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# Interview

**of:** Anna Denmark  
Saul Denmark

**by:** Randall Holder  
Rhonda Stokes

**date:** 1986 July 17

**Q** Did you live here for 30 years?

**A** No, we worked here for over 30 years.

**Q** You never lived in the community?

**A** No.

**Q** What are your earliest memories since been working on the avenue/street?

**A** Well, some of the earliest memories when I first came to Baltimore we used to come down here to a restaurant that was on the corner and it was a big, big seafood place.

**Q** What was the name?

**A** It was called Wilson's. I'm sure most of the people. . . That was my first acquaintanceship with this area. And then a little further down on Eutaw Place, that was a Street that was full of doctors and dentists and only professional people. They lived there, they worked there, they had their offices there, as a matter of fact the dentist I went to was right on Eutaw. And that was my first acquaintanceship with this area. And that was when I came here 35 years ago.

That's when I moved to Baltimore. And then we opened a place here and we were down the street for about a year and then we came into this place. There were an awful, awful lot of business people up and down the street. Every single type of business you can imagine. From the watchmaker up the corner here where you now have the park, and the movie theatre was open then, and the lady who makes hats had a store up on the next block which she just reopened over here and I believe she is the same lady.

**Q** Is that right?

**A** I am pretty sure of it. And I know she has lived in this area for most of her life. So she is one person you definitely ought to try to find. And they had an awful, awful lot of businesses that were open at night. That is something we don't have now.

**Q** Why do you think?

**A** Well, there is nothing to draw them here. When you have a Mondawmin or a shopping center or shopping that people go into and congregate, then they will come. But if you have nothing to draw them here, they won't come. There are very few doctors, dentists, or businesses open at night here. If they are they are a small office. There are no good restaurants here that would draw people here, mostly carryouts, which they can get anyplace. There is nothing for the children to come down for. There are no movies, the Shake & Bake is about the only drawing card and that is further down. It is not a North Avenue project.



<b>Q</b>	What changes have you seen on North Avenue, changes that are positive or negative?
<b>A</b>	Well, the positive ones were when they started to try to keep the streets cleaner, when they started to bring in the trees, when they started to try to keep it in a better condition. The ones that are not positive are some of the things that I mentioned. The fact that there is nothing at night. That this neighborhood had been known for dope dealing, that this neighborhood is known for nothing going on. There is nothing to bring anybody here. And that is the biggest problem.
<b>Q</b>	Even though you said you never lived here, can you describe what it was like living here on North & Pennsylvania Avenue?
<b>A</b>	Yeah, my sister-in-law lived over on Linden Avenue right off of North, and it was a much more urban feeling in other words this area at that time was more like living in Randalistown now. Because the rest of downtown, this was not considered downtown, downtown was Howard Street area. And that is where you got the feeling of city living. Out here you were urban living.
<b>Q</b>	You mean suburban?
<b>A</b>	Yeah, I mean actually urban, because you felt like you were living in the country, not in the city. I mean they felt they were living in the country living here, rather than in the city. And, when they lived down around Howard Street area and any of the areas in that section, that was the city.
<b>Q</b>	What years are you describing?
<b>A</b>	I am describing 30, 32 years ago.
<b>Q</b>	What businesses have you seen come and go?
<b>A</b>	Well, a lot of lawyers offices used to be here and Brooks—Price used to be next door. Ah, there were a lot of real estate offices that were on this street. Of course, Wilson's, the watchmaker, the movie theater, and an awful lot of them. What has taken their place is fast food places, liquor stores, Mom & Pop grocery stores.
<b>Q</b>	How has transportation affected the community? Or your business?
<b>A</b>	The bus service here I must say is excellent. And now with the subway, that's a wonderful feature for people in the area, really. It gets them in and out. So that there really is no reason if they had a reason to come down here that they could say that there's no way of getting here.
<b>Q</b>	Does that affect your business in any way?
<b>A</b>	No, because we deal all over the state. So that we were not affected by transportation one way or the other. Our trucks are our business.
<b>Q</b>	Do you know how was the political climate? What it was like in this area?

<b>A</b>	The political climate when I came to Baltimore was more of a boss climate than it is now. I mean they used to have, I don't know whether you have ever heard of him, but Jack Pollack for instance. He was one of the political bosses and they have had different areas where they had them and that was the way politics was run then. You either were a member of one club or another.
<b>Q</b>	Did you attend school in this area?
<b>A</b>	No, I came from New York.
<b>Q</b>	And when was that?
<b>A</b>	That was 35 years ago. 36 years ago. I don't remember the exact year.
<b>Q</b>	What can you say about the quality of education in this area, even though you never attended school in this area?
<b>A</b>	I have no idea, really. All I know is that you get what you put in, you get out. You get out of any type of education.
<b>Q</b>	What were some of your favorite places?
	(No answer.)
<b>Q</b>	What was the ratio of blacks to whites and any other nationality?
<b>A</b>	I'd say it was 50/50 then, or close to it. And now the percentage of whites down here is minimal. Maybe one or two percent.
<b>Q</b>	Do you know why white peoples leave the area when blacks start moving into the area?
<b>A</b>	Yeah, that was mostly the real estate people. That was called scare tactics in those days.
<b>Q</b>	What you mean by that?
<b>A</b>	They used to come in and say if you don't sell your house today black people are moving in and it won't be worth a penny tomorrow. You remember that. They sure did. And they they'd post the signs all up and down the street. And that's where they, they used to call it block busting - that's what it was, I was trying to think of the term. And they used to go around from block to block, they'd send cards, they'd call with the criss/cross directories, they'd call up the people in the houses. It was strictly scare tactics.
<b>Q</b>	When you first opened up this business, did you sell to black people as well?
<b>A</b>	Yup, always did.
<b>Q</b>	What was some of your favorite places that you had hoped wouldn't left the community?
<b>A</b>	Wilson's was one of my favorites. And that, by the way, lunch time – you would find the largest gathering of businessmen, both black and white, there. It was like a meeting place.
<b>Q</b>	You prefer the Penn-North area of yesteryear or now?

<b>A</b>	I liked it the way it used to be.
<b>Q</b>	Why?
<b>A</b>	Because we had a nice racial mix, we had a nice community here and everybody was happy in it - black and white. And we had no drugs in it, either.
<b>Q</b>	Was there as much violence?
<b>A</b>	No. There was not as much violence anywhere, not in any community, in the entire country, not only here. That's a phenomenon that was brought on by the 60's.
<b>Q</b>	Did segregation affect the community?
<b>A</b>	I think it might. I think segregation affects everybody. The whites don't want to come down here, they feel that there is violence here. The blacks don't want them down here because they think they are encroaching on their territory and that they are looking to make a buck. And the both of them have to get together and better understand each other. Because it's crazy.
<b>Q</b>	How did your business survive the 60's and the riots?
<b>A</b>	We weren't affected because the black people around here know the way we are and they know the way we feel. Because we feel people are people and I don't care if you are black, white or green. You do me wrong, I'll do you wrong. You do me right, I'll do you right. And that's it.
<b>Q</b>	What changes would you like to see occur in the community?
<b>A</b>	I'd love to see something come back to draw people here at night. Because once they feel safe coming at night, they feel they belong to a community. If you could get people to feel safe coming down here, anyplace, at night, you've got to have a drawing card here.
<b>Q</b>	Do you have any ideas about how people to. . .
<b>A</b>	Yeah, same way they did the Inner Harbor. Have one drawing card. don't care whether its a good restaurant, a good theater, something and they will come. Once they see that nobody is out to get them, that they feel safe coming here, then it will expand.
<b>Q</b>	Do you have any comments that you would like to make?
<b>A</b>	No, I guess not.