

Irma Belton (née Lipscombe)

March 26, 2025, The Orange Hub

Interviewers: Donna Coombs-Montrose and Colette Lebeuf

Camera: Don Bouzek

IL: I was born in Athabasca, and I believe my parents moved to Edmonton in 1958. They moved over onto the north side and I don't know if it's still there, but there used to be a packing company. I think it might've been... not Canada Packers, but there was a packing company on 66th Street. Was that Swift's? There used to be a Sunday School called Shiloh Baptist, and it was right across the street, and that's where we used to go. My parents and a few black people that moved here moved into a building that was called the Latoske Building. I guess they would've called it an apartment building at that time, but there were different families that lived there.

Then my parents moved to the West End, and we've been here ever since. The West End was called Jasper Place. The boundary for Jasper Place and Edmonton was 149th Street, and this was Jasper Place. It was mud; there was mud and there were wood sidewalks. I remember that as a kid.

Q: When was this and how old were you?

IL: Well, I told you I came here in 1958, so my parents might've moved to Jasper Place in '59 or '60, something like that.

Q: What were your parents' names?

IL: My father's name was Oswald Lipscombe and my mom's name was Alberta. They're both deceased now. They had six children. We went to that school; it's called Canora. It's still operating, but that's the school that we went to.

Q: Did you have siblings?

IL: Six, there were six of us – four girls and two boys.

Q: And their names?

IL: Richard, Beverly, Irma, Marlene, and my two youngest ones are deceased – Debbie and Lenny. They all went to that school there. Lenny died last year July 10th, and he was the youngest of the six. We all lived in the West End, all of us, Jasper Place.

Q: Did Debbie live out here too?

IL: Yes, Debbie lived over in Candy Cane Lane, and so did Lenny; they lived together.

Q: I know she always had her hairdressing business out here in the West End.

IL: Yes.

Q: She worked with Shirley [Romany] for a while.

IL: She did, yes, she did work with Shirley for a while. She moved to different shops.

Q: So your family settled here and you went to school here?

IL: Yes, we went to Canora. The kids went to Brightview. My mom and dad bought a house on 95th Avenue and 152nd Street, and there's an elementary school right across from there called Sherwood School. Remember that? My mom's house is still there, the school is still there, and that's where my youngest siblings went to school. Then we went to J.P. Composite.

Q: So you graduated from J.P.?

IL: Well, I didn't. I left home at a very early age and I moved. I've lived in a lot of different places. I've lived in Montreal, I've lived in Singapore, I lived in the States, I lived in Drayton Valley. I've lived a lot of different places. But my family, the Lipscombes, they all stayed here. I'm the only one that ventured out different places.

Q: What made your family move to Jasper Place?

IL: I have no idea why they moved here. They probably wanted to get out of that so-called Apartment. So that's probably why they moved out here.

Q: Was there a community here from Amber Valley?

IL: A black community? No. There were very few black people here in Jasper Place, very few. The school that we went to, Canora, there was a family called the Browns – you probably know them – and the Lipscombes. There weren't a lot of black families here; there were not at all.

Q: So was there a lot of racism?

IL: Yes, there was lots of it.

Q: Did you have any experiences?

IL: Constantly.

Q: What happened?

IL: Well kids calling you nigger and doing this to you. Just probably ignorance, because they didn't know any better. In our neighbourhood where we lived, we were the only black ones. There was Ukrainian people, there was all different nationalities, and all the kids played together. You'd get some little kid that's going to call you a name, and you'd take care of it.

Q: How did you take care of it?

IL: You'd kick their ass, simple.

Q: What was the address of your house?

IL: The one over there? It was by Broadstock swimming pool. I remember the house that we lived in on 156th Street – it was 10351 – 156 Street. Now there's an apartment building there. By Broadstock Swimming Pool, if you know where Broadstock is, we just lived about a block from there. Us kids used to go over to that swimming pool, and the pool is still there.

Q: Did you have any problems swimming in that pool?

IL: Do you mean racism? No, not that I can remember.

Q: Just at school?

IL: Yeah, just in school probably. I don't remember walking down the street and anybody calling me names. But it was there; it was there and you just took care of it. Simple as that. There were very few black people; so your friends were white. Simple. You just dealt with it; then, after a while, it was okay. I don't know what else I can tell you, because that's just the way it was.

Q: Did you have any black teachers during the time you were in school?

IL: Well, I'll tell you an incident at Canora school. In those days you used to get the strap. Remember that black strap? And they recorded it in a book. Us kids used to come home for lunch all the time; we were that close. I had this teacher named Mr. Dray; he's probably no longer with us. But anyway, he kept giving me the strap on my hands. So, one day I came home from lunch and I was telling my mom this. It must've really hurt, because I told her. She went to the school. My mom was a little woman, my mom was not a violent person, confrontational. But her kids, no, don't mess with her kids. So she went to the school and she said, "Irma tells me she's been getting the strap every day." So they go into the principal's office and he brings out the book. Every time they give you the strap, they have to record it. So my mom said, "Why is she getting the strap?" "It's for talking." My mom said, "Well, who's she talking to? She's not talking to herself. Why isn't this other person getting a strap?" She said, "Don't you ever put your hands on my child again. It takes two, but she's the only one. Don't you ever touch my child again, or I'll take you to the superintendent or whatever they did." End of story. She said, "Irma, try not to talk." Okay, that probably didn't work, but I never got the strap again.

Q: Did your siblings have similar experiences?

IL: You mean about racism or being strapped? They might've probably been called a name or something like that. I wasn't the only one, I'm sure of it. Did they deal with it? I'm sure they did.

Q: The same way?

IL: Probably, probably. They probably did. You just dealt with it;, you just dealt with it. It wasn't anything about being at the back of the bus. They used to have diesel buses here, that real

stinky smell. Like I said, the border was 149th Street, so they would have buses out here in the West End. They don't have it anymore, but they used to have like a place where all the buses would come. All the buses would come there, and that's where you'd get off and you'd be downtown. If you wanted to take the bus, you'd take the bus. But it was diesel, just stinky. I remember my little sister Debbie always used to get sick on that bus because of that smell.

Q: Was it called Diamond Bus Lines?

IL: It might've been.

Q: After your school life, did you begin working in the neighbourhood?

IL: Like I said, I left home very early. One of my first jobs though, that I can remember, is I think Second Minute Carwash downtown, I think that's what it was called. Remember that? My sister Bev and myself and her friend, we all got a job. We were so happy to get a job, and that's what that job was, washing the cars. They have Bubbles now, but it was the Second Minute Carwash.

Q: It was about 118th Street?

IL: Something like that.

Q: Was that your first job?

IL: Yes. Then my brother Richard... remember there used to be a bowling alley on, is this Stony Plain? Right on the corner there was a bowling alley downstairs. My brother Richard, no, first he went to IGA. Remember the IGA there? There was an ad in the paper for a stock boy or whatever, and my brother Richard was so excited, so he went there and applied for this job. He didn't get that job. So my mom phoned there to see if that job was still open. It was. They were prejudiced; they weren't going to hire him. So then he went and tried to find another job, and he got a job at that bowling alley setting pins. That's what he did. But now you see lots of black people of all different nationalities – it doesn't matter about the colour of your skin. Brown people, you never did see that. In banks, everywhere, you see it now. You didn't when I was growing up. The jobs were very limited, very limited. Most black people that were here were

housekeepers, they'd clean, they didn't have what I would call a good job. Because of the colour of their skin. It's not that they couldn't do it.

Q: Were there many black people generally in your neighbourhood when you were growing up?

IL: No, I told you there wasn't very many black people. There was the Leflers, I think, that lived not too far from us, and they ended up moving way over on the north side. But there were the Leflers and the Browns. There was Alvin Brown, there was Nova Brown, and Ali Brown. Both of those people are gone, and they had a family of 12 kids. They lived right across the street here. That house was like that, and there were 12 kids. I think a couple of them were older and they'd left home. But I remember 12 kids. Then I remember the Sunday school bus picking us up, because we went to Shiloh Baptist Church. The Sunday school bus would pick us up when we lived on 156th Street.

Q: Were they also from Amber Valley?

IL: The Browns? Yes, their parents were from Amber Valley.

Q: How about the Leflers?

IL: No, they weren't from there. Wildwood? Yeah. She's helping me out here. I brought you this book. You can't keep it, but I brought this book. There's some information about all the areas that are here, so you might find it kind of interesting. Amber Valley is in here; there's other areas, maybe Wildwood. Some people put that book together; so they were trying to get information about all the communities. I only knew a few, and that was Amber Valley, Wildwood; there was one in Saskatchewan, Maidstone. There probably were other ones but those are the names that I remember my mom talking about, because she knew a few people that came from Maidstone, she knew a few people that came from Wildwood. . . . I remember when I was a kid and my mom and us kids would go downtown. We'd take that bus and go downtown; it was a big deal for us. We'd see a black person and us kids would go, "Mom, Mom,

Mom.” More than likely, she knew them; there weren’t any black people. “Mom, look”. She’d know them, and they’d maybe nod at each other. But she recognized them maybe from Amber Valley or somewhere. She knew them, but not personally. But it’s just that we brought it to her attention, because we didn’t see very many black people. So we’d say, “Mom, look.” Then the black people started coming into Canada.

Q: So you all went to Shiloh. Was that your social community as well?

IL: I remember going there every Sunday for Sunday School. I remember a big Christmas concert; that was a big thing, the Christmas concert. Then Shiloh moved. They used to have a church, like I was telling you, on 66th, then they moved to another one. I think they moved about two or three times, Shiloh has... and different ministers and what not. I’d say, “How come there’s so many different ministers? Why do they keep changing?” It seemed to me they didn’t get along.

Q: Who was the minister when you were there? Was it Grant?

IL: No, there was a minister from the United States that came here.

Q: Not Pastor Grant?

IL: No, he was at the end. This was when I was young. I’d say, “How come they always change?” A lot of black people don’t seem to get along together, I don’t know why. But they did, they changed. I don’t go to church, so to speak, anymore. I do believe in a higher power but I just don’t go to a church. I’ve seen the way people carry on and I’m thinking, that’s not very Christian.

Q: When you went to church, do you remember the minister’s name?

IL: I couldn’t tell you. The only one that I remember that sticks out in my mind, and I couldn’t tell you his name, was a minister from the United States. Then he moved.

Q: Did he live in Jasper Place?

IL: No, I don't think so.

Q: Do you remember any other Amber Valley families that lived here?

IL: No. There was a family, the Fords, but they all lived over on the north side. There were the Mayses: they all lived on the north side. The Lafayettes did; Joan and Dan had three girls.

Q: Do you remember where they lived?

IL: Yes, I could take you to it. I know exactly where the house is. I can walk there and see it. One of their daughters lives in Camrose, Brenda. Then one of them, the poor thing, she's got some issues. Then the other one lives in Edmonton. One lives on an acreage out that way and I think that was Barb.

Q: It sounds like there was a connection between several families from Amber Valley that moved to Jasper Place.

IL: When I was growing up, I don't remember. I don't know why they chose the north side and my parents chose the west side. I have no idea. Maybe opportunity, who knows? I have no idea; I was a kid.

Q: According to the record, there were other Lipscombes who lived in Jasper Place – Eric and Kathleen.

IL: Lipscombe?

Q: Yes, Eric and Kathleen and Robert and Alberta.

IL: Alberta is my mom.

Q: There was an Alberta Lipscombe in the Journal that reported that Amber Valley couldn't support people to live anymore.

IL: I'd like to see that, because I can't see my mom ever saying that. I'm not saying it's wrong, but I can't see it. Like I said, I don't know who those Lipscombes are that you're talking about.

There were some Lipscombes in Calgary that I think were related to my dad. Did I know them?

No, I just knew that they were Lipscombes.

Q: Richard and Monica?

IL: Richard is my brother and Monica is his wife, and they live in St. Albert. Monica's dad was Rollie Miles; he was a football player. Richard Lipscombe, my brother, is an artist. You've probably heard of his son, Jessie; you've probably heard of him.

Q: I see him often.

IL: Jessie? He lives in Vancouver. When he's here? Yeah.

Q: So you worked at the carwash?

IL: And then I left Alberta.

Q: Where did you go?

IL: I went to Drayton Valley. Then I went to Montreal. What year was the Expo? Was that '66 or '67? '67, that's when I moved there. I was looking at some pictures that my sister Bev had of my ex-husband.

Q: Is that why you moved to Montreal?

IL: With him, yes. He was a Frenchman. Bev just brought me this picture and she said, "Irma, I found some pictures of your husband." I said, "Which one?" It was the father of my children. So I lived there. I've lived in a lot of different places. When I was growing up there were no black boys to date; there were no black boys. My neighbour – she's a good lady – but she says, "All your husbands are white." I said, "I'll tell you why. When I was growing up there were no black guys."

There weren't. So who do you associate with? My friends were white. Colour means nothing to me. I can't handle that when people are into this colour business; I've never been like that. So I said, "Who am I going to date?" I don't look at you as a white woman or you as a white man or you as East Indian. You're a person. I could care less what colour you are. So that's why I dated

Caucasians, because there were no black guys. That's before they opened up the gates, so to speak. That's exactly true, and that's what came into Canada. Then you started to see there were lots of black people. But until they got their citizenship, they weren't Canadians. Like anybody that comes here, you're not a Canadian until you get your citizenship. So I never associated, because I was gone; all my friends, my dates, were white men. My sister, two of my sisters, married Jamaican men. My sister Marleen just moved from Toronto; she's been out there 45 years. She just moved here last year. Her husband was Jamaican, and he died. Bev's husband was Jamaican, and he died. So you didn't have lots of choices.

Q: They must've gotten married later on. You're one of the older sisters?

IL: Oh, yeah. No, I'm the third, I'm the third.

Q: At some point you returned to Jasper Place.

IL: Oh, I've been back in Jasper Place for 30 some years now. Prior to that, where did I live? I've lived in Beaumont, I lived in Leduc, I've lived in Drayton Valley, and I've lived in Mill Woods. Somewhere do you want to start?

Q: When you returned to Jasper Place 30 some years ago.

IL: Probably 40.

Q: What brought you back here?

IL: Well, I met my last husband. But I lived in St. Albert and then we bought that house you picked me up at; we bought that house there. But I always worked in St. Albert, and I worked at the London Drugs there for 30 something years, then I retired.

Q: Where is that London Drugs?

IL: It's in St. Albert. You know where The Bay is? It's in the mall. And I used to work at the London Drugs here in Jasper Gates.

Q: Was that near your brother Richard?

IL: If you go down the Trail, you'll see The Bay and everything, that's where it is.

Q: You worked in St. Albert and lived in Jasper Place?

IL: That's correct.

Q: So you commuted.

IL: Yes. But before I moved to St. Albert, I was at this Jasper Gates store, the London Drugs there. I was there for five years and then I went out there, and I was there for 30 something years.

Q: So you have a lot of experience with that.

IL: With retail, with people, yeah.

Q: When you moved to Jasper Place, what kind of environment did you find as compared to when you lived here previously? Was it more accepting?

IL: I'll tell you what. I've always been accepted; I've always been accepted. It's how you treat people, how you come across. I've never had any issues as an adult, I've never had any issues. I've always been well liked. I'm honest and I'm upfront. You treat me right with respect and you're going to get the same. If you don't, you're going to get it back. I don't know what else I can tell you about my feelings. I don't go out and look for racism. But if it's there I can feel it. I've lived it. I'm not out there looking for it, but I can tell when people are disrespectful. I've worked in that industry for a long time.

Q: How did you find working in retail?

IL: In St. Albert, supposedly they've got money. But I'll tell you what, that store made me employee of the year; no, actually, this store made me employee of the year. When I was out there, and I'm not blowing my own horn, it's like how you treat people. They loved me. When I retired my manager said, "I've never seen anybody that was liked or missed as much." If I'd go on holidays, "When's Irma coming back?" I treated people the way I wanted to be treated, and I

was well liked. I treated them with respect. It had nothing to do with my nationality, nothing. I was treated well and I treated people well. It had nothing to do with because my skin is black and yours is white. I can't say any more about that, because I know how I was treated. There's a few black girls in that store now, but there weren't when I was there; I was the only one.

Speaking of that, I went to a celebration of life out at St. Albert Inn last Saturday. My manager that I worked with for a long time, her mom had passed away. I knew her, because she used to be a rep. So I went out there. I walked in – they had it at the St. Albert Inn – the room was packed, a good hundred people there. I looked around and guess what, I'm the only black person there. That happens so many times with me. My husbands were all white; I'd go to functions, and I'd be the only black person. Did it bother me? Not at all, but I just kind of stood back and watched that. I looked around me and I said, "I'm the only black person here." It didn't bother me, but I just thought about it and I said, "There aren't any."

Q: Around what year was this?

IL: When? When I'm telling you this story? It was just last Saturday.

Q: So in the more than 30 years that you worked in St. Albert, you haven't seen much transition?

IL: With the employees you mean? Well, yes, now I have because there are... I guess they're Canadians now, they're black. There's some East Indians, there's some, are they Muslim? There's some there. They're open; they're not racist; hiring anybody. London Drugs was owned by an Oriental man, Mr. Lui. He's passed away now. He was not like that, and he treated his employees very well. I've never heard of any, and I've been to two stores and know a lot of people in all the other stores, and I've never heard of anybody being treated because of their nationality or their religion or the colour of their skin. They wouldn't tolerate that; they wouldn't do that. I can't ever hear of someone complaining to me or saying something to me about how they were treated. Never, I can't say that. I don't like that when any nationality... and some people do, they'll use that race card. Something's not right; so right now they're going to use that. I don't go for that; a lot of people will use that, and it's wrong.

Q: Where are your children now?

IL: My children are passed away. Remember I told you both my sons died. So I have one grandson. If you saw my grandson, you'd think he was white. He isn't, but he looks white. He's white; he's got blonde hair. But he's not; he's got some black in him; he's got me. And he had his dad; his dad was mulatto and his mom's white, so he doesn't have a lot of black in him.

Q: So you only had two children?

IL: I had two children and one grandson. One of my children, Sean, the oldest one, he had Justin; Robert, my youngest one, didn't have any children.

Q: In your school years when you had to defend yourself when did those altercations take place?

IL: Usually maybe out at recess or on your way home from school.

Q: What did you have to do to deal with it?

IL: "What you just call me boy? I'll kick your ass." You put the fear in them. They know you don't do that. Whether I'm a girl or boy, you just don't do that. "Did I call you a name? So why are you calling me a name?"

Q: So you attended elementary and secondary school in the area?

IL: Yes. Canora was the elementary school and then the other one was I think Brightview. Then Jasper Place Composite. When I think about Jasper Place Composite, I used to take hairdressing, and I was pretty good at it.

Q: Who did you take it from?

IL: J.P. Composite. They used to have it so the public would come in and the girls were learning how to do hair, and it wouldn't cost the clients very much money. That's how you learned. I was pretty good at it. Remember the hairdo with the big bubble? They used to call me... don't ask me why, but I like this name Shannon, love that name, so that's how I registered myself, as Shannon. Anyway, I had this teacher, her name was Mrs. Nicholson; she was a German

teacher, a little skinny thing; she had a strong German accent. The tables were kind of like this – our units, one here and one there, four of them. You probably see that in salons too. So anyway, I was doing this lady’s hair. Do you want to hear this story? Okay. So anyway, I was doing this lady’s hair. Her name was Rory, and she was on the other side. She said, “Shannon, can you come and help me with this lady?” I said, “Well, as soon as I get this finished, I’ll come over and give you a hand.” So I went over to give her a hand. The teacher comes, and she had this strong accent, “Shannon, Shannon,” and she snaps that comb right out of my hand. Bad mistake; I’m embarrassed now because she’s done that, and I take it back. “Shannon,” she says with her strong accent. Well, you don’t want to know what I said to her.

Q: Yes, I do.

IL: Do you really? It wasn’t very nice. I slammed my thing down and I said, “Fuck you.” I turned around and walked out of that school. She’s right behind me, “Shannon, Shannon.” I kept on walking, I was so mad. I got home and said to my mom, “Did you get a phone call yet? They suspended me, because I was cussing.” I told her what happened, and she said, “Irma, you shouldn’t have.” I said, “I know, but it just slipped out of my mouth; she embarrassed me.” So, anyway, they suspended me. When I got back to school two days later, Mr. – what the heck was his name – he’s the one... Dr. Keeler they called him; he opened up that school; it was a brand new school at J.P. Anyway, I had to meet the teacher and the principal in the office when they let me back after two days’ suspension. You know who apologized to me? That teacher did; she was wrong. She had an office there, “You pull me in that office and, say, explain to me. Don’t do it in front of a bunch of people. That’s one thing,” I said, “don’t ever embarrass me.” Nobody likes to be embarrassed; I don’t care whether you’re a kid, do not embarrass somebody. There’s a time and a place for everything. She realized that after it was said and done. So I apologized to her for cussing, and she apologized to me, end of story. That’s what I always taught my kids. I would never embarrass my kids in front of anybody. Nobody wants to be embarrassed. There’s a time and a place for everything. Don’t do that. So that was that incident at that school, and it had nothing to do with racism.

Anyway, the next year my sister Debbie was taking hairdressing, and she says, “I hope you’re not like your sister.” She was completely opposite. But you don’t do that, don’t embarrass somebody. I saw that happen at the Kentucky Fried Chicken place. I was coming home from

work and thought I'd stop and get some chicken and take it to my mom, because she was living with Bev. I think it was a Cheap Tuesday; I don't know if they still have that for Kentucky, Toonie Tuesday or whatever. Anyway, I got some food and the place was packed. This young kid, obviously new, and he's asking I guess the manager, and she yelled at him and embarrassed that poor kid. He wasn't black; he was a white boy, doesn't matter. I'm standing there listening to that and the hair on my back just stood up. It was my turn and I said, "Is the manager here?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Can you call her over here?" I went up one side and down the other, and the people behind me applauded and said, "If you hadn't done that we were going to." That poor kid, I felt so sorry for him. He's learning, how can you do that in front of everybody? They all clapped. The man said, "If you hadn't done that I was ready to step in there." I thought, "I got kids." If somebody treated my kids like that, you're darn right I'd want somebody to help them out. That's probably the kid's first job. People don't think people have got feelings; you don't do that. Next.

Q: Was Richard a boxer?

IL: That was my uncle; his name was Richard too. When you say Lipscombes, my dad, his family were from Oklahoma. They came up here as slaves. It would've been his granddad that was a slave; so he would've been my great-grandfather. I never did meet the man. He was dead. But listening to the little bit of information – and for some reason I guess they wanted to forget the past – they didn't want to talk about it. They didn't talk about it, but my mom would tell me a little. She said, "He really hated white people." You can understand why. If that man was a slave, you better believe he's going to hate them coming up here. My granddad, he owned the blacksmith shop in Athabasca. He had a farm in Amber Valley, and he had brothers. There was Richard, Nathaniel, and then they had two sisters. I never met any of these people because they were all dead; they were old and gone. I just remember the names. I did meet one of his aunts. She lived in Seattle, and I went to visit her. But most of those women, I think there were two or three, they were barren and they didn't have any kids. And the men didn't have a lot of children. My dad, he had a sister who lived in Winnipeg, Aunt Tina. She had no children. My dad had six kids. But his uncles, my uncle Nathaniel that lived in Vancouver, I think he had two kids, a boy and a girl. So they didn't have a lot of family, not lots of kids. So I didn't have lots of cousins, and if I did, I didn't know them, because they didn't live here. I'd just hear stories – "Oh, somebody died." "Who's that?" But I didn't know them, I didn't see them. My mom's family – my

mom's mother – they lived out in Amber Valley. Mom's family had Uncle Ike, Uncle Sun, and then I think they had three girls. But they're all gone.

Q: What was her maiden name?

IL: Coleman. You know some of the Colemans?

Q: Shirley.

IL: That's my cousin. She's still out there.

Q: Richard and Corine.

IL: Yeah, but they're passed away now.

Q: Yeah. I knew Richard and Corine really well, we called them uncle and aunt.

IL: What's that place? Colinton. That's just outside of Athabasca. They lived up in the Northwest Territories.

Q: Richard and Corine?

IL: Yeah, they did.

Q: Did any of your family intermarry with Indigenous people?

IL: Yeah, Ronny and Rossy did, because they lived up in Fort... or Yellowknife, or...

Q: What was their last name?

IL: Well, the boys' last name was Coleman. They did marry Indigenous.

Q: And they lived in the Northwest Territories?

IL: That's where they lived, but they were probably born in Athabasca. But they moved up there. They married Indigenous girls and they had children from them. Don't ask me what their names are. Nadine could probably tell you more, because that's her first cousins. I just know if

they phoned my mom – they called her Aunty Berta – and if they phoned, you'd swear you were talking to an Indian. That's what they sounded like – Canadian Indian, Indigenous.

Q: So were Alberta and Shirley sisters?

IL: No, Shirley was my mom's niece. She was the aunt. Shirley's dad and my mom were brother and sister. Shirley's dad was Ike Coleman, and that was my mom's brother.

Q: She's still alive.

IL: She's 90, because they just celebrated her birthday. Nadine's trying to convince her to move out of there, but she won't. She's probably going to die in her house.

Q: Where's the house?

IL: In Colinton.

Q: When you moved here in the '50s, did you find that other people from Amber Valley moved in in the '60s?

IL: I'm sure they did. We'd go out to Amber Valley and there weren't a lot of people still left out there. All the younger kids: who wants to farm? They're moving away from there, the younger generation.

Q: To Jasper Place?

IL: No, just Edmonton or... She would know too, because she's familiar with a lot of these people I'm talking about. There's no opportunities out in Athabasca. It's a little hick town.

What are you going to do? I don't remember any area where all just blacks moved in. I don't remember any area like that. There weren't a lot of us, and I think everybody kind of spread out.

I've always been against it – I don't care what nationality it is – to congregate in one area. That causes racism and you'll never learn how to speak the language if you have all the Italians over there. You go over to the north side and listen to that broken English. It's because they're speaking their language all the time and they're not learning how to speak English. English is

our number one language here. Same with Mill Woods; they call it... it's not nice what they call it, but it's all mostly East Indian people. That's what Mill Woods is. But people congregate like that and then they're not speaking English. I have a neighbour who's Polish. He's married to a little girl from Cuba. He'll sit there and brag to me about how long he's been in Canada. I say, "Well, Dan, why don't you speak better English? I can't understand you. You've been here for 30 something years, why don't you speak better English?" He's got a Cuban wife who can hardly speak English. I said, "How do you guys communicate?" A lot of broken English, and they had two kids. No, I don't believe in that, because it does cause problems. I just don't believe in it, but maybe people feel comfortable being with all their people. There's probably a reason why they do that.

Q: Do you socialize in this area?

IL: Do I? No.

Q: You don't attend any social or cultural events?

IL: I belong to the High Park Community League, and they're having an Easter dinner here on the 7th and I'm going to it. I belong to that community, but that's probably about the extent of my socializing. I don't want to. I've been in that neighbourhood for 30 something years and I knew my neighbour across the street, my neighbour beside me. The boys beside me, they're Indigenous, there's four guys living there. Nice neighbours. But I don't do that; even when my mom lived over at her house, my mom was never a coffee person. She never did that; she didn't believe in that; she didn't like it. Her family was her kids. She didn't have to go have coffee with her neighbour and this and that. She never did that, and I don't do that. My sister Bev didn't do that. Socializing, no, I don't. I'm going to go to the Easter dinner because I'm a community league person.

Q: Can you remind me of where your mom's house was?

IL: The address is 9535 – 152 Street. Not far from here. The other house we lived in is gone; there's an apartment building there now.

Q: Do Lipscombes occupy your mom's house now?

IL: Oh, heavens no, my mom sold that house and somebody else bought it. My mom lived to 100 years old. First, she lived with Bev; when she sold her house she moved with my sister Bev, who lives in St. Albert. Then she went to a seniors' place out in St. Albert, and she really liked it; you have to be independent. Then she got sick, and she was in the hospital; then that's when she came to live with me. She lived with me until the day she died. Well, she died in the hospital, but yeah.

Q: So when did she stop living at 9535?

IL: I don't know. I could probably look it up. No, I lied. When she sold her house, you know where Westlawn Cemetery is? There's an apartment on this side. She moved there. She got an apartment there and she moved there, and she lived there for about two or three years. Then she moved out to St. Albert to Bev's place. Say the '90s maybe, maybe in the '90s.

Q: When did she pass away?

IL: She's been gone about maybe ten years. I'd have to look it up. I don't remember stuff like the dates. Some people remember dates of the death, the time and everything. Not me, I'd have to look it up. Debby's been '22 maybe, about '22.

Q: How old is your grandson now?

IL: My baby grandson, he just turned 24. He lives in Mill Woods.

Q: And he has his own family?

IL: He better not; he's only 24 years old. No, he doesn't have any kids; he'd be having a talk with me. I've talked to him about that already, "Listen, sonny, you've got all the time in the world to have a baby, and this is not a nice world." He inherited my son's house; so he lives in his dad's house. His mom lives with him and his girlfriend lives with him, and the three dogs. That's his family, and me; that's it. Her parents, his mom's parents, they're gone, "I'm the only one you've got left; that's it. Your uncles died; your dad's brother is gone. It's me, this is it, so you'd better listen to what I tell you."

Q: I read that Jessie did a cameo with Denzel Washington.

IL: Just recently?

Q: Not recently.

IL: Denzel, I don't know. It's very possible. I'm sure you've heard Bessie Coleman was the first black female pilot. That would've been my mom's great aunt. I should've brought that book. Maybe you guys have that book on Bessie Coleman. Too bad I didn't bring it; I'll give it to you to read, Donna, sometime. It's a nice little book about her. Everybody knew everybody, and a bunch of them must have come from Oklahoma; that's why they all knew each other. I remember as a kid that was a big deal, because we didn't have holidays. But when we went up to Athabasca, it was a really big deal; we were going somewhere. My dad's family would've all come from there. It's sad because I remember talking to my... do you ever remember the name Frieda Pauley? Anyway, that was my grandma's name, my dad's mom. Asking older people questions, there was no answers. They didn't want to talk about it. They're coming from the South, so they didn't want to talk about it; you really never got nothing. As a kid, you're just a kid. As an adult, I really would've loved to know the history. But who am I going to ask? They're all gone.

Q: Why didn't they want to talk about it?

IL: Listening to my mom, she probably endured it too, the racism. They didn't talk about it. So I can't tell you; they didn't talk about it. Let me ask you something; you live here now. What have you experienced?

Q: Personally, I came to Canada two different times. The tape is running, and what's important is what you're saying.

IL: It's like a family that's been abused, a child that's been abused or a mother's been abused. You don't talk about that. You didn't talk about it. I knew lots of families, whether they were white or black, that were abused. They never talk about it. They didn't talk about coming from

Oklahoma. They're trying to get a better life. They experienced it down there and they're hoping it's going to be better for them up here. It was in a sense, a bit. But they still experienced it, believe me. What did the men do? They worked on the railroad. What kind of jobs did they get because of the colour of their skin? My oldest son was born with his left arm missing. So he had an artificial prosthetic all his life, a hook. Being a mother, you're darn right I'm going to protect him. But people judged him before they even knew what he could do. I would take my boy when he was a teenager to go get a job, a part-time job. My son ended up as a welder and as a heavy-duty mechanic. His hook was his second arm. Don't judge somebody, because you don't know. He went to get his motorcycle license in Mill Woods. The fellow was East Indian; it doesn't matter about his race, but he happened to be East Indian with some turban? on his head. Sean drives up there, he's got an appointment to get his motorcycle license. This guy says, "I can't do it." Sean says, "What do you mean you can't do it?"

"I've never dealt with this." Sean said, "What are you talking about?" I won't use the language he used. He phoned me. He was so mad and so upset. I said, "Go home Sean, I'm going to get on it right now." Remember they used to have that trouble shooter that used to be on the radio? I called them right now and I told them what went on. His phone was ringing off the hook. You can't judge somebody because of that. How do you know that? You can't, you shouldn't. He was back there getting his license the next day. His wife – well, they're not married – she was behind him with a camera making sure everything was going to go right. He got his license. Sean said, "How do you think I got down here? How do you think I got down here?" And this man's going to judge him because you've never seen that? Shame on you. But that's what I'm saying. People are judgmental; you shouldn't be. Give a person a chance.

Q: Can you describe your house as a child in Jasper Place?

IL: I'll tell you about the house that we lived in on 158th Street by Broadstock Swimming Pool. Like I said, Jasper Place was mud. Our street had wooden sidewalks. I can remember the big ditch and the water was full there. I remember we had milk. It probably didn't last that long, but a horse and buggy brought that milk. People used to have clotheslines. All the women had gardens. I remember the house we lived in didn't have running water. The water man would come there once a week and fill that big water thing, the barrels. We had an outside toilet. There

was a little room in the house, I guess that was the bathroom, and there was a thing you could go to the bathroom but you could only pee in there. My brother would go and dump it in the morning; that was his job. But everybody had gardens. I can remember the Davidoviches ;that was one of the neighbours; they had nine kids; they were Ukrainian. All of us kids played with them. All the women associated with each other. They had gardens, and these women all stayed at home; these women didn't work. They had their kids, and they all raised their kids and they had gardens. Everybody was happy. I remember that house. Then I think we moved to another place in the West End just off Stony Plain Road – no longer there. I think there's a tire shop or something there now. But there was a house back there. That's where we lived. I remember it was kind of a little shack. Then, when we lived on 95th, I remember my brother Richard. He was always out with a little push lawnmower. He was always trying to keep the yard nice and neat. My little brother would drag crap home. I remember that house. When my parents bought that house on 95th Avenue and 152nd Street, we thought we were rich. We thought that was a mansion, considering what we were moving from. It was three bedrooms.

That house that we lived in on 156 Street had two bedrooms, and there's eight of us. So we thought we had died and gone to heaven; this was a mansion.

Q: Did your mother work outside of the home?

IL: Remember they used to have GWG? My mom worked there, piecework, you had to sew fast. I remember she got a job there. Well, prior to that, I think my mom always probably cleaned houses. That's pretty much what black people did; they cleaned houses. So then she got that job at GWG. I can't remember how long she lasted there, because my mom could sew but she wasn't a fast sewer. It was piecework. I remember her coming home telling me that, I don't know how she worded it, but she said, "I wasn't fast enough." She could sew, but she couldn't keep up with it. Then her next job was at the University Hospital. I think she started in housekeeping and then she got a job in Pediatrics working with little kids. That was her last job, and she loved that job working with the kids. My dad, the only thing that I ever remember of my dad the kind of work that he did, they call it a glazier, and that's putting windows in houses. I think that's the term that they use. That's what my dad did.

Q: Did your family have a car?

IL: Yes, my dad did. My mom never did drive. She said she drove when she was out in the country but she said, "Your dad never taught me how to drive when I came into the city." So she never did drive.

Q: So your mother would have to take public transport?

IL: Take the bus—yes, she did.

Q: I read that your father was part of the famous Amber Valley baseball team.

IL: Yes, he was.

Q: Was he able to bring his love of sports here to Jasper Place?

IL: No.

Q: Could you talk about what he did in Amber Valley?

IL: Well, you see, I don't think my... when my dad's dad died, my dad was probably about 11 years old; he was young. My grandma, she went to the States. She was told to come there because they had some land in the States. I don't know if you ever heard the name Cromwell, Mr. Cromwell. I guess he was a schoolteacher or something there. He advised my grandma, Frieda was her name, "Don't go there without any representation. Get a lawyer, because these people are going to take advantage of you," because there was some money involved. Have you ever heard that story? But anyway, my grandma goes to the States and my dad's uncles looked after him, because he's a kid, 11 or 12 years old. My grandma was gone for about a year or two. When she came back, she had gotten married, but she didn't bring her husband right then; he came a couple of months later. His name was Pauley, that's where that Pauley comes from. My dad probably left Amber Valley when he was a young man, probably working on the farm with his uncles. Then my dad went to the army. I don't know what age he went to the army, because I've got a picture of him, and he was in the army, and I've got a picture of him cooking or something in the army. When he left Amber Valley he never went back; he was always in the city. My mom and dad, I've got their marriage license and everything, they got married out

there. My mom was considered a spinster, because she was 20-something years old when she got married. She was older than my dad by three or four years. So they must've come to the city, and that's probably when they moved to that Latoske block. They were young people, and they moved. So I can't remember my dad every working out in Athabasca because he probably didn't. He was out there with his uncles on the farm, and then he came to the city. So I can't tell you what his profession is. The only thing I know is he was a glazier when I remember him doing that. That's all I remember. I don't remember him having other jobs, like being in the army and coming here. I don't remember that. I don't remember him bouncing from job to job; I just remember him doing that. What company it was, I couldn't tell you. At one time I remembered, but I can't remember now....

Q: When you were working at London Drugs, were there times when customers were disrespectful?

IL: Well, I'll tell you something. You know you can feel the body vibes, how people look at you and how they treat you? I remember somebody talking to me one time, and of course I'm standing up, because I'm a cashier working at the customer service desk. I said to her, "I know you're not talking to me like that, are you?" My voice was very strong. I said, "You're not talking to me like that, are you?" She shut right up, and she never said a word. She didn't think that I was going to talk to her like that. "But how dare you talk to me like that? I'm trying to be nice to you and treat you with respect, and you're going to come across like that to me?" I just said to her, "I know you're not talking to me like that, are you?" She backed right down and that was the end of that. That lady made a point of coming to me all the time; she liked talking to me. I talk to people nicely. "Don't talk to me disrespectfully. I'm not your maid, and don't treat me like that. I'm not your maid. I'm here to help you." Pretty simple....

Q: When you were working, was it a lot of shiftwork?

IL: No. When I said shifts, maybe 2 to 10:30 or 7 to 3:30. That's about the only two shifts that I ever worked.

Q: That makes it complicated with the kids sometimes.

IL: No, my kids were all grown up then. Just the two of us.

Q: One interviewee told us about neighbours marching in front of a black neighbour's house with a gun.

IL: Really? What part of town?

Q: Here in Jasper Place. So, you never heard of this story?

IL: No. Really?

Q: You never heard of anything like that?

IL: Oh, heavens, no. They must've killed them then, did they? Really? But that's what really bothers me about racism. Everybody that comes to this country is not a true Canadian. The only one is an Indigenous person. So why do you think... like you said, Ukrainians. Ukrainians were very bigoted people. I remember when I was growing up people used a lot of slang. Blackpeople were called niggers, Ukrainians were called bohunks, Italians were wops, and [others were] krauts or flyheads or . . . People used that terminology. Then they cut that out. But you'll still see it, not often, because most of them are dying off, these old Ukrainians. That's been inbred in them and they can't seem to lose it. Their generations change. But that's where that comes from. You hear that all the time. What are you going to learn? You hear that crap at home. When I was at that celebration of life last Saturday and I told you I was the only black person in there. There were two seats left because I was late; I went to the wrong place. But anyway, I sat at this table and there were three young women and there was an older lady sitting right like this. Those girls were so friendly and happy and talkative; that woman never looked at me. I thought, "You're a bigot. I know you are. You're from the old school." I know it bothered her that I was sitting there. I could tell; I could feel the body language. I thought, "Who do you think you are?" I just ignored her. I don't know if those were her girls or her grandkids, but they all knew the person that died. But I just thought, "I haven't experienced this for a long time." I could feel it. But she was from that generation. I know it. But I don't experience that anymore, but I felt it that day....

[END]