

Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

Derek Mathis Oral History Interview

Konjit Avent, Interviewer

Venice, Illinois, Fire Station and City Hall

October 26, 2016

Konjit Avent (KA): [air conditioning humming] Hi my name is Konjit Avent and I am here interviewing Derek Mathis a resident of Venice, Illinois, and today is October 26th, 2016 and this is for the SIUE oral history project of Madison county. Hi Mr. Derek. How are you?

Derek Mathis (DM): I'm doing fine, how you doing?

KA: So I'm going to ask you a couple of questions...

DM: Alright

KA: ...um about Venice, Madison County. I encourage you to include any stories that you would like to. Tell me how did your family come to Venice, Illinois?

DM: [swivel chair squeaks] Uh, my mother she came from Mississippi at a young age, I think she was 2. My father from E. St. Louis and uh they met up at a dance I believe in Madison. So uh from there, they got together and really enjoyed each others' company I guess because they made six children together. So, four boys and two daughters and um we grew up in the Lee Wright homes in south Venice and um had a simple life style, wasn't nothing spectacular. The uh Vietnam War was going on at the time and we stayed on Bissell Street. We use to see the troops come back you know and um see soldier stories on TVs and everything but that's all you seen TV was white soldiers but when the troops came back you seen white and black soldiers on the back of the trucks. So um everybody seem friendly as far as the soldiers were. I don't know if they were glad cause they back home or just glad to see people period but they waved and they was happy so and um so that actually was my first time really remembering white people. I was about 5 years old at the time. And um it wasn't no racial tension then because I didn't/wasn't aware of it. But shortly after that when I started school and everything uh start going places and I noticed all the books only had white kids in it; really no black kids. All the teachers on our ends was black and as I got a lil' older we moved to the other side of town, and they had just start uh mixing the blacks and whites together. And that's when the racism kinda started. So moving from one projects to another projects ,it was a whole different life style. 'Cause you know this project was all white; few blacks at the time when I moved in and start hearing the nigga word. At first to me it was just another word. Cause I didn't know no meaning or definition to it. You know I was wondering what a nigga was. I thought they was niggas too ya know. Which uh they were for using it the way I figured it. I called them white nigga just like they called me black nigga. I ain't call them honkeys. I found that word out later too. But to me they were a nigga just like I'm a nigga if I'm a nigga you a nigga but, um, that went further on to the schools, um. It was difference in a lot of the teachers ya know because at that time they had set the school Venice up for, um, I'm not for sure the word to use, like a charter or where they experimented on . . . they did a lot of

different stuff like the metric systems and different programs going on at that school it wasn't going on a lot of other school it was um where they experimented on kids with different lunch programs and everything else but it was actually set up for the white kids and everything but with the laws changing the black kids got included in it so yeah and um the teachers were no better ya know I mean they turn their heads when the bigger kids call you niggas and everything ya know a lot of [fire house dispatch] of fights in the restrooms and all through the halls and ya know for about the first two years you could say it was kind of rough.

KA: Okay

DM: Okay

KA: You said you all stayed in south Venice, what was considered south Venice? 'Cause I know that Venice and Madison were separated at one point can you elaborate that, on that more?

DM: Yeah um, they got a train trestle which uh is right where the park is, Venice Park is, Lee Park is and um that separate the north and south side of town. So everybody on the south side town went to um Madison. Everyone on the north side town went to um Venice. With it not being any blacks on the uh north side ya know all the whites found a way... 'cause it was still whites living on the south side when I was 5. I mean shortly after that 6 or seven years old everyone was gone. They still had white stores on that end. The stores they was nice I guess there were use to dealing with black people but I never had any problems out of no white people on that end of town. But once you got on this side of town it was a whole different story. You see uh no black signs on the service stations you could only walk on one side on the street. ya know um when you walk go directly to your bus stop ya know don't be looking around ya know cause you got grown people ya know they didn't have no feeling for no black kids ya know they just grown white people they did not have no feeling for no black kids. They call you and try to have their kids come out and fight you whoop their butt or whatever then you gotta to fight the parent too or take off running. It was a lot of disrespect on the white end. On the park and stuff, at once upon it was on the national register because of how they keep the park. They had gold fish on the park. They use to have lovers lane where they use to fix it up for the holidays, I'm mean it was kinds of scrubbery plants, flowers everything. They had horse shoes, volleyballs, net, a little carnival over there with with free rides and everything but once they let the blacks... laws changed and the blacks was allowed to come to that side of the park they shut all the stuff down whether than let the blacks enjoy theyself as well. So it was a lot of tension. A lot of people start moving out. White started moving out of Venice because they just didn't want socialize didn't really want to have no part of black people living on the same level they were on.

KA: Where did you all live in Venice? Did you live one home and move to another or how did that work? I know you started off in the Venice homes but did your family move to any other areas in Venice?

DM: Yes um we were about at 13 we moved right around the corner from the projects in a house on Jefferson avenue and um we was I think the second or third family to buy house on that end of town and ya know it wasn't received well ya know our people thought we was better than other people black and white was kinda of hating on that because we made it out the projects ya know our parents made a way for us so I mean that was um a time where we had to really kinds look over our shoulders at our friends and our enemies so I mean it was ya know everybody said we were try got be white we were not trying to

be white My momma and daddy just wanted the best for us. so I mean um if it wasn't for the fact that going to Vietnam, this just what I believe, it probably would have been a lot worse but with these black people and white people fighting together ya know in war which they hadn't did in world war I or II ya know in Vietnam they fought together and they got a chance to know each other by doing that I think a lot of racial tension was uh lessened but it was still there ya know because you start seeing white people and black people hang together it was more acceptable after the war and I don't think a lot of white people liked that as well I think that for some people it made them hate blacks more and for some appreciated blacks more.

KA: What did your father and mother do for a living while you were growing up throughout the years?

DM: O.k. my mother... first off my mother had children young so she dropped out of Madison because she got pregnant while she was in still in high school and with all the fighting and stuff going on she didn't want to loose her baby or anything and during the time when she dropped out she had total of five children cause we all stair step but um after she had my little sister, which is the 5th of the five I'm talking about, she went back to Lincoln school and got her GED and um she started for as a matter of fact she worked in Venice at the aluminum place it was called kanackel at the time and um she was a like the first black secretary in the office so and everybody loved her she didn't have no problem on the job but I mean she now how to deal with that situation too and um so she was good at her job and on the telephone you couldn't tell what color she was I mean you just couldn't so I mean when people actually came to see her at her workplace cause they talked to her on the phone they had a whole different attitude a lot of them did. I mean people who were on the job with her they didn't have nothing but good things to say about her but people coming in from town who just talk to her on the telephone just um ya know when they got there they just didn't believe that not believe what they have called a nigga answering they phone lines so I mean it was she stay there a couple of years and then she went to nursing school and she got a nursing license and then she stared teaching as a aid at Venice school when we got up in high school and then she went to work at Granite City steel she did what she did what she had to do she was a smart woman you know she just got off to a late start.

KA: What did she do at Granite City steel, was Granite City steel her last position?

DM: Yeah that was her last job.

KA: What was her last position?

DM: She um marked and graded coils, steel coils um came off a hot roll finishing she um didn't have any problems out there ya know time done changed and ya know people dun changes for the most part she didn't have too many problems out there.

KA: What did your dad do for a living?

DM: Umm he worked a service station and um he worked at Granite City steel actually before her, and that what he did every since we were about seven years old. That's how they was able to buy the house with him working his job and she working her job they both had good jobs so that allowed them to um get a nice house.

KA: You said that your mother dropped out of Madison because of fighting, what do you mean when you say that?

DM: Back... when she was ...my mother was about 16 years old 15 years old when she got pregnant with my brother that's when the early part of the wars and everything else ya know I mean it was kinda of rough ya know cause Madison didn't want the blacks there either but they had to go someplace so they went to Madison and it was a lot of fighting a lot of them went to Lovejoy but ya know that was out the county and if they didn't have somebody I guess living in Lovejoy they wouldn't allow to go to Lovejoy as well yeah but yeah I mean so they the ones did the fighting um my mother she's in the age with a lot of the politicians in the city of Venice and Madison or and all of them know each other they know they fought together and everything else each other back in the day but now they have a respect for each other so I mean so most of these politician in Venice and Madison they fought now they now they on the same side of the boat for the most part so

KA: Umm when you were grown up what were some of the stereotypes associated with living in Venice housing projects I know you talked about um kind of being picked on for having your family move forward and buy a house but what was it like living in the projects at that time with some of the stereotypes types of you had to deal with

DM: The stereotypes wasn't um you didn't had to deal with no stereotypes cause the projects they were like luxury apartments most people ya know I mean ya know and you really thought you was doing something I didn't have any bad experiences actually in the projects other than a few word calling and some fights and stuff but you gone have that regardless if you got black people or mix crowd of people so I mean

KA: So in terms of the overall tension in Venice, what would you say was going on while you were growing up? What did you really feel?

DM: Once you left out the projects um your, your your living space ya now that's when the tension started. I mean when you past by white people houses and ya know um nigga you need to get on the sidewalk type a deal and this come from grown people talking to little kids and stuff like that ya know and you try to keep it respectful because you raised cause a certain way after and ya know after while the respect leaves they not respecting me so why I'm gone respect them ya know try to get passed they house and not go that way or whatever you not going to do that as a kid. as a child you kind of like that stuff ya know jus to make the person mad so it was even when you going to the store which still goes on today ya know all eyes is on the black persons ya know I mean you go to the ice cream stand ,which was owned by whites at the time, until all the white people was waited on you ain't gone get no ice cream type of deal ya know I mean it was if, if you bet not go over by yourself if you didn't go over in a group you know um you might get jumped on, kicked or whatever or slapped around or whatever

KA: Soo did you travel with your siblings a lot when you all went out into the neighborhoods were you all always together? Did you fight a lot? or you were together just to support each other because of the tension in the city.

DM: Umm most people went out I wasn't know I wasn't aware of a lot of stuff that was going on but my uncle use to say know stay together because a lot of kids and stuff, that they was trying to kidnap kids

people riding around ya know and um trying to pick up kids ya know and kill them ya know rape them or whatever ya know

KA: So there were incidents of black children getting raped, or and killed and kidnapped or just children in general

DM: Yes children and young young people even older people we right here by the river ya know a lot of bodies used to be washed up and everything on the river so you didn't want to come up missing being out certain times of the night or day ya know or isolated so yeah you always wanted to walk with somebody back then until to the early 70's at least ya know but um what a lot of people don't know is that there use to be living houses on was they used total the island

KA: I was going to ask you about that can you tell me about the island

DM: Right it was pretty much I believe it was all black and um it was... people on the island had a certain pride about theyself, they form the island people form the island to this day they had nice house over her some not as nice as others but um for whatever reason they wanted that land over there so they start burning up the houses and everything else I'm not really sure what year it was but it was in the 50's I think when they burned they burned and took a lot of houses and just took a lot houses and land from the black people and that went on until they got the last black family out of there which I think was in the 80's so I mean you know and now you have Bellman's over there ya know instead of letting the people have their land living over there they didn't want that black community there.

KA: Bellman's is the granary or?

DM: They didn't have anything to do with it was done before they got there but ya know I mean in the same way way with Brooklyn if it wasn't for them being like the oldest black settlement in the Unites States they tried to give away Brooklyn a lot of time as far as taking.. they have a grave yard out in Brooklyn I believe on Gray street one of the back street and it's a historic sites that one of the main one of the reasons they can't touch Brooklyn... well that's two of the reasons they can't touch Brooklyn.

KA: What's the other reason? [laughs]

DM: One of them cause they settlement. They was like the oldest settlement so that put them in the historic category and that grave yard out there.

KA: So people you're saying from the island are buried there? Is that what you're saying?

DM: It's people from this area. It's mostly a graveyard for Brooklyn. Brooklyn even back in the 60s is nothing like it... was. They had everything in Brooklyn. They had the doctors living in Brooklyn. They had grocery stores. They had a skating rink, I mean a drug store. Everything you needed five and dime they had it. Anything a person in Brooklyn five and dime they had tin Brooklyn. They really destroyed Brooklyn white people coming in putting the strip clubs in and just um ya know torching and coming in with all these businesses I mean they just destroyed Brooklyn. Brooklyn was one of the... to this day it's still a very strong if you from Brooklyn, they recognize Brooklyn. ya know I don't care how big you are I

don't care how big the city is or how small it is when you come to Brooklyn you mess around and have to fight the whole city damn near it's just that how Brooklyn is

KA: Did people from Venice and Brooklyn talk? Did they spend time with each other? Was there a place where people met up, how did that work?

DM: Now with Brooklyn and Madison which is Venice, South Venice now this area is known of having pretty women so anytime you got pretty women like it's gone be tension among the men. So men like the women in Brooklyn. They just seen all the women ya know it's one of those type of things its one of those type of things I mean immmmmm cause this area go some of the most prettiest women in the world and you one of them I'm just saying

KA: Thank you [laughing]

DM: it's some pretty women in this area so you ain't gotta some of the attitudes is messed up but a know as far as looks and you know [**DM:** plays with keys] that something else too um the head of the housing authority and um one of the head her name is Marie Nelson and so if you look up any the boards in the doctors offices and everything else you'll see her brothers all them... products of people from the projects who made it and that's one thing I can say... pretty much most of the people in my age group, who lived in the projects, they really successful even though it wasn't hard living it was .. ya know they knew where they wanted to be at in life I mean I'm not hurting for anything. My other brother has a car lot and he always have work of himself my sister just going back to the schooling what they call she was a part of the that thing.. they brought the um computer language back then they was taking some of the letters out the alphabet, which end out to be computer language you know they took out the k or something they took out the hyphen and start putting everything else in there. So them kids are easy. All of her classmates are either good who were good part of that program with computers matter fact pretty much all them is had got something to do with computers they jobs because it was programing at an early age and it wasn't designed for black kids it was designed for white kids but the black kids the benefited for program already in progress.

KA: Do you remember the name of the program?

DM: I don't remember the name of the program I just use to see my sister homework and I know it was all together different from the homework I used to do so.... and ya know

KA: What was your first job in Venice?

DM: O.K. my first job period? um worked a gas station.

KA: Was it a gas station in Venice?

DM: It was in East St. Louis.

KA: It was in East St. Louis?

DM: Yeah 25th and State.. naw..um well yeah Shells.. it was a Shell right and then you had the one on St. Louis avenue. They had 2 Shell stations. um big boogie or Boogie he used to own them both of them gone. He had 3 of them actually he had one down on like 9th street 9th and State. So yeah I worked at gas station pumping gas then I worked for the Brooklyn Mobile Inn and them some of my early jobs. I went to the service after that for a lil bit but I was in all 3 of them National Guard, Army and Army Reserve. and I learned how to deal with prejudice cause that one the most prejudice places you gone be at even though you gotta um you got a 6 year contract for the most part I only did one in each one case I read that soldier manual book they gave me and I was putting up with all that stuff they was dishing out so they ask me to leave. And I told them... they say we'll give you an dishonorable discharge I say I came in here honorably I'm gone leave honorably so I left with a honorable discharge and they told me bye

KA: What did you do after the Reserves? Did you come back to Venice?

DM: Hmm yeah um I had a lot of jobs I work of myself too. Mean I know how to do some of everything I know how to paint, to do light light electrical. I worked for the housing authority for a while. I drove the school bus for a while, drove tow truck for a while, worked for the water company for a while so I mean even this job right here hmm a lot of times my personality gets the job more so than and that's with most jobs ..you gotta have some knowledge of it but a lot of time it just be your personality if I get and interview I always felt I get the job. So and cause I know how to smile went I have to... that from growing up with teachers when you have to play the role cause they playing role. They don't like your little black ass I don't like your white ass either so you know if you don't like me I don't care if you black or whatever you don't like me I don' t like you either. I love but i don't like you

KA: Talk about being the "darker sibling" between you and Bryan, I know we talked about that briefly before we started the interview and I'd like you to elaborate on that some more for me

DM: If we went into the store together and we separated they would follow me not him, and when white people addressed us they focus would be on me not me ya know. I mean um it was pretty much they would say the stuff like if you white you right, if you light you all right, if brown stick around, if you black stay back ya know and I mean ...even in the hiring practices um it's something as simple as a paper route they would give it to my brother quicker that they would me because of the color of my skin. ya know I mean .. I might of went to apply for the paper route with him I'm sure I did because he had a merge route where he did two routes instead of just one. And um you know they wouldn't trust anybody black and that still goes on today the lighter you are the better your chances of getting the job and that even with a black person ya know... I mean the prejudice it still there it just it's um disguised a little bit better.

KA: So you went with him on the paper routes?

DM: um hmmm yeah I mean especially in like the wind the winter when the days were shorter yeah I used to go with him I didn't go up to the doors cause ya know um he was a little bit more friendly than I am so yeah and um I let him deal with the people and I just help him carry..Pull his papers. He had a wagon ya know I helped him out an stuff so

KA: So talk about Venice now overall compared to back then.

DM: O.K.

KA: Growing up what are your thoughts about it? You talk about racial tension and um being the darkest sibling what do you feel... how do you feel about it overall?

DM: Can you cut me for a second?... cut it off for a second.

[air conditioning hums in the background]

KA: This is part two of the interview with Derek Mathis for the oral history project of Madison County.

KA: So Mr. Derek tell me about the Madison Venice um division and Route 3.

DM: O.K. um Route 3 it stopped at uh Broadway in Venice um and then it picked up I think it used to be called Old Alton road back then I wasn't really into signs and everything but then um then they had another entrance going over to the army depot from um from Bissell street so that was the only thing on that side of the the highway um and as far as taking you to Alton um you couldn't make thatyou would have to come through the city and a lot of times they had trains there. They didn't even have the underpass, which you could get under ,so a lot of times you had to really have to plan your day if you worked over in St. Louis because if you got caught by these trains you may me waiting a half hour or hour or so that and right there that causes a lot of tension too when people gotta wait you know the attitudes is there as well so you know um I'm not going say there was a lot of fights and stuff like that but you couldn't .. a lot of name calling from mad people cause they got caught by the train. You know if you happen to be in that area um. The city as a whole, it just kind of change. They did a lot of routing over the years so right now um a lot of trucks even get lost up in here cause the GPS is not programmed for the city of Venice so um but back in, back in that time, back in the late 60s, early 70s a lot of little mom and pop stores um and actually some of the white people who owned these stores was pretty friendly. They had their little pin ball machines in there and they let you come in and they actually treated you like people you know and um If you pop a game they give you a quarter they give you candy or whatever you know that was some of the better stores and then some of them like you know um one at a time or what you want get- get what you need and get out of here type of stores so it was there was a lot of white stores on the north end of town and some was friendly and some of them wasn't you know. and it was a lot of tension with the white households because it was kinda of like the Civil War in Venice inside the white household because one parent might be racist and then one might not be. Then you got the brothers and sisters. One brother might like to hang with blacks and the other might not you know and it was tension there you know So I think it was actually more tension on the north end of town with the white families among thyselves than it probably was with you know the kids or whatever because all white people didn't feel the same back then. Viewpoints and opinions was changing so.

KA: So you grew up uh during a time of desegregation and busing around Eagle Park area tell me about that.

DM: Uhhh Eagle Park is... was all black. It was a all-black area and um they part of Venice and Madison. They done chopped that in half too so part of that is Madison part of that is Venice so the part that belong to Venice went to Venice school um and the part that belong to Madison went to Madison

school. So when this riot went on um it's hard to say where it actually happen. I mean I don't know... I'm sure somewhere but I'm not... I don't have any knowledge of it, but I'm pretty sure it had to be in Madison but it might be the Venice end of Madison type of deal so...

KA: So you don't remember anything about the riot in Venice?

DM: um I don't

KA: Back in 1969?

DM: I don't

KA: What about policing in Venice, how's that been throughout the years?

DM: Um it started off with for the most part you had your black officers on the black end of town. Your white officers on your white end of town. And um in the 60s I actually didn't see any black officers driving until probably the late 60's but um prior to that I only remember seeing white police officers in the car. I'm not saying that's how it was but that's what I remember. And they had I think 3 officers and um ya know they had a no nonsense policy. I guess that was there job. So they want to keep their job they were told to bust a head they gone bus a head and you know you get caught on that end of town more than likely you more was going to spend a night in jail so um and have a little fine soon... um

KA: What was considered the other end of town?

DM: The north

KA: What do you mean when you say that?

DM: The north end of Venice um so um and I'm talking about the early 60s into the um into the early 70s where I have some knowledge as so. Um yeah. They gotta a whistle that they blow. Called... it was the curfew whistle they called a 9:00 whistle. So at 9:00 to keep down the tension or whatever you had to be with so many feet from your doorstep or either in the house. It depends not the officers who was patrolling the area. So.

KA: Do you think policing at...do you think policing got better at any point? When did it... when do you feel like it changed?

DM: Uhhh

KA: Like things were moving forward...

DM: In the late 70s I would say that there was more blacks on the police department than whites or it was about the same amount. I'd say the late 70s is when you know um um everything changed with the police department.

KA: What did you see change?

DM: Um I think they got like they first black chief in the 70s, you know so um white people wasn't trying to stay in Venice, you had a couple of them and I think the police chief. One of the police chief he actually did stay in in in with the police until he retired so well a couple of them did. So I went to school with one of the police chief's son, which was a white guy. And they was um I wouldn't call them a racial family they was receptive to white, um, to black kids and black family. The mother used to bet the secretary of the school and the father was the police chief but um they wasn't what you call racist. They was a nice white family.

KA: How many of your siblings are still in the area? I know you're here Bryan's here how any of your siblings are still in the Madison County area?

DM: Uh 3 of us in Madison ...well four of us... so but my youngest sister she's... I'm 18 years older than she is so she wasn't part of our experiences. She down there with my children... with our children so she more like a niece than a sister type a deal. Yeah

KA: Tell me about Kennedy, Senator Kennedy coming through the Venice area. Do you remember that?

DM: Um yeah I always remember the parade so I remember the parades more than I remember Kennedy, but he did... say a speech on the steps of the American Legion in Venice, and ya know um it was only standing room. So it was kinds like the Million Man march. He had a crowd. So I remember that I don't remember the speech or anything else I remember the parade.

KA: Tell me about the parade how did it look in Venice back then? Was it really elaborate?

DM: Yeah they had what they called what they called uh, it's an army thing... what goes in land and sea. They had that out at all the parades so. That was our... I think they called it the duck or something. And um they had parades vehicle back then so fire trucks, police cars, um yeah they made it special for him, I'll say. Flags everywhere, the whole works.

KA: So what else do you think is important for anyone to know about Venice or Madison County in general? What do you think is important in terms of racial identity, segregation, desegregation? What's your our overall thought on that?

DM: Well my overall thoughts is I think a lot of people who moved from Venice, black and white. I think that they hearts is still here because Venice is still a special place. you know. it's a lot of history here with one of the former mayors. How he got the McKinley Bridge from the the railroad. um the water problem had came about his name, Venice um the railroad car that use to come down the main streets. The trolleys, whatever you call them, it's a lot of history here, and you go to doctors offices and any place in Illinois can probably tell you more history about Venice than the people who live here in Venice. And um Granite City and all these areas but it's a lot of history here and also I have this flyer that I forgot to... [unfolds flyer] this showing on the activities what these developers in and the Army Depot and everything else. How they though about Venice and the people in Granite City who they thought was low life they had all radiation going on and invited these people to this plant knowing that they had knowing that these people would take this radiation home to their families and kids. They have this on the [phone rings] big screen when they had it on showing clips of all the stuff what happen to the poor families black and white in Venice so when it comes to big business and stuff like that [takes phone call from Bryan his

brother letting him know I was there for the interview] yeah but when it comes down to big business they don't care if you are black or white. Umm it's just what they do to you. They put toxin waste in your areas and, and let you figure out what going on later.

KA: So people had been getting sick...I remember something online... the mayor...

DM: right

KA: in 2010 talking about the radiation in the ground in Venice.

DM: Right it goes way back to the 50s , 40s I mean, it's um, the soil around here a lot of it still got um radiation in it. It's not as active uh, but it's there. The soil around here, a lot of it still got radiation it. I mean it's not but it's there. You get it digging too much ain't no telling what you will find. If you dig in the right spot

KA: Are there any areas in particular?

DM: Umm.

KA: Where people have gotten sick or?

DM: People dying of cancer on the regular mourned here. The closer you worked to the aluminum plant. My momma, she died from cancer, and it's probably due to the radiation that she got from the chemicals, that she got from the plant down there. Umm most of these women was dying at the age of 30 and 40, but it's...You know that's not what you call a racial thing, I wouldn't say, but it's a poor thing or you not living on a high standard of living, and you know that affects a lot of people in this area. It's a lot of toxins went on, it's uh, a couple of places no longer exist. What was in Venice, they had a barrel company, they had some building, I'm not exactly even sure what it was, some kind of warehouse. What was on Kline Street and where the Bissell homes sits, and it was probably full with um a storage place for toxins. I'm not even sure, but it was present. It was there, and you know, so that's a issue the still going on today and a lot of black people and white people have no knowledge of it.

KA: How have people continued to live in Venice? Are there a lot of generational families still here or since the economy has changed. I now a plot people worked at Granite City Steel, worked at the bottle um factory Granite City I mean in Alton and all the factors in the areas. How have people been able to survive? Or have they simply left.

DM: The older people for the most part is still here. They tore down the high school before it hit the 100 year mark so I guess so the land mark society wouldn't kick down and try to save it so hmm Chavis 100th birthday, they tore the high school down and um and with that... with the school and you don't have a school in your city a lot of times people you know people not going to move there, you know. Um it just killed the young population, and the ones who stayed, they got children only thing they have is to do at this time is to hang out on corners, sell drugs and get into[beep from phone] negative activities so um it's not the best area for of raising children right now so. The population of children is probably not what it once was.

KA: Why are you still in Venice?

DM: Umm my heart is just here. I love Venice, I love location. I mean I'm um 10 minutes from anything I want to be at so that's one of the reasons, and the people in Venice are still a special breed. And the ones who come back they are a special breed ya know I actually got love for this area. If you not from Venice..... it's something I can't even explain but it sat with me so

KA: Do you all have reunions. Do you Venice reunions, Madison County reunions?

DM: Umm they have reunions um I think what it does ... 'cause the graduating class were so small and a lot of the people done died off. They make like a reunion just for anybody who went to Venice school. Type of reunion if you graduating from Venice school... one of them type of reunions even... if you graduated from Venice school... even if you didn't graduate, you welcome to come.

KA: So I know your brother still lives in Venice right? As well or no?

DM: No.

KA: Where does he live now?

DM: He says Granite City.

KA: He stays in Granite City. Does he come to Venice often? Do you all see each other often?

DM: Yeah, that's my best friend [laughs], him and my brothers are my best friends.

KA: And it's how many of you all again?

DM: It's uh 6 of us but it's 4 boys and we all stair steps. So we... It's not even year in our ages so that's how close we are together in age.

KA: Do you have a lot of cousins or uncles still in the area or other family members in the area?

DM: Um no. In the area... in East St. Louis ...mostly East St. Louis.

KA: The McKinley and the new bridge that was built recently has that affected Venice at all? Has it brought more traffic through? Has it brought any business through?

DM: It was designed to bring more business through, it brought a new service stationing Mobile the area, but as far as the bridge itself the city wasn't able to maintain the upkeep on it, and the state took over. And when they took over we lost a lot of revenue from the bridge um and a lot of money got mis... came up missing from that bridge. People pocketed and everything else so it wouldn't probably the most... It was the place for thieves to work, I put it like tha,t if you wanted to be dishonest that was the place to... safest job to to get a little extra money in your pocket. I put it like that that one of the reasons I feel the bridge shut down.

KA: What do you see for the future of Venice? What do think the future will look like say in 10 - 15 years, are you concerned or?

DM: Um well I think when they make a change it gone be for the better or for the worse because all of the aldermen are is pretty much the same age, all the city leaders is pretty much the same age, the same age. Pretty much the same people for the last 20 and 30 years who controlling office. Soo um when they got office they...I hate to say it... I put it like this when they leave office, they problem all leave at the same time and you know it's gone put a whole new change on things in the city. So it's going either you gone get people who got some good ideas who really got Venice in the heart or contribute to the city or you going to get some people who just want to pocket some money. And have a title. So I'm hoping that it's you know we gets some people who really want to make a difference so um I got ideas um and a direction I like to see the city go and that might be one of my reasons for staying to see Venice grow again so.

KA: O.k. well I thank you for your time today

DM: O.k.

KA: Any other thought before we sign off?

DM: Uh nothing else.

KA: Thank you.