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Interview

of: Leonora Hewitt

by: Rhonda Stokes
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Q. How long have you or did you live or work in the Penn North community?

A. I lived in the community over 40 years, about 45.

Q. Have you lived at the same address?

A. Yes. I raised my children and my oldest child would be 38, if he had lived.

Q. How many children did you have?

A. Four. Three living now.

Q. What are some of your earliest memories about the community.

A. I always worked in my community, keeping it together, keeping it clean and keeping my neighbors together. See, I am the first president and I will become again the president of my organization. But I still haven't given up the workmanship. I keep my neighborhood clean, my alleys, and I go to meetings. I have a sign in our house, alleys, streets and backyards. . .

You can call my supervisor downtown, or any place and I am a member of the Reservoir Hill. I am an advisory board member in Reservoir Hill. And I keep things together.

Q. How long have you been doing that?

A. Ever since I been in the neighborhood. They were from the American Building when I first met them in the City of Baltimore – Police Department, when the Police Department began for the City, before the City took over. We had a clean street and a clean yard, because nobody could sweep their yard in the alley, no-one couldn't sweep nothing in the gutter. The police would walk the beat and if you did, you got a ticket and have to pay a fine. That's how strict our neighborhoods were.

Q. Why do you think they are not as strict anymore?

A.	<p>Because they are not taken care of. Since the City is taking care, the tenants have gone to the dogs. They seem to keep the clean. They say they are gotten out the Health, now they are only get our alley clean once a month. Before, it was every three months. So I told them we have to have it more often. Wherever the City owns, the Superintendent of the City told me on the phone, we won't be in your alley no more for now on for the 11th of each month. Tell your neighbors, if they have anything to clean, keep their alley like you keep your part.</p> <p>I pay little children, I have little gatherings up my house, kids 7 or 8 years expect me to pay them, I say "no sweetheart that's not my dirt, Mrs. Hewitt just cleaning other peoples dirt." We have to live in the neighborhood so we like it clean too. And whether they see paper, they say "Mrs. Hewitt I been cleaning." I say "I am so happy"; "make Mrs. Hewitt happy"; and "you are worth it." And that's way we do it in my neighborhood. Keeping it clean in the gutter, across the street, down the street, all the little kids get together in keeping our streets clean.</p>
Q.	How does that makes you feel?
A.	Happy.
Q.	No. since your alley only gets clean once a month.
A.	Sad. I feel bad.
Q.	You said there was a changeover. What was the change?
A.	<p>They say they have cut the budget. Health has been cut out. See I have another from Reservoir Hill for my streets and their truck was in the garage. Whenever their truck was on the street, they kept it clean. I could call up and say Reinwright, or Mr. who, would you send the truck over, alright? They would see that the heavy things would pick up and cleaned up. But while their truck is in the garage, the City don't do a thing, they walk the streets</p> <p>And I have supervisors from the Health down there 1313 Druid Hill. They walk the streets, say they are going do this, and they make promises, they never keep their promises. And they won't board up couple of the houses, vandalize them, they never have done this in five years they haven't done nothing. I say well, instead of housecleaning the city, some of these City's should be cleaned out themselves because they are not doing their work and he comes up there.</p> <p>I have one girl Mrs. B., I must give Mrs. B - Mrs. B. takes care of the east side of Madison Avenue - and I must say, she does take care of her work. She works from down the 2500 block of Eutaw, Madison, to Laurens Street over to Eutaw back over to Lennox, all through there. And Mr. Gregory takes care of my side all way over to Penn. Avenue and to Laurens Street. When I walk, see I walks the streets too and,</p>

	<p>they say: "you been walking the beat." I say: "I been checking on it too." Things get too bad, I call Mr. Leonard downtown, Leonard, you know Mr. Leonard downtown, and I been to see him. See I make myself known to the City, I go down and meet with him and tell them who I am. Mr. B. was the management for the whole city before he retire and he call me. Mr. Moore, he say "Mrs. Hewitt, I am retiring."</p> <p>I was sick two years ago with a new hip and they left the leaves, the boys cleaned up and put them four bags. The Trash came by and left them. I called out of my sick bed downtown. They sent a truck right up. The man we comes to see about your leaves. I say "well, it's moved, I had the other truck come up and taking that did."</p> <p>"You have to sign my paper then, let them parents know that I been here" So I had to sign the paper, cause Reservoir Hill came and got them and taken them away. Even if one city truck don't work, Reservoir Hill still work with me.</p>
Q.	That good that you have a lot of options. I wish you had more people in this community was involved as you.
A.	<p>I work hard and someone say, "you are going to be the President again." Every time you around do, someone thought I owned McCullough St., seeing me out there 5 o'clock. I get 5 o'clock in the morning, winter or summer and sweep all the way down to eight houses or more. Buy bags pay for them out of my money and get up all the trash up. Then trash day, Monday and Thursday they come. I do it on Monday morning, 5 o'clock. And I'll do it again on Wednesday. Just checking, and I was checking this morning. See, I do a lot of walking, and I notice there was some bottles been put down the street, so then I got to get that up for the trash man and I love to see a neighborhood clean. I was raised this way. We always did our work early before I went to school. When I was a little girl, we had to do certain things before we went to school. And I was brought about this, so I say life, if everyone was this way, we wouldn't have a dirty street. And I'll talk to the City.</p> <p>Since the City has taken over, I have seen the city going down. . . You see, the Police used to take care, from the Police Department. And so I say "walk the beat" - they wouldn't let the street get dirty. I walked all the way down to Lennox, down there to Maryland, and I walked from there to Linden Avenue and I see the trash. And Tiffany Alley is my alley. Comes back of me name Tiffany alley and traction runs east and west. And that stays a genuine dump. I told them, I say "what you should do is those down there." People from these apartment houses don't have no way to get their trash out. See the service stops, you understand, giving them service. They would get their trash out on a dumb waiter, bring the trash out. Now, they went up on rent and rent go up, they get less service and the poor people have to come all around the block to put their dirt in your alleys. Some people don't feel like going around block, wherever they see a pile, they going add to that pile.</p>

Q.	What changes have you seen that are positive and or negative on North & Pennsylvania?
A.	<p>Well, those broken down houses. I have seen that change and there was all the beautiful scenery up and down North Avenue years ago, you could shop there, and I used to take my little baby in my baby carriage and walk. It was a pleasure. The buildings was beautiful around here. The property for one thing has bought down the neighborhood. Other races come in they stop fixing.</p> <p>They don't speak up for themselves. They rather go in the house, and if the roof is not leaking or anything, they would move right in on dirt. I have seen it, that's it, they don't open up. Our race don't say nothing, they are happy to get in there. When they get in there, don't tell them my house needs painting or something needs to be done. Man told me up the street, own two properties, I say "why is it you don't fix the houses up here." He say "Mrs. Hewitt, why should I, they don't say nothing, why should I go and do?" They are happy when they don't speak up if they don't speak up. So we go on, we get our rent, why worry, why?</p> <p>I worry. Bringing our neighborhood down. We got to live in the house you don't live. So he saw me once, he never met me before, on his phone. So when he met me he said, oh you the lady complaining on the phone, I heard your voice.</p>
Q.	Are you a homeowner?
A.	<p>Oh, yes.</p> <p>They should have a contract drawn up. When you move in a house, you should get a contract. And let him say, what he is going to do and what he is not going to do so when anything comes up, you have that to show. He supposed to tell you when your house needs painting, he will furnish the paint.</p>
Q.	Describe what living on North & Penn. was like?
A.	<p>Penn North was a beautiful section. The white marble steps stayed pretty white, people never hung out the windows. The corners, you never see no hang outs on the corner. We didn't have but two bars then. Before that was a drug store and grocery store on one corner. People would socialize. The only way they would get around this neighborhood by working through laundry rooms.</p> <p>When you don't fix your houses, they get worse and worse. And up on my block it was Sutton Place, all Jewish people live there, and so when they saw the blacks moving in, they said don't fix the houses because we are moving. They said we are going to fix it enough for us to leave. Because they are not going to keep it together. The garbage not cover. But now its terrible. I got Mr. Richardson, he was extra good, the boys in the neighborhood would go with him and put the rats in the bag. He take a stick and kill them up. Then the next thing, their houses begin to fall, you know, with not keeping them painted. I have to call the man up in my</p>

	<p>neighborhood, the city came up and looked at this man house. His grandmother left him this house. He sat in the house and let it all fall down. And he's a teacher! So what happen? I saw this fire department up there, I ran outside. Guess what they were doing? It was dangerous they said, the bricks were falling all down. I had to call my friend and told her. She is a librarian. You know he ain't worried, about it yet. He's not fixing it up.</p>
Q.	<p>Do you remember any businesses that are not. . . any businesses on North Avenue?</p>
A.	<p>Business, it was great. We had a place right down there on Whitlock. I could go down there and walk, leave our front door unlock. And we walked down to the bank, they said had flowers stores, food stores, they had a cleaner, they had a man, a Jewish place - sold nothing but Jewish meat and you got there and bought your meat before 6 o'clock before he closed. You could get as much as can for 50.</p> <p>The Jewish people believe in freezing their stuff. They would rather give it to us and sell it cheap. They would close up all round there on Friday, because they had to be in church at 6 o'clock and they closed until Monday. Everything come in fresh and you enjoyed yourself.</p> <p>Just to go around Whitelock and see the beautiful scenery, all the beautiful flowers. In my neighborhood, we had these beautiful apply trees. I don't fuss with kids. My neighborhood saw my little boy, playing up there on the corner 'round my way. If that sign was a horse stable, I am going around. And we even had Park to go to.</p>
Q.	<p>Do you remember Wilson's restaurant?</p>
A.	<p>Yes. That was a beautiful place. And right off hand it was a store there. They had the whole corner and people just to go in there. People they had money. You see, everybody couldn't go in that store then because they couldn't afford it. And they didn't want everybody to come in there to knock down things. And drinking, they didn't have that in there.</p>
Q.	<p>I heard it was due to segregation too. Did that have any affect on them?</p>
A.	<p>Yes, the undertaker across the street, Wilson's. And they and a lot of their help used to go over there to eat and the people used to stay over night. They used to have upstairs too for out of town guests and the people used to eat over at Wilson's. They didn't want us in there. They wanted whites when the city started letting go down with dirt, and we didn't care less but keeping it together. So what you expect?</p>
Q.	<p>Around what year did black people start going to Wilsons?</p>
A.	<p>I guess about 1950. I got married in 1944 and it was all strictly white then. I guess five years after that. But gradually they would rent a room to you. Like, if you</p>

	<p>wanted a party but not in the front.</p> <p>I don't like that name "black." When we was little, if you called each other black, you went home bloody.</p>
Q.	<p>Why not?</p>
A.	<p>They want to be "black," they were "colored." Why they "black," we are not "black," they were "colored." I wouldn't be white and I won't want to be black. If somebody come their house strict black, you be scared, if somebody come down there white, you be scared.. Nothing white as the snow or the white bear out there, because that's the only thing white. All we all colored.</p> <p>I had a doctor told a dear friend of mine - she was Jewish, see there was a lot of Jewish people. and she was Jewish - and he say to her "why don't you get some color, if you don't get no color you won't live." If we didn't have color we wouldn't all be living, we be dead a long time ago. You take white, brown, yellow, red and orange, ain't that beautiful flowers in your flower garden. Isn't it pretty, that's what make the world so we all color. We got light green people, brown people, so we are color.</p>
Q.	<p>Why would you say, "if we didn't have color we would die"?</p>
A.	<p>That right, we didn't have color, we all been dead a long time ago. That my belief. If you didn't have color in your blood like the doctor say, you been dead. We all have to have color to make it. You go and take a person down the street with no color. Wouldn't you gone? I would be gone. What they used to call them? Hey, "black" "nigger," hey "black" "nigger" and see that went on. You were evil when you smiled. You notice it? I noticed it. And people begin to kill one another. The dope is busy and you killing one another. When you was born nearly "colored," you didn't hear people killing people. And momma used to say, "if you are black you are mean, so don't call nobody black because they are not mean." Every since we been "black" things been mean to one another. We can't even go to sleep. People used to come to you and fist fight then, out now they come to you and stab you to death in a minute. I saw two men one day on the 51 and these two men with his sleeve rolled up. They didn't have no knife out there or no gun, and they was doing the like the old days. Didn't nobody believe in shooting you, and now they kill us. We can not go out of our doors, we cannot set in our house for them coming in.</p> <p>My neighborhood went in the house and when she go in there, there was two boys was in there, and she backed out real quick and got her. My house was vandalized. I had good neighbors. If they don't see me in a day, they on my phone, wondering where is Mrs. Hewitt - don't want you to get sick - makes me feel good. I went down town to the A&P on McMeacham, I came back, my daughter was working at Social Security. She told me I had been burglarized, it was my neighbor but they got him. He had everything, had my Sunday pocket book, my trench coat in the kitchen, and they got him and taken him. I didn't know what I had in my Sunday</p>

	<p>pocket book. So the police told the judge, Mrs. Hewitt had everything in her pocket book. So they got everything and put in a bag, all my money and jewelry and stuff. I had to take identification card to get my own things. And they got him and he served his time, they still in jail. I just pray to God that boy don't, cause I didn't know anything about it before I got home. If it wasn't for my neighbors - she went to court with me and everything - and this judge came out and say "Ms. George you won the case."</p>
Q.	<p>How has transportation changed over the years? How has it affected the community?</p>
A.	<p>Plenty, plenty. When the buses got hold of us, street cars didn't have a chance. It was cheaper, 10, 15, 25. And they started to dropping down and they put the buses on us. Now it's worse. We got to stand on the corner - more money you pay, the less service you get - and we had to stand there in the middle of street and I had to stretch myself, see, I carry a cane. Sometimes they start cussing. They don't have no niceness about them. That's how I feel about it.</p>
Q.	<p>Which church do you belong?</p>
A.	<p>Grace Pres.</p>
Q.	<p>Where is that?</p>
A.	<p>Greenspring Avenue. Across the street from Greenspring Jr. High. and up the street from Martin Luther King School.</p>
Q.	<p>How long have you been a member?</p>
A.	<p>Over 35 years. My children was raised in there. I told you my oldest boy died five years ago. If he had lived he would be 38. So I am telling you, I worked. When they need me they come and get me. I could set a table and makes cakes. Every time a club have a meeting, they say "Mrs. Hewitt, you bake a cake." I say "oh sure." Even my police from Northwestern, he's waiting for me to make him a chocolate cake.</p>
Q.	<p>What changes would you like to see occur in your area?</p>
A.	<p>I would like to see clean up and fix up these houses. If you start on these houses, we can get the rest. But we have a contract to get these houses in shape and get these rats. When you start to pulling down their shades in the kitchen and the rats run every where. And when they got them out of the way, our rats got down. And that's what I enjoyed to see a nice pretty house fixed up and cleaned out.</p>

Q.	Did you attend school in the area?
A.	Oh yes.
Q.	What school did you attend?
A.	Douglass. I finished Douglass. My ex-principal just died, Sam Owens. Did you know him? He was in a nursing home. I sent him a birthday card till the day he died. He helped you and see that you did good. Don't that make you feel good? I enjoyed seeing good children and good neighbor and I do anything in the world. And I have neighbors come to me when I was sick with my new hip, they ladies would come in a bathe me, cook, and do for me just I was a relative. And I say, it makes proud to see I was loved. I didn't realize I was loved like this. And the flowers, the lady helped me.
Q.	What can you say about the quality of education in the area and the school you attended?
A.	Beautiful. If you don't get it yourself, it's no fault of the teachers, you have to get it yourself. And they really help the children, all round my way.
Q.	Mrs. Hewitt, this has been a nice interview, and we would like to thank you.
A.	You are quite welcome. I enjoyed being with you young folks. You know, I was surprise when I came here, I thought it was grown ups. But when I seen these young people, my heart goes out to all of you. Keep up the good work. I have six grand children and one of them works in the Roy Rogers out Ellicott City. And my other little one, he is fourteen, he's anxious to get a job, but he does cut the grass. He gets \$17 for cutting the grass out there. He says "grandmother, I'm making money, I'm cutting three lawns today" and I say "keep it up, you are doing beautiful Kevin." And so mother gave him a week vacation to Wild Wood and last year she taken them to Florida, but they all good children. When you good. . . So I enjoyed being with you young folks.
Q.	Thank you for being here, it mean a lot.
A.	I hope and pray I see you all again.