

INTERVIEW WITH: Kevin Wallace

BREAKING THE COLOUR BARRIER: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE CHATHAM COLOURED ALL-STARS
A collaboration between the University of Windsor and the Chatham Sports Hall of Fame

Interview Status: open to public confidential anonymous

Name of interviewee: Kevin Wallace (K.W)

Name of interviewer: Deirdre McCorkindale (D.M)

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Transcription:

D.M: Okay, so today's date is July the 7th, 2016, I am Deirdre McCorkindale and I am interviewing and, I'll actually have you say your name.

K.W: Kevin Wallace.

D.M: Okay... so we will start with the background questions they gave me.

K.W: Sure.

0:00:26.9

D.M: So what is the name of the person you knew from the Coloured All-Stars?

K.W: Well, that was Louis Pryor.

D.M: Okay.

K.W: My grandfather.

0:00:38.7

D.M: And, when and where was he born, where did he grow up? If you don't know the specifics of it, it's okay.

K.W: Well, he grew up here in Chatham. Married Blanche Paxton, that was my grandmother. She became Blanche Pryor, and right here in Chatham.

D.M: So, they stayed here the whole time?

K.W: Ahmm... worked down at the CIL, down there at —that's where I know of he worked there—for a long time, yeah, for a long time.

0:01:09.6

D.M: Okay. Can you tell me anything about his family? Who they were? What they did for a living?

K.W: Well, there was... at one time there was ten kids, one died. There was Blanche and Larry and Claudine, Uncle Clyde, Uncle Lloyd, Aunt Madeleine. Those were the ones I knew mostly around. And Aunt Madeleine, well the oldest daughter, she moved to Detroit, when she was married. And, Uncle Clyde, he lived here in Chatham, all of his life I guess. Uncle Lloyd same thing. Lloyd I guess he was a... he worked at Libby's. Uncle Clyde, he worked at Libby's for a time and then retired. Always nice, always nice man, my Uncle Clyde. He was something like Grandpa a lot. Strong, strong as an ox. My Uncle Lloyd too, he worked... here in town, liked fishing too. He was my fishing buddy. My mother, Loretta, she was a, she was a... a middle daughter and very nice woman, very pretty, very personable, everybody liked her but she was a tough little kid too. Everybody had to be tough around this area here, and Claudine, she's the youngest sister and Uncle Larry who's still living you met. He's the youngest brother, yeah. Blanche she was the first black lady in nursing college here. And was head nurse of St Joe's¹ and head nurse for 35 years. There's a story there. And my mother, she was the very first black woman to be a meat inspector.

D.M: Okay.

¹ St. Joseph's Hospital

K.W: And the very first woman to—well in sports, achieve an honorary score in bowling. 299, not a perfect game but one off. She was the very first.

D.M: That's still pretty good.

K.W: Yeah, yeah and... well all of them had kids. Margaret, I almost forgot Margaret. She was one of the ones too, she's gone too. She lived in Dresden and married Guy Lambkin. My mother married—well, my dad's name is Clarke Wallace, and my Uncle Genie and Uncle Wyatt. Wyatt's the youngest one. He's all right, I like Uncle Wyatt.

0:04:04.5

D.M: So how important were sports to him growing up and what sports did he play?

K.W: Well, baseball I knew he liked. Sports were always big in this family. I guess they always listened to sports. Baseball, as I heard and witness, like with Uncle Larry and Larry, he's right into it, so I guess my grandpa was in it too. Yeah.

0:04:29.4

D.M: All right, did—we got into—you mentioned a little bit but, did any of the other family members play sports?

K.W: Yes.

D.M: Yeah?

K.W: As I hear just now, there was a black woman's baseball team. And Claudine and my mother played on it. Now that, that's the only details I know of it. Nobody really mentioned it until now and everybody went, "Wow."

D.M: I didn't know anything about that.

K.W: No, well that's the thing. I had mentioned maybe you should research that. Because that's another thing from around this area² that... well you know this area never was really part of the lime light, let's put it that way.

D.M: Yeah.

² Referring to the east end of Chatham, where many of the members of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars lived and played.

K.W: So, that's really something to look into. 'Cause my father, well—he played with Fergie Jenkins and everything. From when they were younger, from right around here, played hockey together, baseball together. Had a lot of good athletes from around here and well, my father, he's in the Sports Hall of Fame in Dresden. Just like the Sports Hall of Fame here in Chatham. Well, Dad's in that one, for hockey and baseball. With Fergie Jenkins and Floyd McCorkle. Floyd McCorkle, you know Shelly³?

D.M: Yeah.

K.W: That was her... stepfather, put it that way. He was a nice guy too.

0:05:48.8

D.M: So, do you know when approximately he started playing with the Chatham Coloured All-Stars?

K.W: No. I just know—well, 1934. You know?

D.M: Yeah, that's okay.

K.W: That was the year my mother was born. So you know he was playing while my mom was born.

0:06:07.6

D.M: That's ok. Usher didn't know when for Cliff either so... Do you know how he came to play with them?

K.W: No.

D.M: No?

K.W: I don't know that.

0:06:13.9

D.M: Did anybody ever tell you about the origins of the team? How it was formed? How they joined the Ontario Baseball Association? Anything like that?

³ A relative.

K.W: No, nothing, no. Our family pretty much is closed lipped. If you're a part of it, you'll probably know.

D.M: Yeah.

K.W: Like no news is good news.

D.M: I know what you're talking about. I know exactly what you mean.

K.W: You know if something goes wrong then everybody want to tell you about it. But if nothing goes wrong eh, it'll be fine.

0:06:41.1

D.M: Yeah... I know. What positions did he play? Do you know?

K.W: That I don't know. No.

0:06:46.6

D.M: Okay. Do you know if he was known for any particular skills moves anything distinctive?

K.W: In baseball, no. I don't know that. I know, well he was a strict father and a good father well, a good provider. He did everything he could for his kids.

0:07:06.7

D.M: Okay. Can you tell me anything about the team itself in terms of their playing, or what they were known for?

K.W: Not really, no. I know a lot of their relatives are still around here and if you look around at the different faces and that, and if you look at the picture of the baseball team, you say: oh hey I see resemblances of all kinds of people from around here, so.

0:07:28.4

D.M: Do you know about... like what were people's reactions to their playing? Did he talk— did anybody mention what the fans were like or anything like that?

K.W: No, no. Obviously, it must have been something very important because well, here it is you know.

0:07:43.7

D.M: Did anybody ever talk about... what he enjoyed about playing baseball?

K.W: No.

0:07:52.2

D.M: Okay. Do you know if he had any challenges or difficulties playing?

K.W: That I don't know, 'cause well, we never met.

D.M: Yeah.

K.W: It would have been nice, but well, my mother couldn't even go to the funeral because, well she was carrying me so.

0:08:05.2

D.M: Did anybody ever talk about him travelling with the team, or any of his experiences with any of that?

K.W: Don't know anything like that, no.

D.M: Okay, that works. Usher had a hard time with these questions too.

K.W: I wish. I wish I knew that stuff.

0:08:30.4

D.M: Oh no, that's okay. I mean like some of this stuff is—is relatively detailed too so... Do you know when he stopped playing for the Coloured All-Stars?

K.W: It might have been right around that time.

D.M: So '34-'35?

K.W: Yeah. Yeah, because well, that'd be when my mother was born, and then Claudine, and then Larry and that came on the way of that. I know they were working.

0:08:49.9

D.M: Would you like to share anything about his life after he played with the All-Stars? We kind of touched a little bit on this but like, how he made a living, family life anything like that?

K.W: Mmmhmm, well he was a strict father, worked at—as I know, at the CIL down there.

D.M: And actually just for clarification, because these are Windsor people—what's the CIL?

K.W: It was a factory for like paint and—well paints I guess you know. And, well he just lived over on Wellington,⁴ and I guess they lived near all their lives. It was a challenge for a bit because there was a big fire there. Like one of the—you know the wooden houses the old houses there have storeys and that on them?

D.M: Yeah.

K.W: Well, it burnt down and—the... was a—I guess a year before I was born so Grandpa was there, and that was only a one-storey house. It was kind of cramped. [laughs] Yeah, but I guess he was a good provider. He'd go fishing a lot to provide for his family. He liked fishing but then he bring home his catch and feed, you know he had a lot of mouths to feed. They weren't rich, they weren't rich by any means. But never really wanting for anything, you know?

0:10:12.7

D.M: Do you know if he continued to play sports, after he played for the All-Stars?

K.W: That I don't know. No.

D.M: Okay.

K.W: Fishing's a sport I guess, so there's a sport.

D.M: I consider—it's considered a sport I'm pretty sure. So we'll go with that.

K.W: Yeah.

0:10:26.4

D.M: Do you know if he encouraged other people in the family to get involved in sports? Did he see any value in it?

⁴ Wellington Street, in the east end of Chatham.

K.W: I don't know if he did. No.

0:10:34.4

D.M: You might not know the answer to this, but how do think sports maybe affected his life? Do you think they improved his life a little?

K.W: Oh yeah, well you know. You look at that picture, and look how they're—it's a camaraderie there, and you know back then, well geez television there was no television, maybe radio, maybe. So you know their physical activities and sports and everything they really brought a lot of people together. Interaction, not like today. Yeah so—I can only imagine.

0:11:07.7

D.M: These are more general kind of questions, do you have a sense of the place of sports in the black community when he was growing up? Was it important? What do you think its value was?

K.W: It was very important. Like, you look at history and the segregation and the problems between the races—and what we have right now... is nothing compared to what they went through. And some of the stories even when I—when my parents moved me to Burlington, Ontario, 1956 and then when I'm five years old, I can still remember problems because we were black. Now you think about... before that and problems, oh yeah, he must have had it rough. Yeah.

0:12:02.6

D.M: Do you know if he ever talked about any barriers or difficulties that he had?

K.W: That I don't know because I never talked with him. But I know the impressions it left on Blanche and Larry and everyone like that... and I know they had a rough time.

0:12:19.3

D.M: Do you think it changed over time?

K.W: Here?

D.M: Yeah.

K.W: I have to say yes. When it became more—not socially correct you know. It's not like it disappeared, but it was more hidden.

D.M: Yes.

0:12:40.8

K.W: 'Cause you know like around here. The east end anyway, you did that mess down here you get your butt kicked. Really, I'm not lying. But if you cross the tracks here east end like with all the ones now, you're part of a different section of town which is... totally different -- there's a different feel, even the police feel that way. When they come across the tracks they know that—well down in the east end they feel they do a lot of their policing themselves. I don't know if you've ever been around here that long for that.

D.M: Yeah. I know what you mean.

K.W: Not as much as before I guess. I know I felt it, growing up.

0:13:20.2

D.M: So overall, what do you think was the impact or significance of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars?

K.W: Hmm... It makes you think. I'm sort of proud of it myself, like hearing of it. I wasn't around to experience it, but now that you hear about it, it must have instilled a lot of pride.

0:13:46.1

D.M: Okay. Has it been a part of your own family history and memories?

K.W: Just of when I hear of it at first, and then you look around you don't hear anything else, but then you can relate to it like seeing how sports-oriented all of us were. So you know—it runs in the family I guess.

0:14:06.7

D.M: Have any members of your family been involved in the public commemoration? So I guess what they have for example here is—there was a 50th anniversary celebration in '84, and there was a recognition of them in 2002. Were any members of your family—?

K.W: That we I don't believe we were ever contacted no. There was a thing in the paper, that's about it.

D.M: Okay. I don't think they contacted a lot of people for that.

K.W: There was a big story in the paper that was about, it you know.

0:14:37.6

D.M: Okay. So, is this a story you think more should—more people should know about and why?

K.W: Yes, I think so.

D.M: Yes?

K.W: Well... I guess there's all sections of the society community, and that have different things that should be told. I don't know—it's hard to put into words.

0:15:02.1

D.M: No, that's okay I understand. So, do you have anything else that you would like to say about your grandfather?

K.W: I wish I met him.

D.M: Yeah?

K.W: Yeah, we would have got along I think—would have been nice. Yeah, but never did but... I have his name, my middle name is Louis, so.

D.M: Oh, okay.

K.W: I guess they did that because well he died just before I was born. I wish I met him. I wish I did.

D.M: How old was he if you don't mind my asking?

K.W: Well, that I don't know. No, no I don't, no. Some questions you just don't ask you know. So, there it is. Like in our family. I know how that its.

