

Interviewee: Clarence Benton
Interviewer: William Mansfield
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William Mansfield: OK. As I told you, Mr. Benton, we're doing a research, an exhibit on tourism in western North Carolina, and the impact of tourism on people in western North Carolina, and I'm researching the impact of tourism on African Americans in western North Carolina. I've been interviewing people who worked at Grove Park, Boyce Layton, Sam Quick, I've talked to Harry Hardy briefly.

Clarence Benton: Henry Hardy.

WM: Henry Hardy, thank you. And I'm just trying to tell the story of people who worked in the hotels, cause a lot of people that come to the resort, you know, their luggage is carried in, their tables are waited on, their rooms are cleaned, but they don't give that any thought. I want to make sure people understand the work that is involved in this and particularly the waiters and the bellman, the art that is involved in that, because what I've read, before integration and Civil Rights black people were working in places they couldn't eat. They were carrying golf clubs in places where they couldn't play golf.

CB: True.

WM: And yet they performed their jobs, and performed them well. So, I'd just like to try and present that story.

CB: Well, the start, the first thing you have to remember is that the black man, or Afro-American was not as dumb as people try to portray him, a lot of times. We had to have certain skills, and a lot of these skills were not written. So, they were taught by the older people and passed down. But there's an art to waiting tables, there's an art to being a bellman, there's an art to knowing how to stroke people, because they had to read them, and stroke them in order to make tips. And of course, the tips was the backbone of your salary. Most places, like when I worked at Battery Park, I think I started like 50 cents an hour, plus tips. So, you had to know how to make your tips. A man, you want to take care of the wife and kids, make sure they have everything they wanted. If it was a group of women, then you had to figure out which one was the head woman, or head person in that group, and make sure you stroked her well. So, it's an art to it. It's not just puttin' down food, pickin' up food.

WM: Well, that's what I've been led to believe. And you say that there were other skills that you learned from-

CB: From the older waiters.

WM: Could you tell me about those?

CB: Sure. They taught you how to properly address a table, how to set a table, how to serve the food itself, how to make it more appealing, if it didn't come out of the kitchen exactly right, you knew how to shift things around and make it pretty-looking. I guess the right word would be appetizing. And then you had to serve it in a certain order.

WM: OK. Well, what, could you tell me what they taught you, how to address the table, how to set the table, could you tell me a little bit more about that?

CB: As soon as some people approach what was then your station, which is a certain number of tables in an area that you were assigned to, if there was a lady in the group, you rushed to pull the chair. Courtesy. If the man remained standing, you pulled his chair. If there were children, you made sure they have a booster seat, or whatever they needed, get them comfortable. Then you rush to get 'em their "pre" stuff. The water, the coffee, the crackers, the butter, all this stuff, make sure you got it down fast before you took their orders. Then you had to remember who ordered what where. So, you had to develop a system.

WM: Did you develop a system?

CB: Of course, I always started with the head and go around to my right. That way I usually got the husband, and the wife, and the kids were usually sittin' on the far left, but at that same table. But you had to be able to read all that stuff. It's not written, there are no books. So, the older waiters taught the younger waiters the skills. And then you took it from there with your common manners, and dressed it up to make you some tips.

WM: You say dressed it up, could you explain that?

CB: Well, if you're pulling a chair, you do it gracefully, and you gotta smile, even though you might be sick as a dog, hungover or whatever. You had to stilt go along with the flow. So to dress it up, you just simply do those things that you knew women liked, or something that would appeal to the man. But it's using your basic manners.

WM: What would be an example of something that would appeal to the men?

CB: The manner in which you handled his wife. Make sure she's sitting comfortably, you pulled the chair for her, make sure she had everything she wanted.

WM: Well, it might seem silly, me asking you these questions, but these are things, like I said, people see, but they take for granted and they don't understand the strategy-

CB: It was always a strategy. You had to have one to make the better tips, which meant you had to read your party. When I say read your party, I mean you understood who the head of the party was, who his date, or wife, is, and where you're gonna sit her, if there were children;

you sat them appropriately. Just common little things that people take for granted is the art of waiting tables.

WM: Well, um, was there certain mental attitude you had to adopt?

CB: You had to maintain an attitude, a positive, if you wanted to make some tips. Who's gonna tip you if you're an old grouch? Or act like you hate to wait on them? I waited on some people I definitely didn't like, but they didn't know it. They happened to have been from Mississippi. But you just have to learn how to deal with people.

WM: Well, now when did you start?

CB: Ooh. '55, '56.

WM: And where did you start?

CB: I started at Battery Park with my older brother. Left Battery Park and went to Biltmore Forest with another brother. Then I ended up at Grove Park with another brother.

WM: So, you had three other brothers?

CB: I had four.

WM: Uh-huh.

CB: Three were waiters and cooks. I mean three were waiters and one was a cook.

WM: OK. And were they the ones that taught you the most or were there others?

CB: Oh, sure. All those you named taught us. Henry Hardy, Sam Quick. All of them were in the group. Boyce Layton was one of the best bartenders around.

WM: You say they taught you. Did they like, take you aside, and say look, this is what you've got to do, or did they teach by example?

CB: By example- you watched. And they said do you understand that, and I said, yea, I saw what you did. They said okay. But you didn't write nothing down or he might call you to the side and show you what you did wrong. But you wasn't scolded for it.

WM: I was just gonna ask if you've ever, you know, made mistakes?

CB: Of course, you do. But they were always there to correct you, or show you, hey, you're supposed to do it this way. One thing I never did learn was "frenching". I couldn't get my fingers to, you had a fork and a knife in one hand and you're "frenching", you're dipping up everything with that fork and knife. And it's a special skill, and I never learned it. So, I always had to go

back to the old-fashioned way and get a big spoon and dip it up. But it's more impressive if you "French." Of course, a lot of those things you didn't pick up, but you didn't get crucified for it, you just didn't do it.

WM: Well like if you were to "french" the food, did that improve your tip?

CB: Possibly. It might dazzle some. Remember, waiting tables is again like advertising, I say, 90% bull. But you have to read your party, know your party in order to serve them.

WM: Well, if some people come in and you're gonna wait on them, can you look at them and say well, if I play my cards right I can get a good tip here, or there's no way on earth these people are gonna give me anything more than a dime?

CB: Usually you could tell, Usually you can tell whose gonna tip and whose not. But I don't know what criteria, it's just a mental thing.

WM: Well, just think for a minute about-

CB: Most of the people that tipped the most usually came in very jovial, very happy, very pleasant. If they're happy to start with, it's not much to please them. But you get somebody come in gripin', cussin', boy this, boy that, you usually can figure what you're gonna do. And then around Asheville you knew who the cheapskates were. [inaudible].

WM: Well, did you have to put up with a lot of abuse, I don't know what other word to use for it?

CB: It was abuse, but it was part of the job, went along with the job. Man, gets too high, has too many drinks, he might get a little abusive, call you boy or something, but usually the more intelligent folks are there, so you didn't have a whole lot of that. They got drunk, they might be cussin' loud, or something, you had to tell them. But usually the maitre' d' took care of that, so you didn't have no, whole lot of problems with that. They liked to use the "n" word a lot. You just didn't take it.

WM: What, they'd use it in addressing you?

CB: Yea.

WM: See that's what amazes me, that you could put up with that kind of stuff.

CB: You had to do your job, so you took what you had to take. We had ways of getting back at them which I can't discuss.

WM: Oh, man. How about if I turn the tape recorder off?

CB: I can't discuss it.

WM: Alright. Ok. Well, you started about 1955, about how old were you?

CB: 10, 12.

WM: Did you start out waiting or busing tables?

CB: Busboy, caddying, and gradually moved up to waiter. Cause when I first started I didn't know nothing. My brother took me to work with him one day as a busboy, and in two or three weeks he moved me up to a waiter.

WM: You were waiting tables-

CB: Very young. Very Young, and followed me all the way through college. I ended up working for one of the hardest people in town. J .O. Buchanan and Alfred Buchanan, I don't know if you've heard of them. They used to have Buck's Restaurant. Very hard men, but good men, they took care of you. When I first went there I was scared to death, cause every word Alfred would say was g.d. this, m.f. that, s.o.b. this. Drop a plate, he'd cuss you out, threaten to take money out of your paycheck and all that crap. And when I left there, I was a senior in college, and they gave me almost a thousand dollars. Alfred gave me five hundred, then Buck came along and gave me five hundred. As long as I was going to school, they kept me supplied with money. But then I had to pay for that, because every time I came home for a rest, I had to go to work. He would send and get me. As soon as he knew I was home, he would send and get me. I had to go to work.

WM: Tell me about what you did, I guess if you could start off and tell me about bussing tables.

CB: That's easy. You just, that required a system that you made up yourself. Most of the time you got all your glasses off the table first. By the time, you get around to that though you've already cleared off all the plates and salad plates, and it's gone. See the salad plates were gone before you served before the main course. So, you were constantly cleaning that table.

WM: Well did you like, come get the plates while they were still eating, like they're finished with salad and you cruise by and get them?

CB: Pick up the salad. Usually there was a sign, they'd leave the fork in the plate when they were through, and you'd go pick it up. So, by the time you got around to the main course, all the salad stuff was gone, or you had to go back and get some more beverage, coffee, tea, milk, whatever. You do that while you're waiting on the main course. When you serve the main course, I went around in a circle, putting down plates, putting down bread and butter, whatever you needed. But it was a system to keeping the table clean. And the more you cleaned the table, sometimes the more tip you got. Somebody drop a crumb, get you a napkin, spruce it up.

WM: Ok. What time of day did you start?

CB: Oh, it varied. Sometimes we had to be there at six, seven o'clock in the morning, especially at Grove Park. You might work breakfast, you might work lunch and dinner. So, if you worked

breakfast, it's like 6:00-10:00. Then you got an hour, maybe an hour and a half between breakfast and lunch. Then lunch is usually over by 2:00. Take a break, come back at 4:30, 5:00, serve dinner. You know, that wasn't every day, but mostly every day.

WM: So, you had a uniform that you wore, standard dress?

CB: Yea. They always provided you with a jacket, you had to have your bow tie and black pants, white shirt. But they always provided with the little jackets.

WM: Well, let's see, I think it was Mr. Layton who was telling me about the inspection, you all had to stand for inspection every morning?

CB: They'd check you out, make sure your uniform was clean, make sure you didn't smell, that kinda stuff, because you were gonna be around people all day, and they wanted you looking good. And a lot of times the first impression got you a better tip than most, if you were clean and neat, it might count for something, you never know. Just depends on who you might happen to be waiting on. So, uniform attire was pretty important. They didn't like you sloppy, and dirty, smelly. So, well most people take baths anyway, but you know that old saying that all black folks stink.

WM: Well, [inaudible] you talked about how you had your stations. Could you tell me a little about the organization of the restaurant because I mean, Mr. Layton said they had head waiters and captains and bread and butter boys and different cooks in the kitchen that were handling different parts of the meal.

CB: Well, you started off, the head waiter assigned you a station. It may be in the front, it may be in the middle, it may be in the back, whenever he figured the crowd was gonna be.

WM: Did you consistently work one area?

CB: No, you moved around. You know, if you could handle four tables, he'd give you four tables. Some of the guys could handle eight tables, he'd give them eight tables. Or if we were short staffed, everybody pitched in and done what had to be done. We worked together back then a lot better than we do now.

WM: Ok, so then when he assigned you-

CB: Your station.

WM: Ok, some people once in, and he-

CB: Assigned them to your area or one of the other areas. But he had an organization, he knew everybody had to have a turn, so he usually started with number one and went all the way around the room, and then if more people came in, your other tables started filling in. But he had a system.

WM: Ok, well, could you walk me through when somebody comes in the restaurant, you know they walk in the door, what happens?

CB: You greet them. Where would you like to sit, sunset terrace, decide which area they wanted to sit in. Whoever was up in that area, you take them to that table- "Clarence, you got a party of four", "Joe, you got a party of five". And you take over from that point.

WM: Ok. So, what happens when you take over?

CB: You get them seated, get them comfortable, get their water, or whatever else they may want to drink. And then come back and take their order. Take their order, usually wanted a salad- "What kind of dressing would you like sir?", "What kind of dressing would you like ma'am?" Go from there on to getting the salads, while you're fixing their salads, you put their main course order in, so by the time they finish their salad, possibly their main course is up.

WM: Ok. Mr. Quick, I mean Mr. Layton said, talked about going back to the different cooks, cause I didn't understand that.

CB: Well, you had a seafood cook, you had a steak cook, you had a vegetable cook. So you let them know what you needed, and what would go with it. Steak, potato, green beans. Then the steak man would throw your steak on, when your steak come up, he'd dip up your green beans.

WM: And the vegetable man would take care of your vegetables? And, now, were these orders all carried in your head, or did they-

CB: We wrote them down if we needed to. You had some of the older waiters who remembered everything, didn't have to write nothing down. And when they filled out the check, they remembered everything. You know any time you did that was when you got ready to write the check out, you had to go back and make sure you charged for everything you were supposed to charge for. Unless you were putting something in your pocket, then you just didn't charge for one order. And you always did it in pencil so you could erase it.

WM: Well, now, ok, why-

CB: Ah, that's another trade secret.

WM: Trade secret? You sure you don't want to share those, not even off the record?

CB: That's one we can't give away.

WM: Alright. Well, so the waiters, Mr. Layton and Mr. Quick both told me about the traveling waiters.

CB: Yea. You had a certain group up here that used to go to Florida every year, my brother was with. They'd go down to, like, right after Christmas I believe or right before Christmas and stay til March. They'd go down to Key West, places like that and wait tables. See, Jack Tarr used to own the hotel here. He also has a hotel in Key West and probably other places, and they would travel from one hotel to the other during the season. See, when our season was out here, there were no jobs, in January and February. You starved. Around Asheville cause there was no jobs. All the restaurants laid off, unless you were lucky enough to be in a factory or a hospital where you're living wasn't strictly related to tourism. But if you was in the service industry, January, February, and part of March, you starved cause there was no jobs. Then March, Grove Park opens back up, everybody goes back to work. The few that were lucky enough to be permanent employees of Biltmore Forest, of course, worked year-round. But most of the places just closed up.

WM: I thought you said that tourist industry kinda held black people back?

CB: Yea. Cause that's all we could do. The only real jobs around here then were waiting tables, busboy, something related to the restaurant. Or teaching, medicine or law. And you know about how many black lawyers we had around here. There were two or three black doctors. We have several, several black teachers that were real good. I went to an all-black school. They were very good and we learned a lot. Maybe not in the books, but what they taught us otherwise, you can still remember.

WM: How was working in in the, how was waiting tables, working hotels, how would you say was that viewed by the black community?

CB: It was a job. You had to eat. My brothers, for example, had to take care of us until we were old enough to start helping out too. Then once we got a certain age, we did the same thing they did, we went to work. Fortunately for me they insisted that I stay in school. My younger brother and I well, there's one in between, I'm the baby and there's one right over me, they made sure we stayed in school. But we worked all the time. We would caddy, or we would serve parties, or and I think, overall it just made us grow up fast, maybe too fast. But it made you grow up. And you learned that a dollar was really a dollar. Cause then you had to buy your own clothes, help mama, or daddy.

WM: You want to take that call? But anyhow tell me a little bit about working as a caddy.

CB: That was the golf course, where we couldn't play of course. But you carried a bag eighteen holes, I think was like \$2.50. Every now and then you got someone who would give you three dollars. You carried double it was \$5.00, \$4.50, they give you five, \$5.50. Back then though that was a lot of money. Sugar was like 10 cents for a five-pound bag. So, five or six dollars was a lot of money. But you could do that every day. Especially in the spring and summer. That's how I got to know a lot of people that I've known all my life. Bob Swain, John Giezentanner, J.C. Hyatt, all of them played in the golf course where I caddied. And I remembered a lot of those became friends later on in life.

WM: Was caddying, that was seasonal about like working at a hotel?

CB: Same as hotels. You couldn't play golf January or February. Well, really then you couldn't play golf November to March, unless you was cold-natured person. We used to get snow on the ground in November, it'd still be there in March.

WM: Well, was there much difference between, I mean, I know it's obviously different job, but you're still dealing with-

CB: Servitude.

WM: Right. So, is there much difference between caddying and waiting tables?

CB: Yea. It's different skills. Caddying, you had to watch the ball, know where the ball is. Sometimes you had to tell the guy which club to use to get to the next hole, to the green as they say. But you had to watch the ball more than anything, you gotta know where your man's ball is, or you don't know where to go. And most of the time they're following you. So if he hits one in the woods, you got to go in the woods and hunt it. A lot of times you found some crawly friends, but you still had to go look for the ball. Then you found it, you stood there til he showed up. But a lot of times they wanted help reading the greens or knowing how to putt. So, you had to know how to read the greens. Most of us could play golf at 10, 11 years old, but we had nowhere to play. Except Muni. I think Biltmore Forest used to let the help play on Mondays. They could go play. I think that's right. But other than that, you went to Muni. And then I think it was Monday or Tuesday you could play out there.

WM: I think, like you said, back then there were certain days black people could play golf, rest of the time it's for white people.

CB: Yea. Back then I think you might have had 20 blacks to play regularly. Jessie Ray, Doctor Butler, Boyce played, probably some of the others I don't even remember.

WM: I think Sam Quick played, Mr. Hardy.

CB: Yea, Henry Hardy played. But you had a good little group that played. Then they traveled where they could. But now you, all, every black in town plays that golf like me. I'm still a Saturday duffer.

WM: Mr. Quick told me about a waiter's club, sort of an organization for people that worked in the hotels. Do you recollect any?

CB: That was about over when I came along. But they used to get together Mondays I believe and go somewhere and party all day. Bought liquor and somebody fixed some food. And they just partied all day. That was a waiter's day. But that was about over when I came along. They used to sit at the old Delcado and hang out in there all day. See when I came along, my generation, it took four of us to get one pint, and it wasn't but \$2.15, Canada Dry. But those

were the good old days. I still remember them fondly. And it was as I said, it made us grow up early.

WM: You talked about working with people who were abusive, and working in a racist atmosphere. I mean, I know you say it's just a job, but how do you-

CB: You just learn to cope, and try to maintain your composure. If it got too out of hand, you could always call the maitre'd' in or somebody else in, or refuse to wait on them, and then they'd sit there and look ignorant. But you had your ways you could get out of it. It never got really, really, very, very bad, except the

name calling. And it was an ignorant person that did that, so you knew that. So you went back and laughed at him. A lot of times they'd do all that raising hell and get up and leave you the biggest tip.

WM: What do you reckon was the biggest tip you ever got?

CB: \$50.00.

WM: \$50.00? Do you remember the details about that?

CB: Yea. I was at Buck's Restaurant and this family came in from Hawaii, and it was a man, and wife, and four children, I believe, plus the grandparents. And I waited on them cause I was the only one allowed to wait tables at Buck's. And he had a private dining room in the back, so he let me work that as my station if they got too full downstairs. And I waited on the guy, gave the kids ice cream, and more of this and more of that, stroked them really good. He got up and left me a fifty-dollar bill. But I took care of the kids and took care of the ladies, the kids wanted more ice cream, I'd go and get 'em more ice cream, you know you wasn't supposed to give them but a scoop. But you know, they wanted some more, you go get 'em some more. And if they wanted more green beans, or more potatoes, you go get it, French fries, whatever. That was stroking them. So, I took care of them very well and I guess he appreciated it. He left me a fifty-dollar bill.

WM: Did you ever see people come to the hotel, was it like you'd see the same people day after day for the same two weeks?

CB: A lot of times they requested a special waiter. One they were impressed with or one that they liked. And you'd take care of them the whole time they're there. And that happened quite frequently.

WM: Would those folks tip after every meal or leave a great big tip the last time?

CB: They might do it either way. But they'd always leave something on the table. But then when they got ready to go, they'd give you a big tip. But if you had ten tables that whole day, and you picked up two or three dollars per table, people thought we was hollerin' yassir, and

being stupid, but we was going home with forty, fifty dollars a day, that's the reason we can't get no jobs now. Everybody found out that we were making money. Now they're paying what, two dollars an hour or better plus tips. Some places four dollars and hour plus tips. Now you can't find no black waiters.

WM: It's interesting you should say they all thought you were stupid, cause one of my professors at Chapel Hill talked about the notion of what people termed as playing Uncle Tom. He says that was survival skill, they didn't do it cause they wanted to, cause they didn't know any better, but-

CB: That's what you all expected, that's what we gave you. But we survived.

WM: Who was it, I believe it was one of Mr. Hardy's grandchildren, sayin it was just a, it was big con game, it was just a joke cause the waiters would be very servile, but then they would, like I said, get the big tips.

CB: So, you said yassir, nosir. You knew better than that.

WM: Did you really change the language that way?

CB: Changed whatever you needed to change to make some money. Cause the bottom line remember is to make some money. And again, that's why we can't get no jobs now. See blacks used to be predominantly in the service industry. Everywhere you go there were black waiters. Now 95% of all the staffs are all white, cause they realized what we were doing, acting stupid and going home rich. Man had a Cadillac, he didn't drive it to work, parked it up on the hill somewhere. But it was his Cadillac, off of waiting tables. A lot of kids went through college behind somebody waiting tables. It was always good money. And if you did the work, you got some good money. It wasn't nothing for a bartender to make two or three hundred dollars a night, I mean a week, back then, but nobody knew it cause he knew how to keep the jar empty, or leave a little bit in there so you wouldn't see what he was making. So, it was a lot of skill involved. But we acted stupid, but we knew what we were doing. Even back in the slavery days, we weren't stupid. What you all didn't realize that a lot of those songs we were singing, were not just religious songs. They had messages. Steal away to Jesus, you can't steal away to Jesus, you steal away from that white man slave plantation, get ready to hit the ground rolling. Keep your head on the plow, alright Mary get off your ass and get back to work, here comes the boss. All kind of messages. So, who was really stupid?

WM: Who, I'm, you can't deny that the white people did a lot of mean...

CB: They done a lot of mean things, but in the end, they're the ones that was stupid.

WM: I can't argue with that.

CB: Well history reveals that.

WM: [inaudible]

CB: Get to the real nitty-gritty. You go back and look at some black spirituals and try to figure out what the message was.

WM: I've read and listened to a lot of them, there's a lot of messages.

CB: We had our codes and we knew what our code was but the slave owners didn't. They thought we was singing and rejoicing. But we was sending a message to somebody. So, it ended up, we ended up being pretty smart cause we could figure out how to do that. The black man should have a very proud history, but a lot of it was never written anywhere. Then lately, the 1900's or so they started recording some of it. They never did get all of it.

WM: That's one of my regrets.

CB: A lot of good stuff was lost forever.

WM: Who was it that said, I think it was Alex Hailey, he said every time an old person dies, it's like a library is burning down, cause there's so much unwritten knowledge-

CB: That that person has. Like we just got a lady out here in west Asheville that just turned 102 I believe. Now imagine what she's got in her head.

WM: Has she still got her sense?

CB: Relatively so.

WM: I know a gentleman that's 104 years old, and is sharp as a tack for a few minutes, and then he'll wave out, and get kinda fuzzy.

CB: History is there, and I always tell people there's only been two free people in America, although we all say we're free, it's never been. The only people that are free here are white man and the black woman, who was also a very smart cookie. She carried the race as best as she could, but if she wanted a certain field hand not to work, he didn't work, cause she was in with the master, and the master wanted took down some nights, so he kept her happy. The wife was on a pedestal, and if she fell off that pedestal he killed her. So, who was really free?

WM: All I can tell you is that like many people, [inaudible] all enslaved by the system in one way or another.

CB: Yea.

WM: But that gets back to why I'm out talking to folks like you, cause if you read the travel brochures and stuff, there's a lot of history to tourism, I'd say 95% is unwritten about.

CB: No. Because the blacks here in Asheville survived off of tourism for a good number of years because simply there were no other jobs. The few that managed to go away and get a better education came back as our teachers, lawyers, Dailey, Reuben Dailey I think was the first black lawyer. I don't know, I think Dr. Miller was the first black doctor.

WM: Didn't he work as a Pullman porter for a time, I believe?

CB: I don't know.

WM: There's a study of black people in western North Carolina and that was one of the few that I saw and I believe he talked about working as a Pullman porter on the Canadian railroad.

CB: He might have while he was getting his medical training because I'm sure he had to do something to support himself. But he ended up being a doctor and, in my day there was Dailey and Epps, Harold Epps was a brain, powerful black lawyer but alcoholic. Then Dailey died, what, four or five years ago, maybe longer. I guess the oldest practicing physician we have now is Dr. Hope, John Hope. Yea, I think he's older than Michaels. But those two families had several doctors come out. Black architects, if you look at Mt. Zion, Hawkins Chapel, St. James right here, if you look at them closely they're all very similar cause they were built by the same architect. So, we got a powerful history around here. My class has the distinction of being the first class to ever lead a demonstration here. That was in 1960. We marched a couple of days and everything swung open, we thought, but you know how that goes.

WM: Yea. They go through the motions but they don't, and it's still that way.

CB: It's still... you're controlled by somebody, that's the reason I'm glad I'm free. I don't make lot of money, a lot of times I go home broke, but I'm free cause I don't have no bosses, when I lock the doors, it's locked.

WM: That's gotta be satisfying.

CB: When my children need me, I can jump up and go to them. Whatever I need to do I can do it because I don't have to ask nobody. So, I love that part of the business. And I enjoy meeting people. Like I just got through talking to Harvey Gantt face to face. You know and I meet all of them, Governor Hunt all of 'em I've met, talk to 'em just like we're talking.

WM: Let's get back to the hotels, you said there was the Battery Park, what were the different hotels?

CB: You had Battery Park, George Vanderbilt, Grove Park, Biltmore Forest, were the I guess higher echelon type places. Then of course you had all the stuff on Tunnel Road.

WM: All the stuff on Tunnel Road? And that was?

CB: But they didn't hire waiters at those. There were restaurants, but the most blacks there were

in the kitchen, dishwashers, busboys. But those places had waiters. And that's where all of us worked.

WM: Was there a kinda like, if you were gonna work, would you rather work for the Battery or the Vanderbilt?

CB: I don't know. All of them had their good points and all of them had their drawbacks.

WM: Could you tell me a little about their good points and drawbacks of different places, just to get some sort of comparison between the different establishments?

CB: Well, Grove Park required a lot of time, and you had to get a, a lot of times you had to find a ride cause it was so far out. Battery Park was convenient because it was right downtown and you could walk. Biltmore Forest, you had to always pay a ride. Most of the people you worked with were nice, pleasant, easy to get along with, as long as you did your job. The only one I guess; the way places were laid out may have caused you some problems. Like the kitchen from Grove Park was about, oh, maybe from here to the end of the hall, you had to go. Battery park had all of it's on one level with the swinging doors. Biltmore Forest had one little door that you'd go in to get to the kitchen, right off the dining room, it's not that far. And then you served a lot out on the terrace. Biltmore Forest had a terrace before Grove Park opened, but you know, Biltmore Forest was limited to Biltmore Forest people. Grove Park was a general populace. I don't know which I'd say was the best cause all of them was just a job. You worked where you could work, you didn't worry about it. As long as you had transportation and could get there, then you made your money after you got there. Of course, Grove Park was the biggest, always has been the largest, and had more type, different types of jobs, waiters, bellboys, what do you call them at the door, parking attendants. So, there was more of a variety of jobs at the Grove Park. And you had to have your banquet crews to set up all the tables and take down tables, and that kind of stuff. They called it housekeeping. But there was a variety of jobs besides waiting tables.

WM: Well, what were some of the other jobs?

CB: That's the ones I just named. And that was at Grove Park, because they needed all those people, plus the chefs, plus the bakers. So, you could find a job, usually you could go out to the Grove Park today and be working tomorrow. Cause they always needed help, or more help. Just depended on how many conventions they had booked. So, you always met some [inaudible] people. Some of the top people in the country used to come right here to Grove Park. But they was so quiet you didn't know they were here. But as far as the best, I just don't know.

WM: Well, but like, for people that would be staying there, was there a difference in that, like would you get a more tourist group people at Grove Park or at the Battery, or was it pretty much the same?

CB: Generally, the same. Cause conventions came in and they came from everywhere, so they

was just people mostly, and every once in a while, there'd be an outstanding name within the group that everybody knew, or maybe a national figure. You just didn't know.

WM: Well, in hearing you talk about the service in the hotels, it seems like the waiters really had more contact with the guests than anyone.

CB: The waiters or room service. Waiters. Cause a lot of times people didn't want to come out of their room for whatever reason, and that's when room service kicked in. But as far as contact one on one it was the waiters, cause everybody else was invisible. They didn't see the cooks, they didn't see housekeeping, they didn't see the maid. So, the only one they really saw was the waiters. And the waiters had to be knowledgeable of the whole entire area, cause you, eventually you were gonna be asked a question- "how do I get here?", "how do I get there?", "what's to see?", "what do you recommend for this?", "what do you recommend for that?". So, you had to be very very knowledgeable, which is another skill you had to have.

WM: Was there any question you got asked over and over again in that department?

CB: No. Usually it was where is the liquor store, or where's another night club, or is there any entertainment in the area for children, which you always recommend Cherokee or something like that. And that was about it.

WM: So, you had to have general knowledge of Asheville, and the attractions in this area?

CB: In the area so you know what to recommend.

WM: And how did you acquire that information?

CB: There was usually pamphlets or something around. Or if you were from Asheville, you knew about Cherokee or Glenville Cabins, cause we all went there as elementary school children. So, you knew the attractions. Now how to get there might be a problem for some to start, but there was always somebody that could answer. And if you didn't know you just got somebody else.

WM: Well, of the people you talked about, the cooks, the housekeeping, the waiters, was that a more desirable position, or less desirable position?

CB: No, I think it was up to the individual. Because mainly people just wanted a job.

SIDE 2

WM: We've been talking for about forty-five minutes so when you get ready to go on, you let me know. But I'm just trying to get the overall, the best overall view of the black man's role in the service industry and how they coped with that and...

CB: We did it and we did it very effectively, and we survived very well. But then again, there

were some skills that had to be learned. Written and unwritten, and some taught by others. But you had to learn 'em to survive.

WM: Did you ever view the traveling waiters as kind of romantic guys, cause they moved all around?

CB: I thought it would be fascinating, because back then I hadn't been nowhere myself. I was too young. But you know, everybody's always enthralled with traveling, you know, seeing a different place or different sights. But I was blessed in college, I got to travel a lot, so it didn't really you know, bother me that much. Plus, a lot of my jobs required travel. And now I just, if I don't fly, I don't really want to go. But then I get [in a u d i b l e] cause I ain't got no car unless I look forward to renting one while I'm away. But that's just the way it is. Back then, when they said they was going to Florida, that was a big thing. That was a real big thing. And very fascinating. As you got older, you got over it. Some of 'em went on, you know some of my friends went on to Florida two or three times, something.

WM: You said you started in '55. When did you get out of it?

CB: When I finished college, '65.

WM: Ok. And in that decade, that you worked, could you see any changes that took place?

CB: Uh, no. Blacks continued to do well up until I left here. I guess '64, '65, we started dwindling in numbers. But for the most part, the only change I saw was that people were getting more comfortable in their various roles, and of course with making more money. But then Uncle Sam was taking more so you really didn't gain that much. Then by the time I was finished college and came back here, there were very few black waiters, very few.

WM: Their place had been taken by white people?

CB: Right.

WM: Is that because white people realized that it was a good job and moved into it?

CB: Um-hmm. Exactly. They saw how we was buying houses and Cadillacs waiting tables, and they wanted to get in on it. I need to make one quick call.