

AR: Dad was a quiet person. And every Sunday, we had the one car, he'd take us for a ride up, going to Darnestown. What is that route?

PH: 28.

AR: And there was a big, big patch of land. And as we were approaching it, he'd say, "Okay, start counting." And I'd count the deer, and he'd go slowly. And usually there wasn't that much traffic out. And we'd all say, "Oh, well, how many was it last Sunday?" But for us, a Sunday ride was a big thing, you know? And I'm still the only child. And so, when we finished, we'd go up and turn on Quince Orchard Road and come down into Gaithersburg. And there was an ice-- I don't remember if it was High's, or whatever the ice cream place was. He'd treat us to ice cream, and that was our big outing after. Because we'd eaten dinner shortly after you got home from church because we were up early for Sunday school and so forth. But we'd look forward to that. But there's something else I wanted to say about that drive.

ED: When you're thinking, can you just put a year on that memory a little bit, approximately, or about how old you might be?

DH: Yeah, how old were you? That might be easier.

AR: I was six when I began school. But the rides began, I'd say, a couple of years before I was in school.

DH: So, you were four or five?

AR: Yes, four or five.

PH: So, you went up to Gaithersburg and you got your ice cream.

AR: And then we'd come home.

PH: On 355, what's now 355?

AR: Yes, 355. Because they cut through roads, the main roads, early, so people could get to work.

DH: And so, it was on one of these Sunday drives that he talked to you about the hanging tree?

AR: No. It was one day after dinner and I don't know what inspired him to do that. And I don't recall that any hanging had happened around that time, but it was just his--

DH: Had something happened? Well, tell what he said to you.

AR: We had finished dinner. It must have been summer, because the days were long. And he said, "I want you to go for a walk with me." He had never done that before. He'd sit and smoke his pipe and listen to the radio, or read the Sunday paper, because we got the Sunday paper as soon as they began to print papers. We'd get them every day of the week, we still do. Oh no we don't, because here in Delaware they don't do the *Post* paper.

DH: Washington *Post*. So, she gets it online.

AR: I get it online. Mother was doing the dishes. And I guess, they had me help clean off the table. And I think it was when I went back to the table was when he said, "I'd like for you to take a walk with me." And I was so excited, you know? And so, I said, "Where are we going?" He said, "Oh, just for a short walk." It's like it was yesterday. And so, we walked down our muddy road, an unpaved road, and turned left. I think we went through the field where the drive-in theater exit was, and it was nothing but field then. And then we found a path and went where people had been walking, but there was no pavement there. But that was okay, we had a path. And as we're walking up the road, I can't remember what he was talking about. But as we got closer-- Paul, did you ever get to see that tree before they cut it down or know the significance of it?

PH: No, I have not seen the tree. But tell your story and then I'll tell you what we've learned since then.

AR: All right. So anyway, we're walking on up. Hechinger's was the first store that was built across from the hanging tree. And he said to me, "This is where some Black men have been..." hanged-- hung, hung, he said. And I looked at him, because that word wasn't in my vocabulary, really, you know? And I said, "Well, what did they do?" He said, "Well, people said they either..." He told me they killed or raped or whatever. He gave several reasons. And he said, "But sometimes..." He was really... he became very sorrowful. He said, "But sometimes they would find out they had hung the wrong man." But you know, none of this really sank into me until I was about 16 years old, I think it was.

And so, one day, I think I just walked up the road. By that time, we had sidewalk. I just walked up, but I didn't go all the way to the tree. But I looked at the massiveness of that trunk. And then I looked at the branches, which were huge, too, that could accommodate what happened. And I never said anything to anybody, I don't believe, ever, until I mentioned it to Paul when we were talking one day. Because I think as I grew older, and got an idea of how cruel that was, I didn't want to think about it.

DH: It didn't make sense to you when he told you.

AR: It didn't make any sense, and I wished he'd waited later, because it was a waste of time. Because I never thought about it until I was 15 or 16. I never told my BFF. I never mentioned it to either-- no one, until we were talking one day. And I said, "Paul, I remember when my father took me for a walk." So, when we came back, and I didn't ask any questions, I just listened. We came back, mama said, "You have a good walk?" And I said, "Yes, it was nice and sunny." I didn't even remember.

DH: You blocked it out.

AR: I blocked it out, because to me it was a hurting situation for me.

DH: You saw your father was sorrowful about it?

AR: Yeah, yeah, because he didn't get upset about anything hardly.