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Interview

of: Harold Brutin

by: Leonard Levin
Randall Holder

date: 1986 July 21

Q How long did you live/work in Penn/North Avenue?

A 28 Years.

Q Did you actually live in the area?

A No, I'm in just business.

Q What are some of your earliest memories?

A What?

Q What are some of your earliest memories?

A About what?

Q About the area, what was it like?

A It was a lot better than it is now.

Q In what way?

A More settled people. Older people. More polite than these young jitterbugs today. That's the main thing. The area has gotten very down, very bad.

Q What changes have you seen on North Avenue that are positive and/or negative?

A Well, the remodeling of the area has been very positive. And the dope is negative.

Q Do you think that is the main thing that is pulling down the community? Drugs?

A Yes, no doubt about it. These people in general that live in the area are very nice. I don't see any problem.

Q You have been here 28 years?

A 28 years.

Q Okay, did you live through the riots?

A Yes.

Q Okay, how did you make out from that?

A Well, they didn't bother me in two of them.

Q And you decided to stay. That's very interesting, that you would decide to stay in the community. So, it's been feasibly economical for you?

A Oh, yes. It's been nice for me. I don't have any reason to complain.

Q	What businesses have you seen come and go, and which ones have stayed?
A	A lot of the, part of the whole shopping center is gone up there on North Avenue which really will be replaced. And I have seen a lot of neighborhood stores come and go.
Q	What do you think has been the main reason, the community itself?
A	No, no. Bad management I think.
Q	What do you think the key to good management would be for people who wanted to start businesses? What advice would you give them?
A	The main thing is putting in a lot of hours. That's the main thing. And run it yourself instead of having managers and assistant managers going out and buying new cars. That's the main thing. You have to live within your means to start with. In other words, you have to crawl before you walk. That's the main theory of success.
Q	How has transportation changed over the years and how has it affected the community?
A	Well, the subway is the big change.
Q	But, how has it affected the community?
A	I don't think it has affected me in any way. People are still walking by. Up and down, I still have the traffic. I don't think it has bothered me any. It has helped , you know the people that have to ride.
Q	Make them more mobile you mean?
A	Well, they don't have to use their car, pay all that parking fees downtown, it's a lot quicker. . .I thought you were supposed to write all this, oh, I see.
Q	What has the political character been in the Penn/North Avenue community, both present and past?
A	I don't know. What are you referring to?
Q	The political climate, what has, how has it affected the community?
A	I don't have anything to do with politics. I can't answer that. I mind my own business.
Q	Surely, politics has affected you in some way, like maybe like,...
A	I don't think it has.
Q	What are some of your memories for entertainment, like the Met Theatre, Wilson's?
A	You're really going back now. Let's see, Wilson's was a fine restaurant years ago. Of course, it's gone. Never been in the Met Theatre, or the Charles, so I don't know anything about it. But I miss Wilson's. They really had some good food.

Q	That's the only sit down restaurant?
A	That's right.
Q	It would be good if you all could get that back again.
A	Well, I understand they may have, build a highrise up here at North Avenue.
Q	Senior Citizens?
A	Yes, I they are supposed to have one there, but I don't think it is going to be sit down. I think it's going to be like McDonald's or Chicken George, one of them. That's what I've heard.
Q	What were some of your favorite places that you would have hoped would have never left the community?
A	I just told you, Wilson's. That's the only place, you know, because we have a problem getting something good to eat around here.
Q	What was the ratio of white and black when you first started your business? Was it actually integrated?
A	Oh, yeah. I think it was all black before I came.
Q	Do you prefer the Penn/North of yesteryear or now?
A	I guess now, because I'm making a better living than I did in yesteryear.
Q	But, I'm sure there are some things that you wish were still here?
A	Yes, the old people, they were a lot nicer, some of them.
Q	What changes would you like to see occur?
A	Well, the main thing is fixing up all this dilapidated property, that's the biggest thing, because it brings a lot of trash around. They are doing it now, you know, but I don't know how long it will be before it's finished. But, that's basically. . . This is a very nice area, four or five square blocks. Nice people, the 1700 block of Carey Street, this block of North Avenue, it's all very nice people. Most of them are home owners.
Q	I think that's the thing that makes the big difference.
A	That's right. That's the main thing. Basically, this is the place, you know, all neighborhoods have good, bad. Basically, this is a nice area.
Q	So you have hope for this community?
A	Oh, yeah. Most of the people do. Yeah, this, that's why the Penn/North Association is so interested in the area. They can see, the outlook looks very good, very good. Of course I want to retire, I want to hang it up.
Q	Do you have a family member that you will turn it over to?
A	I'm trying to sell the place, now. Do you want to buy it?
Q	It might be a start. . .