

Arthur Capper Public Housing Oral History Project

Oral History #6

Interviewee: Sherman Mills

Interviewer: Johanna Bockman

Date: March 5, 2013

Location: Southeast Public Library meeting room

Length: 57 minutes, 13 seconds

Abstract: Mr. Sherman Mills was born on February 9, 1956. His family lived at 118 North Carolina Ave, SE. His family included his parents, two brothers, and one sister. His family then moved to the Ellen Wilson public housing project at 624 I St, SE. The construction of the SE freeway led to the demolition of at least six buildings at Ellen Wilson. His family was moved to Arthur Capper, specifically to 1009 3rd St, SE, the corner house at 3rd and K St, SE. He was about 11 or 12 years old. He attended Lennox Elementary, Randall Junior High, and Western Senior High. Around 1976 or 1977, when he was about 20 years old, he and his family moved out of Arthur Capper. He had his first job, at Howard University. They moved to Oxford Manor in Anacostia. Later, he and Leon Pullem had their own apartment in the same complex. His sister Karen became the pastor of the community church, St. Paul's AUMP Church on 4th and I St, SE. In the oral history, Mr. Mills talks much about sports and about music. He later became a DJ.

Field Notes: The interview took place in the downstairs meeting room at the Southeast Public Library near Eastern Market Metro.

Time Index:

00:16 Location Questions: Where did he live in Arthur Capper? Where did he live before? When did he move out? Why?

03:32 1009 3rd St, SE (in Arthur Capper) and the ambiance of the area.

03:58 Sports at the Arthur Capper Recreation Center and St. Peter's Church. He played basketball and football. Their biggest competition was the Woodland Raiders, from the Woodland Rec Center. At the Arthur Capper Rec Center: Walter Lancaster, referee and coach, and even lined the fields; Gene Smith, football coach; Marvin Grove, employee at Rec Center; Ann Cooke, the director of the Rec Center; Mickie, the coach of women's sports.

08:41 What it was like at the Arthur Capper Rec Center. Sports and concerts. Great dancers: Leon Pullem and Little Beats.

13:02 A day that he remembered most at Arthur Capper: the 1968 riots.

14:40 Interior courts within Arthur Capper, where they could play basketball and park cars.

15:34 Corner Store owned by Mr. Goodman. After the riots, Joe Reed took over the store. Joe Reed had been the delivery person for Rock Creek Sodas.

17:12 Most fond memories: around 10pm almost every night, men would get together to sing doo-wop in front of the Corner Store. Some of the singers included Leon Lilly, John Lily, Sonny Clark, his next-door neighbor Derek, Lorenzo Ross, his brother James Mills, David Young, and Jackie Boy.

19:48 Leon Lilly, Larry Anderson, William DeVaughn, who made “Diamond in the Back”:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myCDlel_Ek8

21:00 Arthur Capper Rec Center talent shows.

21:56 What made Arthur Capper different than other places? Annual reunion on 4th of July. Unity. “We were all family.” They were neighborly.

22:56 Were there any significant changes over time at Arthur Capper? Everyone regularly went back to Arthur Capper, and they learned that there were going to be some “renovations” there and people had to move out. Vivian Williams lived near him and was very active in the neighborhood, including with Neighborhood Watch. In the early 1990s, crack cocaine brought more crime to the area. When crime was happening, Neighborhood Watch would call the police.

28:08 Across the United States, life often became more difficult in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in cities. Was life more difficult for those at Arthur Capper? His parents worked. His parent just could not afford to further their education.

29:40 He was bused to Western Senior High School, now Duke Ellington Senior High, in Georgetown and began to like rock music. He used to play music out his window and later became a DJ.

30:28 Schools, Randall swimming pool, Turkey Town.

33:12 Studying at Western Senior High. Students from all over town and around the world. Favorite teachers: Mr. Walker and Mr. Butler who taught shop courses at Randall Junior High. Also, Mr. Freezell, who taught shoe repair.

36:56 Who he remembered most at Arthur Capper? His friends: Kenneth Keels (Yates), Roland Keels, Roosevelt Jewell (Tookie), Lawrence Rich, Wayne Robinson.

38:04 “Chain Court” – a favorite basketball court. Greg Standbach and Keith Hawkins were the mayors of the court. Keith Hawkins kept the basketball. Leon Lilly was there. Fat Bob sat up in the window and was the referee. Girls played four corners in the alley or kickball.

39:48 Music and DJ-ing.

40:30 Why did his mother decide to move from Arthur Capper? His father passed in 1976. His mother remarried, and they wanted to leave Arthur Capper.

41:06 St. Paul AUMP Church.

41:58 Roller skating at Kalorama Road Skating Rink.

43:12 *Evening Star* paper route around the Southeast police station. Later delivered the *Post*.

46:08 Parents went to PTA meetings, not to tenant council meetings. Friendship House.

47:18 Memorable parties. Parties at Lawrence Rich's house. Food coop run by Ms. Jewell. Drug rehab center called The Shack had an indoor basketball court that they could use.

49:06 Closing of Arthur Capper. The Marines took over 501 K St., SE, the basketball court, and most of the area with the hi-rise apartment buildings. He had been told that the Marines originally owned that property. [JB: I am pretty certain that the housing authority owned the property.] He thought, "Wow, where are they going to place all these people?... Cause they were doing that just about everywhere now. Closing down projects and communities... Some people were saying that they were going to move them to Baltimore...I was kind of hurt." Why? "That's my community." We're still with the unity. "We can be found.": Garfield Park every Friday pitching horseshoes and, if it is cold, at the bowling alley on Silver Hill Road (Parkland Bowl).

53:46 His work as an organizer of the Arthur Capper community.

54:58 Hope for the future of the Arthur Capper community?

56: 32 His general views of Arthur Capper.