don't remember exactly how many days, but Baltimore was not, in my memory, Baltimore was not one of the first cities to burn. There were other cities ahead of us. So for a while, we were sitting around watching the murder, now we're watching *other* cities burn, and then finally Baltimore went up like a powder keg like all the rest.

Nyasha: So how did you hear about the riots starting, was it through the news, or through other people?

Ed Fishel: We were pretty well plugged-in; I was at Loyola at that point. We were pretty well plugged-in, because I was part of a group called the Loyola Students for Social Action. It *was* called the Loyola Students for Social Action. And it was…we didn't have fraternities at Loyola. We had different groups. And our group probably would have been a fraternity, but it would have been a fraternity oriented toward doing public work, you know, social work. And our particular thing was, that we went down and we did tutoring in the inner city. That was our thing. I want to try to explain to you that the reason why the riots were so impactful [*sic*] on me is that up to that point, all of our inner city tutorial work was sort of…was all part of a total package of, "Well, these are my friends, these are the people I hang out with, this is what we do." You know? It could have been a chess club. Does that make sense? I'm not trying to in any way minimize the fact that we were not serious about what we were doing, but we were not…*passionate* about what we were doing. Does that make sense? It was a reason for us to come together, and it was something that we had in common, and so forth, but we weren't crazy about it.

It *did* mean, however, that we had fabulous connections to the inner city that almost nobody else in white society at that time seemed to have. Because we had real live friends who lived in the inner city. So all of a sudden, so when the riots broke out, the whole thing became really, really, really…personal. And it took a bunch of suburban white guys, and in some cases, really *well off* suburban white guys…my friends John and Frank Knott that I wrote about in the e-mail; those are part of an extremely wealthy family. If you ever drive north on Charles Street, and you're going up to Loyola, and you see that overpass? Check it out: K-N-O-T-T. That's the Knott family. That big white mansion, with the 26 bedrooms, that's right on the corner across from there? That's John

and Frank's *house*. Those were my best friends; that's where I went to have dinner with my best friends. They were *well off*. So these guys, these were the real leaders, I was just one of their friends, but I was a class officer. We were hearing about what was going on, obviously from the news, but we were hearing about it from the people that we knew in the city. And that's what led to doing the first courageous thing I've ever done in my life, other than standing up to my father once. The first courageous thing, which was to take my station wagon—my family's station wagon—and we filled it up. This is my story of the riots. We filled it up with, as I recall, it was blankets, it was clothes, it was a lot of food. Because we knew…the people that we knew in the inner city were hungry, and everything had burned.

Nyasha: These people were…what race were they?

Ed Fishel: Oh, these were black people. These were just ordinary, everyday black people. These were families that we worked with. And there is a church, which is still standing today, which is called St. Vincent de Paul. If you go down at the end of the Jones Falls Expressway, it's a magnificent, big, white church. You can't tell today, because the Jones Falls Expressway has been built, and the main post office has been built, and a whole bunch of other stuff has been built; you can't visualize today, but that was in the middle of a neighborhood. That was surrounded by houses. The reason why all those things have been built is because all those houses burned! So this was a Catholic church smack-dab in the heart of where the flames were. The part that I can most vividly remember was me driving with my friends, down into—and there are flames, on both

sides, and I remember there are National Guardsmen, you know, Maryland National Guardsmen, lining the streets. And I was scared out of my mind. But we did it.

Maria: What happened when you got there?

Ed Fishel: It was great, I mean, the priest was there to welcome us, people that we knew from the neighborhood were there to welcome us. It was venturing into the total unknown, the *burning* unknown, that was the scary part. After we made the initial trip and found that we could make it safely, and so forth and so on, we made more trips. It was that first trip that is the turning point, where you sort of say, "wow!" What happened was that that day was a key day in my life, because I remember vividly that that's when Loyola Students for Social Action stopped being a social club, being just a group of guys, and we became passionate.

Maria: You had a purpose…

Ed Fishel: We had a *real* purpose.

Nyasha: So did you get to watch TV coverage of the riots?

Ed Fishel: Extensive.

Nyasha: What were your impressions?

Ed Fishel: And eventually I became a TV news manager, and that's a very large reason why—remember, I was still trying to find my way? You know, as to what career I was going to pursue? So it was a result of all this political activity that was going on, that I then got a job a WCBM Radio, which back in those days was a big damn deal, that was at a powerhouse radio news operation. And then it was a year after that that I was hired by the Associated Press here in Baltimore, and it was a year after that that they sent me to Washington, and then I got to cover the May Day demonstrations in Washington. So my whole formative years in journalism all revolved around…civil rights protests, anti-war protests, a tremendous amount of…public issues.

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Nyasha: So what were your impressions of the coverage of the riots?

Ed Fishel: Are you asking me, do you mean my analysis of the coverage, or what was my reaction to what I was seeing? Because they're two different things. The news media at that point was doing something it had never done before. News media—I'm speaking now as a journalist—we didn't have any experience in covering riots, are you kidding? Our idea of covering a story was some kids swimming, or—

Maria: I suppose, do you believe that it was accurate, both on a local scale and on the national news?

Ed Fishel: You didn't have anything else to compare it to. So you had to accept that what you were seeing was real. But I do think that that's the point when television news *really* became an adult. Because up to that point, television news was still growing up as a medium. At that particular time, we in TV, when I got into TV news originally—I eventually went from the Associated Press into radio again, and then I went to TV news management—when I first got into TV news management, we were still shooting *film*. So at that point, you could only go to the scene, shoot what you see, it was none of that live stuff, like we have today. So you're seeing selected film of events. It would be easy, as a journalist in the year 2007, to go back and look at what they were doing back then and say [*gasp*]! There was no "live, local and late-breaking," there were no helicopter shots, you didn't have the big perspective. It would be easy to go back and critique it as a professional journalist. But if you ask the question from a different way, which is, *was this your reality?* Yeah! This was our reality! It was very different for us back then than it is for you two today, because for you two today, if you want to gather data, or news, you have not only your TV networks to choose from, but you have your cable networks to choose from, and beyond that, you now have your blogs to choose from, and you have the Internet to choose from, you have so many different sources, or ways for you to try to extract the *truth*. Which is a good thing—you have more sources for the truth. The bad thing is, the experience that *you're* going to grow up with is not going to be the same experience that *you're* going to grow up with, or hardly anybody else in your generation, because all of you will have been watching different things and looking at different things. For *my* generation, by contrast, we only had three television networks, and they were all essentially showing the same pictures, even if they were shot by different people,

you're still seeing the same reality, so I and every other person that I knew at that time had the same reality. It was right there in front of us.

I'm not sure that we're better off today, because now we're a fractured country, where *your* perceptions are not the same as *your* perceptions and everybody else's perceptions. But at that time, we all had the same reality. Even my bigoted parents could not escape what was happening, right in front on them on their TV. Now, what they would do is they would turn it off. Walk away. Go into denial. But, for I and all of my friends and all the rest of us, it *was* the reality. Does that make sense? Okay.

Nyasha: So, what was your impression of the neighborhoods that were affected?

Maria: Obviously, the one that you already described, down by St. Vincent…

Ed Fishel: They were just burned to the ground. I guess that's the simplest way to put it, what was my impression of the neighborhoods? They were not…first of all; they were not slums, in the sense that you think of, you know, ramshackle, about to fall over? They had been occupied by middle class people a few years before. They were not in that bad a condition. But after, it was just…desolation. I'm trying to think of a contemporary movie that's a corollary to it, but, you know, there are some scenes in some of the *Terminator* movies, where you kind of see that burned out landscape. It's a *little* bit like that, not quite, but it's a little but like that. It certainly felt that way.

Maria: Which neighborhoods were hit the hardest, that you can remember?

Ed Fishel: See, my exposure was really about that area around St. Vincent de Paul, because, believe me, I didn't drive anywhere else. I couldn't tell you anything about the West side of the city, or anything else. It was just that road that went from Loyola College down to St. Vincent de Paul, and then came back again.

Nyasha: So, do you remember seeing any violence or arrests?

Ed Fishel: No. At that time, by the time that we had mustered up our goods—and mustered up our courage—the National Guard were in place.

Nyasha: So, did you see them around your school, or…

Ed Fishel: No. Northern Baltimore, we're the rich white folks up in northern Baltimore. That whole area from Johns Hopkins up north? Gilded neighborhoods, gilded neighbor—gilded, yeah. No crime up there.

Nyasha: So you only saw them on your way downtown.

Ed Fishel: Only saw the National Guard, yeah. It was downtown.

Nyasha: So, how did their presence make you and your neighbors feel?

Ed Fishel: How did—

Maria: —the presence of the National Guard.

Ed Fishel: The National Guard?

Nyasha: M-hm.

Maria: How did you feel about them being—

Ed Fishel: I found it initially scary, because they were all there with big guns, you know? I didn't have a gun! They *did*! I found them intimidating as all get-out. But you know what's interesting? You'd look at their faces, and I think they were every bit as afraid as we were. I mean, I'm afraid of them because they've got the guns and I don't, but I think they were just afraid to be there.

Nyasha: So, what was the mood in your area, in the Loyola – Johns Hopkins area, during the riots?

Ed Fishel: Say it again?

Nyasha: The mood? What was—?

Ed Fishel: *Tremendous* concern. Tremendous concern. Fear, I guess more than anything else, just fear. Class work— pfft! —came to a screeching halt! I mean, I don't remember going to *any* classes. This was *all* what were about, you know; I don't remember going to another class for the rest of that semester.

Nyasha: Were they canceled, or you just didn't go?

Ed Fishel: I don't remember. I guess I had to take *some* tests, because I came back the following year, and I became a class officer, you know, there was a little group of us that sort of took over the student government. We got real smart about politics, this group did. But it just seems like every waking hour that we could, you know, was devoted to talking about it, helping out if we could.

Nyasha: So, how did your life and activities change during the riots, the days of the riots? Besides not going to class and whatever?

Ed Fishel: We had—you know how a sorority or a fraternity would have their own house? Well, we had our own house, which was where the Loyola Students for Social Action was based. And we spent all of our time there, and we spent our time collecting food, blankets and stuff like that, and—

Nyasha: Where were you getting those from?

Ed Fishel: Parents, friends, neighbors and other churches. To a certain degree, we became the conduit, because we were willing to go where no one else would go. So there was a lot of generosity. And Catholic churches—particularly back in that era, Catholic churches really networked well. And the parents really networked well. So it was not hard to gather the stuff. People would bring it to us. It was just a question of us being the ones who would take it downtown.

Nyasha: So, you spent more time doing that. Did anything else change?

Ed Fishel: That's my best recollection. I mean, there was a certain amount of goofing off, a certain amount of being with your girlfriend, I mean, all the other stuff that you do when you're young people, but the primary focus would have been being involved doing stuff.

Nyasha: So, in your experience, what businesses were affected?

Ed Fishel: I couldn't tell you anything in terms of what businesses, you know, on the street. I couldn't tell you which businesses got burned out or anything like that. I was not savvy enough about what downtown Baltimore was, so I can't help you with that part. But as a journalist, I can tell you that it profoundly affected the news business. There was a real growing up process that went on, because we had never done anything like this before. People got into news, people like me got into news back then for different reasons than people get into news today. News today is primarily driven by dollars. That's why

news departments exist. If it's a newspaper or TV, they all exist for the purpose of making a dollar. It was a very different culture back then, because back at that time, radio and TV news operations existed to fulfill the FCC requirement for public good. You could not—we didn't have cable back then. So, if you were going to have a license to use the public airwaves, you had to, in order make an *amazing* amount of profit, you had to show that your radio or TV station was doing public good. And part of public good, in that time, was defined as doing news. So, consequently, *everybody* had a news department back in those days, even if it was a rip-and-read operation, everybody did news. So, for those of us that were in news, we were the white knights. We were the good guys. We were there to talk about important issues of public policy, you know; we were trying to make the world better. It was not like it is today, where—all about being a star, and making a lot of money, covering the latest crimes, it's just radically different. And you may ask, *so, what happened, why did it change*? Well, all you have to do is go back the Ronald Reagan years, when we—what's the word? —not decentralized…de-…*deregulated*. During the Ronald Reagan era, we went through a lot of deregulation, and in some ways, deregulation was a good thing. You get cheap airplane fares today on Southwest, and a bunch of airplanes, because we *deregulated* airfares. You have a lot of phone options today because we *deregulated* and broke up "Ma Bell," which was the central phone company for the whole world back then; whole country. But one of the effects of deregulation was to take away the public service component of having a radio or TV station, so public service programs went away, have gone away, and there's hardly any news left today.

Nyasha: Looking back now, how do you think Baltimore changed after the riots?

Ed Fishel: Profoundly. You had seen the emergence of an entire black leadership in Baltimore, that was below the surface back then, quite able, but never allowed to rise to the top. Just across the board, whether you talk about politics, whether you're talking about business—Blue Cross Blue Shield is headed by Bill Jews. Bill Jews is a monster, I mean, *big*, big, big guy. Big, important person—African American! As you kind of go through and start looking at the major business leaders in town, we have lots of major African American business leaders in town. That didn't happen back then. The closest thing to having a major business leader in town back in those days was Little Willie. Do you know who Little Willie is? [*Nyasha and Maria both indicate "no"*] Well, Little Willie ran the numbers. Do you what that term means? Is that term so old that it doesn't mean anything to you? Before we had—the reason why we have, what do you call it, the lottery, today, is because before that, we had an illegal lottery which was called "the numbers." Every day, there would be the numbers, and Little Willie was the kingpin who ran the whole West Side, I mean, he was powerful! But he wasn't allowed to rise to become a prestigious businessperson, like the Bill Jews of the world today.

Maria: I'm sorry; did you say that was an *illegal* lottery? IL-legal?

Ed Fishel: IL-legal. Oh, yeah, Absolutely. Abortions were illegal, gambling was illegal, there's a whole lot of stuff that was illegal. Mixed race marriages were illegal, all kinds of stuff. For your generation, it might just frighten you to find out what life was like back

then [*laughs*]. So, you look at it today, and you see what has dramatically changed. The Chief Judge for the Supreme Court of the State of Maryland, Robert Bell—African American. All these things have happened since then. The talent was always there, the people were always there; the opportunities were always denied. It's a night and day difference.

Nyasha: So you're saying it's grown positively? It's changed positively—?

Ed Fishel: Incredibly positively. It's hard for you, I mean you, as in *you, the generation*, to appreciate how far we've come. It's also, I'm concerned, hard for you to realize how much power you have. I think one of the other things that happened back with my generation—which is kind of a lost message, and I feel badly about it—is that we discovered how powerful we were. We really—we turned this country upside-down, put it on its nose. That feeling of empowerment, that feeling of *we can make a difference*; I see in my sons that it's lost, that they don't realize what they're capable of doing. [*pause*] Do you have any clue as to what I'm saying? [*laughs—Nyasha and Maria say "yes"*] You know, they used to say that every thirty years, a country goes through another revolution, some sort of revolution. And maybe it's just waiting for the time. But I'm trying to tell you today—this is my gift to you, thirty years later—[*whispers*] *you've got power*. You've got major power. You get enough of you together, you can change anything. It's amazing.

So, I'm not for one second suggesting that we should rest on our laurels for what accomplished in the last thirty years…but we really have come an incredibly long way in

that period of time. I'm editorializing now, I'm so sorry. But if I had one gift, if I had my way, if there was *one thing* that could give to all the people who feel oppressed today, I'm talking about all the minorities, or if there are women left who still feel oppressed, if I could give them one gift, I'd just say, "Stop feeling bad about yourself and go out and seize the opportunities." Because you can do it. You can change the world. The opportunities are there. And I don't want to come across sounding like a white Republican when I'm saying that, okay? I'm trying to say it with a different slant. You've really got to believe in yourself, that you can do it. You can really go grab, you know, and…change the world. And I hope you do!

Nyasha: So how did your interactions with people of other races change after the riots?

Ed Fishel: Incredibly. I mean, I had gone all the way in the space of my lifetime—I'm sixty now—I've gone all the way in the space of my lifetime from a person who grew up in a lilywhite, protected, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant neighborhood, to become a person who spent twenty-five years of his life living in the predominantly black inner city of the District of Columbia, where *I* was the minority, and raising my children there, and sending my children to public school there. Now, in the twilight of my life, the third chapter of my life, because of a quirk of family needs, I ended up inheriting—taking over—my grandfather's farm, which is in northern Baltimore County, in a place called Hereford/Monkton, which is a return to white, racist, conservative…you know, Ellen Sauerbrey country, and so forth. And initially, my wife and I were feeling miserable. My sons were miserable; my sons were uncomfortable going to Hereford Senior High School

because there were too many white people there. They *said* that to me! It *bothered* them. So, as a family, my wife and my sons and I have all gone out of our ways to embrace and meet as many people of different…of all diversity. Because one of my other issues is, when we lived in DC, a quarter of the people on Capitol Hill around me were gay. So, when I lived on Capitol Hill, Barb and I grew up and said, "Okay, so this is what it's like to be around gay people." They're *just like us*. So, for us to now come up here, to Hereford/Monkton, and to hear this *garbage* that's spewed by these people…horrible!

I'm very, very active in my church, and part of what we've been doing, Barb and I, in the ensuing eleven years after we moved up here, is saying, "God, you did this to us for a reason; what did you have in mind?" So, we eventually found the church—our church in Cockeysville—which we have led from being almost exclusively white to being a racially diverse congregation. And now, it's racially diverse, not only in terms of blacks and whites, but also Hispanic and Indian, as in from India. So—I'm the lay leader of the church—we have found our place. We know what our role was. Our role was to be a virus. We started off understanding racist, conservative white people, 'cause we were raised by them—my wife is from Lancaster County. We lived our lives in the middle of culturally rich, diverse black people, white people, people from all around the world. Washington, DC's a wonderful place to live. Tremendous diversity. We completely changed our attitudes about everything, and now we've been transported back into this other environment up here, where we're the thorn in everybody's side.