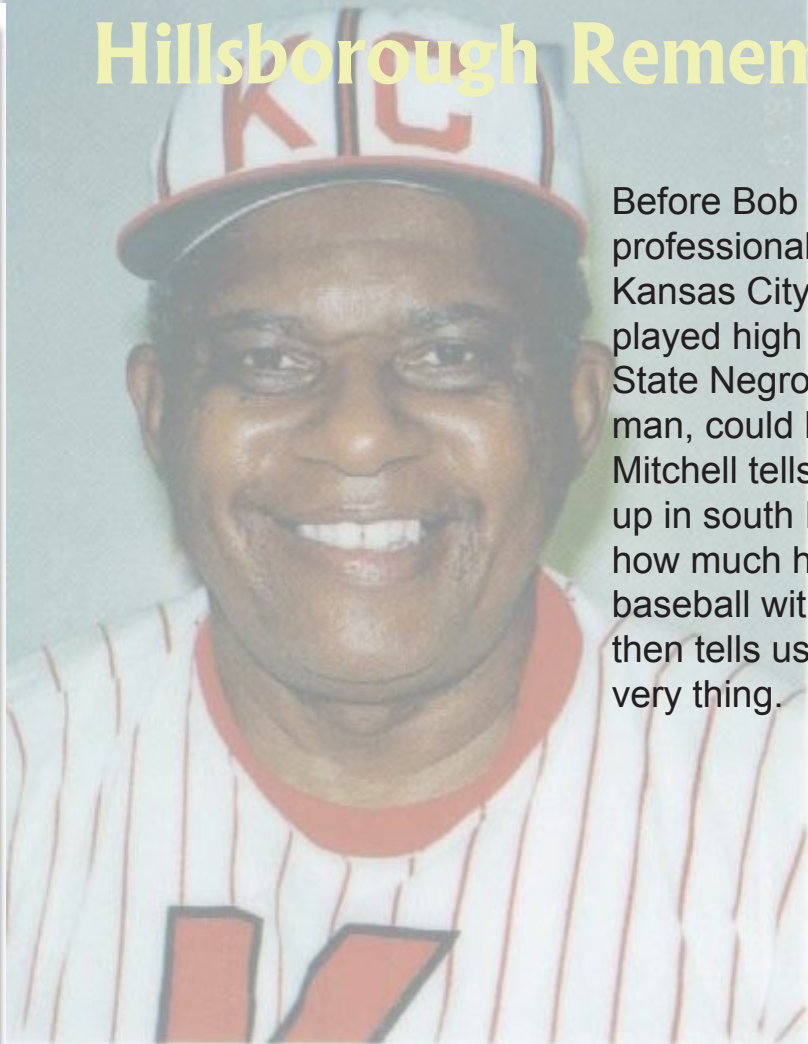




*Bob "Peach-head" Mitchell*

## Hillsborough Remembers



Before Bob Mitchell played professional baseball with the Kansas City Monarchs, he played high school and Florida State Negro League ball. And man, could he ever pitch! Bob Mitchell tells a story of growing up in south Florida and about how much he wanted to play baseball with the "big guys." He then tells us how he did that very thing.



**BOB "PEACH-HEAD"  
MITCHELL**

*[START TAPE 1, SIDE A] This is an interview with Bob Mitchell (BM) of Tampa. We're gonna' be talking about growing up in Florida. The interview is being conducted on June 29th, 2001 in Mr. Mitchell's home in Tampa. And my name is Steve Szekley (SS).*

*(recorder is turned off and then back on)*

**Steve Szekely:** *Let's start out with some basic information, alright?*

**Bob Mitchell:** See, I've been published already about what I'm trying to do here.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** And its an ongoing thing, an ongoing thing in the paper where there's ( )

*[These comments reflect a false start. Mr. Mitchell wanted to make offline comments at this point.]*

**SS:** *Yeah. Well, when and where were you born?*

**BM:** I was born in south Florida, West Palm Beach, Florida. That's in Palm Beach County. That's November 18th, 1932. I was born to Hezekiah Mitchell and Grace Mitchell.

**SS:** *And, could you tell me a little bit about your family life and what kind of...how many brothers and sisters?*

**BM:** I had six brothers and two sisters, uh, minus the two that died before I was born. My mother, my mother came from West End, Grand Bahamas, which is called Freeport now, and she went to school in a little area down there called Eight Mile Rock, down in the Bahamas there. I've never been there yet, my brothers have. My father

was born in Philadelphia. He lived to be about ninety-one years of age.

**SS:** *Wow!*

**BM:** Yeah, so that's where the longevity is. My mother died at age fifty.

**SS:** *What, uh, what got her?*

**BM:** High blood pressure.

**SS:** *Oh, that's a shame. It's so...Cerebral hemorrhage...*

**BM:** Cerebral hemorrhage, yeah, yeah.

**SS:** *Uh, so, your folks were, you were born just at the beginning of the Depression, then.*

**BM:** That's correct.

**SS:** *Rough times, huh...*

**BM:** As I remember, I remember as I got older, oh, I must have been somewhere between eight and eleven years old; going down, ( ) to the Y to get the food from the WPA, uh, yellow, yellow, yellow bricks and dried apples and the very things that they gave, the food that they gave out. I remember that, I remember going down there to get that, the ( ) that they gave out, the government gave out.

**SS:** *Were your, members of your family able to work during this time or were there just no jobs?*

**BM:** Yes, yes, yes. They worked. Ah, my mother worked, my father worked. My father worked more part-time. My mother worked, ah, did domestic work. She worked at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church and she also worked

certain days, uh, part of the day at one the parishioner's homes.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Stafford Beach was his name, ah, in Palm Beach County, there.

**SS:** *What kind of schools did you go to?*

**BM:** Public school.

**SS:** *Can you describe them?*

**BM:** The public school I went to Industrial High School in West Palm Beach, Florida.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** I went there, the other schools were all grades were on one campus, from first through twelve.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** I went to school there 'til I was in about the eleventh grade and first semester.



**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Where we moved to a new school called Roosevelt High School, where I was in the first class to graduate in 1951.

**SS:** *I guess they're nowhere like today's schools. I assume they were segregated.*

**BM:** They were segregated, but they were better along the lines, as far as discipline was concerned and...

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** ...dress code was concerned. You would go to Roosevelt High School or Industrial High School and the, particularly the juniors and seniors dressed like what you might think college students back then would. College students uh, uh, now-a-days, you would think they're just somebody out to the park one day, shorts, there be extremely casual clothes. But back then, the fellas wore, they wore dress pants or even neatly uh, starched, khaki pants with the white kick sneaks, immaculately uh, cleaned, polished, uh, beautiful sport shirts or, either, a shirt and tie. That's the way they dressed then. It was contagious, it was very contagious. That's where the saddle-up shoes result, where the girls wore the white shoes with either the black band across the instep or the uh, uh, brown band. And they relished uh, uh, uh, keeping them clean and polished. This is a fact, this is a fact.

**SS:** *Why was that, do you think it was just a matter of pride?*

**BM:** I think it was a bit of decency in them, uh, uh, I think, ah, upbringing by their parents and it wasn't peer pressure, but it was emulating your peers. If you're peers dress nice, you did everything you can to get clothes to look nice. I think that's more of what it was.

**SS:** *Mmm hmm.*

**BM:** But, ah, everyone took to follow suit in the dress code. The dress code was extremely immaculate back then.

**SS:** *Uh, obviously during your early, your early teen years, you went through WWII. How did that affect your family...?*

**BM:** I remember exactly where I was, for one particular time, when

Roosevelt died, Warm Springs, Georgia. I was on the corner, I was getting...at the ice house - I went to get some ice - which was about...on Eleventh Street and Rosemary Avenue. I lived on 13th Street and Tampadilla, which was, let's see, one, two, two blocks difference, y'know, about two blocks that way, about two blocks that way and I heard them come over the, over the news and I saw the fellow had a newspaper already..."Roosevelt Dies."

**SS:** *And you were about 13 at the time, right?*

**BM:** I was about, I can't tell you, but I was young, I was young... I was young around there. I was young.

**SS:** *So how did you feel when you heard that?*

**BM:** Well, that was the president and--

**SS:** *The only president you knew.*

**BM:** Yeah, the president, and I thought it was...learnin' about death. It wasn't a good thing. It wasn't a good thing. The President died, you know, ( ) and I was, I know exactly where I was at that point. It was on Eleventh Street and Rosemary and I saw the newspaper, too. In fact, I believe that's the way I saw it, rather than on the radio.

**SS:** *Mmm hmm.*

**BM:** Yeah.

**SS:** *Mmm hmm. Were any of your, uh, your brothers caught up in the war, your dad...?*

**BM:** Yes, uh, one of my brothers, my oldest brother John, John Cleveland Cartwright. See, most of my people that I know of, come from under the

Union Jack. You know, they named Cartwright, Nesbitt and all that. Like that come from. [interruption in the recording] I know he went to the CC camp one time.... Yeah, he went in the service, too. Fort Benning, Georgia, I'll never forget that. 'Cause I know a blanket he brought back, I guess from CC camp, it was one of those army green, old army green, uh, uh, uh blankets. Pure wool. And I didn't like it because it sort of itched me, or irrit...bothered with me, you know what I mean? I'd have to keep, uh, get something uh, above me, then put that over me, you know what I mean. I remember him bringing that. He went to C.C. Camp and like that. And then my other brother, Charles, Charles, who was ah, two, uh, Charles who was two above me, he is living now down in Miami. He uh, went to the Coast Guard, U.S. Coast Guard. And those were the ones who saw service.

**SS:** *What is the C.C. Camp? Civilian Conservation Corps or...?*

**BM:** Yes, something along that line, that's right, that's right, 'cause it be work, the government, y'know, job camp.

**SS:** *Um, when the war hit, did things get better, financially for the area, for people in West Palm?*

**BM:** When the war hit, only thing we can remember vividly was the ration stamp. You know, we got them in books. If you got a tank, a plane. This month it might be, you need to have, you have have a tank to get sugar. You got have a plane or something like that to get shoes or any other commodity and you have your ration book you tear out. And people used to share what they don't have. Well, you know how if they have...

**SS:** *Trade...*

**BM:** ...they share it. They share it with you. There was a lot of community. Uh, the community was an extension of your immediate home. That was extremely strong, extremely strong. To go out in the street, uh, in one of those neighborhoods and you'd be acting the wrong way and a lady see you. She admonish, "Aren't you Gracie's boy? I know you goin' get that. Come here, boy," with a

older, he went off and left us, he left when we was a certain age. We must have been about six when he left, y'know like that.

**SS:** *Where did he go?*

**BM:** Philadelphia.

**SS:** *Okay.*

***the community was an extension of  
your immediate home.***

Bahamian accent, y'know, and, and she might take your shoulder and shake you and then pop you in the back of the head like that. "You go on now! I'm gonna tell Gracie I saw you out here" and so on and so so..." like that. You go home, the message, she'd get the message there and there's another one. You get another little switching.

Yeah, you didn't hear anything about, "Oh, you abusing the child," no abuse. After I got older, much older, I learned that the Scriptures teach that. So I'm gonna say that, won't spare a rod on a child. It won't kill 'em. It won't kill 'em. I believe very strongly in using the rod on a child, you know what I mean. You won't beat a child ( ) split open. But I think you need to let them know how serious you are about them not doing something. My daddy was going to stop it, but you let him know how strong I feel that, "This is something you shouldn't do," and you can't express that. That action is stronger than just words. "Sonny, don't do that. I don't like that!" No, but if you add that along with a little bop, bop, bop, bop. I gotta, my brother, I was about sixteen and a half years old, close to seventeen, my oldest brother, who I lived with after my first mother passed, my daddy, not much before that, my daddy, as he got

**BM:** He went back to Philadelphia. And my brother was supposed to pick me and my girlfriend up from the adjacent city of Vero Beach to go to the movies and he didn't show up. This cab, I caught a cab and I didn't go straight to the movies. I stopped back at home, about why he didn't pick me up. Me and him got in a argument. My brother laid me out, my brother started swingin' on me, I was blockin' with my hands like that, ( ) like that. Then I went out uh, uh, and we caught a cab and went on to the movies.

**SS:** *Uh huh...*

**BM:** I'm sixteen, sixteen and a half years old.

**SS:** *Did your brother take over the family when your mother died?*

**BM:** Yes he did, and his wife too. Yeah, just like a mother. And she have her children, so naturally, you take care of her children. All of my niece and nephews, I used to change them, I used to feed them, used to do everything.

**SS:** *How many people did you have in the home at the time?*

**BM:** Well, we had, let me see, one of my brothers went to the military. Me

and Richard, my younger brother, that's two, and he started gradually getting' his children and stuff like that. It wasn't too crowded. We had the room for it.

**SS:** *Did you say that your neighborhood was very Bahamian; lots and lots of people from the Bahamas living there?*

**BM:** Yeah, yeah, because see, blacks used to go primarily, when they came over, in Palm Beach, used to call it the stix.

**SS:** *The what?*

**BM:** The stix, s-t-i-x, you know, stix, over there...

**SS:** *Yeah...*

**BM:** They came over there and they homesteaded over there. And then Flagler came in and, they just, you know how they did, you know the story about Indians, the story about parts Africa! You just ran outta there. The black ( ) in Palm Beach, the famous Palm Beach, ( ) verse seven. And then one time I understand, we used to live down on what you called the Central Business District, like where I told you about New City, what they call New City is there right now. We used to live there right off of number one, almost on number one, years ago.

**SS:** *Uh huh. ( ).*

**SS:** *What did Palm Beach look like at the time? Was it starting to get built up like it is now?*

**BM:** It was getting built and, y'know, the largest wooden hotel in the United States was the uh, uh, Royal Poinciana Hotel and they have a baseball team. They had baseball team ( ), you know,

I think the Breakers had a baseball team and the Royal Poinciana had a baseball team. And they had some of the stars, y'know, uh, you would even know them today, like Oscar Charleston. They had, uh, the well-known stars that you can relate to the Negro League, y'know. I'm trying to think of it, who else was, Hilton Smith is going into, y'know, the Hall of Fame sometime, I believe, next month, I believe it is. Yes, because the last one was Smokey Joe Williams. Hilton Smith already been selected, I think, and inducted. But he'll be inducted on the ceremony ( ).

But anyhow, baseball came into my life uh, when I was about, I must have been about eight years old. I used to...my dad used to carry me around in his arms, I remember. "This is a ballplayer", ( ), go by their house and talk with 'em all the time. And I knew all of the ballplayers ( ).

**SS:** *These were the guys playing for the hotel?*

**BM:** No, these guys played for the West Palm Beach Yankees. That's in the Florida State Negro League. And uh, I grew up knowing all the players, all the players. They knew me and knew my dad and everything.

**SS:** *Did your father play at all?*

**BM:** No, I don't think he played. I can't remember him saying he played or not. He used to box, though.

**SS:** *Oh, really.*

**BM:** Yeah, he could box, yeah.

**SS:** *Professional, or just amateur?*

**BM:** I think, I think, back then it was just what you call professional.

**SS:** *Yeah, right, it wasn't like...*

**BM:** ( )

**SS:** *Yeah, take a while off...*

**BM:** Yeah. But anyhow, uh, I played ( ) around, I used to go to all the ballgames. I used to, I don't know if I ever sold sodas there but these were things my dad liked to do. But I think I must have done some ball chasing for 'em, my dad, y'know. I just grew up in the ballpark, y'know?

**SS:** *Were they, were the fans just blacks or were there, did whites come out to watch the teams?*

**BM:** Uh, predominantly black, but you had some whites come there.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Predominantly black, but you did have some whites come there. Uh, and the ballpark...the grandstand was an old grandstand, but it never fell down. It was packed; packed every Sunday. If it was a Saturday night, Saturday game, uh, it was packed then. Not only the grandstand packed, right behind the line, it was packed.

**SS:** *Mmm hmm.*

**BM:** It was, it really, I mean it was sold out, just like a sellout, you might say.

**SS:** *Do you happen to remember how much a ticket was in those days? I mean....*

**BM:** No. If I were to guess, if I were to guess, I would say it was about, it was between, it comes into my mind, I can't remember vividly, 75 cents, a dollar and a half, something about like that. Dollar and a half, I believe. Comes in my mind mostly, back then.

But this was the 40s then. Going way back, it was uh, uh, something like 50 cents or 35 cents or something like that. But a dollar was a dollar then. And they uh, yeah uh, they played, people, what they called "percentage" ball. Uh, the winner gets sixty and the loser gets forty.

**SS:** *Oh, I didn't know that.*

**BM:** Yeah, yeah.

**SS:** *None of this home and visitor stuff.*

**BM:** Naw, naw.

**SS:** *No incentive.*

**BM:** No. And I think sometimes they like to dare each other, y'know like when you was back in Little League days when we'd dare each other. Uh, before we got to get a league, y'know, ( ), it was a hundred percent. Winner take all, like that. But it was mostly sixty-forty. ( ), like that. And then out of that, the owner would give you a cut to set aside. ( ) and give each player equal cuts. That might be seven dollars or eight dollars or something like that. Which good money back [laughter], back then.

Yeah. But you could take, when I was growing up, they had, you could still buy a half a loaf of bread. They made the bread in such a way, you could take a ribbon, like they do for the aids virus, take the ribbon and turn that ribbon around and you turn it around, the bread is still sealed with another half of it, and that expose the bread. You can buy a half a loaf of bread, or you buy a whole of bread. And uh, age, age go way back to things like that.

My family sold ( ) and you could feed a family of four, you could feed a family of four uh, uh, with at least, dollar and

a quarter, about a dollar and forty cents. You could feed a family of four very well. A loaf of bread, I think, was only around, if I remember, about eleven cents a loaf. Then we had the sodas, three cent sodas, you had three cent sodas. ( ) imagine a coca-cola bottle but it wasn't curved. It had a round bulb here and another round bulb here. Had three cents on the bottle. Used to sell the bottle, go back and get the money for the bottles, y'know. Deposit, you know, like that.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** But, ah, things were very expensive, I mean, it wasn't too expensive back then and everybody got along very well.

**SS:** *You mentioned, uh, how strong the community was. Was that, was it church-based?*

**BM:** Yes, it was, church-based. We are Episcopalian. I guess, she brought it over from... Uh, see, I noticed that some Bahamians, some are Church of God Prophecy and some, I guess the majority were Anglican, Church of England, Episcopalian. We are Episcopalian. Every one of us was Episcopalian: my family, my first cousins, and my third cousins and all the way down ... We all Episcopalian and all of us were, all of my brothers served around the alter, as acolytes. My sister played the organ, my sister served in the choir, of course she played in the jury, the women's jury, which is the ECW, which is the Episcopal Church Women, now a days. So we all were Episcopalian, you know I mean, like that, to this very date.

In fact, I have a young brother, who's family is going through some changes now, his wife is serving one place and he's serving that which he was brought up under, Episcopalian, under Episcopalian. Uh, she was going there

when they were together, but they divorced about, oh almost twenty years ago. And he was gone for thirteen years or better, but he came back and they remarried after thirteen years of hardship. See, when he left, she went to a Baptist church, so she's gone there and he's gone there. And the, and her stepdaughter was in the streets, y'know, I mean it was alright. His family's in the street. ( ) He felt that he needed to leave the church where he is because... What triggered it all, one of the choir masters, he said something about, she criticized the choir when it perform one Sunday, and one word led to another, which she did it, that irritated it to... And that gave him a reason to find fault. he really wanted to just leave. He even told the priestess about it and she done nothin'. She said she'd look into it, she didn't get back to him and so he said, this is it, I gotta leave.

**SS:** *You said priestess?*

**BM:** She was a female.

**SS:** *Unusual, kinda, don't you think?*

**BM:** I don't like female pastors. I don't think God intended female pastors. Of course, He gave the word to Adam. He didn't give it to Eve. Adam was, the man is supposed to be the head, after Christ. God, Christ, and then man, that is the husband is over the wife, the husband, wife should submit to the husband. You know what I mean, that's what he Scriptures states.

But then anyhow, so, he had been Episcopalian all his life, in heart, but he want to go where he feels better spiritually. Although, I have a slight problems about having to leave my brother, so I just, I go along with him. If this is what he wants to do, I told him I love him because of his soul, you do that. ( ) You talk as long as you want to, this is what I'm gonna do. ( )

And then when I had differences in the church and ( ), I'll either don't go for awhile, stay home and I pray here, right here, I leave it alone. I pray here with my wife. Well, I felt one time of going back to West Palm Beach to worship, you got to go every two weeks. I either go down to St. Andrew's, so, something says, well, and I think it's happening in West Palm Beach, something similar, if I'm not mistaken. Unfortunately, you stay there and ( ) what you think you should do. So I stayed there.

Remind me a friend of mine, named Bob Johnson, he's a County Commissioner, a Republican, and he told me, "I got disenchanted with the party and I am now a Republican again." He said that he said, "Robert. Don't leave the fold, don't leave the fold." So, well, if I had got him to talk to my brother before making his final decision, I would have told him to do the same thing, just pull yourself away from it for a while. Somebody'll get the message, if it was the priest ( ), they'll get the message. Let him know what you're disgruntled about, then move apart and you worship, didn't wanna worship, don't leave the fold. You know what I mean, like that.

*SS: Are you saying the churches were segregated in West Palm at the time?*

*BM: Well, not mine!*

*SS: No?*

*BM: Whites could come if they want to, Episcopal Church.*

*SS: Was it very...*

*BM: Just always was that way.*

*SS: And, was there a good mix of people, actually coming in?*

*BM: Well, uh, sometimes, certain, uh, sometimes in the year when we have visiting priest coming in, aa guest priest coming and lot of times most of 'em was white.*

*SS: Yeah.*

*BM: He would bring in a contingent of people. He would bring anywhere from five to maybe eight people with him. But there's no problem in the Episcopal Church, because they sent out a, about three years ago, they sent out a letter coming from the top person in the diocese, national, that they want everything, they want no traces of racism in the church, in the Episcopal Church. They sent it out as a record for all the priests in the country that this was the way it was supposed to be.*

*SS: And when was this?*

*BM: I can go to St. Andrew's, anything, feels just like at home.*

*SS: When was this, the notice sent out?*

*BM: Um, about, '94, about '94, it was.*

*SS: But, it really wasn't necessary.*

*BM: It wasn't necessary. But he wanted the notices to the black history, black Episcopal, Black Episcopal Union, uh, black organization to see to it things that Black people were treating the white people, you know, where they were making, uh, they were making some statements about certain things, you know what I mean? Like black bishops and so on and so forth and stuff and so and so ( ) a father that ( ) with a woman priest.*

*SS: [laugh]*

**BM:** Named Barbara...but anyhow, uh, to make a long story short, make a person feel at home all the time.

**SS:** Yeah.

**BM:** And they welcome you just like..."Well, yeah..."

**SS:** I'm surprised, like, in the 1930s, 1940s in Florida that that's the..

**BM:** Oh no, I don't remember nothing like that happening there, oh no. I don't remember anything like that happening. Not in the Episcopal Church.

**SS:** Yep.

**BM:** Other churches, yes, but not the Episcopal Church and I think the Catholic Church was about the same. We were all one and the same, yes. All one in the same. The mass is the same, uh, uh, pretty close to the same. The mass is very close to same, uh, uh, the Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church. You know, the Catholic is pretty close to the same. Now, the Lutherans have joined... the Lutheran Church joined with the Episcopal Church ( ). Back then, I don't remember any long faces or hard looks, no. I can remember, no, no, I have a good memory. I can go back way, I can go way back when I was very little, very little. And I don't remember that.

**SS:** Mm hmm. Yeah. And, uh, personally, what did you do with your free time? After school hours and...Did you work as a child, did you play? What kind of, what was your life like as a---

**BM:** I, I mostly, when I was growing up, after school, I would mostly play. My mother had chores for me to do. I either had to go to the store, when she was home, I had to go to the store

and get things for her. I was expected to work the yard. I had a system for working the yard, because I had a little Army game. I was the general and I could move guys, certain guys who would do things ( ).

**SS:** A little Tom Sawyer....

**BM:** Yeah, I had, I had a row of ( ) [disturbance with microphone] Had a chicken coop. Used to raise chickens. The chicks used to cost about, I think, six cents each, my baby chicks ( ). [more trouble with the microphone] ...things like that. I used learn how to fix peeps from under their tongue. There's a little hard thing they got under their tongue. You see a chicken like this here, with his mouth open, ( ) stickin' out. You grab a hold it and lift up his tongue and feel a little hard, a little hard stem, like it grew up under there. You peel it off like that, you see there. You peel it off like that and you put salt on it, turn her loose. I learned how to clip the wings when then fly over the chicken coop fence. I used to have to clip this, to get the wings to clip most of the tip off their wings, so they can't fly over the fence.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** And I had my little headquarters on top of the side part of the roof of the chicken coop, with a little ladder goin' up to it. That's where I would be, more or less. Rest of the guys, they would be out rakin' the yard or doin' certain things and I had a lieutenant and... I had complete loyalty, complete loyalty from them. So, I guess that's where whatever leadership abilities I have stem from, that stem from, stem from that.

**SS:** Uh huh. And how did you learn this?

**BM:** Ah, they stem from that and I used to have, even had a flag that... I

had me a butcher string, and a spool, and a spool from a thread, a little roller...

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** And used to roll up the flag, tie it up, up the flag up there and...

**SS:** *This was your own personal flag?*

**BM:** ( ), my army, my army flag.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** My army flag.

**SS:** *How big was your army?*

**BM:** Oh, about, lemme see... All of them are dead. All of them are dead too, every one of them dead...and about, lemme see, about, off the top of my head, about oh, between eight to eleven.

**SS:** *Uh huh...did you do---*

**BM:** Mostly be around eight.

**SS:** *Did the, did the, uh, some of the other boys get some of their chores done with, did the army help with---*

**BM:** I can't remember!

**SS:** *...other boys?*

**BM:** I can't remember!

**SS:** *Well you ( ). You didn't have to do that---*

**BM:** I think there were, I can't remember! But at times when we needed one of the guys to go play ball or something like that or go somewhere, if he had to rake the mango leaves that fall, he'd get mostly sand. The mango leaves were falling

down on the thing. To hurry up and get him outta there, you would have to work, to rake up leaves. Sometimes we rake it all up, sometimes we leave it in piles and get it later. I think I remember ( ) or something like that when we were children, doing things like that. Three of the friends...

*[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A] [START TAPE 2, SIDE A]*

**SS:** *I'd like to talk a little bit now about playing baseball as a boy. Um, you said you started playing when you were about eight.*

**BM:** Well, lemme see...I'm going back to ( ). I was about eight; eight seems like the year.

**SS:** *And where did you play? What kind of, what kind of fields.*

**BM:** Sandlot fields, real sandlot---

**SS:** *Neighborhoods?*

**BM:** Just Little League ball. Sandlot and little league are different.

**SS:** *Okay.*

**BM:** ... cause this is the way that I see it. Sand...lot.

**SS:** *[laugh]*

**BM:** The sand is for a reason. Whatever glass you can't remove, or whatever it is out there, that's, that's what it was. Sandlot was an open space or field. Whether you got weeds, the weeds have to be low enough for us to play on or you end up trampin' them down.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Sandy footpath, using burlap bags filled up with sand for the bases.

Usin' slab of a wood embedded down into the ground for a mound and anything large enough could be a plate. Could be a piece of board, some of us used tin because you'd slide but uh, just something that looked like a home plate, givin' us a home plate.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** And uh, you definitely wear shoes because lots of sandy spurs, you know, the sand down in Florida, sandy areas in Florida and uh, played ball, we started off playin'...and the guys that I played with were, oh, three to five years older than I was.

***Sandy footpath, using burlap bags filled up with sand for the bases. Usin' slab of a wood embedded down into the ground for a mound***

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Always.

**SS:** *Were you a big boy? Not particularly?*

**BM:** Not particularly. Uh, we started off playing baseball with a broom handle and a tennis ball. You played it the same way you played baseball. The tennis ball was thrown hard, hard as they could throw it, and the gloves were paper bags with, uh, newspaper in it, somethin' along that line. Sometimes we'd get tin cans and make uh, uh, but mostly they were paper bags. Four or five pound bags, you know, somethin' like that. And you played with the same rules as you played baseball, even broom handle.

**SS:** *Uh, full teams, nine on a side?*

**BM:** That is correct, yeah, that is correct. We elevated from that to, as you did at a baseball game, for the Florida State Negro League, where the men played on Sunday, our guys

would be out there, outside the fence here and now the balls would come over and they don't come back (laughter). And that's how we got our balls. Sometimes the owner who lives across the, up to, near the intersection where I lived, he had a bar, he had sort of bar/lounge license. He's the owner. His was, uh, William "Dizzy" Elam, that was his name. And he used to be a chauffeur, he used to be a chauffeur for some rich family in Palm Beach. And he was one of those cars, I forget what car, it was an expensive car, he had ( ). Don't know if it was a Deussenburg or what it was, but it was

a good car, a well-known car. And he was the owner of the club. So he live around there and he would give us some old balls and he started going out to the ballpark. Yeah afternoons he was at the ballpark...to play ball.

**SS:** *Now what kind of ball park was this?*

**BM:** Oh, regular Florida, where the big league played.

**SS:** *Oh, where the, where the, the pros played.*

**BM:** Yeah he go out there and, and, and get to take over the field. Used to play teams out of an area called Pleasant City, which was like a subdivision. We played games with the 8th Street guys, the 11th Street guys. All of them had teams, see.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Yeah, 11th Street, 8th Street, Pleasant City and Lincoln Park. Plus,

we had, our team. Our team was the better team, no question about that. ( ) our team was the better team.

**SS:** *Was that because of you?*

**BM:** Ah.

**SS:** *[laugh]*

**BM:** I'll explain to you a little bit more, partly. Uh, we played out there, we played baseball. ( ) The glove...sometimes when an out, somebody come play ball, when a careless guy, player leave his glove the wrong place, it's gone. That glove was confiscated by us. With the black shoe dye, we'll dye it with black shoe polish. ( ) dark like ( ) burning, you know ( ) burning. But hey, dye it, clean it off, all the old ( ), dye it... [slap of hands together]. It's our glove. Then a lot of times we used to make, make our gloves. We would go to go to the surplus thrift store and find them little old things that didn't look like nothing. You didn't even play in 'em, you know, used for gloves. They were baseball gloves but they were little old cheap, real cheap gloves. Get wet and they would dry up and they would turn as hard as, uh, fruit peel or somethin'.

**SS:** *Mmmm hmm.*

**BM:** And we used to make gloves out of canvas, three piece of canvas.. Cut out the shape. You just cut out the shape of a glove and then sew the two together, throw one, throw two together with the cotton in it and sew the other one, fittin' our hand in it and then keep a pocket and that's our glove. And we played ball like that and then when we was done playin', I was always throwing. My idol then as a pitcher was Ewell Blackwell.

**SS:** *Mm hmm.*

**BM:** Cincinnati sidearm specialist. And I must have picked up, uh, Ewell Blackwell, uh, was uh, my pitching idol. I don't know if he threw it or if I read it in a book, ball called a palm ball, and ya hold it. All the balls used to be in here [motions deep in his palm]. Not like that [hold up two fingers].

**SS:** *Mmm hmm.*

**BM:** Right. Without a doubt, as truthful as you can be, my balls could break a full yard, sometimes if it keeps going there, sometimes more. If it keeps from hittin' the ground, it would break a full yard easy. And I was about, at that time, I was about...I was about twelve or thirteen years old. Say between twelve and fourteen, twelve and, yeah, between twelve and fourteen. Somewhere between there. Between twelve and thirteen be better. And I could throw a palm ball that big men, that men as tall as I and as tall as you.

**SS:** *Mmm hmm.*

**BM:** And they were about four or five years older than I am. I actually would, I had it going so good, I used to deliberately--

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** --throw it at 'em and when they'd jump out the way, boom! Right across the plate.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** One guy I know, his name is Earl somethin'. Wynn. Wynn was his name. I can see him now...with glasses...big tall fella, big fella, he was about six foot, six one. And uh, Sherman, Sherman Wynn, that was his name. I threw a curveball, that, that palm curve ball out to him and he ducked down and it went, literally went, it was

so close it went, it went, looked like it went over his back! And came over the plate. Striiiiike!! And he had to move over an inch, you know, we called, we had to call the game for it. Like that.

And I had so much fun, guys would literally throw it at and they just jump out the way, jump out the way. There was a black fellow, one time, we called him Geech--

**SS:** *You called him what?*

**BM:** We called him Geech. He must be from South Carolina. We called him Geech.

**SS:** *Okay.*

**BM:** And, uh, he had a ball and we had some good players, good hitters too.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** He had a ball, the ball was, he had that ball coming up and down like that, when the players jumped, when the players jumped out the way, jumped back over the plate.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** And they, they tried their best to find out how he hold that ball. All, I figured all that we heard was across the diamond, crossed up like that, they tryin' their best to find out what it was he was throwin' and I ain't never, never heard of that ball. That ball coming like that, coming like that. In shoot, sometimes they call it, outshoot

...

**SS:** *Right, right, right, right.*

**BM:** You know like that, it's a slider nowadays, or whatever ya call it. And he had 'em jumpin'. And he beat us, boy. He beat us bad.

**SS:** *He threw out some speed.*

**BM:** Yeah, yeah, oh yeah, he beat us with that pitch. Did indeed. He be about, I think he be about five-five, five-five, five-six, something like that, that's how tall he was.

**SS:** *About five-five, five-six at age fourteen or so, right?*

**BM:** Yeah, he be about, I think he was about fifteen years old, somewhere between fourteen and sixteen. Between fourteen and sixteen and a half, about that. Somewhere like that. He had us going that day. And they jumped out of the way and it'd come out and it's "Strike!" ( ) And we had rival teams, one team one time, one of the fellas got hit by a pitch. This group out in a place called Pleasant City, they were noted for "Toughies."

**SS:** *Mmm hmm.*

**BM:** Tough guys. You had, you had gangs over there and it was, it was an area where you almost had to have a passport to go in, 'specially 'way back and during that time, it was the same thing there and in the forties. Uh, we was playing them and one of the players got hit and then, uh, one of their players hit one of our players with a baseball bat. Big part of the bat right and hit him, uh, on the side of the chest right here, really hard.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** And that started it.

**SS:** *Retaliation?*

**BM:** Yeah.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** That started it, and uh, first kid from Pleasant City to come to school

or the movies for about, I'm just guesstimating the number now, three or four months, maybe a little bit longer, maybe a little bit longer. They couldn't, you don't come across those tracks. See, the FPC (?) run, split half of the town. majority of it was on the west side, part of it was Pleasant City on the east side.

**SS:** *yeah.*

**BM:** Then along and the white and everything like that. And they didn't, they come across there, they come around under cover darkness, likely to step in a, they created a little war.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** They had made zip guns, that's what I said about the zip guns, they made zip guns and they used to uh, uh, have different, different little weapons. One of them got caught in the movies one day and the street guys knew what was going on and the street guys jumped on one of them and beat 'em up and they never did come back. One guy's mother pleaded, " Let my son get back to school", he never come back to school for about two months, you know, because of that war.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** Uh, then one night, we all got together on the, on a, on, on the, sat around on the lawn one night, of uh, one of the doctor's who, a star's house now. They moved that star's house down in West Palm Beach. Got a lot of stars' house now. City did a good job of preservin' them and lightin' them up for people to see.

**SS:** *Mm hm.*

**BM:** Right on the big thoroughfare, Palm Beach Boulevard. And uh, we sit on that ( ), uh, doctor's, ( ) lawn, he's

a ( ). We sit on his lawn, gatherin' up to go scout through our neighborhood, see if any of them had came over. We'd scouted all through the projects and all down there. Didn't see none of 'em. We heard some of 'em way over, talkin'. It must've been about, over there where the freight yard is. Sandy area, sandy dunes like, and then the freight yards and the tracks over there was Pleasant City.

**SS:** *Mm hmm.*

**BM:** We could hear 'em over there, hear 'em shootin' a gun, pah, pah! And then we hear 'em talkin' way over there. But they never did come over. Back then I even had a, uh, bow and arrow.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** But anyhow, one of the guys that was in the group, he became a policeman. Yeah ( ). Many years later, twenty years later, maybe. So anyhow, uh, so everything just finally quiet down. I forgot how we made our peace. But the kids, they couldn't come to town for more then three or four months.

**SS:** *Mm hmm, and ( ).*

**BM:** Downtown, the movies or the school, not across the tracks.

**SS:** *And nobody cared that they didn't go to school?*

**BM:** Sure!

**SS:** *Yeah...but they couldn't go get them.*

**BM:** No, they couldn't take the chance of sendin' 'em ( ). That's a fact.

**SS:** *Yeah, the parents, the parents felt that was okay?*

**BM:** NO!!

**SS:** [laugh] Okay.

**BM:** They didn't think, but what they gonna do? What can they do? They can't do nothing?

**SS:** They didn't have truant officers or anything like that?

**BM:** Oh, we had truant officers now. I'm not sayin' we didn't have truant officers. I used to cut school and I hear her comin', see her comin'. Miss Henderson, dressed in that little old funny black hat and had on a black dress. And I used to run. I had a system where could run, get to my peach-mango tree, catch that limb, [sound of hand smack] get there, and less than, in less than four seconds, I'm up in to that tree.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**BM:** I could see her come. Come knock on the door. I'm looking down out the mango tree. She come, she'd go around and ( ) the leaves. And one day, I made a mistake and, uh, I don't know how it happened. Oh, I saw my aunt coming. My aunt would fill this chair up in here.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** It's my mother's sister. She comin' to wash for us, she washed for us on certain days. ( ) whatever day it is, she come to wash. And the washing thing is up under the tree. You know where you, tin tub, you use a tub for washin', a tub for rinsing, a we had a bluing tub with bluing in it. You get, you, you, you had a hot, a hot-pot, a boiler pot where you boil the clothes. Used to boil clothes and take a stick and poke it like that and then wash it and put in there and they wash it like that and whatever like that. It got the clothes nice and clean.

**SS:** Big job.

**BM:** I saw her coming, way behind, I went up in the tree...

**SS:** Uh huh.

**BM:** ...and I had to keep quiet there for a long time and she looked up at me, she look up and, "Boy! ( )" I don't know what happened. I guess she looked up or what the deal was, the leaves fell or what. But she caught me, hot dang! She caught me. Boy, she tore me up. She tore me up and made me get in that bluin' water. After I got through, know what I mean, take a bath. Get in the house! She put somethin' on me! To get in the house, I had to take, I had to go from here to the house, to get in the house, I had to go from here to about the refrigerator. If I had to take, if I had two boards, I could make it. Or whatever, ten or whatever. I'd take one board, and I'd step on it, go over, after its like, going into your house.

**SS:** Yeah.

**BM:** Same thing to be like go to the store. It be hot down there. Go to the store barefooted, had to go a block away to the store, used to sometime carry a, uh, uh, uh, a piece of a board, a cardboard with you.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** Around there, when it get too hot for us, if there's no grass, we set it out and stand on the cardboard.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**BM:** Then we go up again and run some more. Then we reach Mr. De La Gard's yard, he got lawn, you walk around ( ) Then you stand around before you take off the street, then you run across the street. Yes.

**SS:** [laugh]

**BM:** All those things, we done all those things. Did all those things. Y'know. A lot of things that these kids doing today, uh, older, fer instance, used to take, oh, I thought about that many times. Right now, uh, in the past, within the past ten years I thought about it. ( ) invention, you ( ) just pouring out with. Used to get those old tricycle and carriage wheel and take all the spokes out of it. Sometimes, sometime they'd be about the size of a dinner plate, sometimes we could find a wheels a little larger, about the size of this little tray here. Then we got to, then you have a bicycle. You take all the spokes out of it. Then you take a coat hanger. ( ) stretch it all the way out. The hook of the coat hanger, we used, dependin' on the angle, and we used to put the wheel out there like that and then ( ) it and then get it the way we want to. Like that.

**SS:** Mmm.

**BM:** You take the bicycle wheel, you can take the hanger out and just hold it like that and hold it like, and keep the hanger like that. We used to take and push it any way you want it. .

**SS:** Yeah.

**BM:** The skates, I mean those scooters you payin' fifty dollars for or more, we used to take and make our scooters...

**SS:** Uh huh.

**BM:** ...out of two-by-fours...

**SS:** Yeah.

**BM:** ..and two-by-fours and one-by-fours.

**SS:** Right.

**BM:** Outta skate wheels. Steel skate wheels.

**SS:** Right

**BM:** You can make 'em outta that. that. Used to wagons outta wheels.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** Uh, uh, uh, for ourselves, either for the soap box derbies, that the boy scouts used to have every year on the highest hill. In fact, we often skated that. They tried to do, I heard they were them in West Palm Beach 'cause, see, that's the highest point in the city of West Palm where I lived.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**BM:** You know, nearby where I lived. Uh, that's a high point, a very high point, high Hill. Used to have the derby on that high hill every year.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** And, uh, we used to take a day and try to move the town in that direction, to get on top of that hill, the hotels and everything like that.

**SS:** Right.

**BM:** But they never did get it, before I moved. Start, start all the traffic coming in that area now.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** And, but anyhow, all those, we used to, we used to invent our own little things, back then. And the same things, our teachers, kids ( ) nowadays, doin' some ingenious type things. I saw, you, you, you, you do stuff like that? ( ) said, "yeah." What I did, was build my house.

**SS:** MM hmm.

**BM:** I see guys inventin' some ingenious things with bicycles, little motor things. And they work.

**SS:** Yeah. Like motorized bikes?

**BM:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah! But anyhow, back then, we did a lot of the things for ourselves, you know what I mean. And because necessity is the mother of invention, as you know.

**SS:** That's right.

**BM:** We did a lot of things like that. Uh, and I as I grew up, playin' ball, I actually did... There was a lot behind Mr. Bill's place, you know, the owner of the big team, and I used to be back there and we used to have guys pitchin' and ( ). That's where I learned how hard it was to ( ). I had, I had a ( ). Every, every day the out there. Maybe, weekends we'd be out there all day long. I'd be out there just pitchin', pitchin' that thing..

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** Popping that mitt, popping that mitt. Sometime, Mr. Bill'd walk out the back, come over there and go "Hello, Peachhead," They called me Peachhead.

**SS:** You were Peachhead.

**BM:** Yeah. So anyhow, like that. So he saw the I had the potential at this time and ( ) and it went on and on like that, until he start to talkin' about the things you need; good bat. When the bat, you know when the bat get cracked. That's our bat. So you take that bat and get them little nails that come outta cigar boxes...

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** And then you nail it back together, then you get that black

friction tape and tape it up. That's a good bat from then on. And he used, oh, sometime he gave us bats, you know, like that And, uh, gave us some balls and then, uh, from there I started playing with the high school. I wanted to, uh, uh, he stopped me, he didn't stop me, he lent me the stuff to go to Jacksonville one time, 'cause we had a tournament.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**BM:** I was an eighth grader and my coach at the time, Richard Brooks, he's dead now, uh, he, he graduated from Ed Waters. I understand that's where he stayed, Ed Waters College in Jacksonville. He used to room there. Dormitory there ( ) But the baseball team was good. And, uh, getting ready to load up the bus, getting' ready to go. I wanted to go so bad. Coach told me, said. "Peachhead, you can't play because you're an eighth grader" and start playing until you get a ninth grader. So I couldn't play and ( ) right in front of the ( ).

**SS:** [laugh]

**BM:** I cried, I cried, I cried, I cried. That was the exact year they got clobbered. I know, I know, I really know I could've been a great asset to them as the pitcher. They went in there and got trashed. That's right. And, uh, so, uh, from that high school, and then the next year I started in high school ball. And, uh, during that time, Herb Score, he went with Cleveland, ( ) And Ken Johnson, who was at Palm Beach High School ( ). Ken Johnson, he was still high school and I was doing ( ) down in the ( ).

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** Now, my park, the school there was the original high school was about, mmm, lemme see, 15th Street down to 1st Street, so you say, five,

about seven blocks, now, about seven miles down the street, now wait now, not that far. Um, about, three and a half miles, four at the most, was Palm Beach High School.

**SS:** *Mm hmm.*

**BM:** Scouts used to go there to see Herb, Herb Score. And I mean Herb Score and Ken Johnson played their games and you know, in their time and you know they played some in day and played some at night, because they

but they didn't come, bother to come out to the black parks at all, none! Nil!

**SS:** *How did the newspapers handle, the uh..?*

**BM:** The newspapers, they called in, some of them called in what we do out here. And then they'll print it.

**SS:** *And did they give you as much space as the ..?*

**BM:** ( ) a game like that, but like,

***I wanted to play in the League, with the men,  
the Florida State Negro League.***

used some Connie Mack Field, as we called it, the Wright Field, Wright Field. They never played Connie Mack Field. Connie Mack, himself, used to come out there to bat with us and watch the game.

**SS:** *Did they train?*

**BM:** Huh?

**SS:** *Did they train there?*

**BM:** Uh, yeah. Cornelius McGillicuddy, the real name. His son who became a senator. His grandson became a senator. But anyhow, the scouts go down there, they never come out here. So, naturally knew my stuff, did they get my stuff, I might, uh, uh, I, for instance, I pitched seven innings. I had seven innings, I pitched more than my fair share...

**SS:** *Mmm.*

**BM:** ...of strike outs. I wish I could find the old, ( ). Uh, uh, more than my fair share. First Score doin' it down there, in Lake Worth. Ken Johnson doin' it West Palm Beach. I was not in those parks. They went to see those,

about two, about two columns, like that.

**SS:** *Did they give you much coverage?*

**BM:** Every time we'd call down there, they would give us, more or less give us, got coverage. Get the result of the game, like that, But, uh, no, uh, so I pulled back, I pulled back, my ninth grade, Freshman, played Junior, uh, Sophomore and then Junior Year. I said, I can't, this, this is terrible competition. In my mind, the competition wasn't what I wanted to be. So I wanted to play in the League, with the men, the Florida State Negro League. 'Course Coach told me, naw, he didn't tell me. So in fifty-one, uh, fifty-one, fifty-one, I wanted to play uh, with the men. So when the uniforms came in, the uniforms came in, there's a back room back there, Mr. Bill, Mr. Bill keep his, all his baseball equipment there. And they was handin' out uniforms that day, they had came in, I heard they came in. The name of the team was the West Palm Beach Lincoln Giants.

**SS:** *Mm hmm.*

**BM:** [cough] So, I went back there to get, told Mr. Bill, I wanna play. He said, "Well, your coach tole me...." I wanna play baseball. I can play baseball. He say, "Yeah, I believe ya can." So, I, well I got to get my uniform. ( ) He said, "Hey, I told you that the league can't have no high school boys messin' with this." I said, "I know it, Coach, but you know I want to play." He said, "Okay." He caught me, he's a catcher, he caught me a couple of times, too.

**SS:** *He knew, he knew what he was getting into.*

**BM:** Yeah. So, uh, I said, uh, the big league, they played on Sundays, mostly. So, most Sundays, and I say most, I'm talking 'bout just about all of them, almost. First Sunday, start off, start off with a guy who was a policeman, used to be a policeman. I think he's dead now. Anyhow, and he used throw hard. But he didn't have the pitchin' sense that I had. He'd throw real hard. L. G. Harvey, I believe his name was. And uh, they started him, Mr. Bill had started him against a team called the Florida Cubans. It was an all-Cuban team. owned by a man by the name of Jesse Richardson out of Lakeland, Florida, independent team, and independent team. And that day, L. G. started first inning, first. I don't know whether he got past the second inning or not, threw the second inning or not. But anyhow, he went in here and they attacked him, they hit that ball and a boy named Cal Kaminski, black guy. That boy tapped that ball off the left-center field fence. Tapped it off, off and over.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Up and over. I mean, he hit it, they hit him hard! Then bring me in

there and I quieted it down, completely. I quieted it down! Then, after it all over, I think won, they won. Next day, go across the street, I used to hang around Mr. Bill's place a lot of times. I didn't drink, never did drink much. I used to go around and sit out there, on the bench outside. He used to come out sometime and set out there, y'know, talkin'. Used to sit and talk to him, talk. And then uh, I would learn, he'd say, um, "Peachhead," he'd say, Mr. Richardson want me, uh, uh, like to have you. I said, "Who?" Said, "Owner of the team you with yesterday." I say, "Yeah?" He says, he says, "I'll pay your way up there". I said, "What you thinkin'?" Said, "Yeah, you should go."

So I was the Sunday pitcher, after that, I used to pitch every Sunday. I used to pitch against Orlando All Stars, Daytona Black Cats, Bradenton 9 Devils, Pepsi-Cola Giants even won a ( ) in the League, I know, but I did pitch in Pensacola – hell of a team! Uh, uh, I think, Coco, anyhow, they had six teams in the league. And St. Pete was in it too, 'cause Nat Oliver, his son went to the Dodgers, one time, yeah, Nat Oliver. And, uh, that's who that field was supposed to be named after, at first. I think they renamed it. Did they rename it? Campbell Park Field. Yeah. Anyway, after he played, they changed it around. Nowadays, one of the best little parks for black players, I've seen in the state of Florida, except for my little league around there. I think my little league was just as good as any white league fields you want to see. One, two, let me see, there's three, and they goin' for four. But I understand the Bulls want to make that multi, want to make that multi-purpose, or whatever...

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** ...softball, whatever, like that. But anyhow, every time, every Sunday I

pitched my ball. Then one year I was layin' on a bench, I think ( ) must have been pitchin' for the. I was layin' on the bench, 'cause we didn't have a dugout, we just had a two by ten on cutoff telegraph poles.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** And I was layin' on the bench with a glove over me like that. I ( ), the guys were going through the infield, outfield like that and I was layin' with a glove over me, and I heard a guy walk up. It was ( ) from South America, go up there by

***I used to pitch against Orlando All Stars,  
Daytona Black Cats, Bradenton 9 Devils,  
Pepsi-Cola Giants***

Roderick Silver, who was the owner of the Miami Giants and, in fact, I talked to him last week. Goin' to the Marlins again this year. Uh, he ( ), anyhow, he brought him up here. And I heard 'em talkin', he's tellin' the guy. Some of my players were there, Johnnie Williams was there, he was standin' right there. And he said "I'm looking for pitchers." He's a scout from South America, he's looking for some pitchers. So, Johnnie Montgomery, he said, "He's a pitcher." I was laying on the bench. I raised up and looked. I guess I looked too young to him. He says, "No, no, no, no ( ). And he says, "No, no, no, no he's not a high school pitcher. He's a league pitcher! He's a league pitcher!" And he says something about, uh, Memphis City and he ( ) all expenses and and, y'know, back then that was great.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** So, uh, he sat down and watched about six innings. And he saw ( ) that he ever seen 'cause they clean-up man, named Barber, oh he's got a big mouth on him. Always braggin',

always got to be braggin'. I blew him away three or four times. Swingin'!

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Swingin'! Swingin'! And, uh, I beat him. And then, uh, but Munson said he'd get, he'd be back in touch with me in within a week. So, I waited around, waited around, waited around and, uh, let's see here, uh, I didn't hear from him. And then Elam arranged for me to go try out with, uh, the West Palm Indians, in the Florida International League, one of the finest leagues in the country. They had

twenty-four recall with the major leagues. Twenty-four hours. Twenty-four hour recall. And uh, they had the Pastoral brothers, Little Potato, Big Potato, they were pitchers, you know what I mean. I think they went with the Washington Senators or somebody, like that. They had them down there.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Bucky Harris was the manager at the time. I believe he was with the Cubs, used to be with the Cubs, years ago.

**SS:** *Wanna stay off of it?*

**BM:** I'll go so far and then I'm going to stop.

**SS:** *Okay, good.*

**BM:** And, uh, this is not into the Negro League. This was prior to that. But anyhow, uh, he arranged through one of the owners of the beer company and Mr. Brady, he was one of the major owners of the West Palm Beach

Indians. It was the only all-white team in the league, only all-white team in the league. So I just came back from the Florida Keys one time, uh, I had a, this muscle right here, was out 'bout like that. ( ). But anyhow, could throw hard and everything. So he warmed me up and pitched me the ball ( ), so, before that could happen, I went in ( ). Bruce Henry, he was the general manager at the time and he was talking to me. He said, "You think you can play this ball?" I said, "Sure, I can play this kind a ball!" I said, "Only difference is these guys white and me black!"

He said, "Okay, okay, okay, okay, okay." So he was sitting in his dressing room and he had gotten his stuff and I started dressin', and I heard one of these big home run hitters. Butch Lewring was his name. Started makin' some racist remarks, you know, ( ), you know. A few other players are there, a guy named Posipanka, and guy, one of their star pitchers, he was from Canada, forgot his name. Him and another guy, named Fox, they ( ). I heard what he said, and I didn't even react to it, at all. ( ), you know. And then I went out there to warm up, throwed to three of the batters, bat practice. And he hit one back through there - Pow, pow!!! Just like that and you can't, I caught a few of them there. Anyhow, ( ).

**SS:** *Protectin' yourself, huh?*

**BM:** Yeah, yeah. So I went out there and next night they played the Tampa Smokers. Claro Duany, this Cuban boy, and he hit that ball so hard, oh, he hit that ball, oh, you see those old-fashioned telegraph poles, how tall they can be?

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** He hit that ball over the lights. Over there Okeechobee Road. Out of

the ballpark and over Okeechobee Road. And they beat him, they beat that, oh, they killed 'em. They used nine pitchers!! Eight or nine pitchers! That night Indians did!

**SS:** *Indian?*

**BM:** Indians did, yeah. And I wanted to go in so bad, but I was signed by them. I wanted to go in so bad. And, uh, so I went out there another time and then I read in the paper the next morning, "Robert Mitchell will not be signed the local Indians but the league will lure competition." Well, I been ( ). Where was they gonna send me? See, I had nobody, nobody who really played ball. Go on anyhow. You know that. They didn't have that here. Just go on anyhow. Just lookin' to be myself ( ). So, uh, what happened was, I brought a, uh, no, I went to Philadelphia.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Now prior to that, now prior of that. But I went with the Florida Cubans.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** The ( ) through Spring Training. I think that was in '53, yeah, '53, yeah, '53. They came to, naturally, the Cuban wanted me to start, because of my fast ball.

**SS:** *Mm hmm.*

**BM:** I couldn't find the plate that night. I struck out one man, and that was a boy named Ernie Johnson. He stood just like Stan Musial, same, from the same time. He went to triple A or double A and he'd hit twenty-seven home runs that year. He was a good hitter. I ( ) Uh, we uh, Ernie Banks was with 'em. Ernie Banks was with 'em. He was just a short, another shortstop that came back out of the

Army, ( ) they had before, that's all he was. Guy named Ernie Banks! And I pulled against him. ( ). And, uh, he couldn't get around on my fastball.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** No, couldn't get it. No, everything he hit tore over into the stands...

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** ...over, over the dugout.

**SS:** *The dugout.*

**BM:** Yeah, hitting around there. And when you did get something, he must have got it by, the ball between the flat part of the bat and above, a little above the, a little above the, just a little above where the bat started getting ( ).

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** And hit the ball back no higher than the door right there. The second baseman had already warned about dragging his feet.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** Excuse me. The ball, all he had to do is move away from the, move to the left and then reach up like that. One little swing, ( ), the spring and ( ) and you ( ) the ball get ( ) like that. And, uh, well, as it went on, as the season went on, I mean. That's when I came back and ran through other camps. I went back to, not to West Palm Beach, just ( ) and, uh, then I ran into the ( ) I told you about and from there I went on to Philadelphia.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** But see, after the game, I felt kinda bad I couldn't find the plate like I wanted to. I heard the guys' victory

speech. I heard the guys ( ) accommodation, accommodation that, that, that, uh, that the Cubs, ( ) Ernie Banks.

**SS:** *Yeah, Lee Baker.*

**BM:** Lee Baker.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** He was on the team, I heard, I heard different guys talkin'. ( ) I go in the dressing room, and there's Henry Hill, over in Lakeland where the Tigers playin'. They used these dressing rooms to shower up, ( ) and all like that and I didn't have nothin' to do with them. I just went in to shower. I hear 'em talkin'. "Did you ( )?" I say, "No, sir." He say, "( )?" I say "Yes, sir." "That's ( )." He say, "( )." I saw, "Hop told me to get them up here." Hop was my coach." He said, "You know Hop?" I said, "Yeah I know 'em, he my baseball coach over there in West Palm Beach." He told me to get him up here. "Cause he was playin' school teams. Yeah, I got ( )

**SS:** *Okay.*

**BM:** So anyhow, "What they ( )?" I say, "I dunno, its spring training now. You willing take me with you?." That could be one of my ( ) mistakes.. Again, nobody would say, 'cause see, Jesse had them, just ( ) Jesse that he had notarized. So I thought, I'm under the impression they gonna do it like that, if I agree to it like in another year.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** So Skip said, "Aw, that can't hold you." Somethin' like that. He was the owner of uh, uh, uh, the, uh, Florida Cubans.

**SS:** *Okay.*

**BM:** He had the Lakeland Tigers, which was in the League, he owned the Lakeland Tigers and the Florida Cuban. The Florida Cubans were a travelin' team. Very fine team! Very fine team. I mean, they was good. All Cubans, I was the only American that year. Year before that they had a black guy named Billy Hawkins and in '53 they had, I was one of two, uh, uh, uh, Americans. Me and another pitcher, like that. So anyhow, uh, after I left there, I went on back down, I went on to Philadelphia and, uh, Buck say, this is what Buck said, he said, "Well, we'd like to take you with us," but I said somethin' to him, I said, well, I ( ) the Cubans. Get something under your belt, keep playin' and then maybe next year go with 'em.

**SS:** Yeah.

**BM:** So that's what I had decided to do. And I said, if I follow him, went with 'em, the type of team they had that year, I figured that that fifty-three...I honestly believe that by 1954, '55, ...'54, 55, not later than '56, I probably coulda went to Lakeland.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** I believe I could.

**SS:** Mm hmm.

**BM:** I really believe I could have. That year they won twenty-some straight and ( ), the same year the Yankees won twenty-some straight, they won twenty-somethin' straight that year. So, uh, as with all that, I went on to Philadelphia. That's when I got a letter, uh, from the Monarchs, the red, white and blue, with the red ( ) says Monarchs on it.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** I opened it up and, uh, let's see, Mr. Baird. Tom Baird was owner of the

club at the time. He had incorporated ( ). Tom Baird was the guy who booked the games for us, the Monarchs, along with Mr. Wilkinson at the time. He was the ( ), Mr. Wilkinson.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**BM:** So anyway, um, he says, "( )spoke very highly of you. We would like to have you. How would you like to come to spring training down in New Port News, Virginia, by train or plane?" Well, I never flew I said, "Train." I agreed. He ( ).

**SS:** And you were still in Philadelphia at the time, right?

**BM:** Yes, Philadelphia at the time. So, I, I, I agreed to it and, uh, we left and we took the, the PRR, the BNO and the CNO, after you get there. ( ) and I got there. And I'll stop at this point.

**SS:** Yes.

**BM:** I saw all them guys in the black ( ), guys, some of 'em I heard of. Must have been about seven or eight Cubans.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** ( ) and uh, ( ), first spring training game and then ( ) be fine. Well, ( ). Three innings, ( ). First three innings, strike out, swingin'. All of 'em, all of them dropped out swingin'. They had Ray Neal, about three hundred somethin' hittin' that year. They had Ensley, Frank Ensley. Um, they had Frank Merchant. They had Poole, a guy named Poole playin' outfield. They had a hell of a team. ( ) Junior Hamilton is still living, he was with me about a month ago over here, like ( ) even in Jacksonville; talked to him two months ago. He go along ( ), we usually go together when we sell memorabilia. And uh, I asked ( ), I said, "Sure, you

got my boy. Can I have another inning?"

**SS:** Yeah.

**BM:** I enjoy it. He say, "Look here. All of your boys. Yeah, take another inning. Go on in there, [slap] swingin', [slap] swingin' and next thing, little ball at short stop, right over short stop, [slap] round second base.

**SS:** Yeah.

**BM:** I said...yeah, that's it.

**SS:** Yeah. Uh, what happened to the last half of the inning?

**BM:** I just told you.

**SS:** You struck him out?

**BM:** No. I got the first two in the extra inning he gave me. And the other one just hit a small popup above second base.

**SS:** Oh, he caught it! I thought you said, I thought you said ( )

**BM:** Nah, nah, nah, ( )

**SS:** Okay, it's our fourth.

**BM:** Yeah, yeah, I did. And I, I, I was in the rotation. We had, uh, we had ( ) Mason ( ) and ( ). He pitched a no-hitter one time and we had, uh, myself, ( ), uh, Marvin Jones, that's the first five. Then we had Cuban, couple of Cuban pitchers. Then I went on up the road, went on up the road then I started my new career ( ).

**SS:** Okay, what were you doing in Philadelphia between the time in West Palm and ....?

**BM:** Oh, my dad, I went up there for my dad.

**SS:** Did you work or, did you play?

**BM:** No, oh, I played, I played in a couple, I played in, I think one game. Some kinda way, some guy heard about, heard, heard I used to pitch. And some team, I forgot where they were from and they were playin' somewhere in Jersey.

**SS:** Mmm hmm.

**BM:** It was a night game, that's when the owner, uh, uh, they were playin' a night game. I don't know whether it was the portable lights, J. L. Wilkinson, owner of the Monarch team. He invented...

**SS:** Yeah, he invented them.

**BM:** Yeah, yeah. Long before, yeah, long before ( ). And, uh, he used 'em on an extension ladder.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**BM:** 'Cause see he used 'em on an extension ladder. See the apparatus was up on the top, on the ladder, that goin' up high. They used to pull 'em up like that.

**SS:** Okay.

**BM:** You pull 'em up high.

**SS:** Yeah.

**BM:** And then they had a big generator. That's how you had night games. That's when night games first started. Anyway, yeah, and, uh, I remember when ( ) the Bruins, Baltimore Bruins. That's the name of the team. The team was the Baltimore Bruins. I went over there and pitched a game for them and I think we went to another town one time, to, uh, uh, town in right in Pennsylvania. ( ) small town, just above Philadelphia. I can't

think of the name right now. But we went there and I played with them there and

( ), our lead in that game, something like that and that's the only thing I played right there before I went into the Monarchs. My daddy kept the first ball I ever hit, I think it was in '49, I was up there. My last senior year I went to Philadelphia, some part of it.

**SS:** *To school.*

**BM:** Yeah. Something along that line. We had ( ), now that's when four teams were playin'.

**SS:** *Oh, okay.*

**BM:** Yeah, that's the New York Black Yankees I think it was. ( ) Stars, the Home State Grays, and I guess, the New York ( ). I guess that's the team. And I was, ( ) was gone then. I wanted to see him, he died in 19, uh, 46.

**SS:** *Yeah.*

**BM:** That's when you heard about ( ) and all that stuff there. You heard about Robinson and then that felt good. But anyhow, uh, then after that. So that's it. That's the interview. ( ) Four years.

**SS:** *Did you get a chance to finish school?*

**BM:** Oh, yeah! When I was in Philadelphia, I didn't like the school. I went to Ben Franklin High School, an all boys' high school and the students was, oh, they were kinda rowdy for bein' used to what I came from.

**SS:** *Right.*

**BM:** And, uh, I told my daddy, "I wanna go back home". So I went back

home and the principal, W. D. Stewart, he was the, I understand he became the president of Ed Waters College there in Jacksonville.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

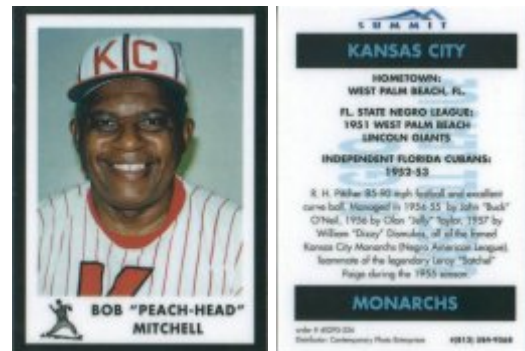
**BM:** He allowed me to take my exams. I took my exams, final exams and passed and I graduated with the first class out of Roosevelt High School in 1951. That was the first class out of that. I graduated from there.

**SS:** *Uh huh.*

**BM:** And, anything else ( )

**SS:** *Want me to cut it off here?*

**BM:** Yeah you can.



[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[END OF INTERVIEW]