

7-28-2011

Oral History Interview on Sheff vs. O'Neill (with video)

Elizabeth Sheff

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Location: At her office, 1229 Albany Avenue, Hartford, CT

Recording format: digital video

File name: SheffElizabeth_medium20110728.m4v

Length: 00:50:18

Transcribed by: Katie Campbell [with timestamps inserted]

Additional files: see additional citations listed in the text of this transcript

Abstract: Elizabeth Horton Sheff (born 1952) describes her experience as a parent plaintiff (on behalf of her son, Milo) in the Sheff v. O'Neill school desegregation lawsuit, originally filed in 1989. She recalls the early stage of her activism as a member of the Westbrook Village Tenants' Association, working with the attorneys (such as John Brittain, Phil Tegeler), meeting other plaintiffs (such as the Bermudez, Leach, Connolly families), and connections with other activists. She discusses the legal process of the case as well as its long-term successes and limitations. Sheff also describes growing up in the Charter Oak housing project on Flatbush Avenue in Hartford, and the influence of the United Church of Christ on her life.

Additional comments: Submitted as part of the [OnTheLine web-book](http://OnTheLine.trincoll.edu) by Jack Dougherty and colleagues (<http://OnTheLine.trincoll.edu>).

Speaker key:

EHS: Elizabeth Horton Sheff

CS: Candace Simpson

JD: Jack Dougherty

[All comments by transcriber in brackets]

CS: So I've heard about the early stage about you getting involved with the Sheff case in an essay that you wrote in 2004, in *Voices in Urban Education*, I believe. [Sheff, Elizabeth Horton. "Sheff v. O'Neill: The Struggle Continues against School Segregation and Unequal Opportunity"

VUE: *Voices in Urban Education*, no. 4 (Summer 2004): 16-21.]

EHS: Ah, yes.

CS: And so, can you tell me more about how you first got involved with the case?

EHS: Well, most people think that something horrible happened that caused me to want to sue the state of Connecticut. Unfortunately, wasn't so romantic. It... very poignant moment in my life, but it wasn't personal. This case has never been, for me, a personal thing. It's always been something that I engaged in on behalf of all of our children. But at the time, in 1989, there was a

meeting held by civil rights public interest attorneys who had gathered, along with some local attorneys and an attorney John Brittain, from the University of Connecticut School of Law to track and address growing racial isolation in city schools. They held a meeting at then, was the Horace Bushnell Congregational Church, they call it Christian Liberty now, about this. They invited people, they invited certain people from the community. I wasn't on the invitation list. At the time I was Vice President Westbrook Village Tenants' Association which is public housing where my children and I lived in the northwest corner of the city. I was Vice President, my President was invited to attend. She, at the time, had a child in the Project Concern, which is now called Project Choice. She was afraid that there would be some political retribution for her attendance, so she requested that I go in her stead. So actually, my job was to go to take notes on the meeting. So I am fond of saying, 23 years now later, I am still taking notes. [00:02:35]

CS: Good to hear. So how long had you been involved in the Tenants' Association?

EHS: Oh, years, years! I lived in Westbrook, oh god, I grew my kids there, about 10 years. But I've always been involved in community advocacy, so prior to getting involved in Sheff v. O'Neill, I worked on the issue of justice for people with HIV/AIDS, housing security, food security, the anti-apartheid movement. So, I mean, I've always been a social justice-minded person and, you know, it just came naturally that I would go to this because I wanted to know what was going on. Again, for my own personal experience, my children weren't engaged in anything negative. I mean, we had our usual bumps with the school system, that the kid talked out of turn, the teacher yelled too loud. I mean, you know, we had the normal kind of back and forth, give and take. But what I heard at that meeting changed my life. This is what I heard. 1989, 74 percent of students in Hartford schools in the eighth grade, 74 percent required assistance in remedial reading. Now, if you are in the eighth grade and you cannot read, what are your prospects? So that number struck me, not as 74 percent of the students were failing, but that the system was failing 74 percent of our kids. It's unconscionable to me to think that a child could be in the eighth grade and still can't read. How did they get there? Why are they there? Who allowed that to happen? What about that child? So that's how I got into it, and I went back and spoke to Milo about it, and again Milo was his mother's shadow, so when we went to marches on Washington, he came. When we went to community meetings, he was there. You know, so he... Candlelight vigils for AIDS, for persons living with HIV/AIDS. He was used to social justice activity, as it was a part of our life. It wasn't, you know, a little hobby. It was a thing, it was ingrained in our everyday existence, so I asked, you know, "Do you want to go to a meeting?", you know, check it out, and he did and it was actually Milo who decided to be the plaintiff. I'm just his mother. [00:05:33]

CS: How did he decide that? What were some things that he said?

EHS: Well, you know, he said it wasn't right that, you know, people were isolated, that, you know, children weren't getting the same resources. He said he would become a plaintiff, so we signed up to be interviewed as plaintiffs. Many people signed up. The lawyers interviewed families, chose ten families, had a second round of interviews, and then requested that we serve as the named plaintiff in the suit. [00:06:15]

CS: And what was the reasoning behind you being the named plaintiff?

EHS: Well, I think basically because I was a single mom living in Hartford and, you know, we

weren't wealthy, we weren't desperate, we weren't wealthy, but I think it was because, basically because of my single mom status, as a person of color and because I am very articulate. [laughs] [00:06:48]

CS: Yes, you are. So you made mention of Milo, your son. Did you have any other children?

EHS: Yes, I have a daughter Tanya. She is seven years older than Milo. She is just... She's like us. Right now she is serving as a commissioner for the Bloomfield... I mean Blue Hills Fire service so, I mean, she's a civic-minded person, just like Milo and me. [00:07:19]

CS: And what schools were they attending at the time?

EHS: Annie Fisher. Milo was attending Annie Fisher. Jasmine [granddaughter] was attending Hartford High. [00:07:32]

CS: I also read that you grew up in the Charter Oak Housing Project. Can you tell me more about, you know, where you're from or...?

EHS: Charter Oak... When I grew up in Charter Oak, which is now what I lovingly refer to as the K-Mart plaza on Flatbush Avenue... Wal-Mart, I'm sorry, the Wal-Mart plaza... that was a wonderful neighborhood when we grew up. We had... all different of families, racial ethnic families, West Indian, Hispanic, Italian, Asian, I mean, there were all kinds of people. Grass, trees, it was really a really nice place. But what made it so very special was that families knew families and took care of each other's children. So, my mother was a single mom. She worked a lot, long hours, but we weren't ever alone because, you know, if Ms. Bansovitch [spelling??] was out there and we did... You know, she would get us. "Don't do that," and then she would tell my mother and we would get it twice, but, you know, it was a community is what I am trying to say. People cared about people, people knew each other. It was... I had a very wonderful childhood. My mom was a saint. I never knew we were poor because if... you know those black and white bucks, you may not be old enough but, you know what I'm talking about over there, Dougherty. Those black and white bucks, if we had to have them, we had them, you know. She worked very hard to ensure that we didn't understand how very poor we were, and I think that is the basis that led us all to be confident youth and persons who have exceled in adulthood. [00:09:55]

JD: And your mother's full name?

EHS: Frances Adeline Marley Horton. [00:10:01]

JD: F-r-a-n-c-?

EHS: E-s.

JD: Adeline?

EHS: Adeline.

JD: A-d-e-l-?

EHS: L-i-n-e. Marley. M-a-r-l-e-y. Horton. H-o-r-t-o-n.

JD: Thank you.

[The interviewer asks whether she was familiar with other activists shown in photos or mentioned in documents.]

CS: Okay, so we can move on to some of these documents that we have here. So this is Simon Bernstein. He challenged restrictive covenants in the '40s and he also authored the Connecticut Education Amendment in 1965, which was how, you know, you made a basis for the case. But this is the race restrictive covenants and property deeds and this is a sample of the language. [Shows screenshot and sample document from "Race Restrictive Covenants in Property Deeds, Hartford area, 1940s," interactive map from UConn MAGIC, http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/otl/doclink_covenant.html]

EHS: Wait, so now wait, so this, this, I think this legislation was the precursor for, not Sheff, but for Horton v. Meskill.[00:11:00]

CS: For Lumpkin... yeah.

JD: Both, both.

EHS: Okay. [00:11:05]

JD: But had you ever interacted with him at all? He was a Hartford City Council member in the 1940's or something like that.

EHS: I wasn't born [laughs]... [00:11:12]

JD: Until '52, right? Yep.

EHS: Yep. I wasn't born then, but I don't know. [00:11:17]

JD: And then, just explain the restrictive covenants, if she's heard of any of those before or not?

CS: This is a map here [Screenshot and sample document from "Race Restrictive Covenants in Property Deeds, Hartford area, 1940s,"] and these are some other flags where they indicate place where we found race restrictive covenants in the property deeds, and this is the town of West Hartford in the 1940's.

EHS: Well, you know, I... in doing some research on Sheff, there are other things that the state of Connecticut should... is kind of... not be too proud of because... Like, for instance, it was illegal to educate students of color once here in the state of Connecticut. People think that slavery happened down south. There were people held slaves here, right here in Hartford. As a matter of fact, the old state house used to be a place where they used to auction off people, but I'm not familiar with this, but I am familiar with other like discriminating legislation and acts in the state of Connecticut. 1940, huh? [reading from a sample restrictive covenant, 1940s] "No person of any race except the white shall use or occupy an building on any lot..." Good old West Hartford, huh? They still feel like that, they just don't put it on paper. [00:12:43]

CS: This is a picture of Mrs. Russell Rhue and this is picketing the Noah Webster School [photo of protest against "de facto segregation" in *Hartford Times*, probably April 15, 1964, from CT History Online collection]

JD: In 1965. [Actual date is probably 1964.]

CS: Does that trigger any memories or do you have any initial reactions to that picture?

EHS: So, this is... What year is this? [00:13:18]

CS: '65.

EHS: '65? I didn't know. [reading from a protest sign in the photo] "Did you know the meaning of De Facto Segregation?" What I do know is that years before we filed Sheff, it was in the '60s I do believe, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission did notify the state of Connecticut that their schools were becoming segregated. Of course, they chose to do nothing about it, so... And I don't really think it's de facto segregation. I mean, that implies that it just mystically happened. But what Connecticut did to encourage segregation is that they made school districts and town boundaries conterminous, so if you live in Hartford you can only go to school in Hartford, if you live in West Hartford, etc., etc. So because of the segregated communities, you produce segregated schools, to me that's not de facto, that just didn't happen, that was design. [00:14:30]

CS: I have some pictures here of some Project Concern organizers. Just let me know if you recognize these faces here. [photos shown from other oral history video interviews]

EHS: Oh yeah, that's Trude, Trude Mero. Oh, what is her name, this one, this lady... [pointing to picture][00:14:53]

CS: That would be Mary Carroll.

EHS: Yes, Mary Carroll, yep. I don't... I'm not certain about this person. [00:14:59]

CS: That's Marjorie Little.

EHS: I don't know. I know Mary Carroll, who ran the program for years and years and years. And Trude, I know Trude. Yep. There's a school bus. Wow. [00:15:15]

JD: How did you... How did you know them?

EHS: I knew Mary Carroll from the Sheff lawsuit, and, you know, she came around. And Trude Mero I know from living in Hartford and being involved in politics, you know. She was very involved in politics. Her and Ms. Cromwell [spelling??] and those guys, and... yeah. [00:15:36]

CS: And let me know if you recognize this person. . . That's Ben Dixon. The next page you'll see... He worked with Education/Instruccion. They were challenging housing discrimination in the 1970's. [Photo of Ben Dixon from Hartford Times collection, via CT History Online.]

EHS: Yep. Nope.

JD: No, that's fine, we were just curious on these. We just have one or two more.

CS: And this last... if you recognize any of those circled names. Those are the plaintiffs from Lumpkin.

EHS: Who was Lumpkin? [00:16:27]

CS: Lumpkin v. Meskill.

JD: This is the 1970's school desegregation case that went to the federal courts and didn't survive there before the Sheff case came up.

EHS: I think that was the impetus for us filing on a state basis. [00:16:46]

JD: You got it.

EHS: Lumpkin? The name sounds familiar. [Reading other plaintiff names on the lawsuit:] Henderson. . . Linda Diaz . . . I know the name, but I'm not familiar with, you know, the persons. May I have a sip of this [water]? [00:17:18]

JD: Yeah, please. And the next one is a short video little video clip we have from 1985. If I put it there, it just plays for like ten seconds.

EHS: Yep.

JD: This is a newscast from 1985. And Sandra Foster and others are interviewed in this news feature. Is that anything you had ever... in contact with any of the people there? [video excerpt from "Jumping The Line" local television broadcast on Foster and other families who were arrested for enrolling their children outside of their designated school district].

EHS: No. And again, this goes just to the point that we began with. I thought everything was cool. I mean, everything... from where I sat, you know, I didn't have... And I was an involved parent. You know, the bake sales and the field trips and . . . Fortunately I've always had a career instead of a job, and so if I decided at 10:17 that it was time to go visit Annie Fisher, I would just go. I never... it was a real shock to me when I learned how poorly students were being educated and how much segregation played into that diminished educational opportunities. [00:19:09]

CS: And you said earlier that to be a part of the case that you were interviewed by some lawyers. Do you.... this is a list of all the other listed plaintiffs. What do you remember about first meeting the other plaintiffs? [Shows copy of the cover page of the 1989 Sheff lawsuit.]

EHS: We bonded from the beginning I believe, as a plaintiff group. We were all and we still remain committed and we have people who are original plaintiffs that are now part of the Sheff movement and we meet, you know, work with Phil Tegeler on those things, but yeah, I remember these. I remember these, and Wildaliz was a baby and so wasn't Pedro and Eva. Now

you should see them.[00:20:09]

JD: We interviewed them about two weeks ago.

EHS: It's like, wow! These were... they were babies. [00:20:14]

JD: The Bermudez family, yep.

EHS: Yep, yep, and Dr. Leach, Eugene Leach. I love him. He is just, I just think he is just wonderful. Tom and Carol, they're there. The Harringtons. Virginia, Denise, Neiima. And Neiima was a baby. When I look at these names I think, "These were little kids." They're not little kids anymore. April 26, 1989. [00:20:48]

CS: You can keep all these things.

EHS: Oh, I get to keep... I get presents. Thank you, thank you. [00:20:54]

CS: So I'd like to ask you some questions about the legal process and the political process as well. When the case was moving through the courts in the 1990's, what was your role and what do you remember most about the process? This is a picture that we found of you and Milo. [undated photo from Hartford Courant website, probably 1992.]

EHS: Yeah, look at my little woogy-poogy [spelling??] You know, this is a plaintiff's suit, it's not a class action suit. A lot of civil rights action suits are class action suits so that there's a plaintiff class. This is a plaintiff's suit so I've always been, and will always be, as long as possible, a part of not only what goes on in a community but also a part of the... of working with the lawyers on devising legal strategy. I'm not saying I'm a lawyer, but I'm saying that to bring the reality of what's real on the street helps them build a better legal strategy. For better, for worse, mostly for political reasons, we know what has to be done. So I try to... I do nothing that... in the community would harm the legal side and they do nothing that would harm the political side, the community side of trying to get people together. I've always been involved. I go to the legal meetings. I went to court every day. I'm on the list... when the legal team sends emails, I get the emails, I read. I got to the quarterly meetings with the state. So I've always been, you know... this is not something... like I said this is not, it isn't a hobby, I'm fully committed to giving... ensuring that there is access to quality, integrated education for those people who want it. This is... Sheff is voluntary, you don't have to participate. If you want to stay segregated, go ahead. But I believe that the best education that we can offer our children is one that is diverse in not only race ethnicity, but also diverse in the learning experience. So, you know, I mean, I plan to stay with it... This is... I mean, I'm kind of stuck now [laughs] but it's a commitment. And again, its... I never did it for my child. Milo never went to a magnet school. He was out of school before we even... before we really got... we really even got to that stage of now implementing a decision. But, you know, I never did it for my child, I did it for our kids. [00:24:17]

CS: How did your friends and family feel about your involvement with the case?

EHS: Well, you know, some of them were encouraging, some of them weren't. My family was a little concerned about exposure, you know, "You're exposing yourself to...", you know. Well, what do I do that I'm worried about, you know? Nothing. So, it was, you know... but I didn't

make the commitment based on them. That one statistic, 74 percent of the kids in eighth grade couldn't read? Candace... That thing struck me to my heart, because first of all, I'm an avid reader, I love to read, and to think that there is someone out there... that many that can't read is a horrible thing to begin with. But to think that we are actually manufacturing illiteracy with a diploma, I couldn't handle that. That's a justice question. I'm just thankful Milo agreed and decided to participate. [00:25:35]

CS: And outside of your friends and family, did you encounter any opposition?

EHS: Oh yeah, girl, all the time. And, you know, some... black folks would say things like and they still say things like, "Oh we don't need to sit next to white kids and learn how to learn." Did I say that? Did I say that? Never said that, you know. What I said and what I continue to say and what I think is important is that when you are in a learning environment with people who have different experiences, you are afforded the opportunity to look at something in a different way. You are granted expansion by looking at a thing through someone else's eyes. That's what I said, okay? And then I had one legislator in a hearing one time, white legislator, female, say to me, "Well, don't you think the children would be more comfortable in there our communities?" It's like, "Okay lady, I get it." So no, I mean, I've got accosted at grocery stores, you know, people yelling at me and stuff like that, but I've also been, you know, been given thanks at grocery stores. "My kid is now in a magnet school, Ms. Sheff," or "They're going to Choice and they're doing so much better, and thank you so much," and, you know, you kind of take it either way. But again, I didn't do this, you know, just because I had nothing else to do, and if folks want to participate, they are free to do so, if they don't want to participate they can do that to. But I try to tell, particularly people of color, "That attitude is deflective of the real issue," is that trying to hang on to a segregated school system is like hanging onto perishable goods without refrigeration: it just doesn't work. I mean, you can see over the years, there is plenty of data out there that shows that the poorest schools in the nation are those predominantly occupied by children of color who are poor. Now, shouldn't it tell you something? NAACP, school-to-prison pipeline, about the effects of isolation, racial, ethnic, economic isolation, how that is a feeding ground for kids to go from the classroom to the courtroom to the jail cell. I mean, people need to start thinking about this and stop thinking about it adversely. Black or white, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about all of our kids, because other folks don't grasp the concept as well. White children are just as segregated as children of color. But, you know, that doesn't seem to enter into people's minds. When they think segregation, they think children of color, but white children suffer the same adverse social reaction to isolation as do children of color. So, I mean, let's not get it twisted. We're not helping any of our kids when we keep them segregated. [00:29:26]

CS: So when the state finally reached a settlement with the plaintiffs in 2003 you offered this reflection at a press conference, and I'll just read your words back to you. You said, "Is this the vision that we held so dear years ago when we started out? The answer to that is no. But is it a reflection of the vision? The answer would be yes. Today is a celebration in my heart." So can you tell me a little bit more about what you meant by saying that?

EHS: Did I say that? Where'd you get that from?

CS: Yes, I found that in [Susan Eaton's book], *The Children in Room E4*.

EHS: Oh okay. Clearly my disappointment that day was that we had one a lawsuit but my

disappointment came in that the Supreme Court kind of punted. Not kind of punted, they punted big time. They decided to turn over the remedy to the politicians. Very bad form. Very bad form. So I was really disappointed that they didn't say, "Okay, this has got to end, it's got to end now. We are going to do... we are going to appoint a special master. We're going to get this done." No, they said, you know, "Okay, we're going to give it to the state of Connecticut, the principalities, the powers that be. You guys fix it and do it quickly," and we know that... and I knew that then, that quickly wasn't a word that comes out of general assembly. [00:31:13]

CS: So over the past 20 years, what changes in the Hartford area have you seen that you would attribute to the Sheff case?

EHS: Well, the many magnet schools that are here. The many students that have gone on to achieve better educational outcomes. The Choice program is still here, and... Project Concern/Choice, that's still operational. The many schools that CREC manages. But more so the fact that we have kept the conversation about unequal access, which still is a problem alive for 20-some-odd years, for over two decades. Once people stop talking about a problem, nothing happens. It tends to like, become embedded. As long as we can keep the dialogue open about the need to provided our children with the best educational opportunity possible, then I think that's a good thing. [00:32:36]

CS: And looking back, would you have done anything differently?

EHS: [sighs] Would I have done anything differently? Probably not, except for one thing. I remember one time I was at an event and I made a sarcastic remark and that's what the paper lit on, so you got to be real careful of what you say. You know, I was only playing, but they took it to heart. I thought it was funny. [00:33:17]

CS: Do you remember what you said?

EHS: Yeah, I said I prayed for two things: divine intervention or spontaneous combustion. [laughs] If you can't change the law, fry 'em. I thought it was hilarious. Oh, that's an, oh dear. Yeah, so you just got to be careful what you say. [00:33:43]

JD: Before we go to the next one... We are winding down, Elizabeth. We... there's lots we aren't asking you about. We haven't even talked about your years on the City Council. We haven't talked about other parts... Is there anything that you want to just make sure it gets mentioned because we are trying to make sure this is kind of an oral history video about the Sheff case but also just about your life. Is there anything else that you think is important that we should know about?

EHS: Well, you know, I think that my years on City Council kind of speak for themselves. I mean, I was voted down more than Carter Cod Liver Pills, but I made it my point to stand for justice, you know, and in my own opinion the... I've been successful 100 percent of the time because I opened my mouth against what I thought was an injustice, and so I am good with that. But one of the things that I am most proud of in my work here in the city of Hartford is the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren housing that I worked from years and years and years, it located on Barbour and Capen, and this housing is specific for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, which is a growing phenomenon in this nation. And I try to explain to people that

it's not always drugs that cause grandparents to take their grandchildren. We have mental illness, we have death, we have financial inability to take care of children. So I'm very appreciative of all those, you know, from the federal government to the state government to the local government, that worked real hard with me to get that housing up. These are two, three, and four-bedroom units, and, you know, it's not only housing, but it is service provided on site for the grandparents, of which CRT, my current employer is a part of. You know, I'm just.... you know, I don't know. I mean, people come up to me and say, "Ms. Sheff, I thank you for... Remember when you did that for me?" No, I don't remember. I mean, it's who I am. You know what I mean? It's not... if I walk out of here and somebody said, you know, "you got a dollar?" If I got a dollar, I give it to them. You know, it's just... I don't know. I just believe that, you know, we have a responsibility to one another. [00:36:52]

JD: I... just talking about caring for children. Obviously we know a lot about Milo, and you mentioned your other daughter Tanya, and then another name "Jasmine" came up.

EH: That's my granddaughter. Ms. Moody, that's what I call her, Ms. Moody. That's my only granddaughter, I got a bunch of grandsons, but that's my only granddaughter. [00:37:16]

JD: Had any of your children, at any time, or grandchildren, had they been enrolled in Project Concern [EHS shakes her head no] or have I misunderstood that one? I think I read something incorrect then, okay. And we know you were raised in Charter Oak housing project. Were you born in Hartford?

EHS: Yes, I was. I've lived in other places. And actually, my home in my heart is Ischia, Italy. I went and did a missionary placement in [Portici spelling??], right outside of Napoli, Naples, at an orphanage and I stayed there for a month. The committee had just... the language of the international committee was English, and they had just bought a new computer system and they were trying data entry and no one knew how to use the computer, so I went over there and stayed. Italy is the best place. But Ischia, now Ischia is... everybody knows Capri, right, the island of Capri? Ischia is the island next to Capri. Beautiful, yep. That's where I am going to retire. I don't know how I'm going to get there, where I am going to live when I get there [laughs] but we'll work on those things, one step at a time. [00:38:47]

JD: Was this with United Church of Christ? I was going to say...

EHS: United Church of Christ, yeah, because I served as the minister for Just Peace Ministries for the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ, where I worked with congregations in response to social justice issues. United Church of Christ is basically a white denomination and I, you know, we would send out alerts about, you know, anti-apartheid, call your congress person. There's a need to make sure that we get more money into the energy assistance program, call your congress person. So I've always been, you know, I've been in this kind of lifestyle for... I mean, it's my lifestyle, it's not like I stop on Tuesday. This is my lifestyle, so, I mean, I... you know, United Church of Christ, I've served on numerous boards and done a lot of, you know, social justice work. I believe that if people could just under... people could just try to look at the world through someone else's eyes, they would see how very fortunate we are to be living in the United States, but if you unveil that fortune, you'll see that some of us are much more fortunate than others, which is not right. So, you know, I mean, I just keep going and when I get tired I watch cartoons. No, and not the Powderpuff Girls, they are some mean sisters,

I mean, they be whopping up on people. I mean, Disney cartoons, you know, Beauty and the Beast, the Lion King...[00:40:57]

CS: Was that Ratatouille in your office?

EHS: Yep, I love Ratatouille, you know. Because here's the thing about those things. There's always strife. Those cartoons, if you look at it, if you watch those movies, there's always strife. Toy Story, Finding Nemo. I love Finding Nemo, because I like blue. But there's always strife, but in the end, everything turns out perfect. So when I get sick of America, which I do on occasion, I just go upstairs, shut the door, get the, you know, remote and just watch. Pixar. [00:41:34]

JD: I am just going to put this [computer] on your lap Candace, it's the last one you wanted to ask. Does that make sense to just put it on your lap? And you've got internet for that if you want to use it for that, so...

CS: Okay, so these are some maps that we created with UConn [University of Connecticut Libraries Map and Geographic Information Center - MAGIC. 2011. "Racial Change in the Hartford Region, 1900-2010." http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/otl/timeslider_racethematic.html], and what this is... is a Google map that has some data about Hartford and the greater Hartford area in it. So this tab here shows us what Hartford looked like in 1980...

JD: Or the racial composition of the area...

CS: Or the racial composition. And this is... That's what it looks like today, this is 2010. And you can feel free to, you know, browse between the two of them.

EHS: Oh I am familiar that the contiguous towns are becoming increasingly colored, and that there seems to be a migration of whites farther away from the ring. So what is the point you are trying to say to me here? [00:42:44]

CS: Oh I'd like to know if you see, between these two maps, this is 1980, and that's currently, if you see... you said that the outer areas are becoming more colored.

EHS: mhm, yep.[00:42:59]

CS:... if you see any... if you are seeing a story of civil rights progress or if you are seeing some racial barriers?

EHS: I think there's probably both, because generally speaking, once people of color living in Hartford get to about a 25,000 dollar earning... annual earning capacity, they start to migrate out from Hartford. So that might be... that's choice, that's not discrimination. But what concerns me is what's happening here is that more folks are moving away from the ring. So I think that's a... that could be perceived as white flight. [00:44:00]

CS: [to JD] Do you have any more questions?

EHS: But you know, you can't go too much farther. I mean, unless you go into Vermont or

Massachusetts... I mean, you can keep... I mean, people do that across the country, colors move in, whites move out. I mean, that's the expansion of white flight, that is a part of racial discrimination and make no mistake about it, black President or not, racial discrimination is alive and well in America, and in fact, I think because we have a black President, more people are acting upon that hatred than would be if we didn't have a black President which I think is ironic but true. But again, you can only run so far. And in this country, pretty soon you won't be able to run anywhere but to another country because our country is becoming increasingly more colored. So you may be around, hopefully, when this country is majority persons of color and then what are you going to do? I mean, you could move to Canada, Australia. I don't think there are many nations anywhere anymore that are single race entities. I think every nation in this world is becoming increasingly more diverse, and we got to deal with that. [00:45:31]

JD: Elizabeth, thank you very much for your time.

CS: Yeah, thank you.

JD: And all of our persistent questions, we appreciate you putting up with us.

EHS: No problem.

JD: This was very informative for me and Candace, and others who we are going to share it with. So Candace reviewed the forms with you, so we type up a transcript, we make you a DVD.

EHS: Cool Beans. [00:45:53]

JD: So you get more free presents out of all of us, and that's our small token of appreciation for you helping to keep history alive.

EHS: Yep, yep, well thank you very much. I mean, that's something, you know... I mean, when the house burnt down, thank god, my stuff... I had moved all my Sheff stuff, well most of my Sheff stuff. I did lose some of it. Everything... Our house burned down last year and its like gone, everything. But you know what, no burns, everybody got out alive, and I got a house now in Windsor with chipmunks. Yeah. [00:46:35]

JD: I am very sorry. I remember when that happened, about a year ago at this time, wasn't it?

EHS: Yeah, yep. [00:46:39]

JD: So, I don't think that there's anything that we happen to have a copy of that you don't have a copy of anymore, but if something along the way comes up and you say, "Oh, I'd love something that you might have," please ask, if you think we have it.

EHS: Yeah, yep. Because I did move most of my stuff, I'm working on a project with it, so it was out of the house, but I did lose some other stuff too. So, eh, no burns. That's what I keep saying. [00:47:09]

JD: Yep, that's definitely the way to think of it.

CS: I saw a poster for Trinity's Black History month in your office. Did you know Channon Miller?

EHS: Yeah! [00:47:19]

CS: Oh ok, I told her that I was interviewing you and she said, "say hey for me" so... Yeah, we were both on Imani and TCBWO at the same time.

EHS: Oh ok. Yeah, Channon goes to our church, she's a member of our church. [00:47:31]

CS: Oh ok, yeah.

JD: How did you get connected with the UCC? I guess I've never figured this one out before.

EHS: Warburton Community Congregational Church is a Congregational Church. I grew up in a Congregational Church. [00:47:45]

JD: And that's right on Flatbush Ave?

EHS: That's right.

JD: Flatbush and...

EHS: Brookfield.[00:47:51]

JD: Brookfield. So that was your church when you grew up in Charter Oak.

EHS: Yeah, I grew up in Charter Oak and that was our Church and it's the United Church of Christ and I've been with the United Church of Christ, member all my life. Now I have studied other religions, but UCC is a social justice minded Church and they act on it. They just don't talk about it, they act on it. We act on it, and so that's always been my choice plus, I'm a Congregationalist. I like 60 minutes, not 59, not 61. I can't stand to go to church and they be in there for hours, hours. "You just said that." They just go on and on and on and they be screaming and shouting. It's like, "Okay." I mean, whatever floats your boat, but do you have to keep repeating yourself. I can't do hours and hours of church. I work for Jesus every day, I just, you know, can't do hours and hours. [00:48:52]

CS: Did you say... that Wal-Mart used to be your housing... the housing project?

EHS: Charter Oak Terrace. [00:48:59]

CS: So, like, where Wal-Mart is, or like...?

EHS: All that over there used to be housing complex. And I had a map of Charter Oak, prior to them taking it, an aerial map and it burnt up in the fire... Yeah, because I named that street. William Shorty Campbell. [00:49:17]

JD: Oh when you were on the Council. I don't know William Shorty Campbell's story though.

EHS: Let me tell you Willie's... Shorty's... Shorty had grocery store, right? Market Basket. And he kept many families in Rice Heights and Charter Oak in food because he would allow you to buy on credit and as long as you paid up at the end of the month, then you could get credit. So he fed so many people out of that type of generosity, hired local kids to work in the store and all that. Little short dude. Little Jamaican dude, married to a white woman. And when they wanted to name that, I said "Well, I want to name that street after Shorty," I mean, we wanted to name it for someone that did something for the neighborhood [00:50:18].