

1944

C. Bruce Lee, Class of 1944

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An interview with C. Bruce Lee, conducted the summer of 1991. Interviewer was Charlie Cowling. Mr. Lee was part of a group of three black students who came here fall 1940 as part of a New Deal educational opportunity program. Mr. Lee came to Brockport from Buffalo. He had seen an article Cowling wrote for Kaleidoscope, the alumni newsmagazine, about Fannie Barrier Williams and wrote to say that when here in 1940-41 he had met the Barrier sisters. Subsequently he came to Brockport and was interviewed as follows.

Interviewer: I took the liberty of photocopying some and passing them around to people. During Black History month I had some of them up on display to give some of the students an idea of what things were like a few years prior to their time. I think for so many of them, three years ago was ancient history. They don't really have any idea what it might have been like for their predecessors.

C Bruce Lee: Driving in today we made the wrong turn and went to Le Roy by mistake. Then we got on the right road and I said "We'll see it because we'll look for the buildings above the trees". Well, it's not that way. I said "I think we've gone too far. He said "No we're going to go on". I think of my first night coming in here, coming on the train from Buffalo. They said "Well, why didn't you go to Buffalo State" The problem with Buffalo State was the problem that I found here. Why educate these colored kids,? Because if we do, we can't place them. Which, you are supposed to do without an education which is being paid for by public expense, by the way. I had teachers who looked up on me in High School. The reason I have a special affinity for Brockport is because you gave me my start. This was the place that opened the door to academia, and the fact that you met people like Blaine DeLancy and Alois Yale all of her strangeness was a person who lived in beauty or lived for beauty. And Blaine

DeLancy, sitting in there and having him read "The Waste Land". Wait a minute, that's something I want to know about. Every day in his class was exciting because he opened doors to the contemporary literature of the day. I also said that Brockport and Buffalo are not the beginning and ending of it, there are other things out there.

Pauline Haines, who was the music teacher, I know that's your first organ in that old administration building. It was brand new in those days. I was sitting next to her and she said "How about some Bach?" I said "What would you like to hear. I would like to hear the Toccata and Fugue in D minor" and she said "Okay, why don't you start to play it". Pretty soon the place was... you know how that music is, these crescendos build. She got in the music and suddenly we both left. We were oblivious to the fact that she was playing and going on and knew it by heart. When she was

finished those magnificent crescendos and the chords died. We looked about and the whole place was...something had happened.

This is the kind of people that you wouldn't have gotten involved with because when I went to Buffalo, I found the difference between the faculty. Hartwell had very carefully picked the people that came here. He's gone to the ivy leagues, and to Columbia Teachers College, and gotten people from there who would come to this farming community and deal with these descendants of farming people and open the world to them. That's the thing that I never forgot about this place.

I attended Michigan, Minnesota, and Purdue, then I lectured at these places. I'm always interested in saying "What are you doing with your beginning courses, who's teaching them?" I always look at some of those lazy bums they call professors, in many instances, who say "That's beneath me". I said "No, it's above you, get up there and do it". When I was teaching myself, they would say comparatively "Do you want to do systematics?" I'd say "No let me have the beginning course. I want to see what's happening in my field. That's not above me, that's something I have to get familiar with". That's one way to keep alert, and I've always done that.

Interviewer: That's an interesting angle on Dr. Hartwell. I had known that he'd brought a number of people in.

C Bruce Lee: It was his doing.

Interviewer: Yes.

C Bruce Lee: Because they wanted to close the place. When he first came he lived in a... I'll show you the house where he lived at. It's that Italian age structure, Victorian structure. Of course, I came down and I had a hundred dollar scholarship from a colored fraternity called the Alpha Phi Alpha. That was a thousand dollars or more in buying power. Then Eddie Mikell arrives from Yonkers, then Jimmy Singletary, and then there was Noreen. There are four of us. The town frankly didn't know what to do with us.

Interviewer: You all came in about the same time?

C Bruce Lee: Noreen was here, but she was commuting from Rochester. She was the class ahead of us. The three fellows showed up. That Sunday afternoon, everybody was running around getting rooms. We were going around

and the people were good Christians, they lied beautifully. They said "We just filled up. We just don't have anything".

Finally around five o'clock Dr. Hartwell got busy. I saw him on the phone and he was trying his best to be cool. I knew what was going on and so did Eddie, and so did Jimmy. After about an hour of calling around, he said "Come on with me". Then he drove us down... I told you that train station in West Leffler, that used to be an alternate road for the New York Central. All the freight trains went through there. He put us in the home of a white janitor. I guess the man didn't have any options. He (Hartwell, ed.) said "You can take these kids. We'll figure out something".

All night long I remember the trains would come in and wake every five minutes and then you'd go back to sleep and then you'd get shaken again. By the time the morning came we were all shook up. Nobody had any sleep. The people who lived in the house were fresh because they were used to it.

Interviewer: Right.

C Bruce Lee: That movie "Letter To Three Wives" had it in it, where everybody got shook every time the train came through. I was ready to say "Look, they can have this. They've got to find something." That afternoon Dr. Hartwell called me into his office and said "Look, I think we found something". We went out Holly Street, a mile out [inaudible 00:06:10] Drive you can see it. There was a farmhouse. There's a young couple named the Phillips (try to ID them – directories etc.). I think he importuned them and said "Take these folks". They gave us the upstairs, which was a farmhouse, but it was clean. It was a long walk to town, but we didn't worry about that because it was the beginning of life. I realized that there was going to be some compromises.

The woman that was instrumental in me coming here was Lethia Warren, who was head of the National Youth Administration in Cleveland. She was Lethia Carr in those days, and she was a woman who was very fair skinned. She was very charming and everybody thought "What's this woman doing pushing colored kids?". She pushed twenty one of us into college in a year by using her skills and her physical appearance. She got us and she says "Now they don't want no niggers coming in there, and you know it". That was just the terms she uses. She said "And don't mess up", then she used the "F" word part. She said "Let's write them down. No fooling around. I don't hear any bad reports. This is your opportunity for life and don't mess it up". She said " I don't want to see you back in Buffalo until the end of the year".

I snuck back that next weekend, and who do I run into the first thing? She didn't say anything. But I didn't come back any more.

So we started. That first day was the big bonfire that they had. Dr. Hartwell went out of his way to make sure that... they were running interference without me knowing it with the townspeople and things. The Phillips's were very nice. They had what was known as a cold cellar. Have you ever seen a cold cellar?

Interviewer: I've heard of it.

C Bruce Lee: You dig down six feet into the ground and when it freezes here, I don't know what it used to be, but there used to be two seasons here, the Fourth of July and winter. That ground freezes. They'd put down layers of potatoes, carrots, root vegetables, and layer of salt pork. She said "You can eat out of there, but cover it up". Because they have rat problems. They gave us this room and the three of us lived on a dollar a week. We had to contribute for meat and staples. The rest of the time was stuckle (??). We had this, and I became a very good cook. I learned how to use the food that was available. Then on Sunday afternoon, the young farm boys would shoot pigeons. They would say "Don't throw out those pigeons, bring them over here". We had squab every Sunday. I would pick these things, and pick out the pellets and cook them. It was the way we learned to live.

It was the beginning of the terror in Germany and we had a Jewish store in the town. He was anxious that we trade with him. That three dollars a week meant very much to him. One time we went to the A&P, I think he was heartbroken. "You cannot do that to me, they might give you a break. You come here". He took out a Baby Ruth and he said "That's for you". By the look on his face, this was blood money, so we traded there. He would get mostly ground up meat and stuff that we could use, hamburgers and things.

The Physical Ed teacher, Tuttle and I think one of the biologists gave lectures. Tuttle's wife gave us lectures on nutrition. She said "Always try to have a green vegetable on your plate and a colored vegetable, a carrot". We had them from that old cellar. We'd buy what green vegetables that we could, aside from cabbages and things from the cold cellar. We had the meat. I even learned to make corn starch pudding. I remember that I made one that was so good that we bounced it off the wall, you could play football with it.

We were always trying to invite Noreen out for dinner because Noreen could cook like mad. It was during the war and Noreen would come and cook. We'd always invite her. It was a long walk out and a long walk in. Then we walked and the neighbors would all look. Then they'd all look coming back. I remember one time I was walking by... I think Milton Cummings was the sociology professor here, and he died in Washington, remember? His wife was having a faculty meeting, and his kid said "Here comes that nigger". I grabbed that kid by the scruff of his neck and I marched him in and I said "Madame, you must control your child". She's having this faculty meeting and I dropped him. Nothing more was said, nothing more was said. It's the way you handled it.

There was an old gossip, kind of old time. Every time I came by I'd wave frantically at her whether she was there or not. After a while, there was no trouble. Of course, the biggest thing was the changing of the seasons, the coming of winter. Arranging to get eight o'clock classes upped to ten o'clock so that you could at least walk in without freezing our butt off.

Noreen was wonderful and living in Rochester. We'd go into Rochester on the weekends and Noreen's mother... I said when her brother died, I said there are people that are divine by the way they treat people. They become God like. She worked for these very wealthy people. When we'd go there and we'd see this woman in the kitchen with laundry piled up to the ceiling, baskets. We'd go to bed and wake up in the morning and she'd just be in tears. How do you say "Mom, don't do it" and she would go on. Then there would be a breakfast set up. You'd leave the house, Eddie going to Rochester, Noreen and I grabbing the bus to come to Brockport.

Pauline Haynes, who was the music teacher would say "This week Elsie Houston is going to sing with the Rochester Philharmonic, and Joseph Turvey and Howard Hanson were the conductors". The day after Elsie Houston sang she died because she sang the forbidden songs from Brazil, "Con dem blau". She did herself in, they said. We had gone that night because there were standing seats. To watch Howard Hanson conduct "The Tragic Symphony" and the various things. Pauline Haynes would explain these things. She went to Albany to plead to get an electric record player. Back then it required Governor's action to get that bought. It was delivered, it was a Victoria, it played the old seventy eight's. The first thing she did was she put on was "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks", and explained Richard Strauss to us. She also tried to explain the major and minor scales. Her final test was we were supposed to transpose "La Plaoma Third" She said "Bruce, I think this rock of ages I've got is yours". I

wasn't the least bit interested in that. But in order to get through you had to have managed to get through.

But [inaudible 00:13:27] the Nicolas Gale and his interest in the theater and making sure that we knew what was going on. Alois Yale, who was the art teacher.

Lee:

I've heard many stories about her.

C Bruce Lee:

She was wild! She was a wild woman who was deeply into her art, but I think the flesh was not served. That's all I can say. I don't mean that in a derogatory manner. She spent her life as many women did, in forced virginity. She desperately needed somebody to love her. I'm not saying everybody needs love in their life, but she did. I was assigned to her to work with her.. Everybody said "You can't do it" I said "I tamed that woman". I'm a malacologist by training, and I've got my African and Australian land shells here. They have those cases in the hall? I did a special exhibit of the African, South American and Australian land shells and explained it. And Lou [inaudible 00:14:31] and we did and she fell in love with them. From then on we had no problems. I dealt with her. She[inaudible 00:14:38] would fight people.

She was into teaching us how to do watercolors. They didn't do that in many places, but she wanted us to go out in the fields, it was in the fall of the year. I picked the milkweed, asclepiads, and the golden rod, solidago, and made an arrangement. Then I painted them to reuse in the cretonne. I worked like a slave on it, and she said "That's just what you want, Bruce." She took it over to the sink and washed it off. Then she said "Now it's ready". And she gave me an A.

She was a woman who had no vice or malice in her. One day, Noreen was turning in her work and she said "Why don't you [inaudible 00:15:25] nigger there Noreen". Noreen said "Well I don't know any". Then she looks at her and says "I don't think you do" and she walks out. She lived with another woman and they had this big apartment down near State Street, which goes through town. I remember that on Easter she spent the whole evening, stayed up all night, making that woman a magnificent stained glass window using cut paper. In the morning, the other woman was supposed to be overjoyed. I don't know how it was received, but I was made party to that.

Then there was Clara Stratemeyer of Columbia and her sister Blanche, the two Stratemeyer girls. Clara Stratemeyer had a way of wearing a leopard blouse over a red suit. Don Novelli was in the class ahead of me,

was razzing the faculty, and he came in dressed like Tarzan. Everybody knew who it was. I think Miss Stratemeyer did not quite approve of that.

Then there was Mary Lee McCrory, who was the Librarian. She wanted everything just so. The library just so. I had worked all day Saturday, well I spent half of my time looking at books.

At the Library of Congress I was always being admonished. "Bruce, you've got to do your work, you can't be reading all the time". But when you have the opportunity to be in one of the greatest libraries in the world, I can pull down anything I wanted. I'd get a manuscript and read people's letters. Why? Because I was a librarian and I could do it.

One time Noreen was there, and the whole state library was visiting. Noreen let out this horrendous sneeze and she went "Noreen that will be heard from here to Albany". Noreen rushed up and said " Miss McCrory, you've disturbed the other readers, I guess we have both erred". You talk about mad.

It was that type of thing that we had to deal with first, as students, and then there was that matter of race, because we knew it was going on around here. Like swimming in the pool when the pool was open. I was using some hair preparation and then the faculty got together and they gave me a rubber cap. I said "What do I need that for?" We knew that something was going on.

In the middle of the year the Phillips moved out and a couple moved in who were divine, the Burlingame's. Mr. And Mrs Burlingame. I'll never forget her. She was just a sweet, wonderful woman. The only thing she knew was goodness. The Phillips were cold and distant, they were doing us a favor. The Burlingame's said you're part of our family. There would be a plate of biscuits when we came in. Little things. The root cellar started getting things we never saw. There were eggs. They had chickens out there, There were always eggs. You had to go fight the rats, because they had rats in the chicken coop. You would always have to chase the rats off. Sometimes the rats would be down nesting underneath the hen who was sitting. It was always a real mess, but the eggs were good.

I remember Mrs. Burlingame the person that we got good love, all three of us. On Mother's day 1940, what do you give somebody? I'd always been a hustler as far as getting things cheap. I don't pay anything for anything if I can help it. I went into Sibley, Lindsey, and Kerr and I said "Where is your return department?" I went down there and they had this exquisite Portuguese lace tablecloth hat had a slight flaw that somebody

had returned. We had three dollars. I laid a trip on this woman. I came up with how much it meant to us and I didn't have the resources. I knew that she wanted to please her mother and we're pleasing an older woman. After talking trash for about an hour, I came out with that. We had another dollar to buy Mr. Berling his cigars.

I took it home and I did the work repairing the flaw. Then we packed it and Mother's day we came down and gave it to her. She started crying, she said "In all my life nobody has ever given me anything". We gave it to her, and we gave him the cigars.

The years trotted in and we knew we wouldn't be coming back. It was heavy on everybody. We were doing the best we could, but we knew there was no place to stay. The Berlingame's may up and leave. She gave us this dinner. The whole morning she was going around the house crying because we were going. She said "You're going" She said "Nobody's ever come into my life like you three". I never forgot her. I wrote several times and then that was that. Forty years ago I was here last time. It was a Veterinarian's Office or something. If it could only talk, you know what I mean? The history.

That's the type of things that went here. As far as dealing with the matter of race, the one person in town who did was the minister of the Baptist church. He had gone to school with Adam Clayton Powell, at Colgate. He welcomed Jimmy to his church. Jimmy was a Baptist, Ed and I were raised Anglican. That church let us know real quick that there's no room here. No room at the Inn. We didn't fool with it.

Weekends we spent in Rochester. There you met the college kids who stayed north. They would going to the University of Rochester and Syracuse, and Brockport, Geneseo and Cornell. We'd get together. Then of course there was the Eastman Theater. Then the downtown theaters, Count Basie and other things would come in. How we'd get the money, we don't know. Then we started making the bars on Lyle Avenue and by the Central Depot. Also, doing the term papers and things that were necessary, we did them of course, the assignments.

The kind of people that Hartwell brought in here were no nonsense people. I know what Noreen was going through with Stratemeyer. There would be assignments that they used to give you units to do. One of them working with Alois Yale, and she wanted units. She wanted professional work. I won the contest for doing posters "Mahant baked beans for the summer."

I did it using collage and won it. Her final test was a stinker. She gave you a watercolor box and she gave you a square paper match that. She gave me a bag from the supermarket and described the color, was it graded, defined, wash. I can still remember what I did. She [inaudible 00:22:44] Mr. Lee, and that was it. I think I got an A.

It was that type of thing and having Blaine DeLancy as a guide and the John Whitlaw, who was the Psychologist from Yale. Years later I was in Washington and I ran across John. We got friendly and he said "I'm retiring, would you please come visit me in Northglenn and spend some time with me". A week later got his death. He was a splendid person to know. That's what you had here.

The assemblies that Pauline would dig up. We had Evaluer, the young man of Caracas, he was here. Major Wright, the man who had the eagles. He'd bring the golden eagle here. I was up there talking to him, and I had this pencil. And suddenly... I was scared. The eagle had reached out and just missed me and took that pencil and held it. The major said "Now you shouldn't do things like that." He could have, what if it would have been my eye?

The fascinating programs that they would bring in, particularly the performing arts. There was never any indication or any attempt to deal with the fact that they had people who were different than themselves.

In the history of the Barriers, I sought out those Barriers. Going into that house and walking in. The only colored students that were here, the 1870's. That was a long time ago. I looked them up and they were two ancient ladies. They weren't old, they were ancient. Some of the neighbors were doing their Christian duty I suppose, looking after them. One was blind and one was mute. They communicated and they welcomed me to their house. I think I went over a couple of times. I took Noreen with me once. The house was filled with the past. I know that that stuff is around, it's somewhere. It's right here in town. That's where your Doctoral, your Master's thesis can go, dig it up. I told you where to start. I bet it's all there. The graveyard is great. Your church records, the various things. Also going to Chicago. The one who got on the Chicago library board. When I was there last week, I drove to the south side and I met a lady who was one hundred. Even though she is one hundred, she came after the Barriers. I got an old lady in San Francisco, she's ninety five. She did remember the Barrier- Williams sister. She said I knew her slightly, that's about as far as it goes. I have to dig up that Dr. Ford is her name. I'll dig up Dr. Ford for you and get her to put some tapes down for you so you'll know what you've got.

I sent you that report I did on Jersey City.

Interviewer: Yes

C Bruce Lee: That is the way you do it. You start with the college journals. Funeral directors are gold mines. Any of the fraternal organizations, and the Usher board. I came by the Usher board headquarters. If you want to do anything in the black areas of the country, those Usher boards are powerful. Also, what you're doing here today, getting the tapes of people's memories. I remember when I was in Detroit, I taught at Widener University in the evening. We found out there was an old black lady in the late 1950's, about '58, who had been a slave in Mississippi. We got her down and she sang "I'm so tired of singing, keep singing, keep singing". I had her on those slave songs. "What are your memories, tell me".

My own memories of talking to my father. Last time he came over I said "Daddy, I don't want to hear about now, tell me about when you were a little boy". I recorded and the memories of my Grandparents and my Great Grandparents. Too often you hear that blacks don't have any history. That's bullshit. You have to remember that there's history when they got off the...

Go see that exhibit Chicago Museum, that's history. It is absolutely spellbinding. It takes you through Africa. You get on a slave ship, you walk through that slave ship. Then you land in America and you see who came. What are the groups that came over? Now that's not known to many people. What does the word baracuum mean to you? The baracuum is the collecting pen. The blacks from all these different tribes didn't speak the same language. In America, all blacks are supposed to be general, the same, came from one stock. That is bullshit also. In our own family we are Ebo, Malgash, Menapawnee, Narraganset. But that Malgash, a Great Grandfather being shanghaied from Madagascar and brought to Niagara on the lake. He was pissed the whole time it happened because he's been taken from his land. He came over here and he married this Irish-English girl. They lived in Niagara lake and had my grandfather. That [inaudible 00:27:47] was there. I had the pre papers. I told Don "You're not going to get them, they're going to the Smithsonian" They almost got destroyed and I saved them. Because that's what libraries are for.

Interviewer: Yes it is.

C Bruce Lee: Are you familiar with the Iroce book shop in New York City? The second floor, that's my second home. The lady who runs it is eighty-eight years old, Ruth Shem. She says "We waiting for you, Bruce". And she brings out Harper's and Illustrated and Leslie's from the Civil War. I made a killing recently. This man walked into a junk shop and here was the 1865 Harper's, the summaries of the Civil War. I got it for sixteen dollars. Everything in it. I have it and I have the whole Civil War. What I do is I collect stuff on slavery. Here, and what they are going to do here is they have to run a railroad through here. Look at Rochester, Frederick Douglas. I was there the day they moved the Frederick Douglas monument from near the station to where it is now. I knew ex-slaves. The last Civil War veteran, did you see the movie "Glory"?

Interviewer: Yes.

C Bruce Lee: Mr. John Dover was the last veteran in Buffalo, and he was a black man. The other day Don and I visited the oldest black teacher in Buffalo. She's one hundred years old. She's the last surviving graduate of Masten Park High School. People don't seem to realize it. Then the doctor looked and my sister looked at her

Bruce: He said, "Is he really that old?" and, yeah, she is. Yet she is very alert. It's the two of the Delany sisters'. They are close friends of my mother. I saw the youngest one on [best day 00:12] 1937. I was telling Donna about that. Here she is. She's 104 now and she's just 106. They are still living. We're going to see more and more of these. I think that not only necessarily black people, but the people of the village. Who's the oldest person here? Who summarized your village? Find out where they live, what are your memories.

You have a sporting club here. There is a bar behind this sporting club. There were a lot of mounted birds. What sits in those birds? You know what's in there? A passenger pigeon. Anybody know what that means? I spotted it right around 1940. He said, my God, it's a passenger pigeon. They were the last, but they were extinct birds. You've got one here. When they doing a survey of them in the country where their skins are, I always list this one. I hope it's still there. That was 50 years ago. It was in their club.

Speaker 1: It is around still, yes?

Bruce: It should be, usually around there. I hope it is being taken care of. It's things like this. Your older residents, your church people, your undertakers. The white residents have a role to play. The oldest ones, you remember these people. The father was a coal dealer, I understand. What happened after they left Brockport? Do they ever teach locally? Do they ever send back anything?

When my son was going to the women's ... Pennsylvania College for Women, medical school, it's now the Pennsylvania college for medicine. When he was going down for his interview, I said, tell them that you are a descendent of an alumni. My great aunt finished there in 1878. When I went there, when Dave was ... I walked over to the alumni office, I said, may I see her files? They brought out her files. They brought me her doctoral thesis. [Opium 01:53] addiction amongst physicians. She had recognized what was going on in there. People shooting up and they couldn't handle. She pointed out.

They gave it to me plus her graduation program, all the various things, had them all copied and returned them. Proving what you can do with the Barrier sisters, I had looked into their files. They are there. Get these people before they're gone. People have a way of dying.

Speaker 1: Yes, they do.

Bruce: Nothing makes me angrier than to feel that we're losing so much. The other day, I was in ... last week, I was in Chicago, driving down the south side we saw, he said it's the Louis Sullivan building, pull over. It was an old ... It's a church now, but it was originally a synagogue.

Will you look at him? I said, well, ring the bell. Push the bell. A man finally came. I said, "May I see your auditorium? I don't know. Ask the minister and ask the ministry." The ministry got excited with me and we had a wonderful time visiting. He said the Jewish heritage and you look at the fact there are

stars of David everywhere and then Jesus Christ is moving out of this aisle. It was in congress, unity and trinity are fighting each other. It's still Louis Sullivan. This type of thing, it ends right here. I think that, I don't know who is on the black faculty here. Do you have black faculty? I assume you do.

Speaker 1: Yes, we do.

Bruce: That was considered I guess ... Noreen and I were, I guess we all laugh now, but it's irony. When you're too damn old to appreciate that. I wish I were younger and to be able to say, "Well, shit, I'm going to go after. I'm going to get that." Every job I went, I went after jobs I wasn't supposed to be at. Working in New York with the government.

Every time I would sit down and say, well, remember, I think back the starting, I think of that first afternoon stepping off the train. I had on a pinstripe suit that had belonged to a dentist in New York. The shirt came from a druggist in Buffalo. The shoes I got saddlers. I was sharp as hell and I had on a big hat. I saw Eddie walking, Eddie Mitchell. He was walking, Sandway. Then we got together, then Jimmy. Jimmy wore a cap. It was considered déclassé in Buffalo for a colored man to wear a cap. It was Southern. Ed and I did a terrible thing. When Jimmy wasn't looking, Nick threw his hat into the canal. He looked high and low. That hat cost him money.

Years later, I told Jimmy. I went and looked him up and told him. I said, "I have something to tell you. I stole your cap." It's making amends. I think that even sitting in the Drake library, Drake was here. I never liked the man. Noreen had to take him to court in order to get in here. They had a court case in the 30s, involving admission of blacks to the normals and teachers colleges.

Speaker 1: I never heard of that.

Bruce: You look in the paper, you'll find it. Noreen showed me the clippings. Eddie, her brother, when he went to the University of Michigan, well my school, he showed me a letter that the quota for Jews and Negroes had been filled. There was one Negro every five years and the Jews ... I don't know how they got in. He had lost a letter. I said, "Well, I remember. I can vouch." Dean Bunting signed that letter. Then when he got in, dean Bunting was so impressed, he made him an instructor. I don't know what happened to me here. I guess, most of us were fighting to keep food in our bellies and to keep working toward that degree.

Speaker 1: You really didn't feel at the end of that year that you could stay on, any of you that it really was ...

Bruce: None of us. Jim did, Jim stayed. Eddie and I realized ... Eddie went to Albany and I went to Buffalo. The situation in Buffalo is totally difference because I had to use pull to get around that thing. What was the point of, if he comes here, we won't be able to place him. I didn't intend to stay there. I couldn't tell him that. The world's a big place and it didn't start and end in Buffalo. I know those winters in Buffalo and winter here.

When everything seems great, the spring and the [four seasons out 06:10] and come back and there is a 6-foot snow drift in the morning later, later. When that Army train pulled out, taking me to the Army in 1943, I was in the back train. Hasta luego. Much later, hasta, más tarde, much later. I still don't have bad feelings. One of the things you do is you remember. I remember that first day and meeting Blaine DeLancey and Pauline and Ms. Jackson. Getting a chance to work at MY&N, there was this wonderful man who take care of the ... custodian, he was a Buffalo man.

While we were working in the morning, his wife would come over and she'd fix the spread. You people are eating under that food cellar and they'd be sandwiches and milk and piles of eggs. They had chickens. Of course, you know what eggs do when you eat them. We didn't worry about them. I said, "Well, take some of this egg home?" "Take what you want, Bruce." Mr. Chapman was his name.

For \$17 a month, we cleaned the buildings. That's when I fell in love with the library because I knew I wanted to own [autograph 07:27], I owned Wilsons, collect these things. I have the originals. I sat up and used to turn the pages on the [other 07:36] Wilsons saying, my God, beautifully done. They were all lose and lying up there. I said, I often wonder whatever happened to them. Somebody was alert to those things.

Speaker 1: There has been a couple of moves to the library and I think each time, anything lost ...

Bruce: They moved. They are down at the [RC 07:55] book shop. As I walk through life, you know Nina Root? She is the Chief Librarian at the American Museum of Natural History. She is close to me, very close. We worked in the library congress. She was a rep with the Library of Congress. Keeping up with rare books. I work at the California Academy of Sciences where [John Moritz 08:15] is the librarian out there.

I'm on his case all the time because of they don't secure the library where I'm working. I'm working in the bird library with all those rare books, 19th century stuff, 18th century stuff. Finally, I took the secretary aside and turned on the books and said, "You send those to the rare book room. I cannot be responsible." Recently, they went ... The ornithologists went to reach for a [goul 08:42] down the birds of South America, plates are gone. Looking for it to come, the finger. I said, I told you so. While we were sitting there talking, people were taking a shark out through the library. I said, how can you control those people. You have a rare book room here, don't you? I hope you do.

Speaker 1: This is pretty much it. This room and another locked room.

Bruce: You don't let people get to these things. The same way, dealing with the hidden black history stuff. It's not hot stuff. There is people called the

dark collectors. That's the buffoons and things that one race shows his disrespect for another race by making ... act like make it a whole shovel of them, of these things. Mostly 19th century stuff. Remember gold dust, [pairs and what 09:30] there used to be down in Main Street, near Dr. Pearce's hospital, this big thing, gold dust. This colored woman washing two black babies under the faucet. It hasn't turned white yet. This type of thing.

Look at that stuff. I found a box of that recently, emptied out the chemical and kept the box. When we have black history month, I loan out this stuff and I take out the free papers. They never leave my house overnight. My father said, they are not to leave your attention tonight. You ought to be with them at all times. I talk on them. It's an opportunity to come back here and run my mouth for a few minutes.

Speaker 1: What are your relations like with the other students? Did you ...

Bruce: We knew some of them, particularly the, let's see, Nick. He was an Italian chap. There was a Jewish chap named Ginsberg, and we started to write to the Germany embassy in Washington to get ... We're selling master race. All these books on Jews and all these hydrocephaly and all these things you can measure the index. All that was said in here. There are theories before the war was declared. He's say, "Look, what I got." We'd look at them and we really weren't laughing because that meant death. You see in Schindler's List, any Jew that got out of Germany, take your hat off baby. They had those traps set.

It's amazing and yet, Ginsberg was able to get those books. I wonder whatever happened to them. I think he did a project on that, one of the classes. I do know that Hemmingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls came out and they did a seminar on that. It was fascinating. We all got into that book, especially that scene in the sleeping bag. It was a lot of interesting because the teachers did push to read. Blaine DeLancey, he was good, but he was a good critique of writing also.

Then he would start with Ben Nicholson's and they'd get into Virginia Woolf and stuff that unheard of, never heard that in Buffalo. Nobody liked that. He opened doors and they have never been closed for me. When I was in England, I was moving in court circles because of my position with the federal government. I stayed in places that I read about and stayed with these people and saw how their [fight was 12:18] and their strengths and their weaknesses.

Being able to walk through a hall that had the original [tineal 12:25] drawing for Alice in Wonderland. I was there. I was at the guest and that host. I stayed with Sir Peter Scott whose father was at the South Pole. Being able to wander through his house, I slept in the next room where he and his wife here and Prince Philip had been there the night before. That type of thing and then with Sir Frank Darling. It's name dropping, but it's a way of saying, I wouldn't have been there if I hadn't stepped off that train September 5, 1940 and saying, or maybe stepping off. This is the stepping stone out of where I am to where I wanted to go.

The Army opened up and closed at the same time as the segregated army. I was prepared for it because I had been through Brockport. I had seen the way when the shit hits the fan, how you duck when I was sailing. Never let the spotlight land on you. I learned that in the Army. If I went to a meeting and there was nobody there, split, don't hang around. Get the explanations later. Never volunteer, always be sick. I realized, the Army had nothing for me and I certainly had nothing for it. Now that the Army is [sequel and power 13:41], all my friends are Tuskegee fly boys. I was one of those people. They are all proud and running around and saying, how wonderful.

I [sound 13:50] ashamed of my service. I did nothing, but set out to war while other people were killed. I wanted to serve my country and I could not because my country didn't want my services. I took my butterfly net and went down there and collected the huge collection of butterflies which are now at the University of Michigan. The maths people were flying things in from South America. I recognized that a lot of these things, the tropical things were being ... They had a summer in Alabama to breed and then they

couldn't survive. I collected things which Michigan ... That doesn't occur in Alabama, the United States did because they bred once and then died. I collected their progeny.

I had this huge collection. I carried it when I was leaving the south. Christmas day of 1945, I always waited there. The troops were getting demobilized and lot of northern boys were staying in the Atlanta station which was segregated.

For some reason, I landed in the middle of 5 or 600 white troops. The MP spotted me. They are trying all day long. I had all this ... I couldn't get out of there and the men kept moving around me, so they couldn't get to us. The way they got to me, the train was ... I wake up at 6 o'clock in the morning and we stayed there till 6 o'clock in the evening and then they called the train. It was going to go on track 4, it will be on track 17. Everybody rushed. As they rushed, I was holding my things like this so they wouldn't get broken. This white MP grabbed me and he threw me right on the floor and he said, you aren't in Brooklyn yet. I stood like this, I did a ... I sort of surfed out and held them up. A few were injured, but the rest were saved and put me in the rest of Michigan.

I never wasted in other words. The same thing here. Blaine DeLancey introduced us to the technique at the seminar and how you would ... We'd get a book or get an article and each one had to develop a position when Hemingway ... introducing us to Hemingway and the whole group of people. You'd be surprised what would come out of people who had been assigned a task and did it well. The same thing with white law. We got to doing the endocrine glands, as I remember. Then somebody mentioned something about geographical distribution. I have been a malacologist all my life and I trained at the Buffalo Museum of Science when I was a young boy.

I bought a series of the Florida land snails, the ones that blown across by hurricanes from Cuba to Florida. They are very, very rare. I had a collection. I bought them in and explained them and they let me out as well. I did the genetics of these things, [I learnt board 16:40]. I was a freshman at doing this. Word got around that they had ... and usually did have ... They had four unusual

people in their class. Jimmy used all his background while [Mandy 16:52] cut a rack right, cut a swath through the State Department. Eddie Mitchell [Ed Mahory 16:59] and certainly my career, it's always been a fascinating career because I never worked in anything I was trained in. I have to take advantage of the moment. I think that's what I would say with anybody, you have an opportunity, don't mess it up. I guess that's ... Any other questions?

Speaker 1: Not that I can think of right now. Sure, I'll think of others at some other time. I've enjoyed chatting with you.

Bruce: I would like to see the original buildings. Is the President in today? I was told they'd ask for him.