

[silence to 00:02:00]

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Not quite. And, uh, I picked her up and told me the circumstances, he says, "Okay." I said I'll take care of her. Now, with me, and while I was on the job, money didn't mean a thing. I needed money. I had money, but I-I put the human concept to work. And, uh, I take her in a room. We start off and, uh, everything went well until we get to Kenora. That's about ten o'clock the following night or next stop, probably Winnipeg. So now it was in the morning at Kenora. She wanted me to send a telegram. She gave me the telegram at Fort William and, uh, she gave me \$20 bill, \$20 bill. I always take a note of, I call her attention to it, but she always says, "There's \$20, madam, okay." And, uh, I went out and send a telegram and the telegram was 65 cents. And, uh, I brought back her change, \$19.35. I checked it out, \$19.35 cents. So, when we get into Winnipeg, I went to the diner to get her breakfast because she couldn't leave her room. I got her breakfast. I got it. So I went up the- I got her breakfast, and the waiter brought it back, order her breakfast, the waiter brought it, by taking to her room. Now, apparently, she couldn't find enough money. She couldn't find how much she have hid it away and probably she forget where she put it, you know? And, uh, so I take the empties, because the dining car were busy. I take the empties, uh, dishes up to the diner. When I get up there, the steward says to me, she says, "The lady accused you of stealing her money. She says she had no money to pay for that." I said, "What?" I get really angry. I says, "What?" Oh, I was- I was terribly upset.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Terribly upset. And, uh, I went back.

**Interviewer:** Where were you from originally, Mr., uh, Gairey?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Jamaica.

**Interviewer:** You are?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Were you a young person when you came to Canada?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Yes. I spent my 16 birthday here.

**Interviewer:** Ah.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewer:** Did you?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** And, uh, my first job was I get in the Grand Trunk as a dishwasher. It used to run between Montreal and Windsor and, uh, like we would leave here for Montreal at nine o'clock in the morning and we'd get into, uh, to Montreal at six o'clock in the evening. And then we stay overnight and then we'd leave at nine o'clock tomorrow morning, back to London. We stay in London-- We get in London around 10 and we stayed there until the next day at, uh, 12:30. Then we leave for Windsor and then we get to Windsor around two

o'clock. We'd leave at 4:30, to get back into Toronto at, uh, 10:30. And then after Montreal, the next day again. Now, that was every live long day. And that was only \$30 a month, Kay.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** And, uh, if you missed a day, you deducted, you didn't get any pay.

**Interviewer:** And you were 16 years old.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** 16 years old. That's the only job I could get.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Uh, at home, I was a cigar maker by trade, you know. My uncle has a cigar shop, and I used to make cigar with him. But when I come here, I couldn't get that. So I just adjust myself to do the type of job. And I liked it because I liked the culinary arts. I liked to cook. You know, I liked cooking.

**Interviewer:** Well, this sort of holds up because you have been in, um, involved, I suppose, more in, um, the, um--

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Mm-hmm.

**Interviewer:** You've been involved with food [crosstalk]

**Harry Gairey Sr:** For so long. Yes, I do. Because at 21, I opened a restaurant on, uh, Duncan Street and, uh, we stayed there for about two years, a young fellow and myself by the name of Brown, and, uh, we went out on Queen Street and opened a very large restaurant there. At that time, it hold 100 people. And, uh, we run that successful for seven years and I sold out and went under-- back on the road, because it was so hard to get help and people who are interested in the business, you know. And, uh, I sold out and I went back on the road. And then I went back into the dining car business on the road, waiting on table. And, uh, I didn't go back into the kitchen because I knew enough about the kitchen. And, uh, and then after the Depression came along- the Depression come along, I was out of work for four years. I didn't get a stick of work. Oh, that's one of the things that killed me, Kay. When I had to go on relief.

**Interviewer:** Huh.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** That takes everything out of me. I had a little money put away. My boy, Harvey, was just about two years old. And, uh, I spent it all. I had around \$4,000 put away and I spent it all in the four years that I was out because I had to pay rent, I had to eat, and, uh, I couldn't get a job. I couldn't make a job. I sat down many a day and cried, I really cried. I guess I try. I walked the City of Toronto where, oh, days and days and months and months, and couldn't-- I just couldn't beg a job. And I was too proud to go on relief. That's one of the thing, mistakes that I make. And when every cent had gone one morning, the wife says to me, she says, "Well, this is it. We have no money. What are we going to do?"

And at that time, the relief station was at, uh, where George Brown College is on, uh, on, uh, north-south streets. And it's funny, is going down the morning, it was around ten o'clock. And I saw a lady that I know, Mrs. Murdoch. Her, fine lady, one of the old-time, they're all deceased now. And she was going to the-- She was ahead of me. And I knew that she was going there, or at least I believed she was going there. And I said, "Oh no, I'm not going to let her see me go in there. No, sir." [laughs] So, oh no, I'm going to apply for relief. And, Kay, so I went way down Dundas, Spadina and Dundas, along Dundas up Augusta, I've given her lots of time to get away, you know. I don't want her to see me. So my dear Kay, just as I as soon as I opened the door going into the office, who do I see, Mrs. Murdoch? I could have died, really. I didn't want to. Anyway, I went in. She left and I went back. I went in and I got relief and I stayed around in relief for about nine months.

And the first trip that I made to Vancouver, I got a job with the CPR, that was when I was 36. The first trip I made, I went down there to the man in charge of the office and asked him, because I would been away for 11 days to give my wife the relief. And, uh, he said he would. And when I come back, I went back and thank him. And I haven't been back there since, never. Never go back, never go back. And, uh, I was so grateful because I had a good wife. She was very thrifty and, um, she knew what to do with a dollar. And I never had the reason to go back on relief again, but it was terrible. Terrible. I couldn't beg a job. So then I, uh, started on the road and I went on the road until I get off the road and I get into the club business, but I liked the food business.

**Interviewer:** Yes you do. Um, as I say, there's a number of clubs that related- your name is related with. The Whiff Club.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** The Whiff Club. Yeah. Mm-hmm, ran that for about 13 years until it burned down, burned down. Right?

**Interviewer:** How did you get started with that?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** How did I get started with that?

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Well, I got off the road and there was a young fellow by the name of, uh, uh, Kermit Lynn, Jamaican-Chinese lad, and, uh, Lucy, Clarence Lucy, you know Lucy, and Jimmy Maxley. They're always involved. They're all railroad men and they thought that would be a good thing to set up a club. At that time, there was ten people coming in. Yeah, they were coming in at the time we had broken- we had broken a barrier and letting them in, and we felt, uh, the girls were coming at domestic and, uh, we felt that would be a good thing if we could establish some place for them to go.

Well, we started off and, uh, it was very, very success from the outset and not in money-making, but in trying to help people, such as these girls that didn't know anyone here, there- there is fairly intelligent girl that came up the first one because that's the only way that we get out the island by accepting this domestic job. They worked for a year and then they're free to become landed immigrant. And, uh, we had them placed on Thursday. They used to come down, get the day off, and sometimes it would be 30 or 40 of them in the restaurant. That time we were in the Whiff Club. We were up on top, uh, third floor.

**Interviewer:** On Brunswick Street?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Mm-hmm, and they will actually take over the place. And they taught me a lot of both West Indian cooking, taught me a whole lot from those girls. And from then on we go, we expand until we get the Whiff Club going. It was- it was more of a social center because- and on the other hand, I used to help a lot of people, immigration-wise, go down and get them extension and get them landed and help them. They could always call and if they get in trouble at one stage, we help them pay their rent. If they were, uh, they were, uh, on the [unintelligible 00:12:10] and some of the girls will tell her what happens. Some of the girls get in trouble. Since I've been here, one girl got in trouble and- and that girl, she was such a nice girl helping her way, but you know, some of these fellows get next to her and then she gets in family and- and I- she told the fellow that I- she was in the family, left her alone. And she told me about, I said, "Okay, you have a friend or you have a father, anytime, any day or night, whatever time of the night, that you're in difficulties, call on me." And she called right here, four years ago, that she's in pain, and I hurry up and get my pajama, my overcoat and dressed, and I went there to, can I take her to the hospital. And in twenty minutes, one of the loveliest little boys you see, come along. And I says, "No, don't worry about anything." And I gathered through another boy, she's married now. I'm so glad, beautiful girl in-in-in soul, you know, in spirit and the boy's four years old and all that sort of thing, we do never get lot them. Lots of them landed. Lots of them landed without a penny. Never charged just because we feel it was a proper thing to do. We- we've done a lot of them.

I have done a lot. I've done a lot for people and I like to do it because I feel that, uh, I-I-I, um, always believe in this. I have- I believe in the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of all men. And, uh, that's one of the thing that guides me out for my life. Now, I don't go to church. I don't yell and jump and shout, but I-I live it. I will not do a person harm. If I can't do any good, I wouldn't do you any harm. Yeah, all the time I was on the railroad, I never report a man, never turned a fellow in. I could have many of time, but I feel fair says now I'd rather someone else do it beside me. I go along the car and see somebody doing something and, uh, before I pass that round I'd go the other way.

**Interviewer:** Uh, there are a number of, um, young chaps from the island that you meet with now that you also have helped in Toronto.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** This old fellow, yes. Yes. It's, uh, we have a good organization there, this old palace [?]. It's-it's- it's a- it's a- it's gotta be once we get, uh, which we are in the interim of getting a license, and thinking of a booming business in a beautiful spot and, uh, you know, we hope to have, uh, we hope to have a convention young life. You know, Pat Hayes?

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Mm-hmm. She phoned a couple of weeks ago that some young men are having an international convention in-in, uh, April. You know anything about that, at the York University?

**Interviewer:** Uh, no, I haven't heard about it.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Mm-hmm, and they came down and saw me about that one time, a banquet for about 300 people-

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** -there and, uh, then we have so much booked up all through from next month on, all through right up until New Year's booked up there. It's doing really well. We're gonna have lots of weddings. With the exception of yesterday, the first time that we haven't had a wedding since last September. Every Saturday big wedding, 200, 100, 150, 300. People's weddings went on.

**Interviewer:** Uh, I believe also, um you told--

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Yeah, we had an investment company here. It was, uh, 13 of us joined it, you know, and we used to put here while we were on the road we'd put in \$10 a month, and, uh, we bought property. The first property we bought, we paid \$3,500 for it, and we sold it for \$1,300. And then we bought a property on Augusta, uh, for, uh, \$8,500. It was two adjoining house, just down from College and, uh, one was 14 rooms and one was 13 rooms. Well, the 14 room, which the-the company spent about \$16,000 and make it into separate apartments and, uh, rented out separate. Then the other one, we make two apartments out of it, first floor and second floor, and we pay 18,000 for that Kay, now 8,500, right? Not 8,000 but 8,500. And, you know, we sell it about two years ago. Yeah, about two years ago. We sold it for \$90,000. Peterborough, we had, uh, 280 acres, 81 acres of land. We bought up there and, uh, we sold, I-I can't visualize things again, set up things, but I'm not really what you'll call a-a good manager. I'd rather somebody else manage because I have a soft heart and, uh, as such first with-with sympathy, it doesn't make a very strong, you have to be cruel and ruthless, you know, and all that sort of thing. But, uh, I can, I can, uh, organize. I can make suggestions, know like the- like the covenant that we had.

**[unintelligible 00:17:30]** come how it started. I'll give you the resume of how it started at for and, uh, it was about 10, 10 sleepers on the train. We leave at 11.30 and we get another one at seven o'clock in the morning. And, uh, after they get their work done at about Port Hope, they all will come back into my car. I always have a coffee shop car. They come back in the morning, start telling whole other lies. So one fellow by the name of Phillips, he came up with an idea and he said, "Put it this way." He says, "We're looking for 10 men to deposit \$5 a pay." And he called it a turn. I never heard the word coin in my life, but they told me the West Indians use that term. Now it simply means that you join a club. If it's 10 people, \$5 a month, you'll get \$5, \$10, \$50 this month, you get \$10. Well, so we all discuss it, pro and con, and after the, uh, discussion, I said to them, "Now we all are working, now why not? Let us take that money, bank it, and put it into real estate." Now I said, "I'll join you if you go into that phase, everything. But other than that, just to take it and draw it down and buy suit of clothes, I wouldn't be bothered."

They decide, well, it takes us three months to get it off the ground because I tell 'em I warn 'em again. I says, "No, you have to be cautious to get people who are willing to sacrifice that \$5 or \$10, whatever the case may be, because some fellas, let's say, well, they got \$5, they get broke, and they want to go and gamble and do what he wants with it. And he says, "Give me my money." And you may have some ideas of investing it. And so-so we lay it for \$3. So

we get 13 fellas. The name of the fellas Kirkwood and, uh, we started as a community trading company. Then it was a- as such, it was a partnership at that time. And our lawyer at that time, Mr. Cullman, advised us that that's not good, to make it into a limited company because as a partnership, your asset, your personal assets can be attached. Whereas as a company, they only take the asset of the company and your private, uh, matters we leave alone. So we organize into a company and call it a Cultural Company Limited. Limited at, uh, I think it was at \$60,000 limited and running for a number of years and we did very good.

**Interviewer:** Is it still going?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Uh, no, we uh, we, uh, disbanded because a lot of the fellas are old and they don't want to bottle bubbles. Most of 'em died. [unintelligible 00:20:00] They all, I would've gone on with it, but you find that the younger people didn't want to get into those ventures.

**Interviewer:** Were you surprised when they awarded you? They, um-- were you surprised when they gave you the awards for the Black?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Yes. I was somewhat surprised because I felt that the thing that I've done, I didn't feel that I, at the moment, when I- when this was done, I would have been, uh, been, uh, thinking of doing this thing. It wasn't for award. I didn't- that was never entered in my mind.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** And I felt there are people who have done public justice, much more than I have.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** And I felt they were more deserving of it than I have, because the thing that I do, I don't do it for myself. I do it because I feel it's the proper and right, and the human things to do. And as such, I was almost shocked. I didn't think that anyone, uh, would think of in the term, whatever. It's nice to know that you have done something and someone other than- and someone other than you, recognized the fact, but, uh, you take like Mr. Moore. He had done very much, put immigration question--

**Interviewer:** Were you involved in immigration?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** He had done more. Uh, and while I was involved with it too, guess, as I've told you, we, uh, we petitioned the Honorable Walter Harris, then Minister of Immigration, and we led a delegation to Ottawa to the parliament building.

**Interviewer:** Uh, still in all, when you, uh, came here, situations for the Blacks were not all that good. So it did need someone with some interest.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Did I do what? Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, you can't because, uh, it was very few Blacks here at the time and it's nothing that they- what I mean in a Java could, or down at the lower totem pole and, uh, it was mostly shoe shining and, uh, and, uh, railroad job.

That's the only thing you could get, where I find one or two in a certain industry, but there was many, not even, uh, in the clothing industry, which our girls were excelling that, but they couldn't get it all. All they could get was the maid service.

**Interviewer:** What was the community like then? Church, I suppose?

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Well, yes, there was church. There was the Baptist Church at the corner of Edward and University and Reverend McDowell was one of its pastors, a Canadian intellectual and he was from Chatham, Ontario. Lawrence McDowell, he later moved. He got a position in Virginia Union University in the States and he went there. And, uh, then there was the African Methodist Church where the Sick Children's hospital [unintelligible] and University. They were there and that there was the African Methodist Episcopal Church on Chestnut Street. I think the little church is still there. I think the Chinese have it, they were on Chestnut Street. And then after Reverend Steward came in and he- the church on Charles Street, the church that the AME has now on Charles Street, but--

**Interviewer:** Well, the churches were really the only- the only buildings at the site.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Only, yeah, that's right, it was the only organization that we had. We could, uh, look to for any sort of health, which they were doing in their humble way. The best they could, but it was no other avenue, no, no avenue. And then, uh, it was no other organization. And then there come along the United- the Universal Negro Improvement Association and that play an important part of the Blacks who were [unintelligible] of themselves. And, uh, they are still in existence on College Street. And I think they're doing a fairly good job. Um, Mr. [unintelligible], the president of it and uh, those were the things. And we used to have our dances and our social at the United Hall, it was part of a savior for us, away from the church but uh. And then like we used to more or less, you know, each other, everyone knows everyone. And they would give, uh, we'd have picnics in the summertime. We'd would have a boat that would go across the Lake to Grimsby. And that would be an annual picnic. People would come from Chatham, Windsor, Brantford, London, Montreal, and have Buffalo, Niagara Falls, a big reunion at Grimsby Beach. Take the boat and go over and spend a day over, usually the first Thursday in August, we'd take a day for it. But we'd get along. And that time- that time, you would hear the word, nigga, very frequent. Nigga, nigga, you hear that. You walk the street and that's all you could hear. But I-I feel, not that I think, I know things are getting better, much better.

There's lots of improvements, in the human relations side of it. But it's much better than it was. I'm happy to see that I've lived long enough to see the changes because you take, like, when I come here, a girl makes, come out of school and she couldn't dare go to the Bell Telephone Company and ask for a job as a- as an operator. But now it's common. The banks, if a Black girl had gone to the bank from one of the central technical schools or the central [unintelligible] and asked for a job, say, 28 years ago, or 25 years ago, they'd think she's crazy.

**Interviewer:** You were instrumental in encouraging people to have the power toward getting these jobs.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Oh yes. Oh yes. Oh yes. Because I felt I always felt very strong. If I'm a Canadian or I'm a naturalized Canadian and I have the ability. I don't see why I should keep from a job just because of that. And I heard, I always try to be the best right from the way back. Try to be the best Black boy, and not to be the worst White boy. Believe in yourself. Have faith in yourself. Have faith in your country. Have confidence in yourself. Love humanity. Love people. And I think that's all takes.

**Interviewer:** I think this came as across [inaudible 00:28:04] and I was involved, and our famous smart team.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Yes. Oh yes. I thought that one, one of the most intriguing thing that I have this on, and, Kay, I-I want to congratulate you as the sponsor or the leader of it and I felt really sorry because I missed it because it was such- it was so- it was so wonderful to see all these young people congregate there, enjoy themselves at the campsite. They go swimming, they go to the lake, they're camping out. I can remember three young men, was Donny. Was it Donny? And, uh, but the boy was in the police force and, uh--

**Interviewer:** [unintelligible 00:28:54]

**Harry Gairey Sr:** And uh, it was just something wonderful that we need. And I do hope that we would some future date that you would start this thing again because it's something that the Black kid can go in the summer and have two weeks of enjoyment and enjoy the country life here and honor, good and strict supervision as you have run camp there a couple of years ago, and I-I really missed it. And I said, again, you must start working on it from today. So that by next July or August, you can go back to camp again. [laughs]

**Interviewer:** Of course, I think [inaudible 00:29:39] his letter home.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Yes. Well, listen I-I would like to see it. What-what's the boy's name? Uh, the little devil era that they get ambitious. He wasn't really a bad boy, but he was mischievous. What was his name? Oh, I saw his sister, Shirley, quite often. Do you remember his name? You wouldn't remember his name.

**Interviewer:** Jack.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** Oh, Jack Grady. Jack Grady. Yeah, Jack Grady. And, uh, I saw one of the, uh, oh. Oh, I saw one of the girls. Did she graduate from [unintelligible 00:30:20]? Uh, one of the girls was up at the Camp-- there's one that was a counsellor.

**Interviewer:** Uh, maybe one of the Atkins--

**Harry Gairey Sr:** No, no, this was a Jamaican girl. Olivia. Uh, same girl, there was, remember, someone told us the other day, it was Lana. Lana brought her down.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** She works in Eaton's at, uh, graduating and going to college but she's finished now, she graduated. She wanted to go back and take, uh, get her master's. And, you know, it was so- it was so nice that you were able to give those kids the incentive

because probably if they hadn't gone to the camp that summer, and get a little money [unintelligible].

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** I'm sure.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Harry Gairey Sr:** So, what have you been thinking of--

**[00:32:07] [END OF AUDIO]**