

KENNETH JACKSON –
DEW DROP INN – NEW ORLEANS, LA
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My name is Kenneth C. Jackson – K-E-N-N-E-T-H C. J-A-C-K-S-O-N

So, let's talk about Frank and your relationship to Frank and how he started the Dew Drop, or the Groove Room, because it was called the Groove Room as well, correct?

It was one section of it that was called the Groove Room. I can show you where it was because behind where we are, is a whole 'nother lot that's an empty area. That was the Groove Room back then. It was one of his transformations, where he went from one area to another, when he decided to just reconfigure things. My grandfather [the owner of the Dew Drop] moved here from Plaquemine, Louisiana. I can estimate around maybe 1930...I would estimate around that time. He was a barber by trade. When he first came to New Orleans. My family set up...they were living directly across the street from where we are. That was the Magnolia Housing Project. He had a barbershop on the other side of the street. This was actually a situation where you had two buildings in one. He first bought one of the buildings that is on the other side from where we are now. And it had already been, sort of like a rooming house and he must have had the nightclub...just a bar in the front of it. And the barbershop was also there.

Can you tell me what year was this?

We're talking about 1938. That is when he purchased the first building. He and his brothers. They started...it was just a bar at first. My grandfather just had the idea to start having some live entertainment going on. And it just was successful. It just took off. People enjoyed it. Eventually, the building where we are now, which was a Chinese grocery store at first went up for sale, and they bought this building and had it elevated because it was a one-story building and had it elevated and the downstairs was finished out.

When you say "they" do you mean Frank and his wife...?

Frank, his wife, his brothers. It was basically Frank's guidance and idea that drove everything. He was the main wheel that ran everything, but his brother, Paul, my uncle, was the person who ran the restaurant. The restaurant was for Paul. You know, so they were business partners. My uncle Paul and his wife actually lived in the building up until he passed.

Is it true that he [Frank] had a 7th grade education?

Yeah, I think that's as far as he went, 7th [grade], maybe 8th [grade]. He never finished, what we called Junior High School. That's about as far as he went. But he was a barber by trade. He did have a barber's license and that's what started him off in...the building on the other side.

How did he generate the capital to purchase this?

I have no idea. I have no idea. I think it was just the success of the renting of the hotel rooms and you know, the bar business. It just took off, you know.

Do you know how much he purchased it for?

How much? No. I don't think the city's records go back that far either. But I do know that it was he and his brothers together that worked, and ran things and kept it all in order. He also had one sister that definitely worked here and one sister that supported it and his third sister, she lived in another state, so it was a family affair. Not only that, he had nieces and nephews that also worked here. His son and his daughter both took part in operating the business.

Do you know roughly what age he was when he purchased this?

I couldn't say. He died when he was 65, that was in 1972. So I'm no math person....he might have been 30 or close to 30. And when he bought this side, they put the club over here and expanded it and with the capacity that they had, it just boomed. He also...he was a promoter. He sent bands out of town. He booked acts into some of the local...like concert venues, the Municipal Auditorium. He was the first black person to book the Municipal Auditorium for a concert. They did concerts at the Booker T. Washington High School auditorium which was a pretty big thing. He'd do dances and bring acts into other the venues...the I.L.A. Hall and there were a couple of other places that he worked with. And he would also send entertainers and bands out of town. They would hook up with other African American nightclub owners. I think they went as far as Galveston, Texas, all the way to Florida. They would exchange acts from here to there. You know, some of the smaller towns in upper Louisiana, you know he would send some of the entertainers that were in the area to do shows out of town.

When did he start having the big acts come? James Brown...

We're talking '50s, '40s, '50's, early '60s.

So back then ['30's] it was the local entertainers?

I think it was a mix all along. It was basically local when he first got started but it was a situation where, if they came to town, they came to the Dew Drop before they left town. Even if they weren't booked here, they had to come here just to say that they wanted to be in the Dew Drop. And a lot of times they wouldn't be booked but they would have what they would call "Jam Sessions" where whoever was here would just get on stage and just perform or try to outdo one another, sometime when they left out, it would be daylight, by the time they left out of here.

[08:08]

And when was it called the Groove Room?

We're talking '40s, '50. The Groove Room was in the further part of the back of the property. It was a two-story area, I could say from my estimation, it may have about 200 people in there, maybe 250 in there. Because there was a balcony area where you could look down on a stage, the stage was

furthest to the back and there was an upper bar, a downstairs bar and the kitchen constantly served food.

What kind of things did they serve to eat?

Basically New Orleans cuisine, seafood, red beans and rice was a big deal at the Dew Drop. It always was one of the sought after items because he had a recipe that couldn't be duplicated. I haven't seen anything like it, I haven't had anyone to fix red beans and had that taste since he passed, you know, my uncle.

Who was cooking?

My uncle Paul, we called him "Uncle Soldier" but he ran the kitchen 24-hours, they never closed, they never closed. They'd go from breakfast to lunch to dinner, you could order, what they'd call "short orders" they'd fix any kind of you know stuff they was on the menu, but they'd have like a daily special. One day it was cabbage, one day it was spaghetti, one day it was just different things, stewed chicken or whatever, but the red beans were a constant. That was a daily part of the available food items in the kitchen.

So it was a barbershop simultaneously for how long?

For the entire time. I am actually a licensed barber myself and I stopped cutting hair maybe about three years before it closed, because I'm a school board employee. I'm a high school disciplinarian so it got to the point where there was just too much going on. I still do cut hair but not in a shop, you know.

And was it ever a grocery store?

Yeah, this side, where we are, was the second building that they purchased. The grocery store was, you know it went up for sale while they had the other part kicked off and it was already rolling as a club and when that became available, they raised the grocery store up, they had an elevator from a one-story to a two-story. They converted all of the upstairs to hotel rooms and fixed the downstairs as a nightclub, restaurant.

Let's go to the Green Book. Can you tell me the first time you heard about the Green Book?

I was grown. Well I knew about the *Green Book* as a kid. Let me back up a little bit. We, I'm old enough to have experienced a part of segregation. As a kid coming up there were places that we couldn't go in because we were African American. So my mother believed in taking us out of town and we would have to study the *Green Book* to figure out where we were going to stay because she always would drive. She loved to drive and we had some relatives in Los Angeles so in the summertime, we would often motor out to Los Angeles so we would use the *Green Book* to find places that accepted black people back then so we wouldn't have to worry about where we were going to stay on our way there.

When was this?

Oh, we're talking early '60s. Yeah.

Did you know that you were using the Green Book?

I didn't at the time, you know I just knew they were looking for places for us to stay but I didn't realize the significance of the Green Book other than it was a place that had a listing for rooms that we could rent to stay. But as I got older I learned that we had to find where blacks were accepted.

Do you remember the places that you stayed?

Not really, because I was like early elementary school, so I can't recollect any actual places. I remember the cities, we'd stop and spend the night in different cities, Houston, San Antonio, El Paso, you know those were some of the cities we would stop in our route going to Los Angeles.

Do you remember seeing white people?

All the time.

In those places?

No, not in those places. No. I can kind of vaguely remember that some of them were actually run by white people that didn't have a problem renting to blacks, you know. They weren't all African American establishments, but you know, they didn't have a problem renting to blacks.

Did you find the racism better or worse? Do you remember experiencing racism as a child in New Orleans versus while you were traveling, or was it about the same?

I really, as we traveled. We didn't experience a lot of racism. It was more of what I knew from home because it was just a constant thing that you were up against, here at home. You know, black versus white. There was always some kind of controversy, some kind of, what can I say, some kind of discourse, or disagreements going on. There were places you could only go in the back door, you weren't allowed to come in the front. You couldn't ride the bus without putting the little thing on the back of the seat. There was a, like a piece of wood that had two pegs that said, "For Colored Patrons Only" And if you were riding the bus you had to have that placed on the seat, in order to ride in the that seat and it had to be in the back of the bus. I can remember that vaguely, but I can remember being chased by a Tulane University student. We would go to Audubon Park. They would get in cars and get behind us and call us all kind of names and have us fearing for our lives and really they were just a bunch of college kids doing that for kicks, but we're running, fearing for our lives because we heard about the things that could be done, that we're being done in some places so we'd have to experience that, you know. In my neighborhood, my street was like the dividing line between the black and white neighborhoods and the street behind us—all white, my street—all black. You know so going around the corner we'd have to encounter some foolishness. We'd end up not really fighting or anything like that it was more or less a lot of name calling, and that type of thing, you know. But I had to get over that myself. It wasn't until I was basically, early in college, that I got over feeling militant, and resenting whites and feeling like I had to go out of my way to prove myself to just be accepted. I ended up working at a place and made friends with some white guys that were really good people. They were good people, period. The color just disappeared and I accepted them as my friends and they accepted me as their friends and I saw how wrong it was, that I was just as bad as everyone else who was prejudice was because of the way that I felt, you know.

And that really opened my eyes up and until this day, I wish I could run across those guys but they went their separate ways and moved on but it took that for me to get over racism.

But essentially, you were being terrorized. That's terrorism what you had experienced.

Hmm mmm.

So it's not...coming from a place of feeling safe and not trusting was a process but..

Yeah, we'd be on bicycles, and we love to fish and we'd go up to Audubon Park which was maybe about a mile or two from the house, but between my park and the house was Tulane and Loyola University so we were chased home several times you know, but once we got to the hood [laughing], once we got to the hood, where we had bricks and sticks and bottles and all that kind of stuff, if we made it to the park, you were in trouble because we had all our ammunition and we could start fighting for ourselves then. Hated that it had to be like that, but it was a definite presence, it was a constant fear that it was possible for that to happen to us, you know.

Were you in this neighborhood?

No, this is called, uptown, some people call it Central City. But we refer to this as "Uptown New Orleans" My house is approximately, one mile from here. The house that I was raised in. You could basically walk, but it's about, I would say a mile from here. That's where I came up at.

So do you know, have you explored what the paper trail is or why Frank listed it in the Green Book?

I really couldn't say exactly why he did it, but he just wanted people to know that if they came to New Orleans, they'd have somewhere where they were welcome.

Yes...but to list in the Green Book, it's so hard to find a paper trail telling us how they came to learn about it. Was it a postal worker that told them to purchase ad space or what other factors brought them to the Green Book.

Unfortunately, if we did, it was lost. Because all of our historical documents or photos and stuff like that, we ended up losing them during the flood, Katrina, you know. We had an uncle who, my mother's brother, who basically took all the photos and kept up with all the booking, the paperwork and all that kind of stuff was in a one-story house that ended up going under water, so as of right now we can't put our hands on anything.

[21:05]

When did you learn that the Dew Drop was listed in the Green Book?

There was some kind of documentary that I saw and I asked my mother about it. She said, "Oh, yeah. We were in the *Green Book*." Because she worked here, she's done the books, you know the check writing and tax paying, payroll and all that kind of stuff, as far back as you can go. My mother's ninety years old this year and to this day, she's still writing all the checks. She's the one that told me we were in the *Green Book*. I must have been...I was in college and when I actually found out what the *Green Book* was all about and she let me know that "yeah, the Dew Drop, we were part of the *Green Book*."

About how many employees [worked there]? Could you guess, or do you know?

If I had to estimate, it might have had between 20 and 30 employees. Some worked regular, had regular shifts and some would rotate. When there was a big event going on, it was like an all hands on deck thing with the family. They'd have people, you know, four family members that when they knew that something big was going on they'd come over and give him a hand. There was money to be counted, you know he was just careful about who he trusted with the cash registers.

Did he live a pretty simple life, did he actually make money off of this?

My grandfather was too free-hardy with money. He made money, but he spent money and he gave away money. He was a person who enjoyed life. He enjoyed having a good time and he would try to help anybody who he knew that needed help. I think, had he been a bit more conservative with his spending, we may have been better off after he passed, but that was just his way and he earned the right to do what he wanted to do. I just have to respect the fact that he was able to do all that he did but as it goes I think he could have been a little bit more careful with his finances than he was, but like I said, he enjoyed his life and he lived it to the fullest.

What did his wife do?

His wife basically was the day organizer. My grandfather ran the nightclub part but during the day his wife would come down here and she would handle the hotel, ordering supplies...making sure that people's rent was paid, the place was cleaned up. She was the one that organized that. She babysat for us when we were too young to go to school. My grandmother would come down here every day, and she didn't drive, but she'd come down here every day and when we weren't old enough to go to school, she babysat for us. The Dew Drop Inn was my nursery school. I was the only grandkid who didn't go to nursery school because I just...it didn't agree with me. I just cut up so bad so they just quit trying so they just let me come down here every day with my grandmother. I've actually been a part of the Dew Drop my entire life. I don't know if any of my relatives can say that. But that's how it went. My grandmother's name was Feddie Iola Painia.

What is that name, Painia?

It has some kind of, I think, French origins because they were from Plaquemine, Louisiana and some of the folks there speak that broken French dialect that is a part of Louisiana culture. But I'm not sure, but I think it's from a French origin or French background. Painia. Some people say Pain-ya, it's hard to say if you don't know the actual pronunciation [Pan-ye].

Talk about the bigger acts and celebrities that played. And who made the song about the Dew Drop?

Little Richard. Yeah, they had the gamut of big entertainers that came here. Ray Charles, actually Ray Charles, my grandfather brought Ray Charles to the house when I was kid coming up. We couldn't believe it you know.

He was a big star then?

Yeah, they were friends. He and my grandfather were friends and Ray Charles had several records out at the time, and one morning, he just came home and said, "Look, I got somebody I'd like y'all meet." And low and behold, it was Ray Charles in the house. My sister had a piano, he came and he played a little bit on the piano, talked to us for a while. Ray Charles, James Brown, Ike and Tina Turner, Little Richard, so many of them. Joe Turner, he was kind of a local guy that had a record or two that went big. Cab...not Cab Callaway, Count Basie...Big Maybelle, Etta James, so many of them. It just goes on and on and like I'm saying even if they weren't on the show program here, if they were in town they would pass through here. We got pictures of my grandfather here with Adam Clayton Powell, he was a politician, Batman, Adam West was sitting somewhere right over here. There's just a whole lot of them. I wish I could show you all of those pictures but.

Where are those pictures?

We lost them.

Do you know if there were any journalists that may have put some in the archives?

If you go to Tulane University, has what's called the Amistad research center and if you go there, they'd be willing to help you, I'm pretty sure to lookup whatever they'd have on the Dew Drop. They have tons and tons of old newspaper articles. Well actually some of the newspapers aren't still in existence, it was an African American newspaper called the Louisiana Weekly that my grandfather would regularly advertise the acts that were coming up in. So they'd have a collection of stuff that dates back a really good ways.

We'll look at that see what we can find. In terms of the history, it's still so amazing. We know that up until the '60s it was still going strong. I read that Frank would tip the cab drivers to get them to drop people off at the Dew Drop?

He did all sorts of stuff like that. He knew so many people and he was friend with so many people. You know parking...there was no parking lot available so people parked on the street so whenever they'd have a big event going on, they would always have a line-up of cabs outside, so he did whatever he had to do to organize them to be ready to handle the overflow crowd but you know. He, my grandfather was a mason, so he had that connection. He had police friends. It was just amazing just how the people would relate to him. They knew he was a friendly person, approachable person, that kind of individual. But he was well respected. They didn't take him for granted, they didn't play with him. He was a fun-loving but no-nonsense kind of guy.

[30:56]

He ended up, you know segregation was a big factor in the Dew Drop because he wouldn't discriminate. There was never a time when you would come in here and there was somebody who was white, here.

That was illegal.

It was illegal.

There were police raids, right?

He was actually breaking the law. There were several instances where the police came here and found whites in here and just hauled everybody off in here and had everybody in the place arrested. They charged them with “racial mixing.” So that went on for a while and there was an episode with a white actor, Zachary Scott was arrested along with the rest of the people that were a part of that raid, and my grandfather had had enough so he sued the city, the mayor, the police chief and ended up winning the lawsuit. They lawyers at the time A.P. Tureaud who they named the street after. He was a well-known civil rights attorney, and Dutch Morial who ended up being the mayor of the city, the first black mayor of the city. So, it was a little bit late because the Civil Rights Act passed not too long after that so that kind of turned.

So he was fed up.

Yeah, he got tired of them coming in here and arresting him. They would just come in here and take you know, they had what they called a Paddy Wagon. Back then it was like some big vans that could have a bunch of people in the back. Pull them out front and just have everybody to take them to jail. So after that went on a few times, he had just had enough.

Did they take Frank to jail?

Yeah.

So they would probably fine him?

Yeah, he probably...I don't know exactly what it was but he probably had enough connections that he didn't ever really go broke from it. It never really...it just pissed him off but he kept going. He never told the people who wanted to come here who were white that they couldn't come in. As a kid, I didn't know it was illegal because there was always white people in here.

Would you say the ratio was about 10% white?

It differed, according to what was going on. Like if it was an ordinary, everyday thing, I'd say about 25 to 10 percent. You know, but if it was a big event going on, that percentage increased. You'd have a quite a few that would be in here, if there was someone that they wanted to see. Something like that, the percentage would increase.

Can you talk about the annual gay bar?

Oh, yes.

That's where it would increase, right?

Yeah, yeah, there was an annual...it was like a fashion show that they did here. There was an emcee, my grandfather would have an emcee for the shows when he would do them. And there was this one guy called Patsy Valdeler who was a crossdresser and he actually I think actually started that tradition on Halloween they had a ball. I don't know the name of it, or what they called it but every Halloween they would have a contest to see, with all crossdressers, to see who had the best outfit. It was a big, big event. It just got ridiculous for the amount of people that turned out for that. They would be in here, and a lot of them, you couldn't tell were men, just by looking at them. But they

were in women's clothes, they would have on the stiletto heels and the mink coats and the hats, jewelry and it would just be ridiculous. And that always was a big draw and a lot of people thought that my grandfather may have been sort of gay or whatever, but my grandfather was all man. He just got his kicks out of seeing guys dressing up in women's clothes. The guy Patsy, he and Patsy were friends. Patsy was actually one of our neighbors in the neighborhood, lived about two blocks from us, so it was Patsy's idea to do that and my grandfather just went along with it and it turned out to be a big draw.

[36:10]

[I ask about the racial breakdown of the clientele]

I don't think it ever got to be 50/50, but it was a big amount of whites in here for the time that it was occurring at.

I'd also like for you to talk about all the different kinds of people who performed here...card sharks, ventriloquists, tap dancers.

All that you're saying, there was a certain amount of that going on. The only thing that my grandfather really frowned down upon was dope. It was absolutely not tolerated. Now the pimps, and all of that kind of stuff, it wasn't like it was prevalent but you could see that there was some of it going on, without a doubt. But the ventriloquists...they'd have all sorts of in-between acts like...

I read about Peg Leg Bates...

Oh yeah, Peg Leg Bates was a guy, he was an amputee who had a peg leg, he had a wooden leg and this guy would be doing stuff, we had some pictures of him jumping up, like in mid-air and dancing and stuff like that. "Iron Jaw" was a guy who they could actually sit somebody in a chair and he'd walk up and actually pick the chair up with his teeth. These were like the preliminary acts to the big acts. But the typical show which I never really was old enough to go to a show but I would end up being down here when the shows were about to get started and get a chance to sneak in and take a quick peek, if somebody needed some change, or something like that. I'd go in and run out, but what happened is, the people were staying in the hotel and us coming down here every day with my grandmother, you know, she would introduce us to the people that were living here that were here to perform. So there was a snake charmer and a guy would show up with a snake and I would haul ass and get out of the way and a ventriloquist, there were several different ventriloquists, you know they'd bring their dummy out and we'd be talking, making the dummy talk, stuff like that. We had some musicians that, you know, would do some magic tricks and stuff like that. But it always...the show consisted of what my grandfather used call "shake dancers." These were ladies that, you know, would wear the skimpy outfits and they'd come out and they'd dance and then it would be the snake charmer or the ventriloquist, or whatever and then the main act...so it was always a series of acts for each night. It wasn't just a singer or a dancer or a musician, there were always segments of the act. You were really entertained.

You know there were about eight to ten other Dew Drop Inn's in the Green Book, do you know if this was the original?

It was original, okay, it was original for New Orleans. This was the Dew Drop in New Orleans but when you Google “Dew Drop Inn” they are all over the world, to be honest with you. There’s a Dew Drop here in Louisiana in Mandeville, it was a Dew Drop that was like a musical venue, but it wasn’t a Dew Drop *Inn*. So I don’t know where my grandfather got the name from, or how that name appeared for him, but there is no one Dew Drop.

Let’s talk about your efforts and how you got it to this point and let’s talk about Katrina and what happened. Since Frank passed in 1972, talk about the transition between Frank and now.

My grandfather ran everything and took care of things up until he started getting sick, this was like [in] his 60s. When my grandfather died, he was 65 years old. Yeah and it got to the point...he had bone cancer and liver failure. I was 17 years old when he passed. I didn’t have a dad coming up, my mother and father divorced before I was old enough to remember my dad living with us, but my grandfather was my dad. He took us fishing. He just was a fun-loving guy. He did all sorts of stuff for us. Gave us damn near anything we needed and most of the stuff we wanted and just was totally good to us. I tried to take care of him we he got sick. He passed...I was a senior in high school when he passed and my grandmother held things down. She didn’t have the nightclub in her so she leased the nightclub out for a while and the entire time up until Katrina, the hotel was open and my grandmother held on until she got old and started getting a little bit senile and her health started failing her but it was just around the time that I realized that she was struggling and I started giving her a hand when I saw that she was kind of going through it. She held on as long as she could. And when it got to the point that she couldn’t do it anymore it was just the time where I had been working with her enough to know the ropes as to running the business and we got her to stop coming down here all together and then, you know, I ran it from that point. I must have been in my 20s. I started out doing carpenter work for my grandmother. I always had a love for carpentry and she had some doors and stuff that needed to be fixed and locks that needed to be changed. I knew how to do that stuff, so I started out having to do that. But then I observed what was going on around here and I realized how much she really needed a hand around here. And I just started spending more time and helping her out more and more and it just coincided with the time when her health and mental state started deteriorating and it worked out where I was in charge, when she got to the point where she couldn’t work anymore. So, I actually started, I actually must have been working here at least about 35 years....So I took over for my grandmother when she got to the point where she couldn’t handle it anymore and basically we rented out the barbershop and the nightclub portion of it, and the kitchen also. But as time went on the hotel was the only thing that we were operating and that kept us afloat. I could never keep an empty room and as fast as I got one out, I had somebody waiting to get in. So there never was a problem having a place where people wanted to stay. Then comes along Hurricane Katrina, and everybody saw what happened during Katrina, so, the people who didn’t evacuate from the hotel ended up having to be rescued by helicopter, the helicopter’s downwash did more damage to the building than the hurricane did.

What is a downwash, specifically?

The downdraft, the downwash, I think they call it [blows his nose] that’s the force of the wind that the helicopter blades blowing down to keep the helicopter up. That did more damage to the building than the hurricane did.

The insurance didn’t cover that?

Here we go. The summer before Katrina, the insurance that we had, the company came here, surveyed the building and told us that we had two options, we could either damn near triple the premium or have the entire roof redone to all one type of roofing material, because we had several different types, because there were buildings that were joined together so of course you had different roofing materials on one side than the other. So we were in the process of getting another insurance company because we ended up having to drop them because we couldn't afford the other premium and here comes Katrina at a time when we didn't have any insurance. So therefore we didn't have the money to rebuild, which we really probably would have had some but very few places in New Orleans, very few businesses, had flood insurance. And it would have only covered so much anyway, and it wouldn't have paid anything for the flood damage which was the major part of it. So it wiped out everything. I tried...several efforts. I actually had a developer to come in and we struggled. We tried funding, different avenues of funding, applied for grants, found out that we were qualified to be a city landmark, applied for that and got that designation, found out the city didn't have one thin dime that they would be able to offer any city landmark, or places that were designated as landmarks so, it's just been a burden trying to finance the restoration. It just got to the point where I realized that I didn't have the same family set up that my grandfather did, and if I kept pursuing it and something were to happen and even if we weren't able to, even at that point, I had to realize that if something were to happen to me, who would take over? All of my family members have gone on, they've passed on. I don't have brothers and sisters, I don't have nieces and nephews. This generation that I'm a part of, weren't as prolific producers of offspring as my grandfather's generation was so, I've got to face facts and that's why we ended up putting it on the market and giving it to somebody who has the funding and everything to do something with it. Because it has potential but you know it costs big bucks to do something like that, you know.

Can you talk about the vision of the developers who purchased it? Or whatever you want to say about them.

Well part of the requirement of the sale was that whoever we sold it to had restoration in mind and had putting it back in operation in mind. So the guy who is buying the building basically had the same goal that I have. You know, that's to put it back in commerce and have live entertainment and restaurant. I don't know about the barbershop, but they do plan on doing a hotel. You know, just plans on just re-opening the Dew Drop as the Dew Drop, as people know it.

Sophie (onsite camerawoman): Do you have an early memory, or an early first impression of like the atmosphere and what it was like here?

It was totally...I was in awe of what all would go on in here. As a kid, to be able to come down and see all the people that I was able to meet here. These were guys who had records that they would play on the radio, you know and here they were just hanging out like this was the place to be. And a lot of the stuff that went on that I able to witness, went on in the restaurant. The guys would come, the entertainers that were coming to eat, they would get close to showtime, and if I was still around, the traffic would start building up outside, people coming in their fancy cars and pulling up outside and double parking. It was just a real unique atmosphere. I was in awe. As a kid, I was just like *man, look at Earl King* you know these were some of the local guys that had records at the time. Lee Dorsey, Raymond Lewis, Deacon John, Earl Thomas you know these were folks that, they had records on the radio and I was talking to them and they knew me. They knew I was Frank's grandson. They had a few of them that, as a kid coming up there's always going to be something that you're afraid of, they nicknamed me Rooster, because there was a guy that worked for my grandfather, he was a character. He had a skin tone, that was real dark, but he had these pink and

dark polka dot lips, and when they would say “Rooster” I took off, I didn’t even have to see Rooster. I would be gone, so I ended up getting the nickname Rooster because I was so afraid of him, you know. But it was truly something to be experiencing as a kid. I got to actually befriend a lot of the entertainers and to this day, still some of them are my friends with the ones that are still around because most of these people are gone. They passed on, and the few that are around, I try to maintain contact with. But I was really fascinated as a kid about all the goings on that were happening.

It was a special place and an important part of our history.

Yeah, it really makes an impression on you.

It’s amazing because since I’ve working down here, so many people that have come up, they share the memories that they have here, I remember this one time there was this white guy that came and my grandfather had been dead quite some time and he came up and said, “do you know, or have you been in contact with Frank Painia?” I said, “Well you missed him by a few years, he passed away.” He said, “Well, is there a member of his family or anybody here?” I said, “Well, that was my grandfather.” He said “Well look. When I was young, I was a musician, I was playing in town and at the Dew Drop. My girlfriend ripped me off. Took all my clothes, all my money, took my car and then left and everything.” And he said, “Your grandfather took me in, brought me over to his brother. His brother gave me some food to eat. He gave me a room in the hotel. He let me work, playing music.” He said he ended up buying him an instrument and he got him to the point where he got back on his feet and he said that he always felt indebted to my grandfather and he said, “Back then...everything...a dollar was a dollar back then.” So in his calculations he figured that he owed my grandfather like around \$800 in today’s money and he went in his pocket and he peeled off eight one hundred dollar bills and put them in my hands and he said, “I know your grandfather is not here but I always wanted to say thank you for what he did for me.” And the guy, he’s a producer or something like that. I don’t know if he’s still in business but he just felt that he owed my grandfather that. You know my grandfather did that for so many people until I was used to hearing that kind of story, you know. So but the guy was really grateful for him doing that for him. But that’s just the type of people they were. His brothers all were on the same level, they just believed in helping people and you know, looking out for folks.

Is there anything we missed or that you want to talk about?

I think we touched on a lot of stuff. I can’t think of anything really significant that we missed other than the fact that I’m excited to work with the new guy, the best I can to try to help him be successful with it to see if this thing may get off the ground. I can’t think of anything off my head. But we touched on a lot of stuff. [END]

