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Interview

of: Juliet J. Bragg (Mrs.)

by: Geneva Carter
Erika Gause

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Q How long have you lived or worked in the Penn/North Community?

A Well, I've worked in the Penn/North community since its existence. I've lived at this address since 1947.

Q When you say "since its existence", what do you mean?

A The beginning of Penn/North.

Q What year was that?

A I guess it's been seven or eight years ago.

Q Oh, you mean the Penn/North Association?

A Yes

Q What are some of your earliest memories'?

A Well, we worked together at the corner of Pennsylvania and Melbourne and then we moved down to this area.

Q Now, we're talking about your earliest memories of the community — the Pennsylvania North Community as well. When you first came here to live or work, what it was like, visually, the images you may have of what it was like, what it looked like, what the people were like.

A When I moved into this area, North Avenue from Pennsylvania to Druid Hill Avenue was mostly white. And on my street it was mostly black. There was a store, the drugstore on the corner of Pennsylvania and North where we have the subway, the northwest corner, and of course Tickner's on the northwest corner. Wilson's was there at the southwest corner where we have the social club. There was a theatre there, the Metropolitan Theatre at, on North Avenue and a drugstore, Rite Aide Drug Store, and a liquor store. The library was not there, maybe it was the health center. There was the car run and that was one of the horrors of my night.

Q In what way, ma'am?

A Because, I lived across the street and cars would pull in and clankety-clank, clankety-clank until all hours of the morning. That was the Pennsylvania Avenue car.

Q What changes have you seen take place on North Avenue that are positive or negative?

A I've seen quite a few changes, particularly in the neighborhood where I live. As you can realize, I'm living right behind the health center. My street comes into North Avenue & Division, and we are behind the health center.

Q	Describe what living on North Avenue & Pennsylvania was like.
A	<p>Well, it was terrible as far as anyone who had a car. You had nowhere to park practically all day because in the afternoons and during the day the conductors could park their cars, people who would go in and out of the Metropolitan Theatre, and they were white, they would come around on your street and park and it was so miserable if you had to get up and go to work in the morning and you couldn't sleep all night long. You were miserable, but otherwise it was a very, very nice neighborhood.</p> <p>As today, we have hardly any crime, and it's hard for people, because if you say that you live off of Pennsylvania Avenue the average person thinks that you are living in the ghetto. Many times in my classroom with my girls, they would say, "Oh, Mrs. Bragg, you live in the ghetto." I said no, I do not live in the ghetto, I live near Pennsylvania Avenue and it is not the ghetto at that end of Pennsylvania Avenue.</p>
Q	How has transportation changed over the years and how has it affected the community?
A	All the transportation has changed because first they removed the street car system, then they put buses up there and that began to be a horror. You'd hear the buses all night long, and there is a law if the bus comes into your neighborhood, they are not to stand and keep the motor running after two minutes. They are to cut it off. But the average bus driver wanted the cool air in the summer and the hot air in the winter and he would sit under the bus and he would let his motor run and that would keep the neighborhood from sleeping. But now, if you come into the 500 block of Cummings Street, and through my effort, we don't have any buses come into Cummings Street, so that has changed.
Q	When you say through your effort, what did you do to make this stop
A	It was at the meeting at the Penn/North about two years ago that a representative in fact I think he was the person in charge of Transit & Traffic, and I spoke about the bus system pulling in at North Avenue.
Q	What bus could that have been, the number of the bus? 21?
A	It didn't have to be the 21, it would be any layover. Yeah, the layover bus, it would pull in and, ironically, I would have to get up many times and go out and move my brother's car and move my car, because if they had a lady, girls, no offense to you, those ladies just couldn't pull that corner. They would have to send back or call in to get a representative to come out and do something to the bus so they could turn the corner. They would block the corner, you understand? Even, I could have moved the cars, but they just could not make that corner, go around that corner. And that was a headache.
Q	What has the political climate been in the Penn/North community, present and past?
A	Well, you know, "the more that's changed, the more things remain the same."
Q	What do you mean by that comment?

A	We have had many changes. We've had many changes of personnel, of people running in the community and they have had many proposals but it remains the same. Senator Welcome, I shall never forget her, how she would walk at night putting papers in doors, things that she would want the community to know. Mrs. Welcome is a very good friend of mine, we're both members of the same sorority and ah, sometimes I would go cut and help her.
Q	What are your memories for entertainment in the community? _____, Nate's & Leon's?
A	Well, when they did decide to let us go into the Met Theatre. . .
Q	What year was that?
A	I don't remember, I didn't go very often, sometimes you could hear, sometimes you couldn't hear. The people were talking, some of the people who could come did not know how to go into a theatre to observe a picture, you know? Then. you'd stay away. You understand what I mean? And, of course, we miss the drugstore. On a Sunday afternoon in my neighborhood, if you became ill, you have to go a distance to get medicine. And I'm very happy, I've spoken to Marion, in the new building they are going to build, there will be a drugstore.
Q	For senior citizens? That makes a lot of sense. Most senior citizens have to use medication.
A	And another thing, in this community now, we will have a nice restaurant. Now in the end, you could go into Wilson's, but I am a very peculiar person. My money was always green, the same color as the other person, I thought I was always clean, and I could never understand that if I went in with my sister, we might be turned away — my sister was brown skinned and sometimes I have had people say to me, "you can come, but your friend can't." And that's a pretty. . . You know what I'm speaking of? If you have a complexion that is fair they don't know who you are most of the time, you understand. But we know who we are. We, you are able to tell. But they don't know, other people. They really don't know, and you know that to be a fact.
Q	Did you ever go in because of that, because you were fair?
A	No. I never wanted to pass. I thought I was always feeling that it is you're keeping me out for one reason, and that's the color of my skin, and that's the reason. I'm fair, and some of my dearest friends were people of darker complexions. So, I used to walk down to Nate's & Leon's.
Q	Were you allowed to sit in there?
A	I didn't want to sit in there. I just walked down.
Q	Carry out?
A	Yes, because they had good pastries.
Q	They had good shrimp salad and chicken salad, I remember that.

A	Oh, yes, and you could walk out, and you would bring it home.
Q	Did you attend school in this area?
A	No, I did not. I am a native of Atlanta, Georgia.
Q	Did you attend school in Atlanta, Georgia?
A	Yes, I did.
Q	What school was that?
A	Clarke University.
Q	What can you say about the quality of education in the area?
A	This area?
Q	Yes, where you live in.
A	This is a public school in the reach of all communities. I have had no involvement with them because I've always taught away from the community.
Q	What schools did you teach at?
A	This is going to be interesting. I taught at Pimlico Junior High School and I opened the division up at Southwestern Senior High School. I knew that she did not know that I had heard that she was teaching at Southwestern. I was among the first group of teachers going to Southwestern.
Q	While you was at Southwestern, what area
A	I was in charge of the special curriculum. I chose that career duty for the simple reason I liked working with the boys and girls who had a problem in achieving. And I have two children of my own. They didn't need me, they would go on in spite of me, but I was rewarded when I had a student come to me and say to me, "Mrs. Bragg, I understand, I got you, I'm going to do it," and that meant a great deal to me.
Q	What impact did the churches have or did have on the community? Do you attend church in the community?
A	No, I do not. I attend Metropolitan Methodist Church at Lanvale and Carrollton Avenue.
Q	What can you say about the ratio of blacks when you first moved here?
A	Here, or in the community?
Q	In the community.
A	There were more blacks than whites at that time. When one black moved in, the whites begin to move out. Why, I wonder. Could I ask you that? May I ask you why you feel that when one black moves in, that sort of breaks things up.
Q	You want to know why the whites move out? Maybe because they are prejudice. That to me is prejudice.

A	I wonder why they would feel that way? Just because, for instance say, I'm moving in. I'm going to move into the neighborhood and they don't know me. What is about us that makes us very offensive to the other people and we are offensive to one another?
Q	Because they've always had so much and we didn't, and they feel that they should
A	Alright, now you're nice and clean and you're moving into the neighborhood. They don't know what you have.
Q	It's just your color, I mean, it goes back to slaves one time.
A	Well, they think black means ugly.
Q	And since we've been slaves, I've always felt that since they white, they will attack, that they look down on us, they feel like they up there, they don't want to be around us. They got so much they can talk about and they don't want no slaves. They don't want to see us making our way up.
A	You agree with her?
Q	What do you think about why whites don't want blacks in their community?
A	As I walk down here from my street and I saw so much trash. Curtains flowing out of the windows. People all over the steps, steps filthy dirty, bottles trash, you name it. You can pick it up. People can be extremely poor but they don't have to be dirty. And its a very sad thing to see that in our neighborhoods, our neighborhoods, not all neighborhoods, and not all neighbors, we're not clean. We look like we just don't like to be clean people. We throw trash out, we'll throw trash in the gutter, we'll litter the sidewalks. Is that necessary? I don't think its necessary.
Q	Some like whites clean themselves.
A	That's true.
Q	White people are the same way, I mean there's no difference. I mean, white neighborhoods, are just as much as you see.
A	But, that's not forgivable, is it?
Q	If a white man, if he killed somebody, they say he was insane, but if a black man, he kill them,...
A	But, North Avenue is a thoroughfare, and they see us as a thoroughfare, the public trash. And as they sit on the streetcars, they see us all over the front. We are on the thoroughfare. You come through the black community, and maybe it's the poorer class of blacks. You don't see the pretty fronts as you know we do have, as we have in our race, we have people who keep beautiful fronts. They keep them clean, just as clean as the white person does. But, I don't know, why, why do you think then that we have to have those people who might be poor circumstances on the thoroughfares, where the people can see? Why is it that way? You go into any city or part of the country and it's like that. Have you noticed that? Why? It seemingly is going to show us that it's dirty people. But, you don't have to be that way. You can be poor and clean. I see it as I go to my church in the morning, that's uncalled for. May I ask you another question?

Q	Do you have children in the community every summer that belong to clean blocks campaigns? Do you belong to it?
A	That helped out. They cleaned up areas. Do we want to go to the next question?
Q	What was some of your favorite places that you had hoped wouldn't leave the community?
A	Well, I hope the library will never leave. And I like the health center because of the hours that it is open after 6:00 P.M. it's very quiet there. And then there's no one in front of me, I get air that comes right down through Druid Hill Park.
Q	Like, Wilson's, did you wish they had left or stayed?
A	It's so sad. It began to be a place where you had rats in there, cause people ate and when they finished eating, they'd throw things on the floor. It had to be very dirty. I had a pretty pair of blue suede shoes once and you know how ladies put their feet, cross their leg at their ankle, and you have your foot back, and when I came in there one day, I had a _____ on my shoe. And that just ruined me for going in there. I did not want to go in there any more.
Q	And our streets used to be real clean, you could walk outside there.
A	Yes, but you can't do that now.
Q	Do you prefer the Penn/North area yesteryear or now? I mean do you like it then or now?
A	Well, you see I've seen the change when I came. And then we weathered the storm and when it was going down, and now because of the Penn/North organization we have a revitalization of the, trying to make the neighborhood as it should be.
Q	Was there as much crime involved?
A	I'll answer that in this way. I have never really noticed much crime in this neighborhood any more than there is crime and violence in all neighborhoods. And that is something I have a resentment to, when people refer to the crime and the violence in the neighborhood. I don't see, you don't see, in crime in our neighborhood.
Q	What changes would you like to see occur?
A	More, better sanitation helpers. I think the schools could do a job in training the students to learn how to live in the school and think those learnings back into your communities and keep your environment clean and to live orderly in your schools, I don't know how my school, Southwestern, looks today, but when we first went into Southwestern I was one of the happiest persons in the world. It was a beautiful school. Carpeted, all over, air conditioned, and that's why I have a lot of colds today, and where it has affected me, because some of my classrooms was so cold, exceedingly on the far end level. They couldn't regulate.

	What floor are you on now?
Q	Third floor.
A	What department are you in?
Q	I was an A student. They are changing everything around.
Q	I think that when people come into visit the environment will look better. And it's just that difficult.
A	Can the teachers control it?
Q	No, the decision has already been made.
Q	I'm finished the questions and everything. Have you got, do you have anything you would like to share about the neighborhood — anything?
A	I think we've gotten off on another trend, haven't we? I think that you are all very fine young boys and girls. Not men and women. And I think it is beautiful that you spend this time of your day pursuing further learning. So many waste time and get into problems. Keep it up.