

# **Samuel Gaynor**

**Interviewed by Laura Furman  
at his home at 2244 Rose Avenue**

**March 13th, 2018**

LF: [00:01](#) This is Laura Furman. I am interviewing Sam Gaynor on March 13th, 2018 at his home at 2244 Rose Avenue about his experiences as Rockford, Illinois' first African American police officer.

LF: [00:00](#) All right, I'm gonna have you start out just by saying for the tape, your name?

SG: My name is Sam Gaynor.

LF: And when and where were you born?

SG: [00:13](#) I was born in Rockford, Illinois. January 5th, 1933.

LF: [00:21](#) And, you, your father was not originally from Rockford?

SG: [00:29](#) No, he, he, my father was born, I believe it was in Beaumont, Texas.

LF: [00:33](#) Okay. And what brought him north to Illinois?

SG: [00:39](#) Uh, I'm and I'm not really certain because, because my mother was from East Moline, and they, they met, got married here in Rockford, so I'm not sure what happened in between.

LF: [01:02](#) Do you know when they got married? Roughly? In the thirties?

SG: [01:08](#) It would have been, yeah, it would have to be in the thirties there because I was born in 33. My and my brother was born in 32 then I was born in 33.

LF: [01:17](#) And you two were the oldest?

SG: [01:19](#) Uh, yes. And then I got a half-brother that... that, that uh, was from my dad's second wife and uh and he lives in Longview, Washington.

LF: [01:37](#) And your, your father had a career with the police department?

SG: With Chicago police. Yeah.

LF: Okay, and when was that, was that, uh, before you were born or after?

SG: [01:53](#) No, it was after I was born because, uh, because initially my dad was, was, there was a man here, he's a Jewish guy and he loved boxing and my dad was a golden glove boxer and this Jewish

guy, his name was Harry [Cassenbom] and you know, he used to go to see all his fights, but he was a furrier and that's what my dad was, he taught, my dad was a furrier and after, oh, my mom and him got married and then he got divorced and he was living in Chicago and that's where he got started on the department. I not, not know anything about his history here except he was a patrolman all the way, all the way till the end. Yeah.

- LF: [02:51](#) How old were you when your parents divorced?
- SG: [02:56](#) I, I think I was in my probably toddler or something like that.
- LF: [03:00](#) So little?
- SG: Yeah, yeah.
- LF: Um, what was your childhood in Rockford like?
- SG: [03:09](#) It was a, well, I was kind of, kind of an introvert and, and I was bullied and just the uh, and uh, my cousin, my brother was the one who as a matter of fact, my brother's and he did some time, he did time in Stateville prison and he did some time in Joliet.
- LF: For what?
- SG: Burglary and it didn't have any effect on it, on my getting on the job. I thought it would, but it didn't. And uh, uh, because I was on the department when he got paroled back in Rockford. And he lived with my grandmother.
- LF: [04:02](#) Um. So you had other family in Rockford other than your mom and your brother?
- SG: [04:07](#) My Grandma, my dad's mother lived here.
- LF: Did you see her a lot?
- SG: Oh yes. Saw her quite a bit. And uh, my mother, my mother's mother, she lived with us, my grandmother, and then she had two sons. They were here too. Okay.
- LF: [04:32](#) Um, where were you living?
- SG: [04:34](#) Let's see. We lived in, we lived on Clifton Avenue and we lived on Knowlton Street and uh, let's see, basically probably that's where the primary part of my childhood and when I went away

then when I went to college in, Oh, on Court Street, 200 South Court.

- LF: [05:10](#) And were those neighborhoods primarily African American? Were they integrated where they...
- SG: [05:18](#) They were, they're integrated because at that time there wasn't that many African Americans here. See now we did live with, I don't know if you know where the Central Terrace Cooperative is right up here. We lived there. My wife and I, after we got married... and tried to buy a house, we even tried to buy this house and the real estate guy told me that, you know, you might as well look somewhere else because they not going to sell it to you that when we got first crack and then the next time we were able to buy this house.
- LF: [06:02](#) At that point it was the real estate agents pulling you away from this neighborhood, refusing to show it to you and white owners who didn't want to sell to black families?
- SG: [06:19](#) Just the real estate guy said, you know, they didn't want to sell it to me, the people. The owners didn', you know because it didn't, because it wasn't a. . . Cause this whole from, from where Michigan is all the way down here, was all it was like that. And then Central Terrace basically. Uh, it was about half black and half white, segregated because there, there's certain, certain sections in places you couldn't live. But because when we were kids and we lived on Clifton Avenue, we used to come down in this neighborhood down here because the, the garbage disposal area was around here somewhere because they used to have real tall piles of trash and we'd call it the mountains. We go down because we would tell my mom, I said, we're going to go down to the mountains, we'll be back in a couple of hours, you know, we'd be playing on the trash.
- LF: [07:37](#) Now. Was your mom renting an apartment or a house or did she house.
- SG: Rented the house.
- LF: And where did you go to school?
- SG: I went to school here in Rockford, West High.
- LF: To West High, and where did you go for elementary school?
- SG: [07:55](#) Barbour school and then Washington Junior High.

LF: [08:08](#) And did your mother work?

SG: [08:10](#) Yes, she worked for Joseph Behr.

LF: Doing what?

SG: She was a mail clerk, I believe it was. She worked there for years.

LF: [08:21](#) And what was, what was her background? What was her education like, before working at Behr?

SG: [08:34](#) She just had a high school education, that's all, yeah, and uh, let's see, she works at. She works. She worked at Joseph's Behr for, for all of, most of my adult life, I remember that she worked at Behrs. In my day. Of course, her and my dad were divorced and at that, see, because Harry [Cassenbom] the furrier after he, my wife and uh, my dad got divorced. My mother and my dad got divorced. He went to Chicago and my mother stayed here and she said, she, she still was working at, to the best of my recollection to the, at a Joseph Behrs.

LF: [09:26](#) Did she like it there?

SG: [09:28](#) Yup. Yup.

LF: [09:35](#) How diverse was the workforce? Do you know?

SG: [09:40](#) Where? Behrs? It was, uh, they had, they had several blacks because, you know, they had a lot of, you know, they were there, their original salvage people, you know, because I remember the Behrs used to have people that would have the old push wagons, you know, push them by hand and they would, and they would pick up tin cans and bottles and stuff like that. And they had a lot of, I imagine there were a lot of Italians there because they were in order to, one of the things they said, the only thing, that the only people who lived in south Rockford, poor darkies and dagos and dogs. That's what I heard that more than once.

LF: [10:39](#) How did your mother feel about your education and your brother's education? Was that important to her?

SG: [10:47](#) Well, my brother never finished his high school and he, because he got in trouble, he got in trouble with the law and uh, because he was, I think he was one year ahead of me in, in high school, but he, but he never finished because he got in trouble with the

law and uh, the man that was really responsible for, for my education, he was named Melwood Davis and he was executive director at Booker Washington Center and he, uh, he told me, well, there were several young men that he got scholarships at the historical black colleges and universities because he, he graduated from North Carolina A & T I believe. But he told me he could get me a scholar, football scholarship. I said, a football scholarship. I actually, I'm not good enough for him. He said, I can get you a football scholarship if you want to go and take advantage of it. And I said, okay. And uh, I hadn't planned on going to college now but I was a piss poor student. You know, I wasn't a very good student at all. So then he got me. It's this football scholarship to Fayetteville State Teachers College and Fayetteville, North Carolina, which was all black and I'd never been south. And, would you believe that I actually made the Dean's list. I never made the Dean's list, never even got close at West High but, but it, at Fayetteville State, I made the Dean's list and I did well and uh, but I hadn't planned on becoming a police officer either because I know... My mother and never had anything good to say about my dad or, or police, you know. And uh. Then after my wife and I got married, I had gotten out of service. Well, of course. One good thing when I got in, when I went into the service, I had my degree and I was stationed at Fort McNair, which is in Washington DC. I had never heard of, you know, it's just a little. As a matter of fact, it's located on the confluence of the Potomac and the Anacosta River come together in a confluence, and peninsula in between was where Fort McNair was located. Ft. McNair used to be a federal prison. And uh, the conspiracy, the people in the conspiracy to murder President Lincoln were imprisoned there after they caught them there with the exception of Booth, they were imprisoned there at Fort McNair and they were tried, hung, and, and they, and they said that they buried there, but they don't have anything to show it, you know, except that they said, I think it was the tennis courts, they were up under the tennis courts and, and, and the uh, and the old prison building were bachelor's officers' quarters at that time, you know. And uh, actually I had a degree in elementary education and I had one year of teaching elementary education teaching.

LF: And where was that?

SG: That was in North Carolina down where the school, my wife went to.

LF: [15:06](#) That's where you met. Okay. When did you enlist in the service?

SG: [15:15](#) Well, I was drafted in a, let's see, '55, November, 1955. I was drafted yeah and I went to a, let's see, we went into Chicago and we rode the train down to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. And then we stayed at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, I think for about seven days. And then we took the train to Fort Carson, Colorado, where we did our boot camp in Fort Carson, Colorado and got to, that was up in the mountains there. And uh, and they had had so many casualties during the Korean War from the cold. So what did they do? They took you to mountains to teach you how to survive. It was miserable time I ever had was because we were there. We spent. Well we were, we went to Fort Carson, Colorado, but the cold weather mountain training command was up into mountains, Pikes Peak and all those places there. And we had to spend a week sleeping in pup tents. In the end, the temperature would go down below 45 degrees below zero at night, but they wanted to show you how you can survive, you know. And uh, we were there for a whole frigging week. Never. You had a coffee cup of coffee, no hot meals, nothing for a whole week.

LF: Miserable.

SG: But just to show you. And they say, can you imagine now you're out there and you got a group of people there they want to kill you. And uh, but I never did see any combat because actually Korea was over with and Vietnam hadn't started and I was drafted in between that time there.

LF: [17:19](#) So you stayed state side.

SG: [17:22](#) You know, because when I finished boot camp at Fort Carson, Colorado, then I went to a quartermaster school at Fort Lee, Virginia. When I finished the quarter master school at Fort Lee, Virginia. It's only a hop, skip and a jump to DC, with my background, I, I had a, have a college degree and so I was shipped to Fort, to Camp, went from Fort Lee to Fort Carson, Fort Leonard Wood to Fort McNair. And because of my educational background and I had an, I had a top secret clearance and I, I was stationed there at McNair and post headquarters and the only black guys they had in there work downstairs in the basement. And that's where the, in those days they had the old uh, copy machines that you had to turn by hand and they printed all the orders and bulletins and that stuff down in the basement. And so when I got, I got stationed there, right in the post headquarters building and the commanding officer's office and bill and the message center and all that stuff was on the second floor in the headquarters building. And one of them on one of the old, he was an older soldier and worked

in the basement and with the copy machine. And he said, boy, now he's black. And he said, boy, he said, so what do you got on these white folks? I said, I beg your pardon? He said, you know, he said, the only time we ever get above the first floor is if you're a janitor. I said, I don't know. He said, Who do you know? I said, I just go, you know, I only got to stay here, you know, it's young when I was drafted in November '55 and I got out in November of 57. It's just only had to stay here to run. And I was there. I was there at McNair probably 18 or 19 months, you know. And uh, I was there for President Eisenhower's second inauguration.

LF: Cool!

SG: And uh, and uh, we didn't have to participate, our unit didn't participate in the parade, but boy, that day that, of the parade. man alive. You talking about shining, that old post was really shining and if you were out on the post, you, you better have your Class A uniform on too. And uh, got a chance to, and of course we were in, we were sitting in front of the, the uh, archives building in the bleachers and we had a couple of six packs of Budweiser, you know, and it, Eisenhower when he was waving and I whistled and said, hey Ike, and he waved at us, you know, we're all, "heh, have a beer." And Nixon was a, Nixon was in, he was vice president, you know, and uh, but then they took the, they took the guys, particularly the guys that worked in the a post headquarters building. You had to a, they have what they call the defense platoon. And that was about once a month we had to go down to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, weapons and stuff like that because they said if the balloon ever goes up, he said you guys are going to be the first ones we send in. We sat there and I said we are? And I said, well what about the guys that were in the Arlington tombs that did the patrol there? And so I said "What about them guys?". You know, you said you're, you're part of the defense platoon because of your security clearance and okay. But nothing that we'd never, ever, never, ever had anything there that.

LF: [22:13](#) Were you married when you were in the service?

SG: [22:15](#) Yeah, uh huh.

LF: [22:16](#) So married housing and your wife was with you then?

SG: [22:19](#) No, she did. She was in Carolina. Couldn't be, like I said, we just were a hop, skip and a jump from, from about where she lived in Carolina. And so she went to beauty school while, when I was in the army. And I used to jump on the bus or catch the train,



you know, and, and her uncle, one of her dad's brothers worked at the train station in Fayetteville, North Carolina. If I would, if I could get there in time, I could catch a ride with him out in the country, whereas where her folks lived because her, her folks lived out in the tobacco country from Fayetteville and uh, but he worked for the train station.

- LF: [23:13](#) Um, rewinding a minute back to pre-service, pre-college when you were in Rockford growing up, um, how integrated was Barbour and Washington?
- SG: [23:28](#) Well, there were a few black, you know, but no black teachers. Never had a black teacher until I got to college.
- LF: [23:37](#) But you weren't the only black student?
- SG: [23:39](#) No, unh uh.
- LF: [23:42](#) Just a really lopsided ratio .
- SG: [23:44](#) There was, there was. I see that I think when I got. When I graduated from West High School, I believe 12, I think there were 12 black students when I graduated from West High School that I'm, were in our class.
- LF: [24:03](#) And what class were you?
- SG: 1950. Okay.
- LF: And how were you and the other 11 treated by your classmates and your teachers?
- SG: [24:17](#) Well, I know one thing that the better, you know, when you talk to a concert or something like that, they'd never, you said you don't have to take this because you're not gonna go to college anyway, you know, that was kind of accepted, you know, black folks don't go to college but they don't have to take any foreign language. No. Used to have, I guess you used to have to take a foreign language and in Algebra and I didn't, I didn't take any of that stuff. Of course I really had to struggle with my math and um, but like I said, I'd never made the Dean's list until I got in the college.
- LF: [25:04](#) How did the teachers treat the black students? Was there, this was the similar assumption that you would automatically not fare as well. Right?

- SG: [25:20](#) Right. Because we didn't have, didn't have black students that were going to college or getting ready now. Everywhere. Now, as I understand it now, now everybody want to get, you know, get the, the courses that you have to take, you know, just in case you get an opportunity. And I'd never even, never even thought about it except for Mr. Davis. That was at Booker and he got, he got, he got guys to go to college. I know I would. Fayetteville state he had people go to Shaw University, Claflin College, Vorhees. Uh, and places we'd never heard of.
- LF: [26:14](#) Did you do other sorts of things at Booker Washington growing up? Was that an important part of your, social life.
- SG: [26:21](#) Oh yeah, that way because we, when we got off the school bus, we'd get off the school bus there Booker. We'd go and do, do our homework and shoot pool. They had a couple girls that were really good. And uh,
- SG: [26:42](#) and you didn't have, you didn't, you didn't have anybody that, that, uh, that you could look up to, you know. See because there's a, there's a young man his next street up, a, he was a good, pretty good football player and it was a matter of fact. He was good enough to play. He played for the Oakland Raiders and he got a Superbowl ring and he and he and his folks lived right up there, you know, and uh, but we never had anything like that to look forward to, you know, and nobody was. No, they didn't purposely discouraging, unwittingly. They, you know, they discouraged you, you know, because you know, you're not going there anyway.
- SG: [27:35](#) And I don't think I ever made a. I don't think I ever made above a C in high school and uh, you know, if I had it to do all over again, I, you know, I, I'd been a different guy, see. But now my, my son, he grabbed, they, by the way, they moved things around. We lived here but he went to East High School, but all my daughter, my son and my two daughters went to East High School and uh, he, he graduated from Champaign University, Chinese and he still lives in San Fran. Got married and got divorced. And he in. Is he and his, uh, let me see.
- SG: [28:36](#) His oldest son lives still lives in Champaign with his wife and two kids. And then his, his youngest son just got, he came to, to visit from China because he lives in China and he and he was teaching in a university, teaching English at a university in China and he and he came to visit here. Hadn't been over a month ago with his Chinese girlfriend.
- LF: So has education of your kids been important to you?

SG: Oh yeah. And then my one granddaughter, she lives in Evanston. She lives in Skokie now and she's working on her master's degree and uh, she's taking it by, uh, online and um, she graduated from Western. She went to Rock Valley for two years. Then she went to Western and graduated and she got a job corps. Of course she's got a little boy now and she's got a job and she moved from Evanston. Sure. She was in Chicago and then she moved to Evanston and then she just moved to Skokie, in there. Last time I talked to her, she told me, well, I'm going to Northwestern.

LF: [30:16](#) Growing up. Were you active at church or with other clubs? Either yours or your mother and your family?

SG: [30:24](#) Uh, not as a child. No, no. Pastor Gilbert was, was a high school classmate or do Rockford high school with my mom and my dad and my uncles. They were all in high school together and uh, Pastor Gilbert was uh, he, he, he was a pusher because he was old school and he was hardheaded, old fashioned and boy, he got a big roster of kids that are graduated from college in the intro. I'm sure you heard the Connie Lane. Yes, Connie Lane. Connie Lane's son was, was chancellor at North Carolina A and T. I think he's working on some kind of high administrator once, some college in Florida now.

LF: [31:27](#) Do you need to get that call?

SG: [31:38](#) And he, he was old school. Uh no, he got his honorary doctorate degree from Rockford University.

LF: [31:48](#) So did you know, know him as a child since he was a classmate of your parents or you just knew of him?

SG: [31:54](#) Oh, I knew him. He was at my. When I got, when I got sworn in on the police department, he was at the swearing in ceremony.

LF: [32:06](#) But your family didn't go to Pilgrim Baptist when you were growing up.

SG: [32:10](#) They weren't members, we went to Pilgrim, but we weren't members of group. I think we wen to, I, my mother and them went to Allen Chapel.

LF: [32:18](#) Okay. Um, while we wait for your daughter, what, when you went south to Teacher's College, what was the culture shock like between Rockford and the south or was there much?

SG: [32:40](#) There was a big difference because like I said, I went out for football so I, you had to be there a couple of weeks before classes began in the, uh, the dormitory we stayed in was kind of ramshackled, you know, and uh, and it's hot, boy was it hot, and it wasn't any air conditioning and you ran into some segregation when you, you know, some, some places you'd go like, Hey, let's go to the movies or when you go to the movie that to sit in the balcony and uh, and when they went to the john, you in the movie, even there, you know, you had a special john, you had to use it. And uh,

SG: [33:42](#) the whole, the whole culture was different, you know, because the, there was a couple, there were a couple black police officers but they only patrol in the black area. In cause because we've almost got a couple of them in trouble because we'd be, we'd have our beers, and have it in a brown paper bag and, and of course we used to, used to didn't use the bag, you know. He told us, he said, no, you guys are going to get us in trouble and you're going to get in trouble because we're going to have to throw your butts in jail. He says you get the, get the old paper bag, you know, the shape, the cylindrical shape bags and a then after a, well let's see,

SG: [34:41](#) You kinda, you kinda learn how to fit in. And then after I graduated and got stationed in DC and it was, and I was in DC when Eisenhower sent troops to Little Rock. And it was kind of interesting because some, you know, some people never even paid any attention to it at all. You know, I was never paid any attention to it all because they didn't have anything to do with it you know and uh, except when they think about before we want to try it here, you know, and, and, and I was thinking just the other night, you know, I was stationed in Washington DC for four years at Howard University in Washington, DC, you know, I never, ever, ever went to the campus and uh, uh, Oh, course now there are a lot of guys that used to go because they used to try and get on with the gals, you know, and uh, but me being a married man and trying every weekend, trying to get down to Carolina and you know, and I was more interested in being able to do that. Make sure I have enough money to catch the train. And a couple of times my wife came and spent the weekend with me and we'd rent a hotel room for the weekend. She be there.

SG: [36:15](#) Yeah.

LF: [36:17](#) Growing up in Rockford by contrast to what you talk about with Fayetteville, were there restaurants or stores that you knew of

growing up in Rockford that you knew better? You knew you weren't invited to?

- SG: [36:33](#) Bishop's was one of them. The first time I ever went to Bishop's, when I got out of the army and I still. You're still got the reserves, so I belong to the National Guard and the National Guard met up on North Main street at the old armory. And so first, first summer coming up that I was in the national guard, we had to spend the two weeks in Minnesota at Camp Ripley. And so we got everything all set to go in and, and when the time came to eat, they put us in a parade formation. We marched down to Bishop's to eat and that first time i ever been in there. Otherwise, they'd throw us out. And uh, there, there were a lot of places that wouldn't serve you, do. It's like the. I like the article that the paper did with Pastor Gilbert when he was at the Nelson Hotel. You could go in there and they're there and you like you were a piece of furniture, you know, you'd sit there until the sun went down, but they've never had anybody that was belligerent. Like it wasn't some places in the south, some places in the south they would take you out and stomp you boy.
- LF: [38:04](#) People some more passive aggressive in Rockford. Yes. Were there movie theaters or places like that that you were.
- SG: [38:14](#) We could go into the movie. Never had any problems in the movie theaters unless we went in and clown around and make the ruckus and he drove us out. But, but you could sit anywhere you wanted to. And uh, I don't think I ever went to any restaurants until after I became an adult. And didn't have any, any persons that you could aspire and envy, you know, like doctors or. Nope. Teachers, you know, because Connie lane used to live next street up and uh, and I used to, because I caught the train a couple of times going to North Carolina and she was going to West Virginia State and we'd catch the train in Davis Junction. And I will be back with her, you know.
- LF: [39:34](#) Hmm. Then when did you come back to Rockford as an adult? After college and after the service?
- SG: [39:46](#) Yes, I came back. You came back. Of course. My, my, my mother was livid. When my wife passed away, she still couldn't stand my mother.
- LF: [00:00](#) Okay, proceed.
- SG: [00:03](#) I went to the Rockford school board to try, you know when I was looking for a job and they were looking for teachers. Yeah.

And I was told no, he said we have no need for you. And then the county has a school board too. And I went there too and they told me the same thing that uh, we're not ready for it. I think it was the company that told me no one will ever see now I went to a interview, that's where I went to an interview at uh what's the school on Eleventh Street used to be? Well it's a community center now or something like that on Eleventh Street and.

Deanna [Gaynor's daughter]:

No, I'm trying to think where Eleventh Street is.

SG:

[00:55](#)

Well, It's down from you know or Schnuck's is on 11th street. It's on the same side of the street but, but it's down toward the bypass. And uh, the lady that interviewed me tell you how professional she was. Now she, she was, she was the principal of the school and so there were, there were two white ladies and myself and we all sat down at the table and she interviewed me. And I, I could, you know, I could hear, heard what he said to the other people and one of the ladies at work there at that school as a sub, but she didn't have a degree and the other lady had worked there and she had, she had been to college but she hadn't finished her degree and uh, then, uh, then she talked to me and she told me, she said, we're not ready for black men, we've got women but not ready for black men. And I said, okay, what could you do? Reach over and punch her in the nose or what?

LF:

[02:15](#)

And yet you were the one with a degree and the teaching experience.

SG:

And the years of teaching experience. Yeah.

LF:

So when you couldn't get hired as a teacher, this was what year? Roughly.

SG:

[02:31](#)

Let's see I was hired in '58 and this was one or two that got hired in 50 days. So probably before that, you know, because my wife says, you better find you a job buddy. They're advertising in the paper for a police officer. I don't want to be a police officer because I hear, I heard my mother was, you know, said about my dad. You know, and I don't want to be a police officer, so you better find you a job.

LF:

[03:00](#)

So how did that conversation start with the police department then? You answered the ad and.

SG: [03:08](#) Yeah, and I went down and took the test and pass, with a group of guys. I think there were eight of us passed and I was the number one guy and then every test I took after that with the exception of a wanted to start first sergeant's test I took, I didn't pa', well, I didn't finish high enough, were way down on the list because they, I think they were only taking the top four or something like that. But then I had the other test I ever passed, you know, I always finish high enough to be in the top three.

LF: [03:55](#) And the, the test taking or the test scoring was colorblind. Did I understand that from one of your interviews that they, they could see that you would passed without seeing who had taken it.

SG: [04:06](#) Okay.

LF: [04:08](#) How did they respond from there? And realizing that they have a well versed candidate who was African American,

SG: [04:24](#) They uh, or you didn't have the little off color jokes and stuff that you had to stop that because a couple of times guide you have to back up one of your fellow officers in the corner and tell him watch your mouth buddy, you get your jaw broken.

LF: [04:51](#) So there wasn't any resistance to hiring you after you pass the test?

SG: [04:56](#) No,

LF: [04:59](#) But there had been somebody else who had tried that hadn't made it through probation. Did I understand that correctly?

SG: [05:05](#) Yeah. Matter of fact, he. But he had worked in uniform and I came home from college for Christmas, and there was a joint down on South Main Street. So I stopped in this joint, going to have me a beer. I stopped in his joint and who's behind the bar, in uniform, except his gun belt is rolled up and laying their monster beer thing is this is this officer and he's got a, what do you call it, that you mixed drinks with shakeups could. He was shaking them up and they're having a hell of a good time. And so was he and uh, he was a college graduate. He graduated from Scranton University, but he was too concerned in regard to he, cause he must've had about six months on when he got into trouble because he had a pickup truck. And he was doing some moonlighting with, on duty with his pickup truck. He was walking a beat somewhere on, in those days if you walked the beat, you know, you'd get assigned here, but they always had a

place on the beat where you could park your car all day, you know. And so he had his pickup truck, parked, but he but he uh was going to do a little hauling for moonlight gig and he got involved in an accident and he's supposed to be working State and Main and he gets into an accident at Sandy Hollow and Kishwaukee. You don't say, what are you doing, you know,

Deanna: [06:49](#) Did you tell Laura about Sinnissippi? And the guys were out there shooting? He had to turn them in.

LF: Not yet.

Deanna: That's another one. And if you don't need me for nothing else, right, she'll remind you sit sleepy shooting. And then they drew, uh tell Laura about when they threaten our family. And you said one thing that bothered you about the police department, they really didn't back you up because you, we all had to leave the house. Me and my sister was went one area and my brother went somewhere else. And um, I, I was just a little girl. I said I cried. I said, Daddy, what you going to do? He said I'm going to sit here with my shotgun but we had to leave because they threatened us and um back then and [religion]. And I asked my dad before I said, dad, what's bothered you the most? I mean, you know, his buddies really didn't back him up. So is that all you need me for? We're gonna make sure to cover that. Daddy do two stories. Yeah. Yeah.

SG: [00:02](#) That one incident where

Deanna: I'm bringing something back with you.

SG: Thank you. I was a sergeant and uh, they had some kind of thing that fits in into Sinnissippi Park, you know, in the band shell. Later that night I heard a call come over the radio to a couple of squads, gunfire at the band shell at Sinnissippi Park, and he sent a couple of squads and I was a sergeant supervisor, they want supervisor, you know with gunshots and the supervisor there. So I, so I drive out to a Sinnissippi no, before I get to Sinnissippi, they give us, let's see now, how did that go?... they pull one of the squads in then, and they wanted them to call on the phone and they didn't have cells yet. They just had the two-way radio and they didn't want to put it on the air.

SG: [01:35](#) And so they said, check the. I can't remember the two, the two. What time is that? Squad had. But uh, oh, I know what happened. They pull a squad from there. And when and when they, I was on my way to Sinnissippi and the two-man squad



was going to go to the payphone. He had to go to a payphone and there was a payphone right there on the corner of Sinnissippi. I mean North Second and [Ethel] Avenue. There was a payphone and I figured it'd be come and sure enough here they come. And so I stopped them and I said, what's the, what's the deal up there? What's going on at the band show?

SG: [02:26](#) You know, they were kind of hemming and hawing. I said, well, what the hell is going on now? I said that it's on, it's going to be on the tape, radio tape that sound like uh automatic weapon fire. And, and he said, well, there's a couple of guys up there, you know, and I said, okay. I said, I'll talk to you later. So I went up there and, and here's, must have been six or eight Rockford police officers and what they were doing, they were shooting at the garbage cans, taken, you know, Pew pew Pew and if you hit it, it jumps, you know, and I know they were having a hell of a good time.

LF: [03:10](#) So this was the cops and they were doing shooting,

SG: They were doing the shooting and I wrote them up and of course I was a real, she used to be, what they call it, a real prick, you know, because I did that because of, because I was black and you know, when they get to stroking and joking and you get a situation like that. So you always had to go, you know, a guy couldn't be late and if I were sitting in the office and the guys coming to roll call and he's walking down the street and he's got his uniform, hat in his hand, right. Write him up. And uh, and I found out that you had to do that because, because they did push you, you know, you know, because they're good, you know, you're my buddy, you know, and all that kind of crap. And uh,

LF: What was your rank at that point, sergeant then?

SG: [04:15](#) Because you already, sergeants had the most contact with the, with the guys. When the, uh, when the, uh, when, when it gets really dirty or potential to be really dirty, they'll always want a supervisor there. And uh, because, because we wouldn't, the guy got because the officers killed a guy in our church property here several years back and there was a supervisor that was sent there and the supervisor got suspended, he got disciplined for, I'm not sure if he, he, he didn't handle the incident in writing. Now I used to hate those kinds of calls because we got a call one night that there was a barricaded subject over on Barton Boulevard. I remember even Barton Boulevard and he's barricaded himself in the house and we managed to get the wife and kids out, being an evacuated neighborhood. Need the

supervisor there. And so we had an east side sergeant in the west side. East side started, had been tied up on something. Then they had another call that the in another area on the east side that they needed a supervisor. So they pulled me from the west side over to the east side.

SG: [05:57](#) Then this call, comes in on Barton Boulevard with this guy with the gun. So they pulled me off this corner, head for Barton Boulevard. So I get over the head for Barton Boulevard there when I get the Barton Boulevard, it was three officers at the front, three officers at the back and everybody's got their gun out. It's at nighttime and they're under the outside lights and you know, and you can see them, but they're talking to the guy, can't hear what he said, he can't hear what he's saying, but you could hear, I could hear one of the officers said, well Joe, if you're going to throw the bullets out, throw the gun out too, you know. And, and I, I can't hear what this guy is saying and they've already, they're already got the procedure in, in motion, you know, in part of the hostage negotiation is Engage with the victim, uh, with the suspect. Keep him engaged in conversation. You can talk for two days, but that's better than anybody getting hurt, you know.

SG: [07:03](#) But I couldn't hear him. So I go down toward the middle of the house and look in the window and I can't see anything. So I can't see anything and I can't, I can't hear the guy talking. I start to go back up to the back door because I was closest to the back door and I could hear the officers talking to him. Ah, come on Bill, and bill said, you know me, I talked to you last week or something like that, and then all of a sudden one of the guys takes his gun and he hits the bulb and the light goes out. I say, what the? So I go back down and look in the side window about six shots, POW, POW, POW, POW. I said, Jesus Christ. And I took a nose dive getting out of ways, you know, because I didn't know where the bullets were coming. And uh, so I look up there and those three guys were shooting and look out the back door and the all six guys were shoot'n.

SG: [08:08](#) And unbeknownst to me, what they had done was when, when they got to his wife and kids out in the house, they got the key from her for the front door and they what they said, we're going to keep you busy talking about the backdoor [Bob Twiny]. You come in through the door at the. Yeah. We're going to keep them visit the backdoor and [Bob Twiny] and you take the key and come in. So Twining goes in and he, he gets shot. Guess who shot him? The guy in the house had a gun but he never got a shot off. One of our officers had shot him in and he was standing. He said the Lord was looking after him because he was

standing in such a position that the bullet went in through it. IT went into his jacket. It was cold, so he had his coat.

SG: [09:11](#) He had a heavy coat on and he had a sweater and a shirt and then a t-shirt. It went through all of those things. Then it went through his skin, right, right on his spine and then. And then it went under the skin and his spine and it traveled along his back and then it came out, broke this arm. If he had been just a fraction of an inch. And because, because the officer had a 3:57 magnum hunter, then even shooting with and he just was at the right angle and he couldn't have never duplicated that shot and just lucky and it, and it would have killed him because he was able to take a chunk out of his spine, you know. And uh, uh, and then we had the firearm that go as, the Firearms Review Board in [Roskowski] was the Chairman, you know, he was a federal judge.

SG: [10:23](#) Remember they, that's who they named the federal building after [Roskowski]. And I was at the, I was at the, uh, traffic institute at Northwestern at that time. And the guy that handles the internal affairs and problems with the officers came to Northwestern University and subpoenaed me. I had to come back for the firearms review board. And uh, so after all that, all that stuff, we had to go through the review board and line by line to radio transmissions and the one person that got in trouble was me because, because when I was on when I was on the east side and they were pulling me to go, come on the west side, I told em, I said, tell the West side units, to standby until I get there. That's all I told him. And Roskowski said, you should have told them to hold their fire.

SG: [11:32](#) I said, he said, but I said that was 45 minutes later, you know. And uh, and uh, none, none of the, none of the guys got. Got it. Well, I didn't get it. I just gotta you know, a line in your file, you know, because I didn't get, he didn't think I gave the correct order. I said, but, I said, you know what I said, I said judge. I said, I said, when you get there? And the things in motion, you know, you only get one chance, you know, and, and I said, and the thing was in motion when I got there, but I had already told them what to do to hold their fire. All six of them were shootin. And I said, I said, what I did is I went home and said a prayer to the Lord. Thank you for sparing that officer because he, he'd been in his grave.

LF: [12:36](#) Now was that, was the response to your action typical for a situation like that or did you feel that it was motivated at all by your being a black sergeant? Did they tend to be harder on you when things went awry?

SG: [13:00](#) Uh, no because a couple, cause a couple times. I know we had an incident that happened on Seventh Street. I wasn't a Sergeant though. I think I was a patrol officer running radar solo and the old [TenStoopit] tavern there. Three squads they sent because they got a big fight in the parking lot right next to the [TenStoopit]. I was running radar up on Ninth Street. So I just come on down Ninth Street to Broadway and they turn into and I told radio, I said, I said, I'll swing by there, you know, I said, I'm only about eight blocks away. I'll swing by and let you know what's going on. So uh I figured by the time I get there they get. They got three squads, three squads and two guys in each squad and they got this fight. So I come on down there and uh pull in and they're fighting like hell on great big strapping guy.

SG: [14:22](#) And I remember him by name, name was Vern Turner. He looked like a tight end that should be playin' for the Bears and they're duking it out and duke it out. And I come peeling into the parking lot. And Vern Turner turns and looks and he said "they just sent one nigger cop" and boy did I get pissed off and I grabbed uh 16 gauge shotgun. It got it cut off so it fit right down in the corner nearby on the passenger side. Didn't have a bracket for it, didn't need it because it fit right in there. I reached down already started. I grabbed that 16 gauge and got out cock it with one hand and I cocked it with one hand, everybody that was fighting, that heard it cocked, stopped, raise their hands and got dropped to their knees. And just about that time the three squads started pulling in, you know, and I took my shot gun, put the, put the shell back, uncocked it, put the shell the gun in there and left.

SG: [15:32](#) I didn't talk to anybody. I didn't leave a report. If I do that today, I'd probably get fired and uh especially cocking the shotgun, you know, because he had another incident with it. It was one of the troops when they used to have a tavern up on uh State and Avon. And a guy named Bert Lakes, if you ever heard of Bert Lakes. Something that happened there earlier in the day and uh, but it was out in the street on West State, in front of the tavern. But then we get another call up there about three hours, a different shift here. We've changed shifts and everything. Was supposed to be a guy up there with a gun. And we figured he came back to finish this job off. The supervisor, heh, heh.

SG: [16:34](#) So we'd get up there and there's one, one of the young police officers, we would go up there and we're all get about together and there must've been six or eight of us and the tavern, my old neighbor really jumping and loud music and everything, but one of the young officers, they had the regular shotgun, wasn't cut off, and it was, it had stood about that high and had a bracket

that holds it in the car, three or four feet high and the officer took it, took it out and walked in the front door o' the tavern, cocked the rap, Dj stop playing music. The people that were playing pool stopped shooting pool. The bartender stopped pouring drinks because they were looking at the guy with the shotgun to see what the hell he was going to do. Everybody just froze for a minute and then we did a little talking, got a guy out of the, out of the men's john and then took a few names and closed the place down for the night.

SG: [17:44](#) Then I told the officer, I said what the hell you cock the shot gun for? And he said, well, did it work? Didn't it? I said, yeah, but who are you going to shoot uh and said if he had just shot somebody you'd gone to jail. If that is the way you feel. Well, I said, that's not the way I feel that's the way the law is. I said, but now I had done the exact same thing, but, but, but, but see there's about eight of us up there at the tavern, at the fight. There was only one guy there and I ended in a good way to get there because if you've ever heard a shotgun cock, you'll never forget that sound again. [Imitates sound of shotgun cocking]

LF: [18:38](#) Were there other instances where the community itself did not respect you as an African American cop. Discounted you when you were on patrol or appearing or did you feel like you had the respect of the people who were serving?

SG: [18:58](#) Huh? I don't, I don't recall having that many incidents, you know, because, well, well I think consciously the people don't even give it a thought when, when they, when, when the supervisor gets there and the supervisor's a black guy. And I think that the public you know in general, especially if you, if you don't come in there cussing and because, because when you get to some of those places, there's your, your officers are good. The one during the cussing and raising all the hell and, and, uh, uh, I think that the public in general, I haven't had any real problems there. 'Cept for that one, that one problem with [Judge Roskowski] and where he says, uh, you should've told them they're in our. said, judge, you have to be at a scene of something to do something like that.

LF: [20:27](#) Well, and at Pilgrim Baptist that night that we met, you told a story too about a restaurant on Seventh Street and a partner who did not have your back really in that. Will you tell that story on tape for me?

SG: [20:43](#) Oh yeah. Well, we had a stopped at a restaurant on Seventh Street for lunch break. And uh, my partner was driving. So he, he, he pulled in, he didn't ask me to do they want to stop there,

but he puts it. We're going to go have lunch here. And uh, we went in and had a cheeseburger and a bowl of chili and then when I got, got ready to leave, you know, he, he was, I didn't talk too much. First time I'd ever been in there and he was talking to the waitress and the owner, the guy who I presumed was the owner and, and uh, so we had to get back on the air, so it was my turn to drive. So I went out and got into the car and started up the car when he, when he came out and got into the car. But I had to even honk, now that I think about it. I had to honk a couple times because they had, they had a call waiting for us and he comes out and he gets a new car and he's giggling, you know, something's funny. I said, what's so funny? He says, "guy says, don't bring you back. So what do you mean? He says, he says, don't bring that guy back here.

- SG: [22:16](#) I said, I said, who? I said, what the hell? So funny. How come? What do you tell him? He said, I didn't say anything, I guess, you know, I said, I said, I said you're. I said, just imagine now, now, suppose, suppose two hours from now, some drunk and black guy comes in there and start raising a little hell, what do you think this guy's gonna do? And then if they call and they send a squad down there that's got a black guy in there, what do you think he's going to do? But then I got in and I went back there for next couple of days and then I realized, you know, it's kind of stupid, you know, say that guy probably spit in your chili and decided so I didn't go back in there it now. What was the name of the place? The Viking Cafe and uh, but see that was early in my early, early on because they weren't used to seeing a black guy. Probably early sixties. Yeah, because I started in '58.
- LF: [23:43](#) As you went through your career, did you feel like you had more support of your fellow officers?
- SG: [23:48](#) Oh yeah, Uh huh. See, that's the thing about the supervisor, because when you're getting, when you get in a supervisory position and you get a situation rides where there's, there's gotta be some type of enforcement of either a state law or a city ordinance or one of the police regulations. No, did it. Then it gets kind of sticky. Then it gets real sticky. It happened this morning. Nobody got hurt, but officer, oh, I know what I'm trying to remember. Exactly what happened. The guy, it was a domestic situation and the guy, I'm not sure which one took the gun and shot it, but either the wife or the husband and they fired a couple shots in the air and when we got there, no, nobody got hurt.
- SG: [25:11](#) I think we took both the husband and the wife in. But they have this beautiful garden that is bad fire. One of the officers were

the officers. You don't sit down for you take it during the court, takes a guy and you have it. I said, no. I said, you can't have it. He said, we're going to turn it into evidence just like we do, like if it had been used to kill somebody, well why not? I said, I said, I just told you, and you take that write for them, said you're going to find yourself in deep doo-doo because he figured, you know, we're in a situation where it's a domestic. A couple people get arrested for drunk and disorderly and you confiscate the weapon and did they don't get the weapon back.

- LF: [26:09](#) So the, the story that your daughter was talking about when your family was threatened, that was, that was the Sinnissippi financial issue or this was a different time?
- SG: [26:19](#) It was. It was a different incident. Okay. Oh, the original incident came from a black guy, raped a white lady in her apartment. He clammed up some step ladder or something and I'm not sure how they found the suspect, but they had a guy in custody. When I got to work that morning, my detective lieutenant says, you guys talked to a [undecipherable] So he talked to me and so we got him on this. This rape charge until we would talk to him and I don't, I don't think he admitted anything, but they had a pretty good case on it, you know, and uh, and so we told him, he said, he said, you said your rape charge is going to stick. So we, you know, they got enough information and return to turn the reports over to the grand jury and, and you're probably going to be charged with them. I tried for rape and it was one of his relatives, I believe it was that call, you know, he gets himself around his house and I don't know if the detective lieutenant told me, but instead of them assigning a squad to watch my house and you said you do it.
- SG: [28:13](#) And so I had. I had my, a one been shot guns there with a double lot bucket. I sat right in this corner here. And I said, I said, if anybody come down my driveway, you're gonna have a hard time. And I know you said you don't use. Well, I said don't tell me this is my house and you assigned me to it. I said you should've signed it and I actually should have signed somebody else because it's better when you get into a situation like that. Then you're assigned the officer. You don't want them to also get involved in that type of deal. But nothing ever happened. I had a dickens of a time stayed awake, you know, because you'd sit here and don't have to get up and kind of walk around and be careful walking by the windows and stuff like that.
- LF: [29:11](#) It just was. How, how far into your career was this? Was this the sixties? The seventies?

SG: [29:17](#) Plain clothes, that was in plain clothes. Okay. So, so let's see. It was probably a c. It was probably 60 to early sixties

LF: [29:39](#) and young kids at and

SG: [29:42](#) yeah.

LF: [29:43](#) So you're with your wife and the kids?

SG: [29:45](#) I hadn't farmed him out. Yeah.

LF: [29:50](#) And did they ever determine who made the threat?

SG: [29:53](#) No,

LF: [29:54](#) but it wasn't repeated or acted on. Just as narrow as you can tell.

SG: [29:59](#) No, the guy that I fit, the guy that was, that they had in custody did time that he had to go to the penitentiary. But, you know, and I saw and I saw him at a funeral, of course I hired him, I hardly recognized him because he has more balls than I was and he had a big beard and he says, I want to talk to you. And he told me his name, you know, and I said, well, I'm in the phone book, but he never did. He never did call and uh, I don't know how good a case they had because I remember him. Okay. I can't remember why the ladder was at the window for the second floor and the lady was supposed to have been sexually assaulted by her brother. He was the guy that did or not. I can't remember how they had him in custody. Um,

LF: [31:11](#) later in your career, did you have partners who were more supportive than the partner at the Viking? Yeah. How did your career evolve? You said you were, if you, if you joined the force in 58 and then by the early sixties you said you were doing plain, plain clothes?

SG: [31:41](#) Fifty eight. Because I worked in, you remember the police white cars? I worked in white car for awhile. Okay. In the white car. That was kind of gory sometimes, but, but uh, the, the contact you have with the public is a little different because the, because you're always there to help and uh, sometimes you wind up arresting somebody that are better at one or the white car and called, you know,

LF: [32:19](#) is this was before the fire department took over the ambulance service,



SG: [32:22](#) right? Yeah.

LF: [32:24](#) So that was one of your earlier assignments.

SG: [32:27](#) Well, I was in patrol then I, then I was moved up traffic and you know, and, and most of the time in traffic you work solo. And then I moved up to the plain clothes and model of the traffic that I worked at white car. And uh,

LF: [32:54](#) and that's when you use your Gi Bill. Benefits to do the nine month traffic school at northwestern. Yeah. Okay. Alright. So then plain clothes.

SG: [33:11](#) I got a coffee cup today.

LF: [33:13](#) Okay. To what David said.

LF: [00:04](#) So 19, 1975 was the traffic institute.

SG: [00:09](#) Okay. And I was a sergeant then when I went there. There's two of my great grandchildren.

LF: [00:17](#) Oh they're Darling. She's so excited. Is that the big sister picture? Oh, that's darling. Very cute. Okay. So did traffic duty includes stops for speeding and things like that?

SG: [00:38](#) Yeah, we worked a lot of solo cause you run a lot of radar.

LF: [00:43](#) Did that result in any friction between you and people you stopped that was racially motivated?

SG: [00:54](#) Sometimes there's. Now I used to moonlight at Stewart's Garage, you know, cause you know, it used to be policemen and fire, off duty firemen parked in parking cars in the parking garage. It never happened on the street, but it happened in Stewart when a lady would look at me and she says, you gave me a ticket for a run when running radar on Highcrest. I said I did. She said yes you did. It happened. It never happened on the street, but it happened off, you know. And then in another situation where the, the, uh, because when you run, when you worked, when you work solo, you know, you can do as much as you want or as little as you want, you know. And it used to get, it'd be boring and you know, See, I pull this car over there doing eight miles over, you know, and uh, and the interesting thing was that the traffic officers and the white car, the traffic officers and the detectives got the same pay and uh, and you can, if some guy I didn't have, they didn't like traffic because you didn't

have, did they contact you, made you, had, you had to make the contact, you know, you'd have to pull somebody over and most of the time it, you know, for running radar or something like that, it, it wasn't like even driving down the street and you see a guy and his wife put pull over at the curb squabbling or something like that in the car.

- LF: [02:50](#) You were making the initiation. Um, how did you advance from sergeant in terms of your positions?
- SG: [03:03](#) Well, I was promoted from sergeant to lieutenant and a then you get, you're in charge of a shift and you have three or four sergeants under you, you know, and at that time we changed shifts every 28 days. And so you'd rotate, rotate shifts and we go backwards. You go from the graveyard shift, you'd go to a three to 11 and then from three to 11 you'd go days and then from the, from the day shift you go to the graveyard shift again, you know, and it was the hardest part about that that rotated was the rotating on particular on that, on the changeover. Because if you, you get offered a three, you get off at 11:00 at night and have to be back to work at seven in the morning, you know, that, that sometimes would be difficult. You know, the rotating shifted. I don't think they're, I think they're working permanent shifts now, but I'm not sure if I'd like permanent shifts.
- LF: [04:46](#) Okay. So that was as a lieutenant when you were supervising the sergeants and then you were promoted from there as well?
- SG: [04:53](#) Yeah, I then, yeah, I was promoted from there to captain. Then from captain to a deputy chief.
- LF: [05:03](#) And that was your rank then when you retired?
- SG: When I retired, right.
- LF: And as deputy chief. Where were you in the hierarchy?
- SG: [05:13](#) I was second in command with the department. Fitzpatrick, Fitzpatrick was chief. And
- LF: [05:22](#) Who was the chief that you were working with them?
- SG: [05:25](#) Bill Fitzpatrick.
- LF: [05:28](#) Okay. I didn't, I didn't come to Rockford until '97 so I get a little foggy on some of those, those details. When you first joined the

Department were the police chiefs supportive of having you on the force?

- SG: [05:58](#) They really didn't. They were, you could tell that it was kind of a, I don't know an imposition in regard to them, you know, because they, because they, I think that unconsciously they, they didn't have too much respect for black folk, you know, initially, you know, because they had never met 'em in ideal situations and they've never had, had to count on him to see because I think it's just like an, an educator in the educational field, you know, you have a problem and you get a black teacher with a white student and if you've never been, you've never had had that type of situation before. And uh, it, it's a because you, you, you could supposedly in every situation, you know, with the black and white and you could, you could wind up, you know, having problems. And there were some guys that, you know, you couldn't assign them to you, you wouldn't assign them to the west side.
- SG: [07:26](#) You would assign them to the east side. Now when my, when my kids were small, I remember one time. I would never think of it now. Now we wouldn't even allow it, but I took Deanna and Rodney to a basketball game at Guilford and somebody in the crowd watched him for me. You know what? I tended to my duties and they were delighted to do it. I couldn't believe it. And I said, I can't imagine anybody doing that. Now, of course, of course the supervisor would never let you bring the kids, you know, because you, your responsibilities was elsewhere and uh, but I don't think I asked anybody and I, I'm, I'm not sure. I'm not sure what the deal was, but I knew the kids and they enjoyed it and the people that enjoyed it with the kids, you know, because I know I gave them money to buy popcorn and all that, stuff like that. Yeah, that's true.
- LF: [08:46](#) Who actually made your hire, one that you were brought on? Was that, was the commission who was overseeing the testing or was the. How did that process happen when you were hired on by the department?
- SG: [09:00](#) Was the fire and police commission? Right. Okay. Right.
- LF: [09:05](#) And was there more than just the written test? Did they? Put you through other sorts of physical tests or anything like that at that time?
- SG: [09:14](#) No, not physical tests, but it was a, uh oral exam because the oral really, if you know how to do it, you could really, uh, determined, you know, the, the attributes and the deficiencies

in in a person, what kind of questions to ask. I remember, I remember one call I got and it's a matter of fact. It was, it was, if I remember correctly, the house was, you know, the fire station, the old fire station just off of Seventh Street there, one of those houses right in that neighborhood there. I can't remember if it was next door to the fire station or not, but I, I, uh, I can't remember. I think we were doing a neighborhood check or something. I can't remember exactly, but I knocked on the door and this girl comes, and she's got on this sleeper thing here. Nancy's got it open and everything. And uh, she tried to come onto me, you know, and I ignored her. I told her, I said, if, you know, if, if you see a nice car or whatever it was, you know, give us a call, you know, he says, they said, well, do I have to, you know, do I have to wait until I see the car or something like that. I said, thank you very much, ma'am.

- SG: [10:57](#) Be careful. She wouldn't do that today. She'd have had her hands so full.
- LF: [11:20](#) Knowing that you started on the force in the fifties, what was, what did you see in Rockford in the 1960s in terms of social unrest, either in terms of civil rights of, or even reactions to the Vietnam War that the police department got involved in?
- SG: [11:52](#) I remember the night that Dr King got killed. I was working that night and a guy right there on West State where the tracks are just almost to Avon, killed a burglar that night. And uh, we expected a lot of robust action that night, but that was the only answer, if I'm not mistaken, he killed this burglar and I had a, I think he had a TV repair shop there. And uh, and what was the other part you said?
- LF: [12:42](#) Where there were, there are lots of reactions to have things like King's assassination in Rockford. Was there concern on the force over how peaceful conversations could be in the community about civil rights?
- SG: [13:04](#) No, we had a situation. No, I can't remember what it was. They were anticipating riotous behavior because we were downtown. They had, they had the mall, troops had the mall all boxed in. So anybody coming into the mall, they wouldn't be able to leave and uh, but I can't remember if it was because they had seen what was going on in Detroit, I think it was, it was something from one of the other major cities there. And they really percolating there, you know, they anticipated but we didn't have that kind of a, no kind of a problem like that, the whole time during the whole time and when Eisenhower sent the 101st Airborne to Little Rock, of course I was in the army then. I

watched it on television. It was kind of interesting, kind of interesting to be sitting in Washington DC and they sending federal troops though.

- LF: [14:21](#) It appears that Rockford at least had some small, mostly peaceful marches around the time of Selma. But I haven't really been able to determine whether or not there was very much in the way of activity in terms of local groups who were lobbying for civil rights.
- SG: [14:48](#) See now, now the panthers, the Black Panthers are, of course the black panthers were, were, they didn't, they were dealing from the bottom of the deck because I never had a reasonable conversation with them out in public always. They were always real, real, real potentially violent, you know, but if you, particularly if the people around, but if you'd be walking the beat downtown and where they're selling the papers and stuff like that they'd call you , "hey Gaynor come here a minute", you know, but otherwise "hey you pig," you know, something like that, you know. And um, but they were putting, they had to put their front up.
- LF: [15:57](#) What were they doing locally that you as part of the police department were aware of?
- SG: [16:03](#) I know down in, down at Pilgrim, they, you know, they had the breakfast program going on, you know, and they were strong arming grocers to get the food to feed them, you know, and uh, I don't recall having any specific physical confrontation with them and I do see Willy Kent. He was a, see, Willy Kent was one of the survivors of. You remember when they ambushed him in Chicago? Yes. They had the guys maybe use a telephone company truck and stuff for decoys and Willy Kent was, is a survivor and I've seen him.
- LF: [16:58](#) Well I, I get the, I'm forgetting what I know about the family. Is Willy Kent the one who played, it was Ernie that played basketball. Willy is the one who goes by Monk Teba and Monk Teba has actually given us an interview as well. Yeah. He came down and talked to us a little bit and then we asked him if he'd be willing to do the same thing and tell his story on tape. And it was fascinating. I learned a lot and I know I had no idea about the breakfast program. And some things like that, which was great to get documented because that's not the stuff that tends to be written down about what the black panthers were doing and it's a completely different version of the story. Completely different side of the story of what they were doing. Um, and it was really interesting, right?

- SG: [17:43](#) Don't seem him that much. But I run into him in the grocery store and you get a big handshake and say good to see it, you know. And uh, and he was, he was a super. He was a survivor from Fred Hampton.
- LF: [17:59](#) Yeah, yeah and he told us that story and I think, um, are there other people you think we should talk to about their experiences in Rockford? Either civil rights or otherwise?
- SG: [18:17](#) Yeah, because I think it is good talking to people on both sides of the fence. And, uh, I'm trying to think of some guys on the other side because now we had a guy he was in. He goes, he, of course, he doesn't go to our church any longer, but he, he done some time, matter of fact. But the uh, and organization, what was the name of it? Organization we had and it had to be documented and they run the names doing, you get a thing from Jesse White, do, you know, from the secretary of state now, but he was on, he was on the other side of the fence and but he belonged to our church and I don't know if in the past the board, I don't think he had passed the board. People got along quite well because he was, he was there, uh, where does, what was the name of that are?
- SG: [19:46](#) I can't remember the name of it now if it's something that President Obama was conceived. My Brother's Keeper. Oh, okay. My Brother's Keeper. Yeah. And uh Huh. And he and he had done some hard time and like I said, he was, he was on the other side of the fence but he was. And we had, we even had him as a studying to become a deacon. And I'm not sure, I'm not exactly sure what happened, but. But he, he, he, he no longer belonged the Pilgrim and we dissolved our chapter of My Brother's Keeper.
- LF: How come?
- SG: Huh? The people from the other side of the fence, they get an awful lot to do with it. I don't think they. I think they thought that. No, I'm not sure because I heard.. Yeah.
- LF: [21:14](#) Was the force, the police force more diverse by the time you retired?
- SG: [21:19](#) Oh yeah. It was. Yeah. Because we had women supervisors.
- LF: [21:34](#) How long did you have to wait to have additional black police officers on the force with you?

SG: [21:45](#) Well, let's see, I think mayor didn't come by me. As a matter of fact. Mary worked in uniform and uh, I can't remember that one. Young black female, I can't remember her name, but she was, she was very different. Very outspoken, and if I'm not mistaken. I don't know if it was, would she, would she, she, she, she got, I don't know if she got involved in something, some kind of a violation or something like that. And they go send her home. And she went home and she took her uniform off and have her skivvies on.

LF: [22:43](#) Okay. That's one way to leave. How do you feel Rockford is doing with race relations now versus then?

SG: [23:08](#) I think that the potential for problems is much greater, but I think old [Shay's] doing a pretty good job. And uh, uh, yeah, of course, of course a lot of black people were. What's his name, Cox? Was he the one that got killed?

LF: Yes. Yeah.

SG: Cox, his funeral and the procession and stuff like that. Black people were. They didn't do that for Kevin Rice and uh...

LF: [23:52](#) Who was a black officer who was killed in the late nineties. Right?

SG: Kevin? Yeah.

LF: 2001. Why can't I remember? Yeah.

SG: Kevin. Yeah. He used to live right over there cross the street.

LF: I just want to make sure for referencing those things that we get the backstory on the tape.

SG: [24:10](#) Yeah. And uh, because even Deanna said, "well they didn't do that for Kevin," you know, having all those cars and all and tie up traffic and stuff, stuff like that. And there's a lot. And word on the street is that the people who killed Kevin Rice were set up by the police. The police made arrangements... A lot of black people believe that even though we've got black guy in jail for killing Kevin. Deanna believes it.

LF: [24:56](#) Well, it doesn't make relationships better if there's distrust and inequity.

SG: [25:01](#) But then they say because he, Kevin had a white girlfriend. He was married but he had a white girlfriend. Yeah. I see. Yeah.

LF: [25:20](#) How have you filled your time since retiring in 1993?

SG: [25:26](#) Well, uh, I uh, now my wife's been gone four years now. Deanna moved down here. She lived up in the Terrace and she moved in down here. And her daughter got two little girls and is expecting a third one. So that's key because if she hadn't moved down here, I probably been under the table drunk all the time or something. Ha ha. She comes down. Well she stays here and I didn't ask her, I do my best to help her with her kids, but she won't let me be careful because the oldest only three and a half and the youngest one is 14 months or something like that.

LF: [26:26](#) Yeah. Hard age to keep up with, they are awfully active at that point. And how long have you been in this house?

SG: [26:33](#) We moved in here and I think right about the time President Kennedy was assassinated, so,

LF: so this has been home for more than 40 years.

SG: [26:58](#) Yes. My wife's been gone for four years and I got a friend who, who goes to Pilgrim. Who's a Deacon, not a police officer, worked at Chrysler as a matter of fact, but he's slipping into dementia, you know. And uh, and I told Deanna that, I said, Boy, I said, I thank the good Lord every night I said, before I go to bed, I say my prayers. I said, because I, I said like those [grand], I could see them and understand what they are saying, have a good time with them and they're healthy. And I said, this guy who's a deacon with me, he's, he's getting further and further out in left field, you know, and I, and I've known him and I've known him. I've known him ever since West High School. And his dementia is getting worse and my daughter in Atlanta always calls him on the phone and she wants me to. And he's got five kids, you know.

SG: [28:11](#) And uh, and uh, I think, I don't know if I told you about my dad. My stepmother told me one time, it was a beautiful day in the summertime and they had a stump out in their yard, like that. And she said, Where's Gaynor? Because she always called my dad Gaynor, his name is Isaac. Everybody, his name is Isaiah and everybody called him Ike. But he's is sitting out on this stump. And she goes out there and he'd sit in the sunshine with his



eyes closed and he got his 3:57 magnum in his lap. This is after he's retired and she doesn't know what to do.

SG: [29:05](#) So she calls us Chicago headquarters and gets hold of a couple of guys that know him. And she said, make sure you get somebody who knows him and they come by and, and I guess they were stroking the joking and laughing and stuff for about three hours, you know, with him. I didn't want her to guy. Just took the gun and he never realized that it was even gone, you know, and uh, what his dementia and he is and sometimes he doesn't even know what time it is, you know? Yeah. I said the Lord has blessed me because I know what time it is. And, and this guy that goes to our church, is a deacon with me because he and I, as a matter of fact, when my dad, uh, my dad was a Chicago, he never got out of patrol. He was a patrol officer the whole time, but he, he used to be the house detective for the, uh, one of them black hotels, house detective and when Billy Williams when he was a rookie for the Cubs.

SG: [30:29](#) He was a lefthander and he was looking for somebody. "Anybody here left-handed golf clubs?" My Dad was and, uh, Billy was a rookie and at that time the black players would stay in the Southern Hotel. That was in moment, which then the Southern Hotel. And he found out, the Billy found out my dad was a lefthander. We went to, we seen a lot of Cubs games. And Billy been by here with his wife and kids, you know, and uh, my son Rodney, that was his bedroom back there and he had a picture of Ernie Banks there and, and uh, when the Cubs came to town to play basketball yet, or they had Ernie banks and Billy Williams and so they'd come by here after the basketball games at Boylan and Ferguson Jenkins who pitched for the Cubs. He, he goes in and he sees a picture of Ernie Banks said, whose room is this?

SG: [31:44](#) And my son, Rodney said, it's my room. He said, well, you know, I won the Cy Young award for pitching. I don't even see my picture in here. And my son goes [well, mmm, bbb, indecipherable]. but this guy from the church here, we'd go in to see the Cubs play. When the Dodgers were still in Brooklyn and we met, we actually met Jackie Robinson, down on the fields in those days, you could go down and watch and watch batting practice, you know. And uh, we been in accidents being seen and met him, met him here in town too because he spoke once at Booker for a banquet.

LF: Cool. Have we missed any other stories about your time on the force that we should record?

SG: [00:33](#) Let me think.

LF: We've covered a lot of ground.

SG: I think one of the reasons I have had a really hard problem, typically it is because I, because I remember some of the meetings, we'd have a staff meeting and the chief Peterson said "Well, what do you think, Sam? You haven't said anything, you know." At a lot of the meetings and stuff like that, I'd just kind of keep, you know, mum. And, cause I know, some of it, it's, it's pretty easy to start a squabble and even at our church when it's just us deacons there, you know, I'll just sit there and everybody be squabbling and stuff and just go ahead and do it. I think maybe my, maybe it's my, my disposition or something, but I, I don't, I don't let my mouth get me in anything I could, I can't handle.

SG: [01:54](#) And I think that's part of the problem with some of the black officers, because the thing that, one of the things that really bothers me now is these officers that wind up getting shot and killed in a traffic stop and, and I made more traffic stops than I've done anything else, you know, and you know, and here's the guy who doesn't even have a weapon, you know, and, and I think the problem is the lack of respect that the officer had, that the citizen has for the officer because I don't know if you've noticed that even some of the celebrities, the way they teach their children, how to have contact with the police and um, because it doesn't make any sense to me to, to wind up getting into a shoot out and killing a police officer, killing a citizen at a traffic stop. And in all in all he's done is shooting his mouth off, you know, like the same thing goes with cops and shoots his mouth off of that. I think that's where you get to hard heads together, like that, right? Then, you know, and, and, uh, well look at the deal has happened in Elgin, know this yesterday, well yesterday.

SG: [03:40](#) And so that lady had a knife and so, so she had a knife. So I mean, you know, because I don't, I don't think that they've taken enough time with, with, with these people that are interested in a traffic stop because yeah, I had her. I had had one problem in a traffic stop. Nobody got hurt, nobody got hurt. Course his car window got broke up. He broke out his car window. But uh, it, it's, it seems like that's a button, you want to see some activity. Just try to make a traffic stop because they're still talking about Cox because how the hell did he ever get shot and killed. Well he didn't get, uh, how did he get when he got killed, he got hurt by the car. The car killed him.

LF: How did he ever get tangled up and dragged down the block?

LF: [05:05](#) Yeah.

SG: [05:19](#) But there had to be some interaction, verbal and otherwise between him and, him and what's-his-name, Patterson.

LF: Oh, at the end of it, both of them had lost their lives for no apparent reason.

LF: [05:34](#) It's snowing heavily. Yeah. Well this has been terrific. I appreciate your willingness to spend a whole afternoon with me and wander all up and down memory lane.

SG: My daughter got these out. I didn't tell her. I told her, I asked her about that thing there.

LF: The statue with your plaque for your service and then on your badges, your father's,

SG: See that one, that one, if you look at the back of the star, it's got my dad's eight, nine, five, four would be his badge number.

LF: [06:37](#) Yeah.