Leonard Stewart

Interviewee: Leonard Stewart (LS)
Interviewer: Mary Cerulli (MC)
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Transcribed by: Hayley Ahouse
Portrait by: Mary Cerulli

MC: Okay, alright so today is November 5th. I'm here on Lyon's Place with Leonard Stewart with the Eastwick Oral History Project. My name is Mary Cerulli and I'm working with the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities. So for the record, can you say and spell your whole name?

LS: Leonard Stewart, L e o n a r d S t e w a r t

MC: Ok, great, thank you. Alright. So just to start off, can you tell mea little bit about where you grew up and how you came to be in Eastwick today?

LS: Well, I grew up in South Philly and I lived there most of my life up until I got married. And my father was born and raised out here in Eastwick, and then it used to be called Elmwood and I think when his parents died, he might have been 12 or 13, he moved from out here and then he moved to South Philly back then. So after I got married I moved to West Philly for a couple years, then I moved out West and then my wife and I, we moved out here in 2000. So I've been out here since 2000.

MC: Ok, and what is special to you about Eastwick?

LS: Well, I always liked the open spaces, and I remember when we first moved here, we was looking at various homes and houses out here in Eastwick and we looked at some around 68th and Lindbergh, and we has some other ones off of Island Avenue but I remember when we came up Lindbergh and we turned left we saw the John Heinz and down the street we saw these open fields and spaces and, so, my wife said, "Oh, I just love it out here, I just love it out here", so anyway, the realtor said they had a couple of houses they had to sell, ya know, we wanted to show you, so, my wife said, "Oh, ya know, I'll take any house out here", and the realtor said, "Well, you gotta see the house", and my wife just said, "I just love all these open spaces. It's not like I'm in Philadelphia. I'll just take this house." So, ya know, she walked in there, "I don't, I'll just take it", so the realtor said, "well, we have other ones", and my wife said, "No, I just like it." Ya know, cause we like it like a little suburban, ya know, quiet, and wasn't like the rest of Philadelphia. So, that's why we're here.

MC: Yeah

LS: Mainly it's my wife, most of the time women got the say, ya know, and that's why we picked this area, ya know, the open spaces, with the houses. You weren't cluttered up

together. So, ya know, that's what I like about this area. That was nice and quiet, actually that particular day, it was in April, the trees starting budding, ya know, wet, ya know, the birds, it was just beautiful, a beautiful spring day and I just said, "Oh my gosh, we love it." My wife was like, "I don't care what the house looks like, I just love the neighborhood."

MC: Oh that's great

LS: So, that's how we ended up here.

MC: Yeah, and you said that your father grew up in Eastwick?

LS: Yeah, well he, well back then it was before the urban, well I guess you've heard about the urban renewal and before they tore everything down. Growing up we were told that they was supposed to make a new neighborhood and bring the people back, which they never did. So, at the time my father grew up here it was really rural, he used to say there was like cesspools, cesspools running in front your house, ya know, and a lot of them did not have any indoor plumbing, so it was quiet rural out here, but he said that he enjoyed it out here. And their way to pass time was walking over to the airport and he said it wasn't really an airport, but he be talking about the twenties, early thirties, and it was a little landing strip, and back then they was still turning the planes with their hands, ya know. So, ya know, he would tell us a lot of stories about living out here and they didn't call it Eastwick, they called it Elmwood. But back then, ya know, it was a lot of, they were all houses, ya know, nothing like this anyway. So, that's what my father grew up from. And he has a lot of memories, he was always talking about this area.

MC: Yeah

LS: Then I remember we first got a car, ya know, in the fifties and he would take us back up there, in that time, ya know, his house was going in that time anyway, ya know, and that was around the time that urban renewal started and they starting tearing down some of the houses, so, yeah.

MC: So was your father directly affected by that urban renewal?

LS: No because when his parent's died, I guess during the early twenties/thirties, ya know, they died long before that anyway and he had relatives down in South Philly so he moved down there with his relatives.

MC: So, when he talked about Elmwood, what were some of the things that were special to him about Elmwood?

LS: Oh, he always liked the open spaces, ya know. The spaces and the things you could do, see deer out there, see all types of things. They would plant food, ya know, they

would always, ‘cause people, ya know, they have big grounds, a lot of ground around there, they would plant their own food, they had grapes they would plant. And a lot of people actually lived off the land, ya know. And he would say a lot of times, ya know, he would just lie, ya know, you just had total freedom. It wasn’t like the city. Walk there and they would go down to Fort Mifflin, ya know, they would walk down there, down in the Delaware River area, it wasn’t hard but they used to go back here, ya know, so, it was almost like a Huckleberry Finn type life, and he just enjoyed it. And he said that what he didn’t like and moving in with other relatives in the house, small house, in South Philly, him and his brother at the time, ya know, he said that’s the part he didn’t like. Here you had all this ground around you, total freedom, then you gotta move down and be restricted. He said it was all sort of racial climate down there, it didn’t exist here, that along with all the white neighbors, whatever, wasn’t like moving down South Philly, all of a sudden, you couldn’t go in the white neighborhood, you had to be careful. It’s totally different down here. There were a lot of people that talked about that, ya know, there wasn’t any racial strife out here at that time. Ya know, everybody got along with each other. You would say about the corner stores and people has stores, well, ya know, you would go inside somebody’s house or in their backyard, in their back door, it was so you can get things like that, ya know, it was pretty interesting. As a time that was long gone. Ya know, it was always like that. So, he talked a lot about that.

MC: So, what was it like for you to move out here, in different times for sure?

LS: Well, ya know, when I moved out here, I always really liked the open spaces ‘cause you know I like to go outdoors and stuff, fishing, I still go fishing a lot. Then I used to go hunting a lot of the time. My father and a lot of his friends, some of the guys from the church, always liked the outdoors. I remember we used to go deer hunting, and we would…. So ya know, I like the outdoors. And one thing, when I moved out there, I said oh yeah since my wife liked it, I knew I was right there on the Heinz, ‘cause I used to take my nephew down here fishing in the 60s but because when Heinz was just a big impoundment. So, I kind of knew the area, and I loved the open spaces, and would take the dog and we would just walk all around, ya know, so I enjoyed it. People out heres was extremely friendly. Ya know, what I also liked about it was, you really wasn’t city living, it wasn’t like all restrictive, and one of the main things that I enjoyed about it and the openness and ya know, wake up in the morning, hear the birds singing. My wife, she isn’t a morning person and she would go out there in the yard, fix some coffee, and she would say, “Oh I’ll go to work whenever I want to go to work”. She had one of them city jobs ya know, she didn’t have to punch a time clock.

MC: Mhm

LS: And she would like to just sit out here, hearin’ the birds sing and the dog be out there and all, and drink coffee, and she’d be like, “Then when I get tired, I’ll go to work”. And so, ya know what I mean, I just like the atmosphere.

MC: And so, how did you get involved with Eastwick Friends and Neighbors Coalition? Well, how did you get involved in the community in general?

LS: Well, number one, when I used to live in, I guess some of the things I picked up from my mother. 'Cause I know we lived in South Philly, and I remember that where I lived at there was a school yard, and I remember there was a school in back of us, and people was always hitting balls over in your yard. So, anyway, they would always climb the fence into the yard, and whatever, go over there and get the balls. So, ya know, when we had a dog, a couple times the dog would chase them out. But some of the people, ya know, would use that and come and break into the houses. So, ya know, you always had this problems with balls going in the yards and kids coming over there. So I think my mother wrote to an elected official, ya know, putting up a big fence around the school yard, ya know, went nowhere. So I remember she went and got petitions with everybody, all the people surrounding the school yard, so she got just about everybody to sign, so eventually they did by the year, they did put up the large fence. And then there was this park there 23rd and Wharton and it was just a park, ya know, just grass, and half the time they didn't cut the grass, they didn't do anything. So, ya know, my mother wrote a letter and said, "Why don't you fix up the park?" ya know, put some play grounds in it, basketball courts for children, and whatever. I think she wrote it to, I can't remember, I think it was to the warden or to some city person, to the person city council, I don't know. So, anyway, they said, "Oh no, we like the aesthetic, the way the park is now and for the natural aesthetic." There was nothing natural about it, it was just a park. They didn't maintain it because it was in a black neighborhood. So, anyway, my mother wrote back again, and she said, ya know, "I can't understand why in the white neighborhoods you have this," and she mentioned one down in 12th and Wharton, the few ones down in the Italian neighborhood, all these are fixed up, they got these parks, they got playgrounds, they got this, and in the Colored one, back then they called it Colored, why don't we have this or that, and I remember she was writing back and forth and one of the things she said was, "If you don't pursue things, things will stay the same. If you don't stand up and get involved." My mother wasn't one of those people that would go out there and holler, she said you gotta write letters to get things done. She said you can get up there and hoop and holler, and do that anyway, ya know. And there wasn't anything about community leaders because you didn't have any community, ya know, back then. You have very few community groups. The only politicians you had were your little community people…. And only on election day, and if you had a problem, "Oh ya ya well solve it," ya know, they didn't do anything. At that time, ya know, people of color didn't have a voice, and people would always say make sure you get involved. I remember after we moved out to …., I remember in like the 80s in the crack epidemic started, and ya know, they'd show you in the bad lands … I remember we had meetings and they would say make sure this doesn't happen in your neighborhood. And we would always say, "Nah we have a nice neighborhood, nothing bad would happen here." And they said, "Well when you do, make sure you chase them out the corner." So, ya know, long story short…on the block, we formed organizations that did pretty well at keeping them … At the time

the crack epidemic more or less took over the city, ya know, we were constantly called, I would tell them I saw a drug transaction first, and the police would be like, "How do you know they selling drugs?" and I would be like, "Cause I would see them pass the money," ya know, they would ask you questions to kind of discourage you, ya know, "Are you sure they not a friend?" Nahh, cause I know drugs when I see one" ….
You do as much as you can, but then they also tell you, "Well don't go out there and get involved" but then you call and report things and then they question you, ya know, so after so many times, ya know. Then when you saw the neighborhood change, ya know, we just decided it was time to leave and come out here. When I first came out here, ya know, I always believed about the community organizations, so there was this organization called the Eastwick PAC, and they had been existing since the early 70s, and they were a very defective organization. At the time, I think it was, Maggie, she was the executive director, might have been in '02 or something, and I remember they were negotiating about the post office coming out here, and a lot of people were voicing their concerns about what they did want and didn't want. They said they don't want these heavy trucks coming through our neighborhood, so they decided, they did say they would come up Essington, ...bypassing.., so they wont be coming up the road, ya know, residential blocks and ppl were also saying they didn't want these long food trucks outside the main post office, they had food trucks outside … all night long, around Lindberg, people around that area. Well we dont want that, so people were negotiating things like that, so we was also saying.. We want people in the neighborhood of color.. And that's where the point of contention started cause you know they say you know it's a federal government, say we want this and we want that, so ya know that went back and forth, so we said we wanted to know how many people were being hired, so that's when we found out that they were eventually going to close down the main post office, they wouldn't really be hiring any new people, they were more or less just relocating the people down here. In fact, they didn't need that many people down at the main post office. Some of them was shipping them other places. So, anyways, that was one of the things that was going on when I was there and I remember the airport would come there with updates whenever they were doing things in the community and doing things on Island, they were always trying to make Island more efficient, which is still a total disaster. It's almost impossible to walk across there. So that was one of the things, they was always working on. So, anyway, I think that woman stayed there until around '06, her son got killed out here, and they were building some apartment, not apartments, some thing like smart homes out here on Island, let's see, right off of Island Avenue. Well anyway, her son at the time was like a security guard, and he was out there at night I guess maintaining, watching the sight and someone came along and killed him, they didn't rob him or take anything, ya know. She was under the impression that it had to be someone from the community because some of the people in the community were upset about building these expensive homes back there and they felt as though they didn't have an input in it. So which I don't think that happened, I just don't think there was any community involvement. Well anyway, to make a long story short, she just resigned, and I remember coming to the meeting and people was asking about what was going to happen to that PAC. And I remember one of the presidents at the time said, "Well we just

want it to dissolve." How you gonna just let it dissolve like that? It's been a pillar of this community for years, so anyway, ya know, they just said want it to, so anyway, we found out that they was lying because they were being funded every year through the city, so anyway, we found out that they stopped the funding. So anyway, they was at the point where they just wanted it to dissolve. So what they decided to do was, was to keep the PAC going, so the old regime quit, so anyway, they said we need somebody to write grants, so they got more funding. So that's when my wife, she said, "I'm good at grant writing, well I've done that before." So they said, "Oh well send you some of those grants, ya know we need." So anyway, they nominated her for president of the group, so we operated it for till the end of '06 till '07, so we operated till she got sick and she got sick in '09. And at that time ya know we raised money, we had fundraisers, we had a carnival, ya know, we did flea markets, and we raised money through, used to be Sunoco, but now its Philadelphia Electric, they donated money to us, so you know, a lot of the time we raised money on our own, so a lot of the time we used our own money to keep things going, so we were pretty efficient about it, in fact, while we were there we were able to get the food distribution center on Island …., I remember they came … we was in the process of getting them, so I think at the time, when my wife passed, ya know, that's when they actually started the ground breaking. Ya know, we was involved in a lot of initiatives, like Ruby Tuesdays was coming along, a lot of zoning issues we was privy to, so it was a learning process, ya know. And then different things would happen to the community, we were able to offer jobs to people, so we did a lot with no funding. Ya know, and a lot of times it was really out of pocket, so when my wife was sick at the time, ya know, when you get to a point where there's no money, nobody volunteers for anything, so she had, they didn't want me to be part of it ya know because they didn't want it to be husband and wife cause of the conflict of interest, but I would go to the meetings all the time because you know I was there with her. So most of the time it was usually her and I that got things done, and sometimes it was the president at the time but there was a lot of community bickering. So my wife got sick and ya know, we reach out to some of them, the vice president and the president, but ya know, nobody really wanted to take the intitiative, and my wife said "Maybe you should do this," and I said "Ya know what my main concern is taking care of you." They found that my wife has pancreatic cancer, she was only gonna have so many months to live and I said "I'm not going to worry about a community organization, my thing is to be here with you, that's my major concern, I could care less about the community." So, anyway, by that time it dissolved. So my wife passed in 2010. So, anyway, I think it was around 2011, there were some break-ins in the community, so we decided that we got a community group together, I think it was Marian, she was instrumental in it, and we was called the committee of ten because there were ten of us. We was also concerned about the truck parking because there was a lot of parking along 86th and 88th street, they would just park all the time. So we wanted to change that and also the lighting at Eastwick train station, there wasn't any light but there was a little light at the platform but other than that there wasn't any lights there at all. So, that's what we started out as and I remember one of the things Marian said was, she said she was involved in community groups before and she said, "I don't want anything big, I just want to keep it small 'cause I know what

happens, you get burnt out," cause she said she was involved, and one time… the drag up 84th, oh my gosh, yah, you'd come home sometimes and eat and they would block off the streets, and they'd just be drag racing, especially on Saturday nights, so she said she was involved with that in the 80s and 90s, ya know, she said we just want to keep it small", so she said yeah. We were all seniors anyway and we didn't want headaches, nothing like we got now. So be careful what you ask for and don't ask for. So anyway, I guess it was around March or April, one day, it was a weekday, I remember I heard all this noise, it was maybe around 5 after 8, I heard all these airhammers, ya know, I said "What are they doing", ya know, like they were pile driving, so my dog was like going crazy and I said, "what is this noise," so I got dressed and I was still working at the time, might have been one of my days off, yah cause I worked at the airport at the time, ya know, you had different days off, so I got dressed and went into Gibson's place here and happen to see these guys, they were out there and they were doing some type of survey and I said, "What are y'all doing?", well they said, "Well ya know they are supposed to building somes houses out here", and I said, "Whose building them?" so they said it was either going to be Wester or Korman. I said okay 'cause originally they was supposed to be building. When they moved they evicted all the people in the 50s 60s, they were supposed to be building single family homes out here, so a lot of these lands, when you come out here on 6th street have been vacant for years. They finally gonna build some houses. But we kind of enjoyed the fact that we didn't have anything out here, ya know, it was zoned for single family homes, so okay. So, anyways, one of the fellas in the group, I think TJ at the time was president, said, "Well I think im gonna go to Korman and see what type of homes they be building." So he came back to us and said, "Oh my god, they gonna build apartments." We said, "Are you serious?" Some seven hundred apartments, "Yes", and we said, "oh my gosh", so anyway, somebody said, "I wonder if John Heinz knows about this" 'cause it was gonna be right from the end of Lindbergh Boulevard all back hill all way round Mario Lonzo. We said, "Oh my gosh." So, anyway, I remember I talked to the guy at the time that had been, somebody gave me his phone number, and his name was Gary, so I was asking if he knew about it, you know, I didn't know, we just asked okay, you know, you John Heinz, you probably know. So I said, "Yeah do you know that they are planning on building apartments?" I said, "Right up against John Heinz." "No, I had no idea", he said, "Oh my gosh, that will be a disaster, just for the Refuge", he said basically everything will be fenced in. So he said, I'm a government employee, I can't do anything but he said, "I'm gonna give you a name." So he gave me this fella, Royce name, he was like a land conservationist, I'm trying to think of the name he was under, he was in charge of getting land and holding it for public use. So anyway, long story short, I remember he called me up the next day while I was at work, and obviously ah man I was like, I was telling him, yeah man we devastated, I asked him we want more apartments out here, ya know, I said that would be devastating, so he said, " look don't worry about it," he said, "We going to work this out", you know, "we want to do this," so anyway, that's when we got along with John Heinz and the Sierra Club, so anyway he said ,which was very good strategy, "Don't tell Korman that you're opposed to it, just listen ask questions." So you know we were asking questions and he said "Oh yeah it'd be so great for the community and they be looking just like the ones

they had." You know, you don't want any, you know, you don't, I don't have anything against you know apartments but they just take away the studies from the community yeah need more apartments all the open space and greenery is gone. So, we were asking questions, so we were asking about what's in it for the community? Are we going to have jobs? What type of job? You know, little clean up jobs you know. So, we said, oh what about construction jobs? Now can you do what are we the people in the community going to do? "Well you know we're restricted to the people in the government we just can't." So he said, in other words, the people that live here ya know we don't get first preference. Well we would like to put your name, but you know this by being the government we just can't put quotas, so we just listened. So anyway, maybe about a month afterwards that's when we had the big public meeting that time they just met with us you know maybe about 25 people and we were very cordial we said "Mhm mhm hey now." So anyway we had the big public meeting at the Mercy Wellness Center that's where we used to meet up until this year thinking in June when they sold it. So, we that's why we been meeting here there at that hot gym or any other place where we could find a meeting space at John Heinz. So anyways we were there and Councilman Johnson, he was new here he had just gotten in the year before you know after the election, so he was kind of new on the job. So, what we did find out that the bill they had to be rezoned. It was zoned for single family homes so for apartments it had to be zoned so it was put in by his predecessor Anne Vernon so by him being new you know, ok the bill was sitting there. So, it was their intentions just to go down to city hall and be rubber stamped and we wouldn't have known anything so anyway while we were there Korman you know got up there and they made their presentation. And that's when the people just jumped all over him and went "Well we don't want this and we don't want that," and you know it got really ugly. You know his lawyers tried to get up there, tried to explain. So the people said, "Number one how come you never addressed us how come you wait till now why do we have to find out?" You know they was asking us we got enough apartments we wanted single family homes we don't need any more apartments and then this one guy came up there and boy he just bombed it. Ok most of us was African American there was a few Caucasians and he said, "That's the problem with you people" oh my god and that was it [laughs].

MC: Oh no...

LS: Yes, he did. So, he was getting frustrated and he wasn't like the main one in the presentation. He was just trying to explain and then when they said, "That's the problem with you people, you want this..." And that's when it went downhill from there and so his, Korman had his lawyers "Oh no he didn't mean it," he trying to clean it well you know we know that everyone don't quite explain things the way you know he was trying to put his spin on it. So, it went downhill from there so anyway. Councilman Johnson he had a few of his people there and one of the fellas got up to say you know, then people start asking "Where's councilman Johnson?" oh you know he got another commitment "How come he isn't here?" So anyway, the time he wasn't there so anyways one of the people from chief of staff said I been out here in Eastwick and the only thing I see out here is a bunch of illegal dumping it's like wetlands so what they doing that's an

improvement. I said "I don't believe that" so they jumped and that's when we saw him getting on the phone, they told him, you better get here. You better get here so any way you know it went bad, it was so anyway "Where is, we want him here now!" So anyway, so he came here you know, "I was someplace else and I had to do this," you know he was kind of you know, he was fidgeting around you know, whatever, so anyway he said "Look, you know this is almost like a done deal. And after all you know this is an improvement and what you ought to be doing is get us some type of community benefit agreement and see maybe Korman can give you all something." And we said, "we don't want it here." So anyway you know he was trying to defend you know whatever after all you know you know "This will help the taxes, this will help this, you know this will help unemployment, you know this is better for the city," you know you know putting all the spin in it. So anyway one of the fellas said, "Listen, you only won the election by 42 votes, we got 200 people in the room you better do the math 'cause you won't be here next time." [laughs] Yeah so anyway you know he goes well I can't make any decisions you know. So we had public meetings we went to city hall and we had bought some geologists you know from Washington DC and that's when we found out that we was in a major flood plain and how building those apartments would actually exacerbate flooding in this community and then the city was trying to put their spin on you know the water department said you know, "We think it could be handled right" and so a lot of people got up and talked about how much it had been flooding in Eastwick and one fella said, "Yeah whenever we have heavy rains I have to lift up the drains and make sure they're cleaned out and the neighbors out here was doing it themselves" so anyways here's the water department "Oh well we never knew there was a flooding problem in Eastwick." Are you serious? Yes, I mean we sat there and listened to all this. So you know the main thing we don't sell people we have to form a coalition because you know you can't do thing on your own 'cause some of the people in the community said "We don't need those outsiders we don't need those Caucasians telling us what to do." Oh yes you do, you can't fight any battle on your own. I said you got to have coalition you got to have building blocks you got to reach out. I said we would never got anywhere with us and Korman. Korman would have ate us up like they did the city. So, you know we had our attorneys we had our experts that we bought from Washington which the city was totally shocked by and everything they told us we had a rebuttal for. And the funny thing is councilman Johnson and Korman's lawyers were following him around like they were in his pocket they were following him in and out the room because he was really he was getting kind of nervous because number one we found out which one of our attorneys told one of councilman Johnson's attorneys said that when we had the first meeting they didn't think the people was going to come out they thought there was going to be a few women because you know women are always involved. But you know they were surprised. Now you in the room with like 200 people. When we went to city hall we had over 100 some people they didn't think we were going to bring expert witnesses from Washington, we had Michael Nairn, we had people from university of Penn. We came we did our homework and they told us you know. I learned all about the you know the community and about how we became a flood plain and this and what I always Mayor well he wasn't even mayor then, Kenney. He was on city council and he was questioning

Korman and what we found out was that Korman wanted to build that and then that it was these homes that it was about 30 plus homes its right adjacent to its right next to the Eastwick train station when they got that they were going to give the rest of the land to they were going to condemn all of those homes and they was going to give it to Korman. No give it to the airport. So, Kenney said "Wait a minute how come nobody didn't know anything about this what are you going to do with this land?" "Oh were going to let the airport," so Kenney said, "This sounds likes some kind of mob deal what is this what kind of stuff you going to keep all this all to yourself and don't nobody know anything," and he was just help sharing it and we just had nothing but respect for him ever since he shot Korman and them down. They walked away with their heads down. So anyway at the same time it was still in Councilman Johnson's hands and Korman was like they people was watching and they said Korman's lawyers. He said I can't make any decisions so by that Fall we had a meeting at Pepper School and that's when he said "I listen to the wishes of the community and I'm going to pull the zoning for them to be rezoned so it's going to stay the way it is" and you know we all shouting yeah yeah yeah you know – you our committee, you our councilman after all. You know so that's the main thing about building coalitions you know that's how we got started. You know when we went from this thing from people of 10 after a while people started dropping off you know and something small you know now we a coalition and we involved almost every aspect of Eastwick you know like I said we been fighting. One of the main points of contention you know is this train station. That thing was built, I think they built it around 1999 but we been trying to get lights out here ever since then finally after we met the mayor last month we were telling him about out here our concern you know number one we got a train station. The minute you walk off that train station you know it's getting dark it is totally pitch black. You have an area you know when people come through leave the train station on 85th street there's no houses there its pitch black so you know we told the mayor that we're concerned about the truck parking there on Island avenue alongside where shopping mall is and we said all the sudden you got trucks there and they not supposed to park there. So he did make commitments you know he said he's going to see that they get, they going to put no truck parking signs and we said no not just no truck parking signs tow away zones because we had problems before because after a while trucks just have tickets and tickets and they been parked there a while but its 2 or 3 hundred dollars and there's a lot of those trucks so anyways to make a long story a short one of the things that they've started already they started last week they started putting lights there along the old part of the Eastwick train station from 84th street and all the way back in fact I drove out there this morning they told me a lot of the work they'd be doing on the weekends when the cars aren't parked there so now they in the process of now putting the poles up there took a picture of the guys putting the poles, whenever I see people I always tell people when you see some people doing something question them, ya know, ask them what they're doing so you know.

MC: Because it sounds like that's how your involvement started. Because you asked the surveyors what they were doing.

LS: Yeah, I ask people on 84th did you hear that noise. Oh yeah, I don't pay it no mind do you know what they would do because you couldn't help but to hear I said it was like this piledrivers, what is this noise. So, you know I'm always one of those ones find out what's going on in your neighborhood you got to be concerned some people could care less you know they could see somebody breaking in their next door neighbor well you know I don't want to get involved you know I keep my windows shut I don't say nothing, yeah but this is your neighborhood, next they going to come to your house. I always had problems with people who say things like that but you know that's why you know that's been part of my involvement and you know now we part of the planning process what they going to do with these 125 acres out there we would like to save it for greenery for flood mitigation we would like to see a lot of green initiatives we've got a lot of ideas we would like to see the schools with some type of training component, which the mayor made somewhat of a commitment that you know he would adhere to the neighbors wishes to the communities wishes you know so you know we've been involved in that. One time you know out at Pepper school you know that's like 40 some acres. And about maybe last year almost underneath our back they was going to turn it over to this church and like for what about a million dollars they going to give it to this minister and this church number one he doesn't have that many parishioners in the church he already has and so he had this grandiose idea he, you know, wanted to do this and he wanted to do that and so you don't own all that land. So we kind of knew what he wanted to do he was going to take that he was going to get on that and he could do anything he wanted to do to the land. So you know, so what we did we wrote a letter to mayor Kenney you know all of the community groups here and he stopped to sell them. You know we wanted that land and the school to be part of a planning process and let the community be involved with that so you know so that's what happened. You know so right now were waiting for all the data. I'm part of the planning process so were going to meet this Tuesday so they're going to tell us you know the latest and probably by the end of the month they'll have a public meeting where they'll update us you know so eventually I said by the spring everything should be finished with the planning process and they'll tell us what they think the best use for the area, the 125 acres out here, Pepper school. And then it'll be up to the community to decide, so that's kind of where we are.

MC: Yeah, alright, so you've talked a little bit about the importance of coalitions and partnerships but I wonder what you can tell me about the role of data and how data and science and research has been important in this process.

LS: Well first thing we found out which a lot of us didn't know which the only thing I ever knew ever since I moved out here, I just knew that you, they said "Oh you live out there in the marshes," used to be marshes, they say "Oh you must got mosquitos out there cause you know it's out there in the wetlands." I knew that we had a high water table because we don't have a basement you know so I knew that, you know. Up until hurricane Katrina I never needed flood insurance and I asked well why do I need flood insurance, "Ah because you in the flood plain." I wasn't in the flood plain when I moved here, why all the sudden? You know, of course, so you know arguing back and forth and

they said "Well you don't have to get flood insurance, but since you don't have a mortgage well just tack it onto your mortgage and you'll find out that it's going to be more expensive than if you got your own." You know, so anyways when you mentioned the data I didn't know what kind of risk we were in, how low we are as far as sea level and when we met with a lot of the environmentalists and hydrologists they were explaining to us about this community, you know, how fragile the environment is you know and they showed us the data about these different pockets in there about you know how fragile it is you know and how some areas are just at sea level, some are below sea level, and all the data it shows about how any major storms a lot of times we would be impacted by that, from the location we are, and you know. Also which made a lot of sense that data we had, that was one of our main arguments for them not building the apartments because number one we're in the flood plane you know its only going to get worse with climate change and global warming everything is only going to get worse. And you know you always hear things and I always remember that hurricane back in 2012 what was it, super storm Sandy, and I remember the mayor came out here and he told us Eastwick needed to evacuate because it was due to hit here, but you know we were fortunate so I remember I think I put my dog in the pound, in the shelter, so I just said I was going to you know, just see what happens and I said, you know I'll just go down to South Philly and I'll stay with my relatives. But they would talk about you how were in the flood plain and we're in between right where Cobbs creek and Darby creek meet and we call it the Planet Streets and as they said we were supposed to get a major hit there but fortunately for us, unfortunately for the people in northern New Jersey and New York, it hit them there and a lot of them didn't even have flooding up in that end so that's when we really realized the impact about the data that was there because the mayor said, "Well you know you have to leave." You know the data said we were in imminent danger, so you know we take all of that serious and when you mentioned about the data now we were waiting to the company that's done the planning process, it's called Interface and what they're doing, they're going to decide what would be the best land use for the 125 acres and some of the other acreage around Pepper School so you know at the time you know they were saying that some places could use a little development some of it couldn't because they said a lot of it is so well below sea level. So now we're just waiting for that data to come in and what we normally do I know it might be hard for some of us to understand so we also turn a lot of things over to our experts, that's why so much of it depends on the data and we have to rely on that, so I said if we didn't have that, those apartments would have been built. 'Cause with the first one they said well you can't just say you don't want apartments because then you come off like you're elitist, well we don't want certain elements. You know so you can't say that, so we use scientific data that helps substantiate what we were saying. Of course at the time I didn't know anything, I only knew I didn't want any apartments and you see this is the only street out here, we would have had 10 times as much traffic they would either come up and down Lindbergh Avenue or this street, and the city I mean you know they promise they pave these streets for the last two or three years so you know thank god for data you know. So we're waiting to see where that will go and we'll probably know sometime this week and we'll make it public by the end of the month. And like I said sometime late Winter early

Spring everything will be out and then we'll say well this is what we think, this is what we recommend and that's what will happen then, you know, because a lot of people are interested. The airport is interested in Pepper and they want to rebuild and relocate some of their people over there. At one time we heard some type of sports academy wanted to build something, we heard PECO wanted to put some type of solar panels there so there's going to be a lot of ideas floating around but the community is going to decide, what they say the community will have a say in it, so that's something we never had before and we did an assessment when Korman wanted to build those apartments and it took us about 6 or 7 months but we went over all 300 plus houses and we asked people what did they want and what didn't they want, and what do you want to see and what don't you want to see. So you know we have a good idea of what people in the community want so you know we did a data grab and you know that's really important.

MC: Mhm yeah, great. Ok so switching gears a little bit what do you think are some of the most important events for somebody to understand Eastwick's history and why the community is where it is now?

LS: Well the first important thing is when they had urban renewal, urban renewal meant that you know you got rid of poor people and you move them out and you promise them a better life or whatever. They started that I want to say in the 50's or whatever and you move the people out. And it's interesting, at one of the meetings we had, oh when we met with the mayor, and this is when this white person said "Oh you know urban removal meant negro removal." So I mean they see, they said that was a bad idea. So, you know that was a significant event in Eastwick because you know they all said the same thing, they said it was a great community. You know it was an interracial community, everybody got along it was wonderful. They had shopping areas out here, they had everything, they had stores, they had 30 some churches, it was a great community. The worst thing that came along was urban renewal, and when they moved the people out that just devastated them. And one of the things we found out, maybe a year or two ago, we found out one of the main reasons why they did that, totally unrelated to us in one way. Schuylkill county where they did a lot of mining, a lot of the waste and stuff from the mountains went into the Schuylkill River, and the Schuylkill River got so thick with the stuff and they didn't know what to do with it. So one of the grand ideas, they just had to do something with it, they said well we could tear down all the houses and we could take all of the fill from the Schuylkill River and put that into the houses we want to build, which was totally against the law by then in the 40's or 50's, but you know they didn't care, those were poor people. And that's how we found out that it wasn't just to build better communities for them - they had do something about the fill that was clogging up the Schuylkill River and that was a perfect solution. We could erase these old houses, get these people out, and build new houses. But, unfortunately, two things never happened - they never did build any houses and the other areas, where I don't know if you ever interviewed Tyrone Beverly, well the people that live around 65th and Lindbergh we called them Town Gardens, the houses started crumbling 30 years ago, come to find out they used that fill and now as the houses start aging the houses started crumbling. We

called Mama Bush about two years ago. Her house the wall just started separating, so anyway they did buy her out, so you know right now when you walk along those blocks you can see how the things are separating, so now that's another thing what to do. So now what did the city usually do, the army corps of engineers, oh we got to do some more studies, Tyrone said they did studies in the 90's, you know, they knew then. So now they got to run and do some more studies, so you know studies mean they going to have to pay money, so in another 20 years they'll come up with solutions you know. We'll all be deceased, the people you know, 'cause a lot of those people bought their homes years ago. But when you mention what was the most, I say that was one of the most significant things, because you destroyed a whole neighborhood. You know, because you moved like 9-10,000 people and you know the devastation that was brought upon the people and you know by me not living here I didn't realize, you know I started hearing stories. Then I remember one day I was doing some flyers about the community group so there was this little area, this little park on the other side of Eastwick they call City Park and I remember seeing this guy, he's a homeless guy, because I used to work at the airport and I would see this guy sitting there and he was very articulate. It was kind of comical, because he would sit down to eat, put his food on the floor, and the city people would say you can't eat hear, and he would say "What laws am I breaking? I'm not bothering anybody, all I'm doing is minding my own business." Very articulate, so I remember I'd seen this guy and he was sitting in the park all by himself and I said "Oh hey how you doing, I remember you from when I worked at the airport." And he said "Oh I'm just sitting here thinking about when I used to live out here and all my parents used to live out here and when they made us move I was so devastated I cried," and he said "you don't know how hard it was really on the people and you know quite a few people committed suicide." And I said "Are you serious?" And I'm listening to him and I really, my heart just went out to him and I said that's probably why he is the way he is right now and he was just sitting there like I don't know this at the time but he said I just like to come out here and I like to think about how it used to be I used to come out here sit out here when I was a child and I remember I used to be out here, he said al this is gone right now he said I have nothing and I was just you know I'm hearing this and going oh my god and I wonder how many other people were impacted by that and I remember talking to pastor Thomas and he said so many people were devastated by that he said people you know they didn't want to leave you know he said that sometimes he forced the people. People you know were just devastated. You lose your house, especially when people get older they don't want to lose their house, the one they had had all those years. They didn't have any rights and some of them you only had a certain amount of time and very few of the people actually got compensated for the full value of your house, you, 'cause a lot of houses, they were old houses, they said "Oh your house is only worth a thousand dollars we're only going to give you x y and z." But that's your home, you can't put a value on somebody's home, and so that's what they did, you know. And that was like the major, that was like the biggest thing that ever happened to this community. It just devastated, killed the community you know, and it never rebounded. We are resaying now that this is something that with this planning process, now the people in this community finally get a say for what they want in this community, which is extremely important, which when we

did the assessment I guess maybe about four or five years ago this is what people right in this area said they wanted now in Eastwick itself, account for the whole area so the people, and they still say we want to have a say in what happens in our community, you know, we're tired of people making decisions for us. You know so I would say that that was the biggest thing. I guess Korman trying to - our victory over Korman and when councilman Johnson pulled the plug and stopped all the rezoning that was the first time the community said "Hey we won a victory," you and also when the Mayor Kenney he stopped Pastor Simmons from actually buying the grounds from the SRC you know, they got rid of that this week. Which that was one of the things he said yeah, the SRC, the school reform commission, you know so, so we have had some major victories. So now we've got to press ahead and one of the main things you know, you've got to tell people because a lot of people feel as if you can't fight City Hall, you can't do this, you can't do that. And I remember when we first had it against Korman I'd tell people, "You stand together there's a lot you can do" and they said "Oh you're just saying that." 'Cause I used to work with the union and I had to tell people a lot of the time, you get them involved its not "Oh nothing can be done, you're wasting your time with Korman, Korman beat the city," look how much money the city owed Korman so the city had to pay Korman, Korman got good lawyers which they did, they had very good lawyers but you know you've got to work together you've got to build coalitions or whatever and I guess like that was the biggest milestone that hey a Goliath can be beat and it was just a bunch of, a few community peoples, the thing about it half the people in the community I'd never seen before. I don't remember seeing a lot of them. Terry, I never saw, Terry I remember he was sitting on the steps one day, I was walking the dog I said "Do you know that they are trying to take your land?" and I said they are planning on building apartments here and he said "Oh I didn't know" - well you better get involved so you know, [laughs] so I mean there's a lot that happened you know and I'll tell you the biggest thing, the worst thing is when that urban renewal, and I guess after that is when you know Korman was defeated and you know that put the power back in the people's hands, like they said back in the 60's 'power to the people' so you know you got power to all the peoples so I think that was the most important thing. And this planning process, now people in the community ask or actually say what they want which is extremely important. You know everybody wants a voice on voting or whatever, you know you don't want anybody outside to say well I'm going to do this like what Korman said "Oh this is going to be great for you, this is going to be great yeah yeah yeah this is going to make your community look better." No, you're not going to make decisions for us without our knowledge you know - so I hope that helped you.

MC: That's great, I just have a couple more questions. So, you talked about open space and John Heinz a little bit, when you think about the environment of Eastwick what comes to mind?

LS: Well when I think of the environment I can't help but think about the open space because one of the main things which you learn is, the more trees you know has a cooling effect which you know is extremely important you know, and with the carbon monoxide

and you know the trees you know that helps clean up the air and it's extremely important to have open spaces. And you know for flood mitigation, you know for rains because we are in the flood plains, you know you've got to have the open spaces for that flood mitigation and for the cooling effect and for the environment. And not only that it's for the environment you know we have species of birds out here that you don't find other places. You know, I think that's extremely important, some people might say our environmentalists, we need all that to help sustain the earth, you know. I'm an environmentalist myself and everybody likes open spaces to a certain degree, I don't think everybody wants to see buildings everywhere. And it's extremely important that we keep open spaces, initiatives is to have open spaces, so now that we have it we must keep it, now one of the things we thought about was urban farming, which would also contribute to open spaces, you could also have a way of generating income, you know urban farming, some of these people mentioned different types of tree plantage you could have out here, you know one of the biggest things, which people talked about how you could grow food, which you know, this way you don't have to worry about people, from whatever you know, the food is dead by the time you get there, so I mean it's kind of important that we could be the bread basket of Philadelphia, part of Pennsylvania, since we got all this land out here, you know, we said we could be in partnership with John Heinz. Urban farming, we have had different ones, you know, we have been up Temple University which has components of urban initiatives, urban farming, we could use all this, and all this would help with the green space, so there's a lot of things we could use in this area.

MC: Ok

LS: You know you got to look at the economic part of it, look also at the other part, economics mean a whole lot 'cause, one of the main things we all know is that when you can breathe better when you have all the pollution, you know and that alone means, you know that sickness, breathing problems, anyways, that's also economic effect, which you got to sell that also. You know the worst thing in the world is when you live in different parts of South Philly, I remember when my sister lived there right next to the refineries, you know, you didn't have any green space. She was breathing all this polluted air all the time, you know, people have sickness and going back and forth to the doctor, nowadays, you have health care that's expensive. You know if you got open spaces with trees or whatever, that also helps, so you know, you got to look at all that.

MC: Mhm

LS: Being around this environment, conservationists, you learn a lot, the only thing I knew was "Oh I like this space."

MC: Yeah

LS: It means a lot, you know, that's why the Mayor has been pushing open space initiatives, you see everywhere they go, I remember when I was young, at 45th and Pine street, trees like that up there, nowadays everybody plants trees, you see the advantage of open space.

MC: Ok, so talking about green space, what does John Heinz, what does the refuge mean to you?

LS: Well, number one, the Refuge means like a place that I always think about, very smooth here, always liked open spaces, and I would just like to walk through there, walk my dog, you know, it was peace and quiet, and sometimes you know when you go into the woods you could just take your mind off of everything else. To me it was like a calming effect, sometimes in your life, like I said sometimes I was also a union rep, and sometimes you get bombarded by this problem, that problem that problem, though sometimes I would take the dog, I would just be in my own zone. And then it also helped me when my wife passed, you know, I would go there sometimes and just think about things, I would go to one place where the pines were, near 95, and I would just sit there and think and reminisce, it was like a calming effect, you know - someone said years ago what the open spaces, what it means to you, it means a lot to me, you know, like I said, my tranquility, some people had to go to a shrink, I went to John Heinz, you know, and that's been working for me, so for the last seventeen plus years. And then when we formed the relationship with Heinz, it was even more so, you know, like I said, I'm involved there everyday, with the clean up, you know, with Johns Heinz and doing down there, they got initiatives with, since Lamar took over, he wants to reach out to the community. And he's doing things, taking Heinz into the community, 'cause there's a lot of people, you know, I couldn't understand how people lived out here in Southwest Philly, they don't know anything about it, we had more people of out of Philadelphia to come to John Heinz than people that live right in the area, and when the he took over, you know, a lot of people of color were not even aware of it, I heard a lot of them say, "Oh I thought I heard a bunch of wild animals out there," I said, no you have to go out there, it's educational, I said it means a lot anyway, I said "You're going to learn a from it, so like I said, its a part of my daily life."

MC: Mm

LS: So, I don't know, if that helped you any, like I said, if there's a day that I don't go there in the morning, I got to do it in the evening. I just have to go, like I said, it's part of my therapy. So like I said, I don't like going to a shrink, I don't like to take a drink for pleasure, I'm going to go to John Heinz.

MC: Yeah. That's great, alright, I think I'm at my last question. And it has to do with data again a little bit, but - oh no I'm going to have two more questions. But the first one is, going forward, what would you want research and data collection to look like, and

how can research and data can be used in a way that is important and useful to the community?

LS: Well I just think, a good example is a 125 acres, I would like it to be coming favorable for our initiative, you know, as far as green space. I don't want them to come back and say, "you found out that it wasn't as bad as a flood plain, you know, they could accept some development." I don't want that kind of data, I mean we can't stop data but to me that would be a negative impact. And I don't want to the data to say, "Oh you know, we allowed to have some development in some areas," I mean I know that there might be some, in the 125 acres back here, we can't stop data, but you know what it is, you know there is some kinds that I don't want to see but they could maybe they could make apartments back here at the airport, because the airport has first refusal out here, we was totally against, you know, we didn't want to the airport to put some maybe some buildings, any parking lots or any rental cars. But we don't want to be seeing any buildings back here either, we don't want the data saying that either. And the same with the other areas. I don't want the data saying like we can't pay for stuff. These advisers will help, but we don't just take it, we could be taking on advisement, still have experts that look at it that wouldn't help you any. Or is your question - I don't know if that's the answer you were looking for.

MC: Well, not so much the data that has been gathered already, but like Eastwick going forward – so, I know that Eastwick Friends and Neighbors works with lots of students, know is in contact with lots of researchers, so what would it have to mean to have research that would be meaningful to your organization?

LS: Well going forward, I can see now that you always want to have research, and we will continue to be reaching out to students. Michael Nairn always said, "There was always more knowledge to be learned." Just because someone had said this, there's also going to be more of that. 'Cause even with this planning process, they have x amount of dollars with what they can do. I don't even know if their data would be that thorough though. So going forward, I know that we will be looking for more additional data because I think they had a budget that was like $70,000 or something, but when you look upon gathering data, you know, that might sometimes go on for years. So I know that we will going forward we will need to use additional data from university students that are helping gather additional data. 'Cause going forward, additional information never stops. And the more data you got, the more you could work with. Going forward I know we going be reaching out, and I'm always glad we have someone like Michael Nairn, which he's been a tremendous asset to us anyway though. And he always talked about the importance of having data, about having the correct information. You know, a lot of times we are not paying for this data. This is being paid for by the airport, whatever, ya know, for that Interface. Now I know that going forward we will be getting some type of grant, or you know, some way to pay for additional data, you know, I know this is not the end of it, we always trying to tell people. So, I hope that anyway.

MC: Alright, and so final question,

LS: Sure

MC: What makes Eastwick home to you?

LS: What makes it, well, well what I think I said earlier, the community, the people, it's the environment itself, people out here. You know, the towns, a lot of them don't know each other. 'Cause a lot of people, a lot of times you might not see people you meet, and they extremely friendly, and I'm one of the ones in these community groups that, I go to peoples' houses, and most of the time people are extremely cordial. They want to know what's going on in the neighborhood, they want to know what's going on, they moved out here for a better life. You know, they want to get involved, they say they going to do this and going to do that. So, I mean it's home because I know they going to enjoy this community, they love it, they say they love the open spaces, you know. They love the fact that they have a shopping center that's finally starting to get better, you know the community is getting better and you know the neighborhood is safe. A lot of people, a lot of the time, and the community itself was kind of declining, was slowly declining. In fact some say, they got to get the police out here, we got to like almost call one, call one, call one because you know we got one of the strongest in the district. Oh you know, there's a lot of crime. You got to hit Eastwick. I don't have any problems, you all live in this ideal community, but we still have our issues. So, I mean, this is what we like about us, the neighborhood knows that people here are pretty friendly. Like I said, I've been out here for 18 years, you know, so, and everybody comes out here, I heard people say, "I didn't know this was Philadelphia, I thought this was Darby, Delaware county, different," and you know, that's what makes it different.

MC: Alright is there anything else that you want to add, anything that we didn't talk about that you want part of your oral history?

LS: I think going forward, that was about the best, going forward my main is that like Eastwick continues, and we try to make the younger people want to be involved, you know. That's why the students, we need more people, younger, in the community. Unfortunately, this community isn't like being part of a younger community. You know, I met a woman that I met yesterday at a cousins funeral, so I mean we don't have that many young people in the neighborhood, so you know, that the only thing, it's home, it's safe, ya know, we don't have problems like a lot of people have. Probably a cat walking across, and there's just a couple of cats and she freaks out, you know, that's the main thing though, about the community so, and my thing is try to make it better.

MC: Yeah

LS: So I hope I was able to help.

MC: Yes, thank you so much for making the time.

LS: Okay, and thank you. And I like the fact that, one of the things that past time when I was talking about, you know, finally Eastwick history is being told. Because you know a lot of the people don't know nothing about here. Only people saying "That's old Elmwood; people live over in the marshes," like back old people remarks like that. I think my wife used to say, when we first moved out here, if you live out there, even some back water place, we would like to see people like, keeping our oral history known. You know, what has happened most people don't know. And those who move out here say, "Oh I didn't know this had happened here." So, I think it's important.

MC: Mhm

LS: Like I was talking to a woman just yesterday, and she told me she just moved around the corner about a week ago, and she didn't know anything about the community. "Oh I knew it was nice, I like it out here", she said something. I said, "I know where you live, you going be comfortable around here."

MC: Yeah

LS: She said, "I'm glad". I said, give me the time and I'll talk to you about it, recruiting people, so.

MC: Ok

LS: Yeah, I appreciate your time. You know, thanks a lot, anything you can do to keep this history going on anyway, so.

MC: Alright.