

Food Sovereignty
in Black Washington, DC:
1950 - 2017

Boe Luther Umar

Oral history conducted by Dominique Hazzard
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Interviewee: Boe Muhsin Luther Umar

Interviewer: Dominique Hazzard

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Summary:

Community farmer Boe Luther discusses his childhood memories of food in Clay Terrace, his experience with incarceration and the criminal justice system, his work to bring urban agriculture back to his community, and his vision for food sovereignty in D.C.

2:42 Introductory statement and early memories of food in Clay Terrace in the 60s and 70s

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8:38 Childhood experiences with the foster care and criminal justice systems

10:56 Reflections on experience in prison in the 80s and 90s

13:03 Reflections on parole and life as a returning citizen in 2001

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Dominique: Hello Boe! (laughter) Ok so what's your full name and what year were you born, and where?

BL: Well my full name is Muhsin Boe Luther Umar. And I was born in Washington, D.C. on 322 54th St (NE), May the 2nd, 1964 on a living room floor.

DH: On a living room floor.

BL: Yeah on a living room floor.

DH: Well tell me some more about that neighborhood.

BL: It's a neighborhood-- I wasn't just born and raised there, my family was born and raised there. My grandma. I was talking to a guy yesterday and he asked me did I remember back when we was little when boys, when bones used to wash up from when we had a heavy rain. Because-- I wanna do some research-- I think that was a burial ground, a cemetery at one time, Clay Terrace. I did know it was a swamp area. And when we was young we did used to see bones wash up when we had a heavy rain. It was never no sidewalk there for at least until like '75 or something. It was always just gravel. Like a dirt road. That's why they called it Clay Terrace, because it was like clay. And it was never-- you could walk from-- the street didn't have a sidewalk or no pavement, it was just gravel from the street straight to your front door.

And I can remember the bread man, the egg man. They used to have brown eggs they called "Muslim." He wasn't a Muslim, it just so happened he had brown eggs. We used to say "The Muslim man coming!" and then he might say "Egggg mannnn!" Errybody run out,"There go the Muslim man!" I can remember when we had eggs. I can also remember we had farms around there, back in the 60s and 70s. Like on the Division and Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue. They had farms, we also had a Wonder Bread company right there. And railroad tracks. That ran right through Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue. It was actually really a country area, purely, even back then even up 'til now you can still find people like-- most people say I talk with a country accent sometime, but hey. I'm right from the heart of D.C. born and raised! [00:02:42]

But growing up in that area was very fun, and everybody was-- the whole neighborhood was overprotective with everybody. It was like with me they was double protective because my mother got killed when I was four. And it was a real serious turning point in my life. You got to imagine a person growing up without his mother. And knowing-- you hear what happened to her. And the guy that jumped out, they said he thought he hit a -- He said "I ain't know I"-- Imma be honest with you, he was a white guy. And from the way my grandma was tellin me, he jumped out the car and said, "I ain't know I hit a nigger, I thought I hit a deer." So you know that's how it was back in those days. [00:03:30]

And as far as with my father, growing up, he was never really there, not 'less I needed a whopping. And always late too. It ain't never happen the day [I misbehaved]. I basically was

raised by my neighborhood. As I was growing up-- let me go back a little bit-- when my mother got killed, it was three of us. I don't know if it still is or not, but it was three of us and I'm the oldest. I have a brother. I have a sister first, and then I have a brother. And I haven't seen my brother since almost fifty years. Technically, he was kidnapped. The lady that was babysitting my brother when my mother got killed-- because my mother was working at the hospital-- and the lady found out that she died-- no, that she got killed-- we never seen my brother again.

I been looking for him but it's not an easy task because he got a common name, Edward Jackson. Don't know a middle name. I've checked my mother's birth records and tried to find out, but it's just a common name. And on the birth record it don't even have his year, I don't even know when he was born. But I just know I had a brother. And it's a hurting feeling sometime to go through the world and you'll hear the name Edward and you'll look like-- is that my brother? And I'll look at the person and see if he resemble me in any type of way. And I don't remember if he had eyes like mine. My sister didn't, but me and my mother were the only one who had the eyes like that. So I wouldn't even know what he look like today. [00:05:29]

But through it all I had a rough life because I was the type that grew up-- I didn't-- you know how most people say they got in trouble with the wrong crew? I got locked up 'cause I wanted to get locked up. Because at the age of six I found out that they could put me up for adoption, or foster care, halfway house at that age because my grandmother was just my legal guardian. And she was like 60 something and they didn't want me to be trouble to my grandmother. So what happened was I was sittin on the steps and I heard them talkin about me and they were talkin about "Well, Ms. Jackson, your grandson is trouble, he's a troubled child. And if he gets in trouble he'll keep coming back home to you. But now we can take him and put him in foster care or something like that." Yeah, that's how they did us back then. And me, I immediately thought like "Nah, you can't put me in foster care." So I'd rather go to jail.

At the age of 8 a guy slapped my sister when we was in elementary school cause he liked her, and I stabbed him in the head with an umbrella. And from there I never cared about going to jail. Because when they did that-- they proved it to me when they locked me up to say well-- and sent me to a receiving home, it's New Beginning now-- when they sent me there I heard them saying "look we gon have to release you into the custody of his grandmother." And they was trying to get to me then. "Well we can move him to a shelter house."

Nah. From that day on, from the age of 8 up until 35 all I did was in and out of jail. It didn't matter. My brain was numb to the fact that it didn't matter. Because I knew every time I went to jail, I came back home to my family. And it seems kind of crazy, but that's the only way I survived out here in this world. Because I didn't want to be separated from the only person I had left, who was my little sister and my grandmother. So going back and forth to jail they didn't understand what I was doing. My grandmother used to be like "Baby why you keep going back and forth to jail?" I says well it's the only way I can get back to y'all. It was hurtin her, but she didn't understand it. But my little sister had no choice but to understand it because I had to provide for them.

It was sad because my father had like four ice cream trucks and a store. Only time he showed up to do anything for us was when [it was] Christmas time, or if it was show-off time for an event where he had to come and get me and my little sister and take us somewhere. But through it all I got through it because it was always a thing like if I could--whenever something happened "Boe, wanna go do something?" -- let's go. [I] didn't kid. It's sad, but [I] didn't kid. And nine out of ten I was always the one that got away. They was always the one get caught. [00:08:38]

And it hit me when I turned I think 27. A crime that I didn't do, they gave me life without parole. They gave me fifty-three years. Fifteen years three times, plus five. Forty-eight to life. I had to get parole from one to go to another. I had to get parole from fifteen years to another, to another. But I fought it. And through the grace of the creator, after thirteen years I got back on appeals and I got released after doing thirteen years.

The sad thing about that is that they set us up for failure, period. Because when I got released, I got released a whole year before time. So when I got released-- look at me. I'm small frame. But when I got released I weighed 210 pounds. On medication. And coming home after doing that much time you get lost. So I got a little lost doing what I did. But through it all I made it, doing the time. It's sad how they let returning citizens come to the street. In a manner where-- when I came home to go see my parole officer, I had to wait a whole year to come back to see him, because I was home a year before my time. So I was home, but more so in a limbo stage, because I wasn't on parole until a whole year. So that means they told me to stay out of trouble and come back to them a whole year-- you're talking to a person who just did 13 years, on psych medication, had no direction on which way he's going to go because you didn't give him no plan, no nothing. You just threw me out in the street. So it was already set up for me to return. So I struggled, struggled to get off the psych medication and all. [00:10:56]

DH: And how old were you? What year was this?

BL: This was like 17 years ago. So that was like... I got released 2001, I'll never forget it. August 31st, 2001. I'll never forget it because when I was getting released they gave me an option. I got released from Atlanta penitentiary. And when I got released, it was Aaliyah, Creator bless her soul, the singer Aaliyah she had just got in a plane crash that same month, earlier. So I was scared to get in a plane, so that's how I remember. So I caught a bus all the way from Atlanta to D.C. And when I got to D.C. I was just so lost.

DH: What did you end up doing when you came back?

BL: When I came back-- I done been homeless several times. It's funny for me, because the type of image I had. This thorough guy who didn't go for nothing, always on a mission. Wound up homeless a couple times because I refuse to commit a crime, I refuse to go back to jail. So within that time I started-- since I wasn't on parole-- I was going back and forth out of town to NY. Start sellin CDs. From selling CDs I went to sellin oil. From oil I start going to the farmers'

market up there on Pennsylvania Avenue, helping another mentor that helped me when I came home, helping him do vendoring. From there he finally gave me a chance and took me to Vegas. And when I went to Vegas to this clothing outlet, it was no turning back. I got hooked up, start selling clothes. From the clothes I done went to selling cars. I done had a detailing shop. I done had a little bit of it all since I been home. [00:13:03]

And like I said I done been homeless a couple times, because trying to help somebody else and it didn't work. But through it all I got into-- up to date now, I got tired of it. I got tired of being tired. Knowing nobody was really gon' do nothing for a returning citizen like me. With a history like mine. Because they try to say they gon help us. But I got a medical history. A violent history. So a person like that they feel like I was unstable to be working somewhere so they put me on SSI. But that's just a form of... welfare. Because my credit-- no matter how good your credit is you still can't get nothin because on paper you don't even make up to \$9,000 a year. But through it all I been going through that.

And thanks to you all and Dreaming Out Loud, it gives me the opportunity to do stuff. When I ran into Chris [Bradshaw] through Xavier Brown, life changed. Because I been struggling like from 37th St to get up, until I got out from Clay Terrace because I was trying to help the kids over there. I got my ice cream truck tryna help the kids, it didn't work. So I wind up ending up back in Clay Terrace where I was born and raised. And I never looked back since then. I been up and down as far as my ice cream truck. But through the agriculture you can't lose.

DH: Tell me about what you're doing now with your food truck and the agriculture you're doing in Clay Terrace.

BL: Well actually with my food truck, I'm not gon have a food truck, I mean my ice cream truck any more. Imma donate my ice cream truck to Hustlerz 2 Harvesters so we can have an office. So it'll be moreso a research center.

DH: So it'll be like a traveling office?

BL: No it's not even gon' be traveling, it's gon' be sitting there on the side of the farm. Because remember when you all come over there, you all don't have any space or anything. Like if I'd already had it in motion you could have been filming me over there or whatever the case may be

[00:15:24]

DH: ANd what's Hustlerz 2 Harvesters?

BL: Hustlerz 2 Harvesters is a group of returning citizens that collaborate with the young generation that want a better sustainable way of life through agriculture, carpentry, hoop house building, compost, garden specialists. All in one-- not just that, whatever you bring to the table! When it comes to Hustlerz 2 Harvesters that's what we are. A group of returning citizens that

just use bright ideas, but moreso wanna get with the young generation for that better sustainable way of life.

Cause you all are our future. I am 53 years old. So how long you think I'm gonna be able to survive doing this without creating and making a future for you all too. Not making one, but moreso making it stable for both of us, the young generation and the old generation. because without us a lot of y'all won't survive. Because we can go and do the things you didn't do. But we can also teach you and give you a guide on the things you should do. And help these other youngins get their self together man it's crazy. [00:16:36]

DH: How'd you get involved with farming?

BL: Farming never left me. I was born into it.

DH: In the countryside of Clay Terrace! (laughter)

BL: In the countryside of Clay Terrace! Right. It was always a farm. We always made sure that everybody had. When you come out of Clay Terrace-- we grew corn in our yards, carrots, it was always a farm over there. But happened was when we got little older, we thought farming was Moreso slavery like, because we had that mentality that "I ain't doing no farming man. That's what they used to do back in slavery days."

DH: So the older people were-- who were the people in Clay Terrace when you were growing up who were the people who were doing the farming?

BL: My grandmother, all the other neighbors. Basically every house, or every other house did some farming. If they [contribute] to it. Like if my grandmother grew something, somebody might have cooked it. Or she might have skinned the potatoes or something. And we always did it like a neighborhood thing. So I was inspired by everybody in my neighborhood. Not just that, just cooking, I could cook like 'em! Learned that from them too.[00:17:52]

DH: Who was the best cook in Clay Terrace?

BL: You know Imma say me! Even though my grandmother was. Imma say me cause I learned from her. But actually, everybody really. Cause you couldn't find too many people who couldn't cook or do something in Clay Terrace when it came to agriculture and farming.

DH: You said people were growing corn, potatoes, what else?

BL: Corn, potatoes, we had berry trees, we had apple trees, we even had a few orange trees, some pear trees, the little crab apple trees. I mean it wasn't too much of anything when it came to that. We had some chicken. The lady n'em down on Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, she had a few pigs. Oh it was country! It was real country back then.

DH: Where were the chickens?

BL: Well, chickens was in people's yards. Like matter of fact right there where Woodson-- Woodson wasn't there. It was just woods. It wasn't nothing like you'd find right there where Woodson was, that was mainly the park where people had the livestock. By us living in the projects we couldn't really have some of the livestock, but we did have the option to just grow what we wanted to grow. [00:19:11]

Yeah we had livestock. Matter of fact, we even had a guy who used to come around-- they was horses. He was a police officer, used to call him Captain Dan. And he used to come with his helicopter. But he'd come through every now and then.

DH: Helicopter?

BL: Yeah we had helicopters come through like-- KIPP school used to be called Richardson. And when we was in elementary school-- see when it came like that, the police wasn't-- we wasn't scared of the police then. The police were just like who they were to us. Officer Friendly. And we had the police boy club, and every year Captain Dan would come down with his helicopter. And he's come down with his helicopter and our school, the goodest kids always get a ride in the helicopter. Unfortunately I was the baddest one (laughter).

DH: So people was growing food, it was chickens, and pigs, and you had the egg man would come--

BL: Yeah! Well actually, egg man he came and we bought only the brown eggs, 'cause we had chickens. We bought the brown eggs, we had the milk man, and actually I could show you one day-- it's a circle in the ground in each one of those project homes. That's where our trash cans were. They were in the ground. You had to pull 'em up out the ground. But after while in the '70s, they changed it because all the water would go down in there and the flies would leave their larvae down there.

But it wasn't nothing, we had the guy-- what was it Bergamot? They come and iron your clothes. You know cause like then it was like it was set back in the 30s-- but it was the 60s and 70s~ Because if you notice, we the far end. We was the whole country out of the whole Ward 7. We the far end of it. If you skip, you right into Maryland. We was the far end, so everybody who lived elsewhere, they pushed em there. Like my grandmother n'em, they took our house. We lived in Georgetown. So when they start gentrifying Georgetown? They didn't ask us to move, the put us out. They just threw us-- all of us from Georgetown, they just threw the majority of us over in Clay Terrace. Then like I say Clay Terrace was a swamp area. [00:21:46]

DH: So you're family has been in D.C. a long time. You're grandmother was living in Georgetown.

BL: Yes

DH: And then they moved her out.

BL: Well they put her out. They threw them out. They just took their homes. Yeah back then, if they want something they took it. My grandmother said we did own a house up there, they just took it for redevelopment. And that's where they put us, over in Clay Terrace. My family been in Clay Terrace for at least seventy something years. Before I was born my family was living there.

DH: Who were the-- we talked about who was growing food. Who were all these people coming and doing these things? Like who was the milkman? Was he somebody from the neighborhood?

BL: No, actually--

DH: Were they black people?

BL: Yeah! We had one guy that wasn't black, but he never came back. He had an ice cream truck. See our ice cream trucks were different than-- see we had the Mr Good Humor trucks where you could-- your ice cream you opened up a little cabinet on the side and get your ice cream out there. And one time the guy came around and he disrespected one of the sisters and they took his truck and everything so we never seen him again.

But the thing is, when it came to our neighborhood, everybody that did come in there was black. The egg man was black. The chicken man was black. Even the guy that came past that took your clothes to the cleaners, all of us everybody in there was black. Only person you might see every now and then that come through there that's white was the insurance man. [00:23:31]

DH: (laughter) I see. So how would you-- you had these roots in this almost agricultural community. And all your neighbors were growing food. How did you come back to growing food?

BL: My roots brought me back. I get energy. And my energy brought me back. And not just that. If you was to take a survey on every person that come out of jail or anywhere, they always go back to where they came from. I mean irregardless. I done asked everybody that I know. Even the dudes that make a lot of money, or made a lot of money, they always wanna come back to they hood to see what's there.

But me myself, I didn't want to just come back, I wanted to do something. Because if we're there every day, why we can't do nothing there? I explained that to the guys. Y'all wake up every day. Y'all sit right there. Half of y'all that I talked to don't do no dirt, don't do nothing wrong, but you're there. You ain't never think about trying to make something happen while you're here? First it

was a problem but now they're starting to see it because I'm there every day. That's one of the problems with us. We come back, but I want to come back and do something. That's why when I came back I literally took that farm. I had to make a difference.

But making a difference, man, it's not easy. Because a lot of people they are with you 50/50. Sometime they want you to do, hoping you'll do something-- but at the same time if you fail, "I knew he was gon fail." But if you make it, "I knew he was gon make it." So I always been raised by my grandmother to always be the person "I can show you better than I can tell you." And she always raised me that way. And that's how I start striving to do things in the neighborhood. Because I want people to understand ,what I'm doing you can do or be part of doing.

That's what really got me back in the neighborhood, that I don't want to leave. I'm *not* gonna leave that neighborhood. Those are my roots. It's like a energy, it's like ancestors calling me to be there. "Say this, say this, not say this, make it known what need to be told here, you need to let people know what's going on." How we were raised. And not just how we was raised, how we come back to want to do something. A returning citizen that helped tear up his neighborhood is back to make a change, one way or another. [00:26:24]

DH: Well alright. Well tell me about the farm.

BL: I'm happy with the farm. We have our farm that we have up at Dix Street. That farm is not even two years old, so last year we went to RMA 2016 with all the country singers, Willie Nelson and all. And it was vibing. The Creator's luck, the will of the Creator actually. And after that-- that was my first 3 months into farming-- and after I went and seen, my eyes opened up to all these people that's into agriculture. And it just made me strive even more, to the point where I got with DOL, Dreaming Out Loud. We collaborated. And now we have a farm up at... Kelly Miller, and it's up and booming. And I'm loving agriculture. Because it's a way of life! That's the way we eat. We can say one thing for certain, two things for sure-- we gotta die, we gotta eat. I figure at my age, doing gardening I can look a little more healthy, be a little healthy, and teach the youngin how to eat healthy too. And some of us old people! Some of us too. I love agriculture. It's fun because it teach you about yourself.

DH: How many people are in Hustlerz 2 Harvesters and how many people are farming at the Clay Terrace farm?

BL: Husterlz 2 Harvesters is just two of us right now that runs it. I'm the co-founder and Wallace Kirby is the co-founder. As far as working wise, we have at least 10 people that come and help us. From that neighborhood too. It wasn't easy. It was like "What is Boe doing over there man? He keep growing stuff! What is he--" They thought it was a joke for a minute, they was like "Boe you over there trippin, you ain't growing no food." I said if I ain't growing nothing, why I'm eating? Why I'm deep frying my okra? Why I'm deep frying my zucchini if I ain't doing nothing? It's fun, it's maybe ten people that help us and they're starting to come in more and more. They starting to see the value of what's going on. We gotta eat. [00:29:01]

And they do know for certain that the Safeways and the Giants, they not there for us. You got one healthy part of the Safeway. What we need the rest of the Safeway for? Really when you think about it. When you go you you say "We going to buy stuff from the Safeway. We gon buy food." But we got one section, what do we need all the rest of the Safeway for when we're just going for food part. And it's too high. And the food is like *ripe*. It's like if you get it that day you gotta *eat it* that day. Doing agriculture? Wow. I didn't know how long some of the stuff that we get can last. I didn't even know that zucchini can last for the longest. And it can grow in the worst weather condition. And so does okra. So I've learned a lot from agriculture.

DH: Were you saying you pickle the okra?

BL: I did it last night!I pickle okra, this was my first time doing that. But that zucchini? Pickled zucchini??! It tastes better than a pickle. So you gotta remember zucchini absorbs whatever you put in it. So what I do-- pickle zucchini, then I fry 'em. Pickle zucchini. Take em right on our the pickle jar and fry 'em. You talmbout something good?! (laughter)

We do kale on the grill. Green peppers. You ever had kale off the grill, the chip? What you do you take and rinse it all off, clean it off. What I do, I rinse it off and let it be a little moist. I might sprinkle some salt on it, a little butter, put it on the grill. If you leave it on there long enough-- but you gotta flip it-- it turns into a chip. Yeah it turns into like a dehydrated chip. And you can eat 'em.

DH: That sounds good.

BL: Yeah I do it all the time. Leave it up to me, I'll grill and fry anything.

DH (laughter). You can't fry it all, Boe!

BL: I try. I'll deep fry. I'll try, I ain't lying. I'll fry it, grill it, or something. It's good experience actually because it gives people in the neighborhood ... the chance to try something that they never tried. I never ate a beet until last year.

DH: Did you grow it?

BL: Yeah, that's the only reason I ate it, because I grew it! Because I always thought beets might taste like blood because it's red. Come to find out they sweet, it's nice, and I like it. Something else I really like that we grow real quick-- acorn squash. 'Cause they sweet a little bit. Taste kind of like a-- not a sweet watermelon, but almost like sweet watermelon and a honeydew melon. They taste like cross a little bit but not at sweet as that. But what I do love about 'em is the seeds. I don't throw nothing away when it comes out the garden. I take the seeds, let 'em dry out and I put lemon pepper on em and put 'em in the oven. Put some butter

on 'em, put some lemon pepper on 'em take 'em out, and you'll be eating them all day long. When it comes to agriculture and gardening i don't let nothing go to waste.

DH: Acorn squash seeds.

BL: Yeah!

DH: Ok i'll have to try that

BL: Yeah! It's a lot of seeds in there. So why throw 'em away... [00:33:30]

DH: Thinking about what you were saying about grocery stores. Right now there's just the two grocery stores in Ward 7. The one on Alabama Ave and the one off Minnesota Ave. What do you remember from when you were a kid or where you were younger? Where were people buying food then?

BL: We had a Safeway on Nannie Helen Burroughs Ave, which is Steve Young's church now. We had a Jumbo out on Seat Pleasant, which is a discount market now. And then between that on Division Avenue we had one Safeway. That Safeway changed from a Safeway to an IGA, a few other places, markets. But it didn't really last because it was never none of us working in there. Last time some people had it, it was some Korean people and they had a problem with one of the people in the neighborhood. I think they hit a sister because she was stealing or something . And they closed it down afterwards. But that's all we had over there. And now you say we have two Safeways. It's really not two. It's really one and a half 'cause we basically share that Safeway at the top of the hill, that's borderline 7 and 8. More people from 8 go there than 7. So it's really not considered ours.

DH: It is like 1 1/2. That's the closest to me.

BL: Yeah you see more people from Ward 8 go there. But it's in Ward 7. Honestly I didn't even realize it was in Ward 7 at first, I honestly thought it was in Ward 8.

DH: Ok so there were some different markets. What about restaurants? [00:35:55]

BL: On Nannie Helen & Division we had-- not restaurants, we had carryouts. Oh! Yes we did-- can't forget about Mr. Barnett's. Mr. Barnett's is now Riverside. But Mr. Barnett's was the first black in our neighborhood that worked in the White House. And he wasn't a butler. He was a chef, cook. And he had bought the Barnett's, he bought that place. If you look at the Barnetts' now, they try to replicate it for gentrification. But... Mr. Barnett had a Barney Burger. Which is terrible-- he had a Barnet Burger, he won in court with Burger King because his Barney Burger was like the Whopper, but it was better than the Whopper. And he went to court, they took him to court on it and he won in court. And still right now today I know somebody still has that recipe, the Barney Burger.

DH: So Burger King sued him to get him to stop selling the Barney Burger?

BL: But he won! It's in the history books. He won. You'll never hear that story but he won. A black person winning against a big food chain. He won. Because it was his recipe, and they actually stole the recipe and tried to make it different. But you couldn't copy the Barney Burger. It was a flat long hamburger with a piece of ham, some lettuce, tomatoes, and secret sauce that you could not copy.

And Mr. Barnett's as like this-- that's what made all of his so friendly and loving Mr. Barnett's-- if we didn't have anything to eat, go to Mr. Barnett's. "Go down to Mr. Barnett's" is what my grandmother would say, [if we said] could we get something to eat. [He'd be like] "Your grandmother gon pay me back too!" Which, you know, we never could really pay him back, but that was just something he always said cause we used to go down there at least once a week. And what happened was, when he passed it went crazy really. But we had-- Mr. Barnett's was the carry out restaurant. And where Marvin Gaye used to perform in the Barnett's.

DH: Marvin Gaye used to perform in the Barnett's?

BL: Yeah! Marvin Gaye, Peaches and Herb, the song (sings verse from "Reunited") . They lived in Clay Terrace! On Blaine St. Then you had had William DeVaughn (sings verse of "Diamond in the Back). You ever heard that song? He lived there.

DH: In Clay Terrace?

BL: Yeah I think it was Billy Preston too. You had a few artists that lived there. We want to get back into the that and replicate what was really done. That's why I say my roots call me back. Because that area was upset over there. That area was in an uproar. Everybody always say "Man ain't nobody gon change nothin." Imma change it. Cause I'm changin it. Slowly but surely. Not only me, but you all helping me change it through agriculture and showing people-- we can show em better than we can tell em what we're doing over there. [00:39:48]

DH: Now I remember that you were telling me that at one point they did redevelopment of Clay Terrace. What happened with that and how did that impact the people, the neighborhood, the different grocery stores, and the businesses.

BL: They closed Clay Terrace, the redeveloped Clay Terrace at least three, four times. And every time they redeveloped it they closed it, like shut it all the way down. And when they shut it down they'd relocated us elsewhere. Then when they open it back up some of us back come back, move back. We always-- basically up until-- I can't remember when the Safeway actually left because I was in jail at the time. But every time Clay Terrace closed we wind up getting another supermarket or something else. But it was never nothing pertaining to us. You might have some Koreans running the place, or some white people running. It was never really

catered to us or to help us. Cause everything was still high. Even though a lot of us has farms and we did-- we chose to have stuff from our people.

And I think that was one main reason why they shut it down-- it was too high, and people kept robbing it. Because it wasn't nothing for us. We didn't have-- they didn't give us jobs and stuff like that. So we called ourselves helping it cause we would rob the Safeway and took it back to the neighborhood. We helped the neighborhood but we also hurt us too... they could have had better stores, better food places. We did have carryouts. Like right there on Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, a Chinese joint. But they had fast food stuff that was catered and designed for us too besides Mr. Barnett's. And McDonald's was always there. [00:41:57]

DH: (laughter) Ok so McDonalds always stayed, and in between the different redevelopments there would be new owners of the grocery stores. And what happened to the carryouts and the small businesses like Mr. Barnett's.

BL: Well Mr. Barnett's-- some of the family members got older and didn't want to do it. And then Steve Coleman came and talked to people to do it for Parks and People. Before you know it he squatted on the property and took it.

DH: Parks and People?

BL: Yeah. 'fore you know it, he squatted and took the Barnett's, and now he calls it Riverside. He still has it in there like it's a replica-- Marvin Gaye bricks in there he try to make it like the show in New York where you rub the stone?

DH: Cheers?

BL: No it 's like... they had a stone you rub. And they gong you or drag you off the stage?

DH: Oh, the Apollo?

BL: Apollo! He got some bricks in there. He say the brick you rub, these Marvin Gaye original bricks from his house. It's a lie. Marvin Gaye house got torn down in the 70s when they built Woodson. *He* try to make it seem like he a reincarnation to save our people, but he took our only spot that we could ever say that was ours, the Barnett's. A legacy, the first black man we could ever say worked at the White House that wasn't a butler. He had credentials. And it's sad when I do walk past the Barnetts-- cause I don't call it Parks and People, I don't call it Riverside, cause it's not no river on this side, period. We fighting hard to get that to end too. Cause like I said he squatted on our property and we're sad about our community. [00:44:05]

Everybody look for the white people to be our savior. I'm not racist or prejudice. I like anybody. But when you start using us against each other, I got a problem with it. I'll call you what you are then. I call a spade a spade. The white guy, gentrifier. And he's bringing other people in there to

bid on property and that's how they get us. If you notice. They'll take one house and-- next to the projects-- sell it to the highest bidder, that knows he'll buy it for half a million. So that raises the property level and it lowers ours. It make us look like an eyesore. "We don't need to do that. They don't need to be there. If we tear it down and do the redevelopment, they can move back."

Now take the word-- a little off the subject-- they say "middle class," let's help the middle class. You ever in your life heard what happened to the lower class? You always hear them on TV, "We gon' help, we gon' build people up in the middle class." But lower class people don't exist anymore? So if you're building up the middle class, there not gon ever be any more lower class people? And that's where we get hurt at. And the only time we count is when it comes to agriculture, anything else that they want us to do. Only time it counts, when they want some money. Figure they'll get some grant money. They'll get \$50,000, pat you on the back, tell you all they got was \$5,000. They can give you a job or you can do this. And they do it over, and over again in our community. That's what made me take a stand when it came to agriculture. You know? WE dd agriculture, from the beginning of time! I don't care how they paint it.

Look at the pyramids! Agriculture in the pyramids. And them people ain't white. So we did it, we don't have a problem dealing with anybody else-- but give us the respect we're supposed to have for what we do. That's how I look at it when it come to agriculture. We shouldn't have to be fighting and saying 'black power' for this and do the "black agriculture" and all that. Nah, it should already be "look, they did this, play fair! They're not going nowhere." If we look at it we are the biggest customers to you all. So that's one reason why I'm in the agriculture, to make a change of what we have to do for the black farmers. We have to make a change for the black farmers. [00:47:05]

A little bit off the subject I want to talk about what we really want to do in our neighborhood. We want a -- a real farmers' market in our neighborhood. Right there in Ward 7 off of Eads St, it's street nobody even uses. It's in the park. I don't see no reason why it should[n't] be a farmers' market there every day. We have enough black farmers where we know each other , where we can get fruits and vegetables from here and there and start a market. If not every day then at least every other day. We can sell our fresh produce, collaborate and have fun. Do our music, do our dances that we do. At a real farmers' market! Like me I like to pickle stuff. We got a guy Xavier he like to make pepper jelly. Wallace like to use the blender. So all them type of things that can be taught, then our old fashioned family recipe can be taught there. Who know what we know, what you know, what recipe or whatever you might could conjure up? That's my real dream.

If you didn't know, Martin Luther King Jr. did the Poor Man's March over there back in 1967 on Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue. With Walter Fauntroy. And we wanna somewhat replicate that into-- I figure we'd march from MLK's monument over there. They got it hidden you don't really know where it is, but it's over there . We want to let people know, our young generation, just as well as myself because I didn't know-- know where it is. March from there into Marvin Gaye Park. Into our future farm or our future farmers' markets. Most definitely because we got a big

old farm at Kelly Miller, can't leave that out. And that's up and coming, that's with Dreaming Out Loud and they partner with us.

So it's cool. But that's up and coming. We'll be doing something actually on the 28th of this month. We'll be having a pre-opening on some of the stuff we're doing. We'll be doing face painting. Of course I'll be on the grill. And I'll be help building raised beds. We already have some raised beds there now but I'll be doing some more raised beds. And these the type of stuff that I learned as I came home besides carpentry. So I want to teach it back. I didn't get a certificate or anything to brag about, but I want to teach it back and reform our generation to a healthy generation and a place where wall of us can walk through. [00:50:22]

Cause they paint Clay Terrace so bad! "Man they doing the shooting, they doing this, they doing that." But when you come through you don't see that. You come through and get the respect cause I get it. That's all I want, and we want to spread that outwards.

DH: What do you think is the role that bigger forces have played on food in D.C.? So like the riots in '68. How do you think things like the riots in 1968, or D.C, getting home rule and being able to have our own mayors and things like that-- how have you seen those those types of big moments impact food in D.C. Or impact food sovereignty in D.C. What was the big change do you think in food in D.C. before the riots and after the riots?

BL: Before the riots we had food in abundance. Cause like I was saying we had farms so nobody really was starving. And after the riots, we starved. Because from -- I was young but some of the seniors was explaining to me-- they beat the mess out of us in the riot. They chased us up back in Clay Terrace, locked us down, quarantined the whole Clay Terrace off from everybody else. They starved us out for a while... our neighborhood been scarred from that. But afterwards-- we suffered after the riot. And then afterwards they started, moreso they'll shut [Clay Terrace] down for reconstruction. Then they'll open it back up. And every time it was something different. But it started worsening after the riots.

We were really suffering if that's what you're asking me. We suffered to a great extreme because we got bad Safeways, IGAs, or whatever supermarket that they named or put there. The black carryouts started slowly ... getting up and leaving. They strategically starved us out. Meaning like if they take the Safeways and take that from us we'll starve. But the biggest part that really starved us-- we had no jobs. [00:53:24]

So if you don't got no jobs you're already gon starve. Now if you have no job and all you're waiting on is a welfare check-- how many stores in that area want to stay there? We had no money back then. Remember we had to wait on our money. We didn't have that card, like a food stamp card. We had paper food stamps. We had to wait on all that. So if you didn't grow it, or knew somebody that was growing, you starved a lot. And as we grew up it started withering away, withering away, withering away. Like until now. No Safeway over there.

DH: Do you think that was connected to-- last time we talked about how that may have been connected to how they would pull them down, because they were wiping out the customers over and over--

BL: Exactly! If you close-- they closed Clay Terrace down, then they closed Lincoln Heights down. You closing a neighborhood with 200 something people-- supposed to be, you know it's way more than that because we live together, a lot of us. You close that down, what Safeway gon still want to be there? Or supermarket? Then you close the other one down. It's nothing coming there! And you're at the far east. And that's how that went. Then when the Safeway and stuff closed, they stayed closed for years. That's like now. The Safeway on Minnesota Ave, it close at 9:00! So if you not getting that meal before then, you gotta go *elsewhere* to another store. Back then, up until now when you really think about it we got starved out. Like now. Just totally starved out.

Look at Division Ave, NB Avenue. What could you eat there? Nothing! It's a Chinese joint, that's the only thing that's there! Only thing that's there. Other than that they got the little IGA. Ain't nothing in there. They might got an apple or n orange but it's nothing there. It's nothing in our neighborhood at all that's healthy. In that ward at all. They got liquor stores! You know they keep them. But other than that, that's it. It's a liquor store, Chinese joint, and a IGA. SO we really suffering. Only thing that really keep us alive is our little farm up there. And thanks to Dreaming Out Loud getting read have a bigger farm up there. It's not gon be like a Safeway, but we want a market. [00:56:20]

DH: What's your vision for people in Clay Terrace and food?

BL: The vision is to be able to have a full market, farmers market down at the bottom and have people in the neighborhood working there, any time and every time. Even if they not working in the market they working behind the scene preparing the meals, or preparing the vegetables to be cut or whatever the case may be...

I want that neighborhood to be like how I grew up. A family oriented neighborhood where you can go to this person's house and get some bread. And not begging for the bread 'cause when you get the bread that lady also probably gave you a recipe on how to make some bread with some flour. That's how we grew up. It was no thing like you bummed. You asked and you got it. And I want that to be similar back again. Not where you're begging, but you're asking. "Aye let me get a loaf of bread or let me get a slice of bread." And you start "Come on over here I'm getting to bake some. So you can get it *hot*. Matter of fact here is the recipe and some left over ingredients that you can make it with. That's what I want to see.

We come out our house, it's an abundance. I want, you can come out the house and say "Boe do y'all got any tomatoes?" "No, we ain't got no tomatoes, we got a whole rack of carrots though! Or matter fact you can go up to Kelly Miller Farm and we got some carrots up there." But I don't have any but I got this. This is how I want it to be. I want it to be where I come out the

house like it used to be, the Wonder Bread right there. I want to smell fresh stuff. I want to be able to know if someone's cooking on the grill or somebody's frying something.

A breakfast, a brunch, you know and the person-- not where they're standing in line to wait for the meal, they stand in line cause they might be hungry and they know they 'gon *get* a meal. In the process of me getting a meal I can cut some grass, pick some apples or some oranges, help on the farm. You can eat! Not only did I feed you but I just taught you something. Patience, time. What' on your mind today? That's how we want this farm to be. If you coming then I can read your aura. "Man why you lookin like that?" "Man..." "Alright come over here while we pick this corn, pick this okra man, and holla at me man. What's the problem man?"

See that's how we grew up. That's what I want. That's why it's hard for people to understand me because they don't understand what we really actually been through and what we want. I know what we want. But everybody scared to reach for it 'cause everybody "I don't know, man, I don't know..." nah not me. I'mma get it for you.

I want those brothers that's-- before a brother's coming out of jail he can call me or get in touch with me, "Boe I'm coming home, what can you help me do?" I can link you up with something in agriculture or anything pertaining to it. That's not what I want to do, that's what I'm *going* to do. I'm not going out like that, I want my people to come home and say look man, "I can go holla at Boe," If he ain't got no money he can feed me a couple days. I can go eat something off that farm. I'm quite sure he might got the link up where he might could get me some used clothes until I can get me a job. Or I'm waiting for Boe to get this program together and we gon be working! I want us to have not just dreams-- reality, entrepreneurs and all facets. I don't want it to be nobody doing a documentary on Bo, I want you to be flipping the script doing it on any and errybody that comes out them neighborhoods because everybody has a story to tell. And I want it to be a person can say man "I love this neighborhood! They've really changes this neighborhood around!"

You heard I said "they" not Boe. Because W want to to be nah I ain't do nothing. I showed y'all what to do and made y'all change your mind and do this. That's what we want, that's not what I want. I might be 53 but I still feel 25. That's what I want though. I want that and we gon have to have that. Cause that's the only way that make us happy, make us cool. Make us sit back and chill. And then that makes the young generation-- it'll be so easy for y'all. It was easy for me! Cause I had mentors and guides to protect me. Even though I was doing wrong. They protect me doing wrong! Now look at me on the other side, doing right and making it right. [01:01:41]

....We're at the borderline where we're at in Ward 7. Where we going after Ward 7?

DH: PG County?

BL: Oh they're ready for us. They already knew what was going on. Come on out here! But trust and believe the laws are different. It ain't none of that "you can come out here acting crazy." The

thing is people in our neighborhood don't realize that. "Imma get a voucher!" Really? Really? What you gon' do if they tell you ain't no more vouchers, or any of that? You gon be over the homeless shelter. Where a lot of people end up over there that's not broke or wasn't homeless. They fought the system and realized they couldn't win it and got stuck over there. "Imma fight for my house!" You not gon move? "Imma fight for my house!" Then they come back with a clause that they can take it because-- that's your house, you can take your house but that's *our* land, that's government land, you don't own that land. [01:08:47]

When they wanna do a Metro, go through with Metro, they'll try to buy you out. Oh you gon take it. You don't got no choice! Or they'll take it and don't give you nothing. Or probably just the value that it was worth from the beginning.

So we already caught up in catch-22s where we got to fight. If we don't fight, we ain't gon have nothing. First and foremost we have to fight first with this agriculture, the food chain. 'Cause that's how they always starve us out. With this food chain. And turn me against you. "You wanna eat real good? You know you starving." "Yeah!" "Come on let's snatch one and this gon be our poster child. We gon let her eat good. She ain't gon sit at the table, she gon sit beside the table though, we got her." And that's how they do us. Game changed, Dominique. We fighting. We taking.

DH: Well alright. Thank you so much Bo.

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