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Duane Brown, oral history interview conducted by Katie Burke, September 5, 2019, "Sweet Souls, Voices from the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House in Cambridge" oral history project; Cambridge Historical Society.



Sweet Souls, Voices from the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House in Cambridge

Oral History Project

Interview with Duane Brown, September 5, 2019

This interview is part of “Sweet Souls, Voices from the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House in Cambridge,” an oral history project of the Cambridge Historical Society, in partnership with the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House and The Loop Lab. This project was funded in part by Mass Humanities, which receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Interviewee: Duane Brown

Interviewer: Katie Burke

Interview Date: September 5, 2019

Interview Location: Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Length of Interview: 91 minutes

Transcription: by Lina Raciukaitis, October 4, 2020, 13,875 words

Note: The Loop Lab audio engineer Jeff Solomon recorded this interview. Jeff asked Duane some questions and offered some reflections toward the end of the interview.

Duane Brown grew up in Cambridge, and moved to the Port neighborhood as a teenager. He attended programs and dances at the Margaret Fuller House as a youth, and later served on the board. Duane worked in Human Resources for the City of Cambridge for 29 years, until his retirement. He currently lives in his childhood home in the Port.



Start of Interview

Katie Burke [00:00:00] My name is Katie Burke, I'm here with Duane Brown and his sister, Denise, and our audio engineer Jeff Solomon at Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is Thursday, September 5, 2019. This interview is part of the Sweet Souls Oral History Project to explore Margaret Fuller House's role in the Port in Cambridge in partnership with the Cambridge Historical Society. Duane, do you agree to have this interview recorded?

Duane Brown [00:00:24] I do.

Katie Burke [00:00:25] Okay. Can you tell me your date of birth?

Duane Brown [00:00:29] Sure. It's August 24, 1953.

Katie Burke [00:00:32] Okay, and where do you live?

Duane Brown [00:00:33] 114 Pine Street.

Katie Burke [00:00:35] Okay.

Duane Brown [00:00:35] Right up the street.

Katie Burke [00:00:37] Where did you go to school?

Duane Brown [00:00:41] All the way through?

Katie Burke [00:00:42] Yeah, tell me it all.

Duane Brown [00:00:43] Well, we're born in Washington, D.C. but came here in grade school. So I went to the Russell Grammar School up on [Grosier] Road - on Larch Road in Cambridge, which no longer exists, it's condominiums now. And went to Cambridge High and Latin at the



time - I think it was Cambridge High and Latin, yeah, Cambridge High and Latin was the high school. And then went to Boston College in Chestnut Hill.

Katie Burke [00:01:10] Okay, and what did you study in college?

Duane Brown [00:01:14] Education.

Katie Burke [00:01:14] Can you tell me some of the jobs that you've had?

Duane Brown [00:01:19] Sure. So right out of college I was a teacher at the Sacred Heart Community School in East Boston. From there I came to Cambridge and worked for the Department of Human Services as a project manager with community schools for about six years. Went into the private sector and worked for - it was called The New England at the time - New England Life Insurance in Boston, in human resources, and I was there for about another five years. And then I worked for a headhunting company and that's how I came back to work for Cambridge - had been asked to be on a panel to hire a superintendent of schools and started working with the personnel director for the City and for the school department, and they had offered me a job about a year later working in human resources for the City. And that's where I stayed for the next almost twenty-eight, twenty-nine years I guess, and retired from there.

Katie Burke [00:02:35] Okay, and when did you retire?

Duane Brown [00:02:36] When?

Katie Burke [00:02:36] Yeah.

Duane Brown [00:02:39] My goodness. Three - well just three years ago. So this is what [inaudible] sixteen, 2016.

Katie Burke [00:02:45] Okay. So can you tell me a bit about where you're from?



Duane Brown [00:02:49] From - originally from Washington, D.C. Strangely enough though, both my parents are from Cambridge. Well, from Cambridge and from Newton. But they met in Washington at Howard University but came back here when I was five I think, about five. So I really grew up in Cambridge through the Cambridge Public Schools and like I said didn't go very far, just went over the bridge to Boston College for four years and then graduated from there.

Katie Burke [00:03:24] And then after that did you move back to Cambridge?

Duane Brown [00:03:27] Yes, so, I did. I lived in Brighton when I was at Boston College and moved back to - actually moved to Somerville. I lived in Somerville for about fourteen years before I came back to Cambridge.

Katie Burke [00:03:44] In what neighborhoods in Cambridge did you live in when you were a kid growing up?

Duane Brown [00:03:49] Sure. So I lived on - up in what's called North Cambridge, but it's really West Cambridge, by Fresh Pond. So on two different streets, Alpine Street and Concord Avenue. And then we moved here, down this end. The family grew, outgrew the house, so my parents sold and bought here when I was in high school. So that was back in [19]67, [19]68.

Katie Burke [00:04:22] Did you have extended family in Cambridge too since your-

Duane Brown [00:04:26] Oh yeah.

Katie Burke [00:04:26] Okay.

Duane Brown [00:04:26] Absolutely. My grandparents came from down South and they migrated here and everybody followed them. They - my grandfather was from Macon, Georgia, and my grandmother was from Morganton, North Carolina. They met at West Point. He was an officer there and she was a domestic, and they married and they traveled around while he was in the service which spanned World War I, World War II - I'm sorry, Spanish American War,



World War I and World War II. Landed here in the [19]30s, and my grandmother came first? And, right, my grand- no, my grandfather came first. And he was to be stationed at the arsenal, Watertown Arsenal, and when he arrived they didn't realize that he was, at that time what are colored men, and there was no housing. There was no place for him to stay. So he was wandering around Central Square and went to get a cup of coffee and told somebody sitting next to him, this is my predicament, do you know of any apartments? And I don't remember the man's name but he said, "You know what? Go to St. Paul's Church two blocks down. They have a parsonage. Maybe the minister can help." And sure enough, my grandfather went to St. Paul's, which is at the corner of Bishop Allen Drive and Columbia Street, and a minister offered him a place to stay, but he was there for two weeks. My grandmother and - at that time it was just two, they had two children at that time - two daughters, they came and the first apartment - they got an apartment on Main Street over where Toscanini's, the ice cream parlor, was - my grandmother wasn't having it. She hated it. So she took it upon herself to look around and found an apartment on Western Avenue. And that's where they stayed until they bought a house on [Canard] Street, and then as the family grew they moved to West Cambridge. They bought a house there as, again, the family grew. But it was quite a story. Like I said, he was - they were like, "Sorry, we have no place for you to stay." And he was an officer at West Point, and so that didn't give a clue as to what his ethnicity was or race.

Katie Burke [00:07:33] Do you remember what they would say about the area at the time? Like why your grandmother didn't want to live over-

Duane Brown [00:07:39] She didn't want to live over a storefront.

Katie Burke [00:07:41] Oh okay, okay.

Duane Brown [00:07:41] That was it, it was over a store and she just didn't - I think probably because both were from rural communities down South where there's a lot of land and they both were born on farms, that that was probably just so foreign to my grandmother to live in an apartment number one, but particularly over a store, she just didn't - she wasn't comfortable. And there was a furniture store she had - in Central Square, so she had walked up there, called [Maller's], [Maller's] Furniture Store, and they had a sort of a community board and it said,



"Apartment for rent", and so she took the number and went over and there was an apartment. And it's funny, the landlord, they became best friends. I mean, they were - the families were very similar and they became best friends for the rest of their lifetimes. That was the [Jimmet] family, Mr. and Mrs. [Jimmet].

Katie Burke [00:08:50] Do you remember any stories that they had about Cambridge while they were living there?

Duane Brown [00:08:56] Cambridge, it was very diverse. It was definitely working class, a lot of factories, and there were opportunities that didn't exist down South. One of the reasons my grandfather - well, both of them - left was there weren't a lot of opportunities, particularly in the Deep South. My grandfather had said the only job he could get was retrieving big kegs that were delivered to saloons, to bars and saloons, of beer. And he would deliver those and collect those and he said that he just wasn't having it. So one Sunday he left for church and didn't tell his parents he had enlisted in the Army and just - he basically ran away and never looked back. He never really went back to Macon, Georgia until much, much later. He went with one of his daughters to visit the family and to reestablish ties. But he said he wasn't gonna have it. And my grandmother - there wasn't much at all. She had found out that there was a general who needed a domestic at West Point and her and her sister, her younger sister, they both went and got jobs, and my grandmother met my grandfather at a dance there and in turn he introduced my grandmother's sister to his friend, and they got married. Mama and Papa, via the way of the Philippines, came back here through the military, like I said, and ended up in Cambridge. Same with Aunt [Bert] And Uncle Johnny. They came back, followed him here, and then one by one my grandmother's mother came up. She was a widower at that time, still had a ton of young children, and so she came up with her children one by one and lived with my grandparents and with Aunt [Bert] And Uncle Johnny and just more and more family - particularly from North Carolina on my grandmother's side - they saw that there were opportunities here and came. But that was it, it was for opportunities. There were - just seemed to be more employment opportunities for people of color than there were down South.

Katie Burke [00:11:58] What kind of things did you do with your family in Cambridge when you were growing up?



Duane Brown [00:12:01] I was a Boy Scout. I was a Cub Scout, a Boy Scout, very active in the church. Our family's always been tied to St. Paul's, same church. In the summer we would - we had a place up in New Hampshire not far from Lake Winnepesaukee, so we used to go up a lot in the summer months. I used to love it as a little kid because I was eight when they first bought that place, and hated it as a teenager [laughter] and never really got into it as an adult. Most of my brothers, well, my brothers still do, they like it. Met some wonderful people there, good neighbors. But it was definitely - it was fun as a child. It was very rural, no paved roads, frog ponds, and lots of hiking and stuff like that, which was great, loved it. As a teenager I couldn't wait to get back to the city and [laughter] and I was definitely a city boy. Had a paper out with the Cambridge Chronicle and I won an award one year for having the most new subscriptions. I'll never forget that. Enjoyed Callanan Field, which was right across the street from where we lived, and enjoyed Fresh Pond, which was just a block away. Enjoyed, really enjoyed, Cambridge. Cambridge was a good place to grow up. Loved it. Great school. I loved - I still have ties to some of the students and, well, not the teachers - I did with one of the teachers, he's deceased now - but it was a good place to be to get - to be grounded, to get your feet on the ground and to learn. It was a good learning experience. Didn't care for high school as much. It was tough times. It was 1970 - I'm sorry, it was 1967 to [19]71, and Cambridge was definitely in turmoil racially and economically. So it was tough. High school was tough. I don't have a lot of fond memories of high school. College, glad I went. I didn't want to go to Boston College, I wanted to go to this school in Minnesota, Macalester College, and - because it was so far away, I just wanted to be off on my own, and my father told me how cold it got in Minnesota and I didn't believe him. I really thought they just didn't want me to go, and I was bent on going. And then I applied to Boston College, which was not one of my top schools. They thought it was a top school, which it was, but I didn't want to go there. But I got a full scholarship so [laughter] so that made the - that was the deciding factor. And I'm glad I did. I enjoyed it.

Katie Burke [00:15:35] How many siblings do you have?

Duane Brown [00:15:37] There are six of us. I'm the oldest, Denise is next, and there's David, Tommy, Bobby, and Jonathan.



Katie Burke [00:15:44] Okay. So Denise is the only girl?

Duane Brown [00:15:47] Yes. Yes.

Katie Burke [00:15:49] And can you tell me about your parents, what they were like?

Duane Brown [00:15:54] Let's see. God, it's gonna sound so hokey but they were the best parents in the world. They both were. So, father died young, he was only fifty-seven. And it's funny, when he did - I always thought of them as much older because they were very strict and very traditional and so I always thought of them as old fogies. I didn't realize just how young they were. But they were just great. My father could do anything at all. He always worked a lot of jobs. He worked for the post office, he was also a musician, he was a drummer, and also drove a cab. I mean, he always worked multiple jobs. But around the house he was so handy, he could - if it was him I could - him and I would be putting the roof on today, wouldn't have to get a roofer, he was that handy. He was definitely a craftsman and he got that from his father, who was also a craftsman. My mother was just an incredible person. She raised six children, worked full time. My father worked nights, my mother worked days. And we were not easy. So she ruled with an iron fist, I mean she was very - she was just strict, but they were good, I'll tell you. They were the best parents in the world. Always - I mean, we just had a good life. Plenty to eat, always had a roof over our heads, always had - and we got to, like I said, we got to go different places and go on vacations, had great holidays, great birthdays. And it's a big family, my mother had - my mother was one of six and they all were in the area and so we did a lot as a family. My father only had - well, he had actually had two brothers, one died when he was five. So it was just him and Uncle Julian, so it was a much smaller family. But we were very close and to this day we still are. We get together every Sunday at my house, a lot of the family, after church, and we spend holidays together, and we do the birthdays together and stuff. And I think a lot of that has to do with the way we were brought up. It was a very large extended family and we just carried it on, there's a lot of benefits to that, there's a lot of support. I remember my mother, she got a lot of awards, my mother was incredible. She - like I said, they met at Howard, both were hard workers. Then the family came along and they both had to work, and when my father passed my mother decided to go back to school. She's like, "All my kids are -" well, they weren't all, Johnathan was just starting high school. But she went back to



school, got her Master's, and retired from the government. She worked for the Social Security Administration and took a temporary job with Cambridge College as a recruiter for six months and ended up working another fourteen years [laughter] after retirement. I remember she got an award and it was for - it was working mothers, and they were honoring her saying how hard it was in the [19]50s and [19]60s, and she said actually it was a lot easier. She said, "I had family that took care of my children." She said, "I didn't have to worry about who was watching my kids from two o'clock until dinnertime. I didn't have to worry if I still had something to do because I knew they'd be fed. I knew they were with family." She said, "Today, both parents are working to afford child care and you worry. Is everything okay? If somebody gets sick, am I gonna get in trouble with my job?" I never really thought of it that way and a lot of people had. She said, "It was a lot easier, there was less stress", she said, "So the real heroes are the mothers and fathers today because it's a whole different set of challenges." That's the type of person she was. She - it's seven years, six years this year that she passed, very suddenly, and still very much around. Everybody misses her, but not in a sad way. She lived her life. She enjoyed her kids, enjoyed her grandkids even more. I remember her saying the last day I got to speak with her before she - she was in a coma - she had had - it was right after Christmas and I went by, I was gonna watch her sister who she brought up from Maryland, and I said, "I have to run to a funeral, of all things. But I'll be back at noon." "Don't worry," she said, "I had the best Christmas. All my kids were home, all my daughter-in-laws were home." She goes, "It never happens," said, "So it was the best Christmas and the best week ever." And I'm thinking, how many people can say that, they had the best week ever? So I don't have any - I have happy memories with her. She lived, she traveled, and there's a piece of her and everybody. There's a lot of her in my sister, Denise, now. In all of them. My parents, they did well from the baby on up. The baby is a judge in Roxbury District Court. The next one up, Bobby, is the assistant headmaster up at the high school. Tommy is an emergency management - he's an EMT in Boston and a realtor. David's a teacher in the Newton system for going on thirty years. Denise graduated from John T. Berry Rehabilitation Center and worked for [shelter] Triangle in Malden for thirty-one years - thirty-two years, and she's retired. I worked for the City in the City Manager's Office, human resources, for like I said, I worked for the City almost thirty-eight years. It was good.

Katie Burke [00:22:52] How old were you when you moved to the house on Pine Street?



Duane Brown [00:22:56] I think I was probably fourteen.

Katie Burke [00:22:59] Okay.

Duane Brown [00:22:59] Yeah.

Katie Burke [00:22:59] What was it like for you at that point to come into a new neighborhood?

Duane Brown [00:23:05] It was perfect timing, only because I was just starting high school. And so, even though Cambridge - there was West Cambridge, and North Cambridge, and the Port, and the Coast - it was very separated then, "I'm from the Port", "I'm from the Coast". When you get to high school, you get to know all of the kids so you start to mingle. Had it been before, I think that would have been a little tougher. And it's funny because I had a cousin whose parents moved from Cambridge to Mattapan his sophomore year of high school and it was devastating for him. So, that sort of contradicts what I was saying [laughter] - well no I guess not, because he then, he knew nobody and his whole world was in Cambridge. So that was tough for him. But for me, I don't - it wasn't a big change. I at that point was starting to experience kids from all different parts of the city. Plus, my church. My church was pretty diverse in terms of people that attended, they were from all parts of Cambridge.

Katie Burke [00:24:30] Do you remember any interesting characters that lived in the Port at the time you were here?

Duane Brown [00:24:36] Oh yeah. Absolutely, and fondly. There was a lady across the street from us who I was afraid of at first. She - you never saw her. She'd just peer through her blinds during the day, barely peer through them, and she would come out at night. And her husband, the same thing. And I remember one day I was sitting on the steps, it was summertime, and I was watching my younger brothers and sisters. And I had very strict orders, "You just can play in the yard but don't go out of the yard", because both my parents were working. So I'm sitting there with the baby, Johnathan, and the ice cream truck came down the street and this woman who I did not - had never seen her in the light, she says, "Come here." And she says, "Come!" And she said, "It's okay, you're Jack's own." That was my mother's name, it was Jackie. She goes,



"Here, buy the baby an ice cream and one for you." She said, "And it's okay!" And I did. So that night, I told my mother and she laughed, she said, "Her name is Mira," Mira - it was a str-McQuiggin I think was her last name. "All I know," she said, "She'll never hurt you." She said, "She's a really nice lady and she looks out for the neighborhood" [laughter]. I was petrified of that woman. And I was like - and she did, as I got older I got to appreciate her. Her husband was totally different. He ran the bowling alley around the corner, which is now part of St. Paul's Church. It was a bowling alley, pretty big bowling alley, and because we were the neighbors he'd always let us in at discounted or he'd give us extra strings or stuff. And he was like, a sweetheart. She was very, she was sort of tough. But I got to love her dearly as I got older, and really miss her. She's not - that's somebody you don't see in the neighborhood. She looked out for everybody's kids, she looked out for everybody sort of, she was - some people would call her nosy I guess [laughter] but I saw her as very caring. She was definitely a character. We had a lot of characters but they all played an important role. Selvin's mother, she wasn't a character, but she - there was sort of a sense back then that it didn't matter whose mother, particularly the mothers, whose mother gave you instruction or an order, you followed it. It wasn't - there was no question. And because they lived directly across the street, like if Mrs. Chambers said something it was the same thing as my mother saying something. It was like, yes, absolutely. And vice versa. And my brother wrote a paper once, the one that's a teacher in Newton, called "Growing Up on Pine Street", and it was really - it embodies it and if I can find it I'll give it to you. But he speaks to all of the smells you would have. Kids would be playing and there were Italian families, and Irish families, and West Indian families, and Southern families, and Haitian, there was just - Latino families - and you could just smell all of this good food, [laughter] right, at four or five o'clock in the afternoon. And you were praying that your friend's mother would, "Okay, well you can come in." It was that way with everybody. It didn't really matter where you went, you knew you were gonna get a good meal because everybody's mother cooked so, and it's one of the things you forget. Then he reminded us about NECCO Candy Factory, oh my God. You could smell the candy cooking in the morning, Squirrel Nut, you could smell all of the candies they were making there. You could smell all of the bread companies in East Cambridge, oh my God. It was hard going to school because you could smell all of this all over. Cambridge had so many good smells. There were other characters, but again they were all - there was a lady by the name of Annie May and she's another one. She didn't have any children, she had a dog and she had a brother. But she looked out for everybody,



everybody, nothing got past her, and it wasn't in a nasty, "I want to tell your parents." I remember one night I was sitting out with a neighbor way past the hour that we should be sitting out, on the steps, and we heard Miss Annie May going up so I jumped the fence. And this is in the back, she said, "Excuse me, Miss Joy." She said, "Are you okay back there?" She said, "Yup." "I thought I saw somebody jump the fence," says "Oh no, that was a dog," said, "That was a two legged dog" [laughter]. So I knew she knew that it was me but she never said anything to either of my [laughter] to my parents. But that was the type of thing people really - they paid attention to what was going on and it was a sense of community type of thing. And not to say - I mean, it's still a great community, it's just very different. It's a little harder to find people that will stop and talk, now they more or less got the headphones on or the ear buds and they just go on, that's it.

Katie Burke [00:30:49] What were some places besides home that you spent time at in the Port?

Duane Brown [00:30:56] Came here as - I didn't come - I came here once as a child to a day camp. But it was just like, once. I remember having a great time, I was mostly playing out in the playground. But as a teenager, the Margaret Fuller House had some serious dances. Those were fun [laughter]. So I remember coming down to the dances and that was a lot of fun.

Katie Burke [00:31:25] What were the dances like?

Duane Brown [00:31:27] Well, it was - we were in high school so it was just the forty-fives and I think maybe punch. Nobody cared about punch or chips or anything, it was just being able to dance and just mingle with other kids, and it was mostly kids from the Port. You'd get some from the Coast - and that was the other thing, I would go to parties at the Community Center which was the equivalent of Margaret Fuller House here, and that was always good because supposedly the Coast was always just a little bit better than the Port, if you were from the Coast, supposedly. But it was okay because I had that extended family so I knew a lot of the Coast kids [laughter] so I could go to the Coast or to the Port.

Katie Burke [00:32:21] Was it better as in like, more fun parties, or what was that about?



Duane Brown [00:32:26] I don't know. It's funny, in my mind - so again going back to my parents, they were very strict. I didn't get to go out during the week unless I was going someplace, I was gonna go play ball, I was going to bowling or something. If you had a destination to go to you could go and you had to be in by I think my curfew was 8:30 or nine, something like that. My cousins down the Coast, they got to go out every night, every night! Because they were going to the Community Center and they had to be in by nine. But I just thought my parents were so mean [laughter]. I thought that was the biggest thing in the world. And when I would go to visit them, they're like, "This - what are you talkin- it's no big deal, we're just going to the Community Center." But, so to answer your question, in my mind it was. I thought - plus there was the CYO, which was the Christian Youth Organization the Catholic kids went to and that was like a little teen center. So there was like different places the kids had to go to, there's more like organized places for them to go. So I thought it was, in my mind it was, probably in reality it was probably the same wherever. And no matter what part of Cambridge you were at, at ten o'clock you heard the curfew whistle that came out of East Cambridge letting anybody under I think sixteen - you better be home, it was the curfew. And at the same time simultaneously on TV - oh, I take that back, it was nine o'clock because - no, ten o'clock - a commercial would come on, no matter what was on TV, it said, "It's ten o'clock, do you know where your kids are?" [Laughter]. So, and I don't know what the consequences would be but I never - you never had to worry about that. I wasn't about to get caught out - "It's ten o'clock, do you know where your kids are?" So maybe that'll bring that back, I don't know. Some of the other places, let's see, like I said I was a Boy Scout - Cub Scout, Boy Scout. The troop was in Christ Church in Harvard Square. Really enjoyed that. I think I was the youngest. I was the youngest so was sort of just trying to keep up with the other kids. Loved overnight camp, went to two. One was an all-Black camp that came out of Roxbury and so different neighboring communities would all meet at - can't remember the church now. I liked it, most of my friends and relatives did not, they didn't like it. It was in Sharon, Mass, it seemed like it was a million miles away but Sharon isn't that far. But I went to Breezy Meadows two summers in a row. My parents had gone, it was like the onl- that was definitely a place that Black kids went to. And then when I got to Boy Scouts, went to Camp Quinapoxet up in New Hampshire and I loved it, I really did. I loved everything about Boy Scouts. Only made it up to - I think Star was the rank that I made. After that Boy Scouts wasn't cool anymore, I wanted to be more like Richard Roundtree and John Shaft [laughter]. Let's see, what else. Like I said, a lot of times we were in



New Hampshire for the summer. Sometimes we'd go - we used to go up to Canada in the summer with one of our relatives who was from there. So that was nice, Quebec and Montreal. We'd always drive up like in a caravan, with the family cars. What else? What else would we do that was fun? Revere Beach wasn't far, my father would love to surprise us with that. I loved that about him, "Let's just go!" And hop in what they called the "beach wagon" and go to Revere Beach. That was a lot of fun. Loved it. Salem Willows. [To Denise] How about you, what do you think? What did you like to do? She took ballet, she -

Denise [Brown?] [00:36:53] Not that good.

Duane Brown [00:36:54] Not that good? [Laughter]

Katie Burke [00:36:54] It's tough, it's not easy.

Duane Brown [00:36:54] Yeah, she was definitely spoiled being the only girl. She was definitely my father's - God, used to drive us crazy. All had chores, except for her, she could get out of them. She didn't feel like doing dishes she'd just have to - "It's okay honey." I'm like, can I do that? He's like, "Get over there and do the dishes!" She definitely cried the loudest when daddy died, lost her best friend. Let's see, what else. My father was a golfer, I never liked it except I used to love to go on the range. He would get a bucket of balls for me and my brother and we would just hit these balls while he would golf. I never took it up as an adult. My best friend did, he spent more time with my father than I did because he loved it. He still does, he still likes golf. That's about it. But I enjoyed Cambridge, I did, I really thought it was a great place to grow up. Just had a great childhood, and like I said, had the best parents in the world. And we were - my grandparents, we were right around them, so it was great. We would either - after school we'd either go to my grandparents' house or to my aunt and uncle's house, everybody in the family. Get home, change out of your school clothes, get something to eat, do your homework, and then you took off, you could go to the park till your parents came. So, it was a good way to grow up.

Katie Burke [00:38:27] What was your impression of Margaret Fuller House when you were living here as a teenager?



Duane Brown [00:38:32] You know, it's funny. Like I said, I didn't do a lot here. My mother did, my mother took some courses. She took a - like some enrichment courses so like, she took a millinery course and she took something else, I don't know, but she enjoyed it. She liked coming down and taking some of the adult courses at night. Plus, I think it was a break from work and getting away from the kids [laughter]. And probably, I think that maybe Selvin's mother may have gotten her into that because Selvin's mother as I remember was a great seamstress. Because I remember always, she would come over and either would fix a dress that my mother bought or whatever, and I think a lot of that stemmed from Margaret Fuller. But I didn't have a lot to do with it other than, like I said, the dances. And then I was on the Board for about three, maybe four, years and that was probably my young twenties then. And I'd chaperone some of the dances that they had, which is funny, that was - it brought back memories.

Katie Burke [00:39:39] Did your siblings do any programs here?

Duane Brown [00:39:42] Not really. They - so let's see. Not that I recall. They were more - I think I was the only one that was a Boy Scout. They were definitely more into sports. They played baseball, football, boxing, and they probably did more things at the Roberts School, like in the summer, like day camps and whatnot. That was becoming more and more popular then, some of the public schools had summer camps and whatnot. Although my younger brothers, they all went to - and Denise too - we all went to summer camp. We went to overnight camp. I think probably it was like a vacation for my parents [laughter] to send us all off for like two weeks. Yeah probably, they were probably like [pshh] so this is what it's like not to have kids [laughter]. So I don't think they did a lot down here. I'll have to ask, I should have asked before I came.

Katie Burke [00:40:52] That's okay.

Duane Brown [00:40:52] Yeah.

Katie Burke [00:40:52] Can you talk about what the political environment was like in Cambridge in the [19]60s and [19]70s when you were in school?



Duane Brown [00:40:58] Yeah, I can. So, it was very different from today. Politicians were tied to a community. So, like East Cambridge had Al Vellucci, who was touted as the Mayor of Cambridge - and he was the Mayor of Cambridge, many times. But his community definitely was East Cambridge, that's where he was from, and you knew he looked out for East Cambridge. West Cambridge had Barbara Ackermann, who was the first female mayor. And I don't know if she was the first female city councilor, I don't know. But she was the first mayor. I think she may have been the first female city councilor too. But she - definitely west. North, Saundra Graham, who was a trailblazer. Definitely was an advocate for what's known as Riverside now, which I know as the Coast. The Port had nobody, you had nobody. Until - until who? Things definitely changed when city councilors realized you could no longer just have like an area of the City, you had to represent Cambridge because Cambridge was becoming more and more diverse community-wise. You had a very Italian neighborhood, which was East Cambridge, Portuguese neighborhood, which was the Harington neighborhood, which was very distinct. If you were over the tracks you were East Cambridge, Italian, if you were before the tracks you were Portuguese, and that was very distinct. Port was pretty diverse. You had a lot of African-Americans, you had some Puerto Ricans, you had some young Harvard students because the Harvard [married] dorms were all around there. Port was very mixed, very mixed. You had working class, across from you, next to you - and it's funny, I had a sense that that was the area that I lived in, and when talking to relatives it was very much like that back in the [19]40s and [19]50s, it was more working class, like Roosevelt Towers was working class. It didn't matter whether you were Black, white, what ethnicity, it was working class, and I don't know. Cambridge goes through sort of like this pendulum, it swings from one end to the other. I wouldn't - it's probably different again now I'd have to stop to try to think of how to classify it. But coming up, again, politicians were tied to a neighborhood. It probably changed somewhere in the late [19]70s, mid-[19]80s where there were more issues, that politicians were hired because of issues that they held up, like rent control, like desegregation. What was going on in Boston was going on in Cambridge, but Cambridge handled it so - I think much better. They voluntarily desegregated schools and they weren't really segregated in the [19]60s. They were in the [19]40s, the [19]30s and the [19]40s, when I listened to my parents and relatives speaking about the makeup of the Webster School and the Houghton School. This is where all the Blacks went, this is where all the whites went, this is where - but somehow that changed a bit in the [19]60s. Like the grade school I went to was - probably it was largely white but there was a large



population of African-Americans in our school and so the PTA, and this is part of the political landscape as well, was pretty mixed. You had Black parents, white parents, mostly mothers, on the PTA, and from that I think they started organizing on - well, there's this young guy, [Coates], who I think was probably the first Black city councilor. John [Coates], came from West Cambridge, and it was a diverse group that got him elected. And then because of that, there was - the next one was Henry Owens, who was also a businessman, so he had this base that was very diverse. He didn't just have Black customers, he had white customers, so it was easier for him to get in. Another big change, if there was a non-white councilor, there was only one. You could never have more than one running because the votes would be so split, nobody would get in. And that's, again, that was a huge change probably with Sandra Graham, with Denise Simmons, with Dennis Benzan, that it was more a culture. This is who lives in Cambridge, and it transversed race and ethnicity. This is somebody who cares about affordable housing, or cares about safe streets, or cares about education, and so it's very different today. But before, and I know - I can remember candidates that ran. I remember I had a cousin who ran and not only did he run against another African-American, but the same neighborhoods. It was like, oh man, and neither one got in because it was so [laughter] it was so split.

Katie Burke [00:47:25] What kind of issues were important to you as you were growing up in the community?

Duane Brown [00:47:30] So it's funny, I didn't really think about issues coming up, and really didn't - I didn't notice big differences until I got to Boston College. I can tell you that. But in high school, you were made to realize that there were differences. There were - Cambridge was good, it was very manipulative in some ways but it was also very good. When I was in high school there was one Black staff person at Cambridge High and Latin out of - at that time there was probably nine hundred students. And that was a teacher, she was a biology teacher, Miss Walcott. Wasn't any custodians, cafeteria, nothing, only a teacher. And the Black Student Union had organized and had sit-ins trying to get more Black teachers and it was amazing, it was amazing. I remember initially the National Guard was called in to - oh, it was a mess. That's another whole - I don't even want to - that could be another whole series. But that's when you started to realize that there were differences in the world, at least for me. I never felt that the color of my skin was gonna make any difference in where I would end up in Cambridge, and



that's just - and that's good and it's also dangerous because this great school that I went to, there was no difference. You had Black friends, white friends, you had rich friends, poor friends, and it just didn't matter. You noticed a little bit more when you got to high school and then, boom, around 1970, like I said, there was a lot of unrest, and not only with the school system but with Harvard. There was a lot of controversy with Harvard encroaching on Riverside, so that's when Sandra Graham, who was a city councilor and then became a state representative, she and some other mothers in the neighborhood took the stand and they interrupted the graduation at Harvard, and had their fists up in the air, and had sit-ins, and on and on and on and it just - it snowballed, it really did. [Background noise, door opening.] And it was, I'll tell you, it was tough as a high school student because I was pretty active in the community with the City Council - not the City Council - with the School Committee, and with the Black Student Union. And so it put me in a really funny position because at that point I could no longer be a student. I was different, I was just different and I was just sort of held to a different expectation. It was tough, it was really, really tough. And so from that point on I really didn't enjoy high school, I have to say I didn't. But I don't want to get - I don't want to go way, way off but it was a defining time when politicians had to take stands that were important to Cantabrigians. It could no longer be East Cambridge, and North Cambridge, and along with Sandra there was - and I can't remember her name, I should, this is terrible, terrible, terrible. There was a city councilor who came from the projects and she was very different from who was on. They had very sophisticated Ivy League educated councilors and this lady was grassroots and she didn't have the language or anything else, and I think people thought she was gonna fall on her face and she didn't. She was very successful and she brought an important voice to the City Council, and one that wasn't heard before. So a lot - that was going on, there was a Sandra Graham piece going on. Harvard, Radcliffe, MIT, these students were so involved with - we're gonna be the voice for these students in Cambridge. A lot of good things came out of it. There was an organization called Concerned Black Parents - I think they may have met here at Margaret Fuller, I'm not sure, I think that's where they initially met, and that was formed because they felt they needed to be able to be a voice that the kids couldn't have. That we just - we were kids and the establishment was like you either get back to class or you're gonna be expelled. So the parent - and you're bad, you're really bad, look at you - and the parents were like, "No, these are my kids, they're not bad, and they have -" Anyway, long story less long, the good thing that came out of that was the City Council heard, the School Committee heard, the City Manager



heard, the Superintendent heard, and the following September, that was 1970... 1970 - so I was wrong, I was off a year, 1970 - ten Black teachers were hired, ten Black teachers. And it was incredible to be able to walk into Cambridge High and Latin and see people that looked like me that were in positions of authority. And it was important. My guidance counselor at the time couldn't stand me, for many reasons, and - one, because of the color of my skin, that I'm certain of, two, that I had this leadership role, and she was going to block me every way she could. She did! She was like, "You're not college material. You're not college material." And she kept changing my classes, I'll never forget my eighth grade teacher, who was a white man from Russell School, had to come up and say, "What are you doing? He's been - we want him in the college courses." And it took him, the principal, and my parents to go up to override this guidance counselor who said, "It's my experience that colored kids don't do well in this." So she hated me because they had changed this. She was definitely against me, wouldn't tell me anything, and so I just picked my own guidance counselor because - I shouldn't say there were ten teachers, there were ten new staff. Some were guidance and there was a guidance counselor, Andrea Jefferson, who I just decided you'll be my guidance counselor, and she was and she was great. She told me how to apply to college and what - how to take the SATs and when I needed to do this, when I needed to do that, all the things that a guidance counselor's supposed to do. Then there were other teachers, John Modest - I remember them - Leslie Kimbrough, Les Kimbrough, who just passed away suddenly about two or three years ago. It was very - he was one of the teachers, one of the first ten, and was one of the most respected teachers ever of all time. But it was - that was a turning point. That was - it was a turning point. To me it was as important as Barack Obama becoming President of the United States like, wow! This could actually happen. I remember all of those teachers. I remember how they were rejected by staff that were there, how the School Committee tried to hinder - they decided to come up with a new policy that if you weren't certified within a certain amount of time, you couldn't be rehired. The rule at the time was you could teach for three years before you were certified. And so they thought they were gonna catch all these teachers, which they didn't. Somehow somebody caught on and they were all able to come back. So big changes probably in the [19]60s and [19]70s on the City Council and the School Committee.

Katie Burke [00:56:14] What was it that drove you to take on those leadership positions at the Black Student Union and-



Duane Brown [00:56:19] Friends, they had these nominations. I did not want it and it happened, and I didn't have a choice [laughter]. Also, I think part of it was because I had good grades and I had a good reputation, and I wasn't somebody they could say, "Well, he's a little thug." However, I did - that's what people tried to make me out to be as I got involved but didn't work, didn't work. But it still was a tough time. And that's another reason why I valued my parents. They - it was tough for them. It was really tough for them. They would get calls, "Your son's a troublemaker. What's going on? How can you let him do this?" And they got involved. They were like, let's see what's going on. And then they realized, nope - and there were bits of troublemaker, you know D? Denise is special needs. When she started school - and I remember this - special needs students were all put into one classroom in the basement by the boilers. And you walk by and you just sort of - and I knew because my sister would be in there, but that was it. My parents were like, "Oh, no. I'm a taxpayer here, these are our kids." So they were troublemakers, too. They started way back then and they were very responsible for 776, which - I can't say they did it, but them and a lot of other parents. So they were always outspoken and always ready to know what's going on. But the simple answer is friends nominated me for it and it was good. I mean, it was actually good. I learned a lot. I was on the Ward Committee, I was one of the - I was the youngest ever Cantabrigian to be elected to the Democratic Ward Committee on a slate with one of the school teachers who was wonderful, Anthony Glavin, Paul Chase, I can remember these community people, David Sullivan, who was a city councilor, and I was a student, and we got it. We were on this write-in slate and we all got on. Through that I was on the Board for Cambridge Legal Aid - I mean I was in high school. [Inaudible] It was so - I was no longer a kid. It was like, I would have rather been a kid, probably [laughter]. Anyway, I made up for it at Boston College, I had a good time.

Katie Burke [00:59:03] I think I mentioned when we talked before about that period of time where the Black Panther Party was at Margaret Fuller House. And you weren't as involved here at the time, but you had mentioned that they had a presence in Central Square.

Duane Brown [00:59:17] Yeah, I don't remember them being here. I was talking to folks, and they may have, I don't remember them meeting here but I do remember them being in Central Square. And there was the Black Panther paper which you bought every week, I think it was a



quarter, maybe. And I remember they used to stand right out in front of [Jerry's] Supreme Market and then there was another time they used to be up around - oh man, I'm losing my mind I can't remember these stores. Isn't that terrible. But, yeah, they were - so they used to be right up around where the starter box was for the MBTA, it curves around. I think it's Amazon pickup service now, but that's where I remember the Black Panther Party being. But I don't remember them being here. I do remember them coming up to a couple of the School Committee meetings, City Council meetings, things like that. Didn't really get involved. I'd love the paper, I followed them, had a Black Panther Party pin. But I don't think my parents ever - we were too young, they wouldn't have allowed that.

Katie Burke [01:00:32] Were you at all aware of the transitions that were happening at Margaret Fuller House during the [19]70s and [19]80s? It sounded like that was a period where there was a lot of organizational changes and -

Duane Brown [01:00:46] I don't know...

Katie Burke [01:00:47] - things happening at the building.

Duane Brown [01:00:48] Yeah, I don't. I think, I sort of remember, I think it - and I may be telling tales out of school, but - I think there may have been a time they were sort of in receivership, the City sort of took it over, but I don't remember. I don't know the specifics. I was trying to remember - I think maybe I joined the board after that and Gloria - I wish I could remember her last name - was the chair and that's when I was on the board. But I remember it was Frank Duhay that had recruited me along with David Sullivan. But I think that may have been sort of on the tail end of that. I think it had - ownership had gone back to the Margaret Fuller Board. I think for a time it was in receivership just like Cambridge Community Center. I think it was just - could have just been tough funding time, I don't know.

Katie Burke [01:01:47] What was going on in your life when you decided to join the board at Margaret Fuller House?



Duane Brown [01:01:53] I was working for the City in Human Resources and sort of encouraged to get involved more with the community. I think I was on the board at the Y, YMCA at the time. I was on the board over at St. Paul's and just - as people call it today to give back, type of thing. But yeah, I wanted to be involved in the community and - that you grew up in.

Katie Burke [01:02:21] What sort of things did you work on when you were there?

Duane Brown [01:02:26] Fundraising, I remember [laughter]. Fundraising was one, and sort of just reviewing - like I know Tutoring Plus was very strong. Is Tutoring - I don't know if Tutoring Plus is still here, I think it is. But -

Katie Burke [01:02:40] I think, I mean I've heard it recently, so I think it is too, but do you know?

Jeff Solomon [01:02:43] I know they were doing it over at the workforce program -

Katie Burke [01:02:48] Oh okay.

Duane Brown [01:02:48] Okay.

Jeff Solomon [01:02:50] - for a while but I don't know if it's still here at Margaret Fuller.

Duane Brown [01:02:50] Yeah, it was very strong here and so there was a big effort to make sure that that continued. I remember that was one of the things David Sullivan and Frank were interested in. They wanted to make sure that they had the resources that they needed. And I know it was up until after I left the Board, I know my mother joined - I was living in Somerville at the time - my mother joined the Board of Directors for Tutoring Plus. I know that they - at that time they were still going on. But what else was going on? I think there was an effort to sort of increase services for childcare that were going on here. I want to say there was - we had some issues with the roof for the daycare. And I may be getting that confused, there was another daycare around the corner that the City owned - it's just called the [Blue in Sight], I don't know



where they come up with these foolish names - and that needed a roof. But I want to say that we had to do some fundraising around repairing the roof here for the daycare. And then we, like I said, we reinstated the dances for teenagers which wasn't too popular with a lot of community people. They were afraid there was gonna be problems. We never had any problems, ever. So that I remember.

Katie Burke [01:04:20] What were the dances like compared to the ones that you had been to when you were young?

Duane Brown [01:04:23] The same. Kids are dying to get here and then all the boys are on one wall and all the girls [laughter] are on the other wall. And then towards the end of the night they all start dancing, being shy around you, and of course you like to needle it by walking around, making sure, and just - exerting your power there and just make them nervous. And then them not wanting it to end at the end. Same thing, it was the same thing. Just, it was so reminiscent that - and everybody's trying to be so cool, at the same time aloof [laughter]. The things that teenagers do. I'm trying to think of somebody - I wish I could remember more or... Gloria was very - she was big into fundraising, she was big into - she was able to - I don't know where they came from but she had put together a computer room. That was the first time we'd had these desktop computers, which aged out and whatnot, but that was huge, that was big. I think there was like fourteen computers. That was because of Gloria. I think she did some fundraising for like, coach buses and school busses for summer trips, things like that. Nothing really big but you just - issues that any community organization would have to face and needed people to pay attention to. So some of the things that came after which seem like they were real successful would be - like there was a jazz night, I'm trying to think of the name of it, but that's I think a fundraiser and that's huge. That that happens every year. And couple of other things but, yeah.

Katie Burke [01:06:20] How does it feel for you to be back in the building as an adult, like particularly at the dances?

Duane Brown [01:06:26] Well it's nice. I mean it was, like I said, I noticed - you can tell I'm an old fogey - I noticed the natural wood floors. It was nice to see the carpet came off of that and



those [laughter] were restored, because the house is old but looks like it's being kept up really nice. And I saw books over by the daycare. I mean it looks like it's still very vibrant, people are using it. I should probably get off of my lazy self and walk down here some nights just to see what's going on. At least find out what's being offered.

Katie Burke [01:07:01] And what years were you on the Board again?

Duane Brown [01:07:08] I'm gonna guess and say probably maybe [19]88 to [19]91, [19]92 I'm gonna guess. I think that's pretty much a safe guess, around there. I just wish I could remember Gloria, it's terrible I can't remember her last name. Gloria, Gloria, Gloria. Now if it was my parents, they probably would have all of this stuff in their files - me, hold on to stuff a little bit and then I shred it.

Katie Burke [01:07:40] What has your perception been of Margaret Fuller House since you left the Board, like in the past few decades?

Duane Brown [01:07:48] Vibrant. I think that it continues to meet the needs of the community, which changes. Like I said, this - not just Cambridge, but - this neighborhood definitely, it changes. It goes from being full of families with kids to seeing hardly any families or kids, mostly young professionals and students. And right now it seems to be a comfortable mix again which is good, that a lot of families - and definitely there still is an influx of young professionals because of the closeness to Kendall Square and to Harvard Square. Cambridge, six point three miles, you can walk anywhere [laughter]. So if you're lucky to find an apartment like in this neighborhood, it's great. You have access to so much. And I think that the Margaret Fuller House continues to be able to say, "Okay, well what's needed now? Do we need more activities for school aged children or is that met? Do we need things for pre-teens or do we need things for teenagers? Do we need programs that go beyond recreational for say that tough group of nineteen to twenty-nine? It's sort of - there's hardly anything." So, and I think Margaret Fuller has, and I know they have because when I was still working with the City, there were members from Margaret Fuller staff that were sitting in on programs such as that. We were concentrating on [inaudible] job readiness, or the soft skills, on needed skills, put it that way. And we would meet. Sometimes we would meet here at Margaret Fuller with the staff here, sometimes we'd



meet at the City, we'd meet at different places. But Margaret Fuller definitely had a couple of seats at the table and had staff that were part of that - I guess the best way to phrase it would be programs for people who needed second and third chances. Whether it was with employment, people that weren't going on to higher education, people that didn't have enough skills to get into a career, just were able to go from here to Jack in the Box or Burger King, people that were looking to go to the next step, how can I - and the Margaret Fuller House was very involved with the city of Cambridge in a program called Workforce Development. So, I definitely have to sharpen my skills, I can't remember [laughter] half of this stuff anymore. But we don't - so yeah, so Margaret Fuller House was doing that. So I guess my answer would be it continues to step up and meet the needs of the community that lives here. And that's always important.

Katie Burke [01:11:26] Do you think there are things that Margaret Fuller House brings to the community besides services? Like how do people think about it who live in the neighborhood?

Duane Brown [01:11:37] I don't know, and that's a good question. I don't know. So, and that may be helpful. Maybe there needs to be some sort of a - not a survey but, I don't know. That's a hard question to answer because I think, to give an example, my street I would say as of September 1 there is a whole new group of people that have moved in that I don't know. And that's pretty typical. You get a lot of people who are transient because they're here going to school or they took a job and they're ready to move on someplace else. So, my goodness, it is - it's a ton of new faces on Pine Street. I bet you those people wouldn't know a thing about it, and there's no reason for them to, to know. So that may be something Selvin wants to look at. Like how do I get these people to at least question, or to take a look at these - this is what's being offered. It may be sort of a short survey in there, is there something you'd be interested in or is there something you're looking for that you're not seeing that Margaret Fuller could meet.

Katie Burke [01:13:06] Yeah, that's a really interesting point because it seems like from what I've heard it's such a pillar in the community to people who grew up in this area, and then to have people moving in who just don't know anything about it -

Duane Brown [01:13:15] Ton of new people, ton of new people.



Katie Burke [01:13:17] Yeah.

Duane Brown [01:13:18] And then maybe I think families probably know more because they need to. Like if they have kids, "Okay, this is where I go for - get my kid registered for school, this is for preschool, this is for aftercare." So they probably know because they have to know. But for young professionals - I was just teasing my kid, he's thirty-five in New York now, and so I was teasing him and some of my nieces and nephews call [inaudible] a young hipster [laughter] just to get on his nerves. But for some of the young professionals - I won't be rude - they probably don't know about it. They're probably so busy just getting settled, "I found the place, here's the job, this is where I can go to exercise, this is where I can go to meet people, here's-" Yeah. It may be a great place to at least happen to find out, what would you be looking for? What's missing from what we - what isn't here in your neighborhood that you'd like to be here? Maybe could be something Margaret Fuller could provide.

Katie Burke [01:14:36] Do you think there are ways to kind of introduce that history to people who are new to the neighborhood?

Duane Brown [01:14:42] So, well I think Margaret Fuller does open houses, I know they do. So I mean, I think they're already doing it. It's just maybe timing. You have to look at what are the - so when do you have a turnover in residence? What are the key times? Definitely - they probably already know that, but - definitely August and September 1, because people coming back, were moving here, probably again would be April. People are making - tend to make moves around April and in the fall. Those are two key times. So yeah, maybe open houses. I don't know, I don't know. I think that probably the staff here probably they probably have a good handle on it and they know how to tap into - like there's a fair that's gonna be up at - not Senate Park, I can't think of the name of the park - right around the corner from me, but I know Margaret Fuller House has a presence there every year along with the City has their employment there and I think Multicultural Arts Center has something there so - I know Margaret Fuller House is, they're tied into that. They know those dates and when to collaborate.

Katie Burke [01:16:13] When was it that you moved back into the house on Pine Street?



Duane Brown [01:16:17] So I moved back most recently - so, probably about seven years ago I guess, when my mother had - my mother had brought her older sister up from Silver Spring who was elderly and needed to be taken care of and then unfortunately just dropped dead. So, Denise and I ended up taking over, so - I, actually I was there before then, so probably about ten, been back about nine, ten years.

Katie Burke [01:16:53] How did it feel for you coming back to the neighborhood after being away?

Duane Brown [01:16:57] I hadn't really, never - I didn't live here but my family was still here so it wasn't very different at all. So the family was always here so I was still coming back and forth and stuff. I was only in Somerville [laughter].

Katie Burke [01:17:11] How would you say that the neighborhood has changed since you were first here, like when you were a teenager?

Duane Brown [01:17:16] Again, it goes back and forth. It really does. It goes from young families, working class, to young professionals. I'd say most recently you - it's tougher for young families to be able to afford to stay here. People were moving from here to Somerville, those people were moving from [Somerville] to Everett and then moving further and further out. And it's funny when you look at my siblings, they're all moved. They all bought out, and I look at Duane, younger Duane, he is - he bought out in Salem, that was all he could afford. And he's what, thirty, thirty-three. All of my brothers, they - the youngest, he's in Holbrook, and then it's funny I have three that are like one exit away from each other on the Pike, one in Newton, one in Framingham, and one in Marlborough. But if you asked them they'd tell you, "There's no way we could afford Cambridge." And even just to rent, I mean, rent is crazy. I remember when I got married my father laughed because I was gonna take an apartment in what's called Riverside, Cambridge which is off of Central Square, and I think it was four hundred dollars a month. And he said, "You must be out of your mind." He said, "I would never pay that kind of money [laughter] for something that wouldn't be mine." He said, "Why don't you guys move to the basement and save your money!" Instead, we found a place in Somerville which was three hundred and fifty-six bucks a month.



Katie Burke [01:19:03] What year was this?

Duane Brown [01:19:04] Unheated, with nothing included. That was in [19]81. And we did look, about nine years ago that place went - because it was a gorgeous apartment, it was two bedrooms, a living room, dining room, fireplace, kitchen, and it was a house, it was a three family house - it went for twenty, I think it was twenty-three hundred dollars a month rent. And we knew we had a good bargain, we paid, like I said, 356 - unheated, nothing included, my father was like, "You're crazy!" He would probably turn over in his grave if he could see what people are paying now. So that's the biggest change, affordability. Really tough for people to be able to - and you get a lot of students who - some are in the position where they can buy a condo for the four years instead of having to deal with housing at Harvard or MIT. I don't know if that's still going on but that was, in my neighborhood, people were just buying a condo and three or four students would share it and then sell it, and it was a smart thing to do because it certainly was going to appreciate, not depreciate.

Katie Burke [01:20:24] Are there like locations or things that you miss that used to be in the neighborhood that are no longer here?

Duane Brown [01:20:30] Absolutely. So one big thing is a supermarket. I mean, Whole Foods, I love Whole Foods, but the nickname is - people call it "whole paycheck", it's expensive. There used to be a Star Market, although I did not like that Star Market over at MIT. But there isn't a real market. There used to be at least three or four in Central Square, there was a co-op. A lot of people use Tar- I guess it's [Target] to fill that need. I see a lot of elderly people, I'm saying, "Well, where do you go now?" They say, "Go right up to [Target]." But there were markets. There was Purity Supreme there before that, there was the Manhattan Market, there was a seafood - you could get fresh seafood right there - two places that you could get fresh seafood, markets. There used to be a theater up there. There - well, there is now there's another theater now. A lot of clothing stores that were affordable. Central Square is mostly fast food and like sort of fancy coffee places, things like that. That's - so you missed that, being able to walk up - there would be a - oh my God, there was a fresh produce place that was not Whole Foods and you could get fresh produce five days, six days a week. And I knew that the kid's parents, the



people that owned it, their kid went to high school with me. But you could get fresh produce there on a daily basis. There was a store where you could get fresh butter, peanut butter, milk, bread, eggs, Fresh Kennedy's, it was right there. That's where you went. There was a Fanny Farmers, there was two Brighams, a lot of things like that. Those things you do miss. There were two bowling alleys right there. A lot of things that you as a child could go, without your parents, with your friends and what not, to do. There were a lot of places where parents could go that they didn't need a car and actually do your main shopping right there in Central Square. So things like that, I think a lot of people miss that, particularly senior citizens that don't drive, that don't want to have to wait on the ride or have to wait on a neighbor. That's tough. There isn't any place really to shop.

Katie Burke [01:23:37] Where do you see Margaret Fuller House fitting in as the Port and Cambridge continues to change, the people who live here change?

Duane Brown [01:23:44] Again, that's something I think that the staff are gonna have to - they're gonna have to canvas the neighborhood and maybe just sort of look at what other neighborhoods are doing as well. Probably off the top of my head, I would say definitely childcare will always be an issue - well, as long as families still live here, it'll be an issue. So affordable, safe, quality childcare is something that's always on a parent's mind. I think that there are a lot of people who, yeah, there's a lot of industry here that's changed in Kendall Square. But how many of those jobs are accessible to people who are from here? So maybe Margaret Fuller House can take a leadership role in some job readiness programs for adults, not kids, but for adults that like I said, aren't gonna go on to four years, or even two years, or have a couple of marks against them already, whether it's with the system or they dropped out. That's tough. I look at - there's a couple of adults across the street from me, and past prom they had no plans. And I was like, go up to the city, do this, do this, but they had no plans and one of them, that was a year ago, he isn't working. His goal is to get what's called a nine week job with the City. It's through a lottery, it's a stroke of luck. If you win the lottery you get to work nine weeks, throwing trash. And that's something but it's not going to sustain somebody. So Margaret Fuller House can - I won't say should get involved in that, they probably should continue, because I know Margaret Fuller has been very involved in that. But that's something that I think would probably be a need. Maybe a need would be going back to some of the more



lighthearted stuff too, like what are - it used to be pottery, and it used to be sewing, and basic carpentry. I don't know, maybe a place for yoga. I don't know, instead of having to pay an arm and a leg up at some exercise places. They're gonna have to sort of canvass the neighborhood, people that live there now, find out. Maybe things that they say, "Yeah, we can do that," maybe things they say, "No, we're not gonna do that."

Katie Burke [01:26:47] Thank you. I think I got through all my questions. Do you have anything else to add before we wrap up?

Duane Brown [01:26:53] No. Just sort of - no, we can wrap up. Maybe some questions after. Yeah.

Katie Burke [01:26:58] Okay, Jeff, do you have any questions?

Jeff Solomon [01:27:03] No, I just - when I first got here, I noticed that he used to be my football coach -

Katie Burke [01:27:10] Oh really?

Denise [Brown?] [01:27:12] That was [inaudible] my brother John.

Jeff Solomon [01:27:13] Yeah, he used to be my Pop Warner coach -

Duane Brown [01:27:16] Johnathan.

Jeff Solomon [01:27:16] And -

Duane Brown [01:27:16] I love you though, because he's almost eighteen years younger than me. I love you, thank you [laughter].

Katie Burke [01:27:19] Wait, you were his football coach?



Duane Brown [01:27:19] No.

Jeff Solomon [01:27:19] No, his brother.

Duane Brown [01:27:19] John, yes.

Denise [Brown?] [01:27:24] He thought that John was [doing the interview].

Katie Burke [01:27:24] Oh!

Jeff Solomon [01:27:24] And um -

Duane Brown [01:27:24] Yes.

Jeff Solomon [01:27:27] His brother Bobby was my principal when I went to Rindge and Latin.

Katie Burke [01:27:28] Oh! [laughter]

Duane Brown [01:27:28] Yup.

Denise [Brown?] [01:27:28] And Tracy became a nurse.

Jeff Solomon [01:27:33] Rindge and Latin.

Duane Brown [01:27:33] Yup.

Katie Burke [01:27:33] That's funny.

Denise [Brown?] [01:27:33] And Tracy became a nurse.

Duane Brown [01:27:34] And then probably yeah, Bobby's wife was the nurse.



Jeff Solomon [01:27:37] Yeah, Tracy was my nurse [laughter].

Duane Brown [01:27:37] Right. And she's just across the street now over at Cambridge [inaudible].

Katie Burke [01:27:41] Oh!

Duane Brown [01:27:41] Yup, so that's great.

Katie Burke [01:27:42] Yeah it's been nice having -

Duane Brown [01:27:44] Does it sound different? I mean the neighborhood, does it sound different from what you know, from what I was saying?

Jeff Solomon [01:27:49] Oh yeah. It's definitely different. I've only been here for fifteen, maybe fifteen years now? I moved here when I was like nine or ten.

Duane Brown [01:27:57] Yeah.

Jeff Solomon [01:27:57] And I'm twenty-six now.

Duane Brown [01:27:58] Yeah.

Jeff Solomon [01:27:58] So, yeah it's a lot different. Even in the ten years I've been here it's a lot different.

Duane Brown [01:28:06] Yeah, that's interesting, really is. And it's still here. I - yeah.

Jeff Solomon [01:28:12] I remember like riding my bike down Pine Street when I was younger and then like he would be coming in and out of his mom's house. I'd be like, "Hey, what's up coach?" And he was, "Make sure you're at practice son." So it was a pretty cool experience, like



growing up and now that I'm older, as an adult, seeing them and like - just around the neighborhood. Taught me a lot when I was younger.

Duane Brown [01:28:33] So funny, his - so I just talked to him this morning - his oldest daughter is at University of South Carolina, so she'd sent me a text late last night. I got - she was saying, "Oh, sorry to send this so late." She sent me something about midnight, which I saw this morning, saying, "Can you believe that this is the only school that isn't canceling classes?" So I said, "Well you have my permission, if it's dangerous, to stay home." And then John had texted me this morning saying his son, who is five, just started kindergarten in Holbrook. And the first day he's like - tears, he didn't want to have the tears. He said, "Good news," he said, "Second day, no tears, didn't even look behind. Just went right up into the school." And I said, "Are you talking about your son or your wife?" [laughter] And - cause she was a little teary-eyed. But John - and then he has a daughter that's seven.

Denise [Brown?] [01:29:24] Eight? She's gonna be eight.

Duane Brown [01:29:24] She's gonna be eight, you're right.

Jeff Solomon [01:29:26] Is he a judge now?

Duane Brown [01:29:27] Yes. Yeah.

Jeff Solomon [01:29:28] So he, I - when I went into the courtroom, because my brother ended up having like a court case recently, and he was the judge, and I'm like is that my coach? [Laughter] And then when I got out of the thing I told my mom and his lawyer, I'm like, that used to be my football coach. So, it's pretty cool just to like see him around the neighborhood.

Duane Brown [01:29:48] So funny. He, out of all of us, he's the youngest. I mean, he had - my father, the least, I was saying, my father passed away young, but he's the most - he's so old fashioned and he's just so - "What are you doing out here?" To indicate, like you're saying, cause you'll say, "That's okay, coach." He's like, "Okay, well -" blah blah blah blah blah. He's really, he's very - he's still very invested.



Jeff Solomon [01:30:13] Yeah.

Denise [Brown?] [01:30:13] Plus he helped my nephew a ton.

Duane Brown [01:30:13] Yeah. Hm?

Denise [Brown?] [01:30:18] He helped [Raymond].

Duane Brown [01:30:18] Oh yeah, he is. And Bobby - Bobby is a surprise to me that he was the principal because he, out of all of them, I think he was the biggest handful [laughter]. He was the biggest handful out of all of the kids.

Jeff Solomon [01:30:33] He was a cool principal though.

Duane Brown [01:30:33] Yeah, good.

Jeff Solomon [01:30:35] I loved him. [Inaudible].

Duane Brown [01:30:37] Yeah, they're a good couple. They have a band, too. Did you know this? So they do that and plus they're - as a matter of fact they want me to watch their dog Tuesday and they have a gig somewhere. I don't know where they get the energy from, but - so I'll have to tell him. What's your name again? It's -

Jeff Solomon [01:30:56] Jeff.

Duane Brown [01:30:56] Jeff. What's your last name?

Jeff Solomon [01:30:58] Solomon.

Duane Brown [01:30:58] Solomon. I'll tell John.



Jeff Solomon [01:30:59] Alright.

Duane Brown [01:30:59] He'll be happy. I'll tell - he'll be really happy to know that you're doing this. Yup.

Katie Burke [01:31:07] Okay, great. Thank you so much!

End of Interview

This interview is part of "Sweet Souls, Voices from the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House in Cambridge," an oral history project of the Cambridge Historical Society, in partnership with the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House and The Loop Lab. This project was funded in part by Mass Humanities, which receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.