

[Phone dial tone]

Stanley Grizzle [Phone Interview]: Leo Gaskins, Toronto, 2nd of March 1988.

[phone rings]

Stanley: What is your full name please, uh, Leo?

Leo: Leo Alphonso G-Gaskins.

Stanley: With an s?

Leo: G-A-S-K-I-N-S.

Stanley: Right. And you were born in Toronto?

Leo: That's correct. Yeah.

Stanley: What was your date of birth?

Leo: 1916.

Stanley: Right.

Leo: March the 1st.

Stanley: Right. And you became a sleeping car porter on the Canadian Pacific Railway, on what date?

Leo: Oh.

Stanley: Yes.

Leo: From, um-- 1948-

Stanley: Uh-huh,

Leo: -to 1961.

Stanley: What date in 1948?

Leo: I couldn't t-t-tell you the date.

Stanley: Uh-huh.

Leo: All I know is the year.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. And why did you take the job as sleeping car porter?

Leo: Because I couldn't find any other kind of employment.

Stanley: All right, and how long-- sorry, you told me how long you were a sleeping car porter.

Leo: Thirteen years.

Stanley: Thirteen years, yeah. Did you enjoy the job of sleeping car porter?

Leo: Um, the job, no; the travel, yes.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. Why didn't you enjoy the job?

Leo: Because it was subservient.

Stanley: Oh, I see. Um, how did you find the traveling public?

Leo: Um, um, maybe about 85 pleasant, and the other 15 unpleasant.

Stanley: Did you become a member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters?

Leo: Yes, I did.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. And how long after you be- were employed did you join the Brotherhood?

Leo: Well, I'm not too sure that the- that the union was- was formed after I was there or before I got there.

Stanley: No, just for the record the Brotherhood had its first contract with the CPR in 1945.

Leo: Ah, well then, when I became an employee of CPR, I-I might have joined the union.

Stanley: Uh-huh. Did you join voluntarily or under any pressure?

Leo: No, no, voluntarily.

Stanley: So that leads to the question of why did you join the Brotherhood?

Leo: Well, for protection-

Stanley: Uh-huh.

Leo: -as far as employment was concerned.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. Did you find that they gave you the protection you expected?

Leo: Um, well, I didn't get myself into any um, troubles to-- um, to have any specific protection.

Stanley: Uh-huh.

Leo: It was just that CPR, they knew that we had a union and they couldn't mis- um, treat us.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. But other than that, did the Brotherhood give you protection as far as working conditions and-and income was concerned?

Leo: Yes, I believe they did.

Stanley: Yeah, Mm-hmm, to your satisfaction?

Leo: Yes.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. Now, um, can you recall who were the chief, um, the Brotherhood would you said the Brotherhood stalwarts in Canada?

Leo: In Canada?

Stanley: We had the Brotherhood and we had the Ladies' Auxiliary and can you think of any of the members--

Leo: In Canada? You don't mean in Toronto?

Stanley: Yes, why yes. That's right, start in Toronto, Montreal, go right through to the various divisions, if you wish.

Leo: I can't recall the name of one of the chaps from Winnipeg—

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Leo: --um, I believe he was the-- he was like an Executive Director of Canada.

Stanley: O, Blanchette?

Leo: Yes, that's the name, yes.

Stanley: You considered him one of the strongest-

Leo: Yeah.

Stanley: -supporters of the Brotherhood?

Leo: Yeah. And in Toronto at the time was, um—the time that I was on the road-

Stanley: Um-hmm.

Leo: -would be, um, Shirley Jackson.

Stanley: Um-hmm.

Leo: I can't-- Shirley Jackson would be, Petgrave, Bob Willis. I think that would be it.

Stanley: Right. Now, um, could you-- could you evaluate the leadership given by A. Philip Randolph? What did you think about his leadership?

Leo: Oh-- evaluate A. Philip Randolph?

Stanley: Yeah.

Leo: Well, so-- what I knew he was the uh-- he was the founder of the Brotherhood of Sleep Car Porters.

Stanley: But what did you think of his leadership? Did he give good leadership or mediocre or--?

Leo: Um, yes, I think he gave good leadership.

Stanley: How about Blanchette?

Leo: I think he did also.

Stanley: Yeah. All right. Getting back to the-- return to the portering. What did you think of the practice of tipping? Did it bother you at all?

Leo: The tipping?

Stanley: Yes.

Leo: Well, when we were hired on, I think, we were-- when I was hired on, I believe, they-- the salary was oh, about, I don't know, \$2,000 a year.

Stanley: Um-hmm.

Leo: I think between \$2,000 and \$2,800 a year, and we were t-told by the-the office in Toronto that, uh, the reason why the wages were so low was that-that our tips would make up our wages.

Stanley: Could you get close to the phone, please.

Leo: That our tips would make up a living wage.

Stanley: Um-hmm.

Leo: Along with the, um, the-the- the regular salary of approximately \$2,000.

Stanley: Who told you this?

Leo: It was the-- in the office, I don't know who.

Stanley: Who-- a CPR official?

Leo: The CPR officials in Toronto.

Stanley: I see, yeah.

Leo: That the salary would-- the tips would make up to a living wage and-and the reason why they did that was to make your work harder to get the tips. So, therefore, your, the service would be better.

Stanley: But did-did you think this being a negative aspect to it? Did it- did it bother you?

Leo: Of course, it bothered me.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. In what way?

Leo: I thought it was ridiculous that-that a person had to be- had to be a-a- a threatened in order to become more subservient.

Stanley: Threatened? How?

Leo: The threat uh, was the-the-the low wage—the tips to-to-to make it a living wage. And the tips in order to, ah, to make you give more service. Bend backwards to give service.

Stanley: I see. Right. Mm-hmm. Okay. Anything else on tipping?

Leo: No, that's about all.

Stanley: Um, getting back um, to the organizing of the porters, you started in 1948, right?

Leo: That's right.

Stanley: So, you weren't here when they-- when they organized?

Leo: No.

Stanley: But you may have-- was your father on the road then?

Leo: Oh God, no. No, he had left the road.

Stanley: He left the road. He was a CPR porter too, wasn't he?

Leo: Um, yes, he was.

Stanley: For how many years?

Leo: No, he was, he was-- by the time I got on the road he was pensioned off.

Stanley: I see. Anyway, as far as your information goes um, two names have come up—the odd time and there seems to be some, uh, the information that I'm getting varies about these two people and their organizing of the Sleeping Car Porters. One is Charles Baldwin. What do you know about his role?

Leo: I-I know ver-ver-very little- a little about his, uh, involvement.

Stanley: I see. Mm-hmm. What about Harry Gairey?

Leo: Well, when I- when I started on the road, Harry Gairey was the, uh, the Porter Instructor. So, I-I, uh, by him being junior management.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Leo: That, uh, he couldn't be connected with any union.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. At that time, yeah. All right, um. So, I want to, uh, talk to-- talk about all the Ladies' Auxiliary. Your family was involved in the Ladies' Auxiliary, I have photographs here showing your mother and I'll free this as part of the Ladies' Auxiliary, right?

Leo: Yes.

Stanley: Uh-huh. What did you think of the Brotherhood having a Ladies' Auxiliary? You think there was a, uh, a real purpose that they served?

Leo: Repeat that again?

Stanley: What did you think about the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters having in Ladies' Auxiliary. Was it a good idea or not?

Leo: Well, I never give it to the, that much thought.

Stanley: Mm.

Leo: I just, uh, I guess the Ladies' Auxiliary was, uh, to give, uh, support to their- to their spouses.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Leo: Um, or their brothers or fathers.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Leo: That were members of the, uh, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Leo: And that's what I-I figured their function was for the, uh, support.

Stanley: Yeah.

Leo: Like we always say being a successful man as a woman.

Stanley: All right. Now, you were not the only member of the, uh, your fa- your family who was, uh, working as a sleeping car porters the same time you were.

Leo: No.

Leo: You had two brothers.

Stanley: That's right.

Leo: And who-who were the most seniority?

Leo: Uh.

Stanley: Who started first?

Leo: I thought-- I think they both started about the same time.

Stanley: As you did.

Leo: No, no, no, no. Oh, you mean between, uh, the three of us?

Stanley: Yeah.

Leo: Uh, I think, uh, Romeo and Nathaniel-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Leo: -started about the same time.

Stanley: Before you?

Leo: Oh, well-well, way before me.

Stanley: Oh, did they?

Leo: Yeah.

Stanley: Oh, see. Mm-hmm. I'm gonna have to get their phone numbers from you. Mm-hmm. Um, you have them, do you?

Leo: Yes, I do.

Stanley: We'll talk it at the end. Now, I want to give this-this, uh, book a little, a light spot.

Leo: Yeah.

Stanley: Um, it's gonna be all heavy history, but one of the things that amuses me is some of the nicknames of porters [chuckles].

Leo: Oh yeah. Uh-huh.

Stanley: I was wondering if you can think of any nicknames of porters. I have quite a list here.

Leo: Oh, I see.

Stanley: But I don't want to miss any, uh, nicknames of to include them, show that. So, the sets of humor that we did have, even though we were the bottom of the ladder, economically-

Leo: I see.

Stanley: -to begin with.

Leo: Well, I know the-the-the-the-the, um, nickname they give, but that was before he was on the road, uh, they called Nathaniel, Tech.

Stanley: Oh, yes. Where'd you get that name from?

Leo: I have no idea.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Leo: His-his-his chums and his peers.

Stanley: Oh, I see. Any other nicknames you can think of?

Leo: From me? No.

Stanley: You didn't know a fellow...

Leo: I was just plain Leo.

Stanley: Yeah. I mean, you don't know nickname, any other persons had?

Leo: Well, there was a lot of nicknames. There was Pipe Smokin' Brown, Pipe Smokin' Johnson.

Stanley: Mm-hmm, right.

Leo: We both talkin' somebody, I don't know.

Stanley: No Talkin' Brown.

Leo: Yeah.

Stanley: Pussy Hill.

Leo: Yeah.

Stanley: But I can't put- I can't publish that one.

Leo: I know you can't put that one down.

Stanley: Unless I can say he, had a lot of cats in and around the house, you know?

Leo: No, that's right [laughs].

Stanley: All right, uh, now in concluding.

Leo: Yeah. You want the phone numbers?

Stanley: Uh, just a moment. In concluding, would you like to, uh, make any comments about or observations about the role of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, uh, played in Canada? Do you think it played a role in uplifting the-the-the, um, Black community, givin' them any, more pride? Or what effect do the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters had in this community?

Leo: No, I-I-I believe they, uh, that they, uh, that they gave a little more dignity to the, uh, the, uh, the porters.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Leo: And, uh, which, uh, you-you give them a little more pride.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Leo: But that's about all I could, uh, answer.

Stanley: You don't, that's all?

Leo: That's all.

Stanley: You don't have any concluding comments you wanna make?

Leo: Not particularly, no.

Stanley: Okay. Thank you very much. No you gonna give me those phone--

End of interview with Leo Gaskins. Interview of, uh, William C. Wright, uh, Toronto, 3rd of March, 1988. What is your name, your full name?

William C. Kingfish Wright: William. C Kingfish Wright.

Stanley: Here. D BA, uh, date of birth, Willie?

William: Um, June the 25th, 1915.

Stanley: And, uh, you were born in Toronto?

William: Right in Toronto.

Stanley: And when did you become a sleeping car porter on the CPR?

William: In-in-in July the 1st, 1936.

Stanley: Why did you become a sleeping car porter?

William: Up until that point up of my life, I was playing in an orchestra and we had the only-- it was the only coloured orchestra in-in Toronto. We had tried to- tried to get into the union, but they wouldn't, uh, they said they didn't want any coloured in the- in the union. And this was- this was said to us, right to our face, by a guy named Luigi Romanelli. He was the- he was the Secretary-Treasurer of the Toronto Musicians' Union. And he practically ran the union and he was in a band playing at the King Edward Hotel. And he says, he, no, that we can't- we can't come in. So, therefore, there was a lot of jobs that we could have had, but were denied us because we weren't a union. But, however, we did work- we did work-work in, um, non-union places. And, um, we had a Jewish booking manager at the time and what he used to do--

Stanley: What was his name?

William: Geez, I can't quite think of it, his name, but Mr. Klein used to drive us. Mr. Klein had a big Pierce-Arrow. The seven-passenger Pierce-Arrow and he could-- and our band could fit in there providin' we had no more than six or seven. And, uh, so--

Stanley: Whose Ben Lucas.

William: This was called a Harlem Aces and it comprised of, uh, uh, Harry Lucas on piano. Um, Knowle Allen on-on saxophone, um, Charlie Wynne- Charlie Wynne on trumpet and Wallace Thompson on banjo. And what this- this, uh, booking, uh, manager would do, uh, in those days, there used to be quite a, uh, the big bands, like Basie, Lunchfort, and Ellington, all those big- all those big bands, they would come and they would go on a tour of the tourist resorts, like in Owen Sound, Kincardine, uh, South Hampton, all those, uh, all those, uh, uh, uh, places were, they had night, uh, they were small towns, but they had big dance halls because they would rely on people coming from as far as Toronto to go up there to those dances. So, what he would do, after a big band would-would like Basie, for instance, would make the tour, about a week or so later, he would book us up there and we would-- we would make the, make the tour. And so, when we would, we would come up there the week after and, of course, I was just around about 16 years old then. And I was very, very enthusiastic and I was just, it was just great for me just to get away from home, just to stay in a hotel. And such as the type that we were so second-class hotels. So anyway, we would get-- Harry Lucas was the piano player. He had a wooden leg, a peg leg, and Eckhardt was the guy I remember the... And it was Eckhardt that was, he used to book us too, Eckhardt. I forget what his first name is, but that was his last name. And he had this vehicle and it was a cross between a station wagon. It wasn't exactly, and a van, what a van is today. But it was an odd-looking vehicle. And, so when we would drive up to these towns and he'd park it, he would always park the car, like we had a sign up there, Harlem Aces, Harlem Aces on the side, a big sign up there. And he'd park [laughs] the car on the main street and then Eckhardt would go out there and hand out handbills about where we're going to play that night. So, therefore, in no time, there's a crowd around the vehicle and they'd be lookin' in and they-- And so I would hear- we'd hear, I would hear different parts of comments like this, "Geez, Hey, listen, Geez, there's niggers, there's niggers in this thing." And they'd get a little closer, a little closer, "There's a nigger with a peg leg there." [laughs] I would laugh. I would laugh and Knowle Allen and Charlie wouldn't, they were really mad. In fact, Knowle Allen, if he was, he would try to spit at them, you know, until. In fact, if Eckhardt was around-- he would spit at them, you know, and they would be real, real mad about that. You

see? So anyway, when we'd get to the places, well, I'm sayin' that to say this, that I would be about the only one that was crazy enough to speak with these people. Because I didn't know any difference. And, uh, and...

Stanley: Okay, well.

William: And I didn't feel insulted about it. Like, like Charlie Wynne, and Knowle Allen, they were, and Lucas, they were very insulted.

Stanley: How old were you when you joined the band?

William: I was about 15.

Stanley: And when you joined the CPR, you were?

William: Well, I had just turned, I had just turned-- as a matter of fact, I had been in, in, to answer your question, I was 20 when I joined the CPR, but what happened was I was in school for two weeks and, and, and, and one day I got a notice. I had to go upstairs to the office. And, so there was a fellow up there. And that was my first dealings with this guy called Norman Smith.

Stanley: Well, I don't want to get into that, Willie. I don't want to get into that.

William: Well, I was going to explain what happened, what happened, what happened, how in those days you had to have a birth certificate to-- and be 21 before they would take you on. But I was. So, Norman Smith had picked, I had been in training for two weeks before my application, I guess, got perused carefully by or checked, should I say, by Norman Smith, and he discovered that I wasn't 21. So, he told me that I was finished, that I couldn't, couldn't continue. And then he even started to lecture me and, and start to say, tellin' me, I shouldn't have lied, actually, what I have done, I've lied about my application. And he talked real down on me. And that was my first, and I took a dislike for that man, right from the very first time.

Stanley: I want to interrupt here. Who was the leader of the band to get the back?

William: The band? Well, I would say it would be between Harry Lucas and Charlie Wynne.

Stanley: Okay. Now, how did you get the name Kingfish?

William: Well, everybody in the band, everybody in the band had a, had some kind of, had some kind of a nickname. And, uh, and uh, oh, we had a fellow that came and joined our band and he was quite a musician. He was from Detroit and his name was Brown, Brownie. And, uh, so anyway, for some reason or another, see, at, at, at that time, at that time, Amos and Andy were the big things on, they were, they were the stars on TV day. Not TV on radio, on radio. And, uh, so anyway, for some reason out of Brown, Brownie from, from uh, Detroit, he put that, he put that name on me, Kingfish for something, I don't know. And that's how it [laughs]

Stanley: What did you play in the band?

William: I used to play drums in the band.

Stanley: All right. Did you, how long were you a sleeping car porter? How many years?

William: Well, I was from uh-- so coming back from see now it's 20. And--

Stanley: Well, tell me when you left the railroad and I can figure it out. When did you leave the railroad? What year?

William: But see, I applied for a leave of absence. Geez. I don't have that exact date...

Stanley: Oh, I see.

William: ...with me, but I applied for a leave of absence when the government, when the CPR start givin' away their overnight runs. I was running to Ottawa.

Stanley: Did you retire because of age? No?

William: No, no, no, no. I resigned.

Stanley: You resigned?

William: Yes. I resigned.

Stanley: Why?

William: Because I wrote a letter, I wrote a letter. I wrote a letter and, in that letter, to the Superintendent who was heart- named Hardaker, Artie Hardaker. And I said that-- I framed Mr. Hardaker. Well, I'd like to get a leave of absence, because due to the uncertainty of this Canadian Pacific Railroad, as far as their passenger trains was concerned, the sleeping car, I could not-- I said, "I was at this funeral and Mr. John Mooney, who was General Manager of the Jockey Club, approached me and asked me if I would be interested in coming and working with the Jockey Club permanently. And he offered me this position, this position. So, I would like to have-- I would like to have 90 days. Yea, three months. 90 days, leave of absence to try it out." And I had to discuss that and Mr. Hardaker said, "Sure." He says, "That's fine." He says--

Stanley: Do you remember what year that was?

William: No.

Stanley: You have no idea how long you worked in the road? Did you work 20 years, 25 years?

William: Oh, yes. I worked-- I would say at least 20, 25 years. Maybe 30 years. So that would bring it, can you figure that up.

Stanley: Well, you started in what year?

William: 1936.

Stanley: So, '66, around 1966, you retired?

William: Yeah. Around there.

Stanley: Somewhere around there.

William: Yes.

Stanley: You get a pension?

William: No. No, no pension.

Stanley: They gave you the money you put in, though.

William: Yes. Which was \$1,000, \$1,500.

Stanley: Oh, my goodness. Not much.

William: So, yes.

Stanley: All right. Did you enjoy the job of sleeping car porter?

William: Very much. Very much. I really enjoyed my trip on that railroad. And if I had to do it over again, I would do the same thing over again. I enjoyed it, enjoyed it so much.

Stanley: What did you enjoy about the job?

William: The fellowship of the men. The comradery of the men.

Stanley: How about uh the public?

William: And, and, and meeting the- meeting the power in my-- I was just there a few years and then they put me on a, uh, on the observation car, then I could run steady. And I was running steady on the railroad when men like Charlie Baldwin, I'm saying Charlie, Ray Lewis is another one, they couldn't work, they were laid off and I was workin' steady.

Stanley: All right, now uh--

William: Because I was on the observation card.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. Now, uh, during the time you were a porter-

William: Mm-hmm.

Stanley: -I understand there was a-- what was called a Porters' Welfare Committee.

William: Yes.

Stanley: Do you know anything about that?

William: Well, not-- No, not-not really because, uh, the-the men that ran that were, uh, were senior- were senior men. And when I say senior me- senior men and like, uh, if I could just call like a few names like Shirley Jackson, George Ellis, Mag Nickel and, uh, uh, the Cromwells. The Cromwells, both Cromwells, Frank, Less and Frank, they were the junior that-- They weren't junior men but they were junior as far as Shirley Jackson was concerned cause he was so far ahead of those guys. And, uh, so they were [unintelligible 00:31:30] on that PM. Is that the Porters' Mutual, PM...

Stanley: PMBA.

William: Yes. And uh--

Stanley: Was the Porter's PMBA and the Welfare Committee the same thing?

William: I think so, uh, I think so.

Stanley: What did they-- What-what purpose did they serve?

William: Well they were uh-- they were-- they were-- they were the social, they were the Grievance Committee. They were the gre-- If anybody got into any trouble they would go up and plead-plead for the-- Because in those days you could get fired for almost without a-a hearing.

William: Right.

Stanley: And, uh, so-so they would go up there. They would go up there and-and-and plead your case, because there's no way that you're gonna get up to-- A.B. Smith was the, uh, superintendent in those days. And-and-and he was just like a lord. He sat up there like a-- like a-- like a lord. And-and--

William: Okay, um, did you become a member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping, Car Porters in time?

Stanley: Right from its inception.

William: Right-right-- If there's such a thing as a chartered member, I would be a chartered member.

Stanley: What year did you join?

William: Was when, what-- I can't-- I can't-- I-I looked last night in my drawer. I did have some year cards and I think-- I got-- I got five- or six year cards. What we called gold ca-- gold cards-- gold cards. Because I always paid my dues a year.

Stanley: I wish you had brought them. Those are the kinda things I like to have.

William: Yeah. Jeez, I-- And I-- And I've had those things in my drawer but they're-they're tied together and they're probably--

Stanley: You find them, you let me know.

William: I sure will, yeah. And I know I would like to-- That-that would be good proof of-- 'Cause, uh, just-just to show that there was very-- Most of 'em were gold cards, you see.

Stanley: They are to make-- I might even make a photostat of them.

William: Sure, sure. Of course, sure.

Stanley: Okay. Um, why did you join the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters?

William: Well-well, it was a choice. We had a choice of either joining the, uh, joining the Brotherhood. But fellas like, uh, like Shirley Jackson and-and-- True Shirley Jackson who act incidentally. Even though he was, uh, like a, uh, uh, uh-- We all worked on the road together, but he-he- he more or less treated me like a son. And, uh, so he was the one even to, uh, to say, "Well, okay, Kingfish you get in-- get in this thing." And-and I-I did. I forget how much you had to put in there to, um, to join.

Stanley: But he signed you up, Shirley Jackson, eh?

William: Well, I guess Chevalier did, but he took me to Chevalier and introduced me and said, "Do look after him, [unintelligible 00:43:55] just you know. 'Cause I-I didn't know Chevalier before I started on the railroad. But I sure in the hell knew who Shirley Jackson 'cause we were all-- I mean, uh, his family and our, uh, my brothers and sister, we're all-we're all raised together. And I used to go to Jackson's house all the time and they lived on Bellevue Street.

Speaker: Down near the Fire Hall.

William: Right. Yeah, a few doors down from the Fire Hall, yes.

Stanley: I see. Okay now, uh-- But you didn't really tell me why you joined the Brotherhood.

William: Yes, well, so anyway, there was-- there were starting this-this-this, uh-- There was a-- There was quite a bit of-of, uh, of controversy about, uh, dissatisfaction with-with the Social-Social Committee, uh, or-or the Porters' Grievance Committee which was Shirley Jackson and-- Another one I forgot to mention. And he played an important part. His name was P. Fox- Fox. Ben- that's Bennie Fox's father and he was-- They were-- I mean he originally is American but he's uh-- He was-- he was up there and age and in seniority with Shirley Jackson. Shirley Jackson was probably at-- Now Cyril Woods was one and-and-and he was-- He was the Porter Instructor in those days.

Stanley: He was against the union, wasn't he?

William: Oh, yeah, definitely. Definitely. Definitely, and-- So-so and then they were-- they were-- they were, uh, the CNR was-- The CNR was- was-- They had a couple of aggressive fellas over there and they said they were gonna come over and organize us and we would be part of the-the- that-- They would make fun of us and say, "Why join an American union when you can be part of a large Canadian union. And there's no prejudice and-and there's prejudice in the-- in the Brotherhood?" I mean, like, uh, in other words, uh, uh, what I mean by that, uh, that-the Brotherhood wasn't fully accepted. It was acceptable in certain parts of

the-- of-- A-at that time in certain parts of the States, they were still having-having-having, uh, uh, trouble uh, I mean, it was-- wasn't, uh, it was-was segregated. And, uh, uh, for instance I was-- I remember real well, of, one of my nice trip, I was on a special party and I went to Louisville, Kentucky. And-and in that, I-I had to go down to Cincinnati and-and- and- - So the Pullmen put me on this train at Detroit. The Big Four out of Detroit. So, the Pullman porters came back. I never met him before but he was a member and he said that he worked out a-- I think he said he worked out of Chicago and he was an officer in the-- in the-- in the Brotherhood. They're not-- I can't think of this fella's name but he-he introduced himself and-and-and asked if-if how-- He was interested how we were doing with, was I and he was— He was a, I talked with him and-and he said I should stay with the-- with the-- with the Brotherhood. And what I, then next one I first heard about A. Philip Randolph. And uh-- And he taught me oh how bad these things were and-and how-- what they could do. And I ended. I was to, uh, don't- don't argue with, uh, conductor or don't get in any discussion, you know? And he told me to be careful. And, uh, uh, so we got to Louisville. And that was right after they had the big flood. They had a big flood down there. Oh, huge, and water came up.

Stanley: Okay let's, uh, get back on track here. Now um, so you joined the Brotherhood, uh, because, uh, you haven't really said, but you thought the Brotherhood could do a good job.

William: Yes.

Stanley: All right. And, um, do you remember what the joining fee was?

William: It would be something like around \$25.

Stanley: All right.

William: Somewhere around \$25, around in there.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. Um, do you know um, who were the-- You mentioned P. Fox.

William: Yes.

Stanley: Chevalier, Shirley Jackson as being part of the organizers. Were there any other-other people who were-- Do you know how the Brotherhood started in Canada? How did this-- did the Randolph get invited over here to organize that?

William: All I know is when he- when he- when he came over and spoke to us when he spoke to us and I got invited to that meeting, I think we had it at the- at the home service, if I'm not...

Stanley: Because I've been to Montreal and across Canada, and I'm getting two versions.

William: Yes.

Stanley: One version is that the Montreal, The-the Brotherhood started in Montreal and then I've been told it started in Toronto.

William: Yes.

Stanley: I've been told it started in Montreal through Padmore.

William: Yeah.

Stanley: Uh, remember we were talkin' about Padmore, but, um, he was the head of PMB down there, uh, I met his daughter when I thought she was telling me. And then I was told that Charlie Baldwin started it here. He went. So, I'm not too sure. You know who-who started it?

William: No. Well, I don't think I can--

Stanley: You don't know, eh? Right?

William: I can't say for sure.

Stanley: Well, was Harry Gairey one of the- one of the key men?

William: No, I should say not. No.

Stanley: Wasn't he on the road then?

William: He sure we, he was in the same class with me.

Stanley: Oh yeah?

William: I was in the same or I was in the same class with him.

Stanley: Yeah.

William: And-and Sealy-Sealy was another one. Mertin Sealy.

Stanley: Was he an organizer?

William: No-no. Oh, no-no-no-no Mertin.

Stanley: But Gairey wasn't-- didn't have a-- he wasn't one of the key men?

William: No, I wouldn't-I wouldn't think so.

Stanley: Oh, I see.

William: No.

Stanley: I just wanna get it straight. How about Charlie Baldwin? Was he a key man?

William: Oh, yes.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

William: Yes. Oh yeah. Charlie Baldwin.

Stanley: How about Bob Willis?

William: Yes. Yeah, but-but, uh, but, uh, Bob Willis was, uh, yes, he did a lot of hard work for-- hard work, but he-he-he was, uh, very overbearing and-and-and he couldn't, uh, have patience with those that, uh, weren't quite sure what-what would've--

Stanley: I know what you mean there.

William: Yeah. See.

Stanley: Well, what were the working conditions under which the porters worked before the Brotherhood came in?

William: Well-

Stanley: Because it were the working conditions which caused the Brotherhood to come in?

William: Yes.

Stanley: So, what were- what were the working conditions that were so poor?

William: Well, uh, uh, what was, uh, uh, what was drilled into us when we started in-- and that was in 1936, what was drilled into now, a passenger is always right. That's number one. And just-- you just remember that and-and-and-and, uh, and- and you better not go upstairs and-and- and make a difference what a passenger said. They went by that-that letter.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

William: And you could be, you- you could be fired- you could be fired practically without any kind of a hearing, except for maybe the Grievance Committee. If they couldn't do anything for you-you were finished.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

William: And, and they- they had the- the CPR, there was a favourite-- they employed a-a clause in there [laughs] and that was their favourite clause. And they used that against people like Ray Lewis and Charlie Baldwin. He had that thing rammed on him. He said, "Mr. Baldwin, we-we-we- we have the right through fitness and ability, fitness and ability, in our opinion, we have that right to pick who we wish for that observation car."

Stanley: Right.

William: And, uh, and it's right here. It was right here in our agreement that you're- that you are you're that, uh, your- your [laughs] agreement with-with the- with the porter, he says, and that's, and- and-and we reserve- we reserve that right.

Stanley: Oh, I see. So-so was the system of favouritism, which they, they used.

William: Yeah, the youth, yes. Oh, yes, of course -of course.

Stanley: How about the, uh, other working conditions?

William: Well--

Stanley: How about the meal situation? Did you think, the meal situation change after the Brotherhood came in or--?

William: Uh, no, uh, see, we never had on the CPR-- I mean, when, while I was there, we never had the thing, like, they head on the CNR with that curtain when they used to put that curtain on you. In other words, you-you-you could never sit in the same-- in the dining car and- and, uh, the CPR, they would have to serve, they would serve you in the-- even though you were buying your meals.

Stanley: But there was a curtain when I started.

William: Not on the CPR.

Stanley: You couldn't, uh--

William: No. The curtain was there on the CNR. Yes- yes. When you went on a CNR train, yes. They put the curtain up, but now, but now the CPR never, they never had no curtain. And I'm talking from 36 now, when, and you were after me.

Stanley: The CNR had it?

William: CNR had it.

Stanley: Oh, I see.

William: Yes. Was she, oh, yes? CNR had it because I remember we used to go on that train to Montreal, on the pool train to Montreal.

Stanley: All right, um, was there any intimidation practiced during the organizing of the union? Did the company put any pressure on the porters not to join?

William: No, not that I, when if they did, I didn't know anything about it. But, uh, just like with this man ex-explained to me, when I went to Louisville and he was a Pullman porter, he, what he said there was some, he said that there were some that lost their life.

Stanley: Yeah.

William: In the south.

Stanley: Right.

William: Uh, through my through uh, so he really put, he really had me. He really, when I say scared me, I was, we were in the yards there at, uh, if we were in the yards there at-at, uh, Cincinnati [laughs] he would've. And-and that's why--

[00:47:16] [END OF AUDIO]