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Josine Osborne: ...can see it even now when you ride down. I don't know that everybody is really... that has a flag or something like that on their property...they really look at it from the standpoint of the kind of hate that is systemic from the past. But I do know that when it comes to ganging together, voting, doing whatever, you know, those are the pockets that stick together. So they keep it alive.

Laura Browder: They definitely do. Another bus driver told me that when African Americans first started becoming bus drivers, in the late 60s, white people would call up the police and report that a black man had stolen the bus.

JO: Oh yes. My uncle—and it was a sore spot—was nearing retirement from the company...I used to know the name of it...but he was an operator of a cement truck, you know with the big barrel and pouring the cement. He was very good at it. He was well liked by all of the people and everything, but one day...He was a hunter and he carried his hunting rifle which he didn't think was a big deal. On his lunch break he had found this place and he just went hunting. He was near retirement and that was a real... Everybody looked like they clammed up. And they fired him. So he lost everything. Those were the things that people remember; they remember the smiling in your face but cutting you in your back. That's why they don't trust. That's why even when people get jobs, they know about this past, but they don't stand up for a whole lot of things, and all, so... It's still in the air. It's one of the reasons why a lot of people say if they want to keep those statues—put them in a museum, pay for them, pay for it with their own money. Because it doesn't... it shouldn't reflect on...or we shouldn't be held hostage to that kind of... And some people just are so broken and helpless they just don't wanna think about it. They just don't wanna have any kind of opinion at all about it 'cause it just pulls them down. They'd rather change the subject because then they'll go back to memories... or if they have memories. That's why they don't pass on the history.

One of the things I really wanted you to come hear, and I thought about it, is because when we talk about... oh, did you wanna ask the questions?

LB: No. You keep going. I've got tons of questions to ask and we'll do it all.

JO: When I was looking at it I said, "Hey. She's talking about a space of time in my life, but it was so impacted by what happened before." And what you said about slavery and all... Virginia had different types of plantation, around Virginia. Richmond you had the big plantations along the James. In the Braxton Plantation, that's where my mother's family, my lineage, comes from. Okay? In Buckingham County, which is near Appomattox, that's where my father came from. We know all about the history because my father's...my grandfather was a product of a...I guess one of those mixed relationships. So it didn't just happen, you know, so...

One thing about my...in the "country," as we call it, Buckingham, you had smaller holders that would have maybe about, at the most, they would have maybe no more than about ten people. And they usually had people that were very skilled like blacksmiths because they trained them to be blacksmiths. They trained them to be...especially Virginia... 'cause we had a lot of people who were constantly import/export from England. And Buckingham is one of the oldest

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counties, so their slaves were the people that later stayed on and served them. They were well educated. They were exposed to the gentry and high things. But they had to stay in their place. You know? And they were treated much better, more like family, but there still was a...especially Virginia and going west because that's the Bible Belt. You had families like the family that my father came out of...they were very respectful to the people that served them, especially the people that stayed on. But in the city it was rough 'cause those were the larger plantations. They weren't...they weren't... There are some bad stories. You know? Especially, like I said, going...Hanover...that's where my mother came from. The Braxton Plantation goes...the people who own that goes way all the way back to the Declaration. My sister did some research the Braxtons on that was related both in Hanover and also down in King Queen's I think, going down 360.

So that's the backdrop. And I don't care who it was...the turn of the century...I heard from my father, my grandfather, 'cause my grandfather lived in the home. And my grandmother lived in the home. I was about four years old when she passed and she came from Louisa. And the piece about that was that she was a wet maid for the Chapmans that lived on the hill, Church Hill, where the monastery was. What's the place?

LB: Ben Campbell's Richmond Hill?

JO: Richmond Hill—that's it. Richmond Hill. We knew about that. We knew about how my grandmother met my grandfather because the Chapmans and the McGees...which, after slavery...after his family moved out and he was born...the McGees and all...which there's a McGee House down in Hanover.

There's quite a bit of history that precedes me. As I look back it was like—people talked about the stories. They kept them alive. My father talked about Buckingham. They talked very openly about the South and about the experience in Buckingham. Maybe you had a kind of servitude than it was in Richmond because of the small numbers of people. And because they wanted to be nice Christians, sort of like in *Roots* when the lady said, "Which one are you? Are you the one that will kill me or are you the one that wanna try to save my soul?" So that's the kind of...they were the kind...as long as you were well-churched-along. And that's also throughout, I would say, throughout Virginia. And it impacted on Richmond. As I go to other places...like I go down in the Carolinas or whatever...which they were like Richmond too in terms of real hardship 'cause it was...the thing was to sell you down the river. You know? But in Richmond people were not only educated in terms of enlightenment about the issues, many of them, but they also knew skills that were taught to them. And that's why you have a lot of caterers. You have a lot of people who have skills in taking care of the home. It's one of the reasons why Virginia Union, I mean Virginia State, a land grant school, had agriculture. Just like Tech. Tech dealt with some other things. They dealt with animal husbandry and those things. But down at Virginia State they dealt, basically, with home economics—because those were the jobs that people got in the training from the South. I remember looking at...and I look a lot at a lot of movies...Maya Angelou's *Why the Caged Bird Sings* and she gives a speech at the end when the man offered her—for the boys they would have the football field and for the girls they would have they would have the...what is it? The home ec.

00:12:09 **LB:** The model kitchen?

JO: Uh huh.

LB: The test kitchen, yeah.

JO: And so that part of history was a part of the way they transitioned and the jobs were. Course the regular places like the undertaker shops that would serve the community. In the community that I grew up was families, family businesses... Everybody had just about a trade or hustle or some way in which to barter. That's why I looked at each part of Richmond as, in the black community, being self-contained. That's one of the things that we didn't really plan for in integration because it was another world...so people's dollars went outside of the community so the economics went out. I hope I'm not rambling. But that's the reason why I came here because my mother's education... She was the baby of thirteen. My father was the third of thirteen—oldest. And, like I said, [00:13:47 unc. rule again?]. And both parents came from agricultural backgrounds. You know? So anyway... my mother was the first to go to college and she came here. She was a math teacher. I mean, she was a mathematician. She did not finish school but several of her classmates said that she... And I ran into them when I started substituting in the Richmond Public Schools later when I returned back to Richmond. They would say, "Oh! I know your Josephine Braxton's daughter." They didn't know her married name. And I said, "Yes. Why?" She said, "Because of the way you walk!" I like that.

I am the oldest of four children. And the oldest of four children get to get all of the scolding-outs. They did it in good ways but it's almost like you were the one that had to set example. And, of course, I got...my sisters will tell you that I was a bad person. The reason that they would say I was a bad person... well, I wasn't a bad person but I would do little mischievous things, you know? And I was always asking questions—"Why...?" And pushing the envelope when I was growing up. My mother had this really strong will on the children. And she said that, "I had to make you an example." And she spared no.... They would've put her under the jail in child abuse—if you let us tell it. You know, she was talkin' to us all the time. She was saying, "You know. You know you did wrong." But that's why they would say that. But I had two sisters and they were twins. They were two and a half years younger than I am. And I have a brother. I still have a brother, who is six years younger than I. That was the extent of it. And I'm gonna stop right there.

LB: No need to. Although I have so many questions. So tell me about what neighborhood you grew up in.

JO: The same neighborhood I'm in now, the same one. First it was annexed, in 60...when Richmond was annexed...can't remember that year. But it was in the 60s. We had land. Daddy purchased land that was really on the east side of the home place. That was my mother's home place. And at that time we lived in Woodville, which is like a little suburb at that time. Right now it's right there. When I was eleven years old, the state came through Richmond, 64, came through Richmond and it split our properties and gave us a little alley. But it was on the county line at first. No, no, no, no. They extended it to over the county line. Yes. I don't remember. That has to be researched. But anyway, half of our property was on the other side. Also Creighton

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Road, that goes right on down to Cold Harbor, and connected us with my mother's home place, my mother's family, down in Eastern Henrico. That area was really wooded but heavily populated. You know, a house here and a house there and all. But the community that was closed in, which is where Kennedy is now, which is why parts of Kennedy is in the county, even today. It's funny how that line was drawn. Basically the neighborhood, when I came up, was still growing cotton. Woodville School, in the back of Woodville School, where the swimming pool...all that was a big cotton field. Then we had what they call a "juke joint." You know? And two churches, two little churches, and then we had Mount Table Baptist Church which is now on Fairmount. Church Hill was just like that—church on every corner. But as far as integration was concerned, when I grew up, there was a community called Peter Paul, which is right there by the...I'm gonna show you that...right there by Woodville School, Elementary, which is the second Woodville School. The first one, which I went to, was a...those old inkwell desks, potbelly stove, four...two...four classes downstairs, by partition, and four classes upstairs. You had to go sort of like in a separate area for the restrooms. But that's when I grew up. And my mother also went to that school. And how close it was. My first-grade teacher was in the neighborhood, Mrs. Page. We are very close to the family now because they were very close. That area now is Fairfield Court. My father helped... My father was a carpenter by trade and also a landscaper. He did a lot of landscaping, freelance landscaping, in what is known as...what's the place...Cary Street...

LB: Windsor Farms?

JO: Windsor Farms area. I remember coming back to Richmond when he was ill and he still was on the tractor. He had heart problems but he loved the outside. You couldn't fence him in. The other thing about that that I remember is my mother wanted to make me a lady and my daddy wanted to make me a farm boy. So I got to learn how to do the tractor. When I came back my father had to go to pick up the tractor from a job that he was doing in Windsor Farms. And guess who got to navigate that tractor back? I took him out in the station wagon and I had to help to get that back. That gives you kind of a little picture. I definitely was a daddy's girl and the only beating...well...the merciless beating that...I really would say "merciless"...was when my father tried to stop my mother and they got in an argument. "Let me have her." Yes. So my mother was very strict. She meant what she said. My sisters tend to follow the rules strictly. They didn't mess with her. But she was a very strong disciplinarian. And that also came from a thing over slavery because if you did... You didn't have too many chances. You weren't to... The whole... We'd get all these lessons about making sure we address people the right way so that people would not misinterpret. And we would get in trouble. That's one reason why today I think most of my activities have always been involved in the community—NAACP and very involved during the Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights era... Because it was just like you had to fight. We had laws on the books that you couldn't...you couldn't do...There were not a lot of things that you could do outside of your neighborhood and be safe about it. You know? So everybody was on the same page. Doug Wilder's family lived on Church Hill down on 28th Street, the same street that we lived on—we knew them very well. Henry Marsh's family, the Harris's, his wife's family—we knew them very, very well. It was like a big connected family that wanted everybody to survive.

LB: Did you know the Jacksons? James E. Jackson who ran the pharmacy?

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JO: Are you talkin' about Edloe? Or which Jackson? Which...

LB: Well his name was James E. Jackson, so maybe the father went by Edloe. I don't know. The son went by James E. Jackson Jr. and he went to Armstrong. They were very involved in...

JO: Where was their...?

LB: They were somewhere in Church Hill. I don't know the exact address, but James E. Jackson went on to found the Southern Negro Youth Congress.

JO: Oh, okay.

LB: If you...

JO: And maybe... How long ago was this?

LB: That was in the late 1930s, but the pharmacy was already going and I don't know how long it survived, but I think a long time.

JO: Oh, oh, oh, oh. Okay. That would've been something my mother and all... That predated...

LB: I know you were not born in 1920 so...

JO: That predated. And when did he graduate from Armstrong?

LB: He would've graduated early 1930s and gone on to Virginia Union. But the father kept the pharmacy going. And he was the second black pharmacist in Richmond.

JO: Yeah. Because Edloes probably... The Edloes probably... I don't know how long Edloes... Edloe is the only establishment on Church Hill that I know of. But I don't know how long...

LB: Yeah.

JO: And whether he may have been up and coming. Another thing, there was no competition. People basically... Edloe might have worked in his pharmacy. And people tend to pass on, you know? So it wasn't this thing of competition. People would refer people constantly. That might... those dates may have... and he might've worked, Edloe might have worked and got his apprenticeship. Because those dates... I know when I grew up, the Edloes, the children... his father probably would have been young and probably upstarting. And Edloe followed in his father's footsteps. He was also NAACP.

LB: And I'm guessing you were born around '49?

JO: Yes. In March '49. So I will be 70 next year.

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LB: That's exciting!**JO:** It is! I don't believe it—especially when I used to look at the stories and they would say something like, "I'm never gonna grow up. I'm never gonna grow up. Not me!" And I'm like, I was havin' too much fun being young.**LB:** Well tell me about some of that. What did you do for fun when you were young?**JO:** Okay. I played, like I said, Mama was trying to make a lady and Daddy was trying to make me another boy. So I was very much fond of being outside. My sisters were what I call "book nerds," and my brother was heavily into sports and whatever. But, for me, growing up, I was always connected to my cousin. Janet was about seven years older than I was so I got her hand-me-downs, everything, you know. And I guess Janet... My Aunt Janie... Janet was only one girl, only girl in the family and it was her father that the Nixon truck incident the scenic truck incident. But I always loved the church. I always loved being in choir. I always loved oratorical contests, speaking out. I always enjoyed asking questions. The problem that I had, Mama said, once I learned off of the learning wheels... what is it?... tricycle and all like that—then I got busy. And I was rambling. So you could see me on a summer day going down by the tap hole, down by the creek that really runs along our property how 64 comes by... or either picking blueberries. And I would also... the other piece that my mother kept her eyes on was, as I was growing up, I blossomed very early, and so I didn't see myself but she said I could be a little sexpot. I mean these were her words. And I'll never forget, one day... I loved water. Whenever it showered, you know we didn't have the sprinklers back then, we'd just go out on the front yard and as long as it was not thunder/lightning, we could go out. Now my sisters would play in the sand box and all. But I'd go out on the front saying, "Stormy weather!" Something about, "It's been raining all day long ever since my man and I are not together!" And Mama one day came to the front room. She said, "Bring your little woman-in' self in here!"

I guess, you know, I was very... I was a mixture. I was a mixture between very... I always liked... Mama said I liked to flirt. But at church I was just interested in people's relationship. That was all it was. My aunts say I was always looking at people. I guess it was like little sneaky stuff—seeing what they would do, how they would shout in church, or how they would pray. A whole lot of things fascinated me about the people in the church and that's why I guess I'm a reverend now. But I just think that the conversation my aunt who was very... she never married. She always took us to all the conventions in the church, all the activities in the church. She had a keen understanding of the dynamics of people. She didn't take any nonsense offers either. She was very straightforward. And I know that she basically... I would ask her about certain things and she would give me very strong theological answers to it. I think that was... even though I was young I just took things as very... they took everything serious, but I took things pretty light. The things that I didn't take light though was when, as I was beginning to grow up, things were changing. I remember the first thing that was integrated, that I can remember, was the Girl Scouts. We would go to these big things and we'd have to be all separated. I'd say, "Why do we do that? Why can't we go here?" and all. And then my mother would have to explain all of that to us, to me. But Aunt Olivia, Aunt [00:34:26 unc. Dimple?] spent a lot of time with us. She spent a lot of time taking us to different conferences. And our churches basically didn't just deal with the spiritual part. They dealt with our educational enlightening part. They dealt with us

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being constantly in programs that was dramatic presentations, and we learned a lot of poems and things that you would normally learn in the... well somethings you learned in your literature class and all.

LB: What church was it?

JO: It was Mount Olivet Baptist Church. And Mount Olivet, too, can be considered kinda typical of how churches operated, mainline churches operated as a Baptist church. It was in the part of Church Hill that was right there at 25th and S Street. So you'd go to where the food...the big intersection where the building that they're doing now for bringing food into...it used to be considered food desert. So that's there, where they are remedying that problem.

LB: Now you told me earlier when you first completely piqued my curiosity...

JO: Oh, okay.

LB: ...that you had gotten involved in the Junior NAACP when you were eight years old.

JO: Eight years old.

LB: Tell me about how that came to be.

JO: Oh! 'Cause my mother... Well, first of all, my sisters were two and a half years younger than me. They were twins. And I was a little "frisk pot," as she would say it, and all like that, and so she was... I was busybody. I was asking all those questions. And our neighbor, I don't know whether it was church or what kind of program and all like that, they took a liking to me and so invited me to come to their church. I think their church is no longer there. But they were the entry point of me getting involved. Mama said, "Take her." You know? "Just take her." She could trust them. But I was really asking too many questions for my mom. And she was the type of person don't do a whole lot of talking, you know? She would give answers. But—let's do. She was a very... She got things... She's a mover-and-shaker. And she basically was the person. Daddy worked and she managed the home. She wanted to go back to school, but when we came along she wanted each one of her children to go where she could not go. I often think of her devotion, especially when I hear people talk about her that were in school with her and said that she had a lot of talent, a lot of gifts. For her to basically see that I was coming along and that I needed things...at that time when the twins came along, they did not...she was like, I guess, most parents—and poor. We were rich in resources but we didn't have a lot of money. So she wanted someone that she could trust. And like I said, people took a lot of attention with other people's children and if they had means or if they had time, they would offer, you know? "Let me take her with us to some event? Or be involved in some program." They had back then a...used to be Tom Thumb Weddings for churches to raise money...but they had a queen's contest. And that was how I got involved in...you had to do some talent, and then you raised the most money...the whole community helped you. I didn't win, but it was fun. It helped me to see other kids all over the city that I wouldn't normally see outside of my community. That's another reason—when I look at the kids in Fairfield Court and Creighton Court, they very rarely, if any, have an opportunity to go outside of that community. When I think about all the different people

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that came to my aid and helped me to get outside of that community—it not only helped me to go and be alongside them, but it helped me to grow up in much of the activities that was going on at that time. We would come to the school...this was just the field, but the big round building chapel—that was Coburn Hall. That's where we met a lot of times. Under the boys' dorm there was this grill, and that's where we had a lot of social activities. By Virginia Union attracting people all over the nation, we always heard of people coming. Martin Luther King—we would hear. Wyatt T. Walker, who just passed. I remember one of the big events that I went to was at Virginia State. All of the state schools bounded together. You had the youth council. Then you had the college council. So you could go from the youth council to the college. And Norfolk State, at that time, I was interested. That was "Little State." That was considered "Little State." But now...then it became "Norfolk State."

The thing with that was—you formulate activities growing up, as I did in the youth council and making friends all over. Some of them were persons that went on to integrate the schools. I did not. I stayed right there at Armstrong, complete. But when...I think it was Farmer and Wyatt T. Wyatt T. was in Petersburg and very involved in it. He was a connection with all of them. He had this church, Gillfield Baptist Church, and a lot of people went to Virginia State doing various activities, doing the voter registration. But every strategic thing that we had to do to foster change was done on the campuses, mainly, of Virginia State. If we had to bring people from the southern part of the state, they would always meet at Virginia State. A lot of times Norfolk would come here and other places more north would come here. But the bottom line is—that's the sort of socialization that I had growing up. The seriousness, as I grew up... Daddy would carry us. One time we were only kids and we just loved parades but we thought we were going to a Christmas parade. We ended up at the Confederate parade.

LB: Wow.

JO: But Daddy was not scared. He honestly was fearless. But this is why—he would always tell us... He grew up around a lot of the areas that... basically it was like Charlottesville. See you would have these born-again Christians or this very religious upbringing. They would be very nice to you and at the same time, their cousins, their kissing cousins, the Ku Klux Klan, they knew where they were. They just didn't want them to come and show their hands. Now if you were real close to the family or whatever—nobody bothered you. And Daddy grew up under that umbrella.

LB: So what Confederate event was it that he was taking you to?

JO: To the parade. They would come down...

LB: ...near Oakwood?

JO: No. They would come down Broad Street. It stopped. The last one that I remember—Governor Allman—it stopped around that time because the activities were more and more. The activities of... we were sitting in more. Richmond does not want to appear like it is. You know? It's hidden. And as long as you're nice and long as you're in your place—you're alright.

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LB: I have still interviewed people a good deal younger than you who have told me about the Ku Klux Klan marching down Broad Street and at the Cloverleaf Mall.

JO: Uh huh. That's it. It's those pictures that people have that are constantly saying, "Take those statues down."

LB: Because were there Klansmen in the Confederate parade?

JO: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And the people in the counties and all—they knew. It's just the people... Many times... That's why I say... Not everybody that's involved in... Honestly, they look at it in terms of—this is a part of their past. They don't know how it hurts. They don't know how it continues to keep that symbol. You know? And how it has hurt a lot of black people. Some black people have not been hurt. They don't have that. They're the ones saying, "It's not botherin' me." But if you've ever looked into somebody's face, if you've ever heard stories that were passed down in your community, if you've ever been into an environment where you can feel the spirit, you know, you don't wanna know we're around. And my mother was that way. She wanted us to behave, be in our place, so that the system would not hurt us. That's why she was... She wasn't tryin' to beat us, whatever. And I was the kind of person that was always pushing the button, always seeing and asking, and not knowing that all I had to do is be in the wrong place at the wrong time. You know. So that was her contention. That was her contention.

One time, I'll never forget, being outside again, playing very early and my mother was not really worried about us, or me, at that time because it was nobody around. It was isolated then. It was like being at the end of the road. But a kid, who must've come from a very privileged white community, drove like he's going into a isolated area and he's gonna drive real fast. And my mother looked out the window and she just knew I had been hit. Yeah. And that was... [00:48:53 unc. an obstacle?] And then seeing it on your grandfather's face and being able to see fear on those people who...if they're fearful, you gotta be fearful. And this is real. Some people don't have that.

I noticed when I went to the different parts of the city, some people were in the NAACP because it was, it's a professional. That wasn't the case with me. That was the case that people... in other words, in order for you to advance—these are the things that you gotta do. Of course, everybody...Martin Luther King, all of those people that would come through and all like that...they were vivid memories of how much stock you would see. They would also come to churches. They were not like our people that normally come now, speakers, to college universities. They would come to the churches in the area. They would have big festivals to bring them and voter registration education. I remember going. One summer, just before that summer, we had, at Virginia State, Farmer. James Farmer and Wyatt T. Walker showed us how to protect ourselves. These are the kinds of things that the NAACP did because they knew we could be hurt. Then that summer we spent, like the Peace Corps and everything else, going down to Mecklenburg County and South Hill. That was an eye opener because where I had been used to gentile involvement with the land—down in Mecklenburg County, that's when they had people that were actually living on the land and had to pay for... If you didn't do so much crops, you could be evicted.

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LB: Sure. Sharecropping, yeah.

JO: Sharecropping and all like that. And so to see how that actually was... That let me know now those people actually were considered what you're talking today of "the working poor," the *real* working poor... and worried. So all of these things. Another big thing that happened to me as a part of the NAACP. I think this was...I can't remember...I think the second year of high school or whatever...

LB: So around '65 or so?

JO: Yes. '65. I went two years to the Encampment in Citizenship and Democracy. Now that was started by Eleanor Roosevelt. It was a two-people, male and a female, on Virginia State, well at that time it was RPI. Ms. Ruby Walker was one of the persons along with Ruth Tinsley—she's a well-known person. She and her husband really devoted themselves to the NAACP. Their home was torn down. She assisted. He was a dentist. And you found all your professionals. You found people in business, all of them coming together and making sure everybody's child, not just their child. Now you had people that picked. You know? "I want that person, that person." But that's just human nature. But basically the overall community came together to support the youth, whatever you wanted to do. And if they saw some talents...I think that's what people were talking about. Dennis was talking about it. If they saw some talent in you—they really, really pushed you, really pushed you out front. Many of them were what I would call a part of social groups like the Deltas, the fraternities, the Masons, the Eastern Stars. That's outside of the church. But many of them had connections. And that's the pipeline. We got many doctors. And we especially got many lawyers because people...that's what everybody wanted. They wanted to work on betterment of their people. But those lawyers... I don't hear anything in the black community doing it like then. You know? So we lost that. To me that was a casualty. And that was because people were not thinking that... They were thinking that that would be with us always. But when people are able to put their moneys elsewhere and you get a bigger vista—you really don't think back home anymore. So that's that.

But I went to Barbourville, Kentucky for two years, two encampments. Ed Peoples was one of the people who also came out of...

LB: I know.

JO: Uh huh. And that was a rich experience. That was when I went kind of, I would say, national and some degree, international. 'Cause you had people from Mexico. You had people from other countries. But basically you had a lot of national flavor of people. I remember we were in Barbourville, Kentucky. Decided that we were going to go on the last day. He writes about it in his book, by the way. And we went off to a...planned a trip to the park...and the park in Barbourville, Kentucky was winding around up in the hills. As we led off we were all together, but then as we started walking and some people were walking at their own pace, socializing and everything. And they were into different subjects and we came around the corner and we looked at the side and we was talking about, "Look at that little hut. That's like the Jed Clampett." And we were laughing and all like that not really knowing how much danger we were in. 'Cause that's hillbilly country up in Kentucky. And we were a diverse group. We didn't know

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that they had been talking about us all the time right when we were at that university there, Berea University. And especially when we went into swimming, we would see them maybe get out or whatever. But it was a lot of us that were mixed, in a mixed group, so I didn't pay any attention to that. But that particular day, that particular evening, when we wended, got really midway our trip between the park and the campus... Oh! Before that. We were talking about all of these high tall grass and these ditches and I was walking with the one girl from the... what's the... the Indian... the Nava... out in Utah... it's a tribe... every once in a while I think about that... But anyway, she was out in Utah and one was in Nevada and another girl I think she was of Spanish descent. And we were talking about how if something came at us about there or whatever, 'cause of the tall grass—where would we go? And so the little girl, the Indian, said, "Well you take that side of the road, and I'll go behind that..." I said, "I'm not going behind any of that. I'm going straight down to that big tree." Right after I said that—shots came out. And that's how we dispersed. I mean we said it, but then we acted on it, almost without even thinking about it. That was one situation we were very... it kinda dampened us. It kinda made us really realize that we were not in a safe place and all. So I guess I could say that the neighborhood, the extended neighborhood, the extended family, it took me in different directions. And gave me a lot of deep thought about...

LB: How did your mother—who was so intent on keeping you safe within the neighborhood—how did she react to all of the places you were going and kind of being out there on the front lines?

JO: Let me just say that my mother was not anything like the average. As long as she knew we were with safe people and she could trust us... Another thing I learned too—even though I tested my mother and I did a whole lot of things, my mother pretty much knew my personality. There were places I wasn't going to go. There were things I wasn't going to do. I did not... I guess that's the religious part of me. I was pretty... I didn't test drugs. I didn't test any of those type of things. Inquisitive. I remember when I got out of... No! I was still in college... at Norfolk State. I always loved the beach. And it was a guy who was quite older, a friend of mine's brother, well he wasn't all that older but anyway he was a nice person. And he said, "You like to go to the beach? Well, they're having a beach party down there." I didn't know what School [01:01:09 unc. name spelling] did. We were in this little circle and all of a sudden everybody was passing the pipe. And School, he said, "You pass the pipe." And so I asked him, I pulled him on the side, "Is that dope?" That just shows you how... you know? And that was like... I think I was in my second year.

LB: So '69.

JO: So I was pretty sort of like ran by the book and wasn't going to get myself in trouble.

LB: So what kinds of civil rights actions did you engage in while you were in Richmond? Were you involved in?

JO: We were in the sit-ins. Mostly. The sit-ins. And we would come here, have our meetings, a lot of times we had somebody that was a Farmer or somebody that did a rally. We would always be in the church. I remember one of the things that we did. At this little restaurant right there,

01:02:34

turns into... where is that restaurant? What's that street? That comes right...the Jefferson 45 used to go to...can't think of it now...Harrison! Harrison and Broad. It was a little restaurant. That was the last place that I remember. Things were beginning to break loose then. But the first time was basically at Miller & Rhoads and Thalhimers at the lunch counter. But they basically were well-planned, well-supervised. By the time that I came on we had had a lot of times that was done. So it wasn't... It was like we were keeping up the resistance. This campus had a lot of participants downtown, as did a lot of schools, had a lot of sit-in activities. But I can't say that we had any violence. It was almost like they would see us and they really wasn't pushing the envelope here. When you go to places down in Georgia or you talk about other cities...I didn't experience that. Maybe that was early on. But all we did was just keep up the activities, the constant activities. And we would come here, we would go to meetings, and then we would go downtown. We would never do anything after dark. It was well before dark. And, like I said, it was always very controlled, always very... We knew. We were well educated and sponsors. It was not like something we were doing just on our own. We decided to walk out.

I think that...that's what made the Barbour... And it was interesting, I went on a field trip yesterday and we was talkin' about the Rosenwald schools, just going over, hearing her speech, and they said it was basically...people that knew her said she was just like that. But the one reason she could've been like that is that things had gotten so bad and that she had the backing of...Vernon Johns was her uncle, and the community respected that. So once she took the stand...they really did as much as they could to keep her from doing it...but she would never have had the impact today like she had back then. That's because the community embraced. That's just the way it was here with us.

LB: I remember talking to Paige Chargois once and her talking about how the NAACP had prepared her to integrate a school, and how disappointed she was...

JO: ...when it didn't happen.

LB: When it didn't happen.

JO: Yeah. See...another thing about...you look at what Richmond had—Richmond had Oliver Hill. Richmond had Tucker, Tucker Hill, he came out of Fredericksburg. Richmond had Marsh. These people were well-documented, well-respected, and they weren't scared. To me... They knew about the church. They knew about all of the pillars surrounding the community. So they didn't want anything... just like in Charlottesville. You saw more whites out there stopping that madness because they knew the temperament would really make it look bad. They don't want that. That's the same spirit that is here in Virginia. In a family they might be just as racist as I don't know what...but they gon' smile and they gon' treat you right and they gon'... They might go to your same church.

LB: And yet I have interviewed so many people in Richmond who had crosses burned on their lawns or...

JO: Mhm, mhm. Especially if it was a white person—a n****r lover.

01:07:59

LB: Well this was Robin Mines. I don't know if you know Robin Mines.

JO: Oh. Yeah, yeah, uh huh.

LB: When she moved to Southside...

JO: Oh, yes, yes.

LB: ...they had a cross burned on their lawn. And there was another woman I interviewed, Carol Wray, whose father had to leave town 'cause he was a white minister and she was dating a black high school student at the time. And so they were run out of town.

JO: Yeah. Yeah. A lot of that happened. That's why, as long as those statues are up there, that symbol is really intra...intra... That's what. That's the thing. I've heard it this way: "They need to do something about that because the next generation isn't gonna tolerate it." If they keep talking about—and this is kinda radical—if they keep talking about the history of it...Richmond also had another history, a dark side, and Richmond burned. We don't want that. So there's a faction of people who know how it can go ugly. And it has been hidden so long. It has been hidden. But it's the mentality. It's the way in which... Richmond has never been a city that wants to keep its dirty laundry out there. It wants the pacifier. It wants to drag it along. Don't wanna deal with it. Look how fast those flags came down in Charleston. People are talking about removing statues down south. You would think that up here that would be a piece of cake, but it's not. And it's not because the sentiment is buried. I feel that is buried there because of political moves, quietly, even with black leadership...that is done under their watch to carry us way back. You know? And that's what really gets to me because you don't know what you're dealing with. I don't know what I'm dealing with in terms of the real sentiments of the black community. I don't know who has sold out or whose agenda is going on, you know? I used to be involved with the Crusade for Voters. When I came back to Richmond, you had the Crusade for Voters so divided.

LB: When did you leave Richmond? Where did you go to college and what happened after that?

JO: I went to college in Norfolk. Like I said, it was Little State at that time so it was in transition. My major was physical education. I've always been interested in, like you said, sports, health, and all of those kind of things. I took a minor in recreation administration, was among the first life guards in the city. That was one of the big things because of James River—that we got swimming pools. And that we're looking at...ahh...that's right I forgot all about that. We're looking at the 70s. We're looking at the... I graduated in '67, went to Norfolk State, got my water safety instructor's almost the first year. Then...oh!...forgot about another big mile stone. I was second, no third runner up, in Miss Norfolk pageant. And all of that was...and that's what I keep saying...the activities of the NAACP put me in a place of being a much more used to being assertive in mixed company. 'Cause I'll never forget the lady that did the pageant. It was right there in the middle where the scope is. There's a hotel that we did the interviews and at night we were supposed to do the bathing suits and the evening gowns and ask the questions. So they were breaking it down so that that night they would give the first, second, and third runner up. And it was really funny, my talent was... I was into, very much, during college years, into fashion. So I

01:13:48

designed five costumes. I had a screen that was lit up; I used Christmas lights around it and the shop people at Norfolk State made me this screen of the United States. ‘Cause you always have to come up with something very patriotic. And so I changed...some of them I had an outfit under the other and then the others I could just slip on. And that’s how my talent was. I remember when we had the interview to break down the placement. I remember Mrs. Bryant. Her name was Nellie Bryant. She came back in the room to get other people. I was the third person they interviewed. And they came back in the other and she was just sending us what I call a code to the rest of the girls, “Get your act together!” ‘Cause I scored pretty high on that one. I don’t know about the bathing suit. I don’t know about the... And that’s the out and all like that. But that was my transitioning. But it was all built on the activities, the curriculum activities.

When I was in school basically I was pretty much social. I was in the...kinda like the pep squad. Always supportive. There is something that is little touch and go and I don’t know whether I should say this or not, but it has to do with a issue that has impacted my life a lot. And I see it now even more in a quiet way. Virginia... Armstrong was very professional, okay? Not that Walker wasn’t. Walker dealt with pretty much the blue collar, you know, group. There’s always been this quiet—even in the church, even that threads through the black community—that hurts us now. It’s something that you don’t talk about it but I feel like it has to do... Back in the day it was something quite, but people basically overlooked it. It had to do with light-skinned and dark-skinned blacks. It had to do with the picking of who they picked as the first this and the first that in Thalhimers in Richmond. If you were dark-complected, you didn’t get a chance. If you were light-complected, you were rewarded and you moved right on in. It’s typical of advertisements now. And it’s going back the other way. It used to come out better. But now it’s going back the other way. You hardly see a dark-complected person in a magazine or whatever. The thing is...back in the day that would’ve been something that we talked out about—the strength of it. Because we didn’t want anybody to be overlooked. We wanted people to cut the mustard as far as ability, not the way you looked. That’s what I see that’s missing now that was a strong point. The reason was that my mother’s side of the family was very dark. My father’s side of the family was very, very fair. And I could see how it affected their worlds. You know? I could see that. And I could see the division, the quiet division, more in Richmond than in the country. ‘Cause everything that happened in the country is by survival. But in Richmond...And it has a lot to do with when I came back home and I wore corn rows and everything and I was in Armstrong School and everybody treated me as if I was somebody that was from another country. Now I came back in ’81. I left in ’70...right after high school...’67. I made this joke that I wanted to try out for the majorettes. I said when I was at Armstrong I basically was too... I was not quite light enough. And when I got to Norfolk, I was not quite dark enough. You know? And it was really funny, you know, because it came... it was like the division within us. You know? But nobody paid it any attention except for when you were excluded. You know you kind of bore that in pain. But it was so much going on there. That was the time in which you had...what was it...Martin Luther King...wait a minute... ‘cause Kennedy died it was when I was in school...it was somebody that...yeah...that was when we had the race riots. We had rioting and everything.

LB: In ’68?

JO: Yes. Yeah. That’s when it was getting really bad. Then it came onto campus. You know. That’s the Black Power. That was also the burning of the flags and things like that. So I stayed

01:20:45

out of the way 'cause I had to work for my... I didn't get any scholarships. That was another thing around then changed so fast. My sisters got scholarships—one from the Rockefeller Foundation and the other one from the Ford foundation. And they were tapped when they were in middle schools. So so much had happened that impacted where it didn't... I stayed pretty much intact with the school experience, but could feel it from my friends that I knew had gone to Thomas Jefferson or different other schools and they happened to be either a little younger than me or whatever. But, because of the NAACP, you had a large range of young people that was involved. And when I went on to college...which got me to college...because I was a...socialization that I'm at... It wasn't that I went to Norfolk State and checked this out and checked that out. It's because I heard someone [say] they have a good physical education department down there and they had a swimming pool, competitive swimming pool...that's all I needed to know. You know? But I got all of that not from a recruitment but from the socialization at that time.

LB: What did you do after college?

JO: After college I was recruited again. I was recruited to work in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania so I went from one commonwealth to another. I also was appointed to the governor's commission, bicentennial commission, for the state's involvement. I worked for Pennsylvania's Department of Community Affairs. Things were opening up there even more. And the reason I got there is again from my socialization with the NAACP College Chapter and the recruitment that they had when they were looking for talent in other states. I don't know whether you're familiar with C. Delores Tucker. She was very active and one time—she's passed now—she was concerned about the rapping. I think it was the Soldier [unc. Soulja Boy?] or somebody that was kinda abusive rapping and she didn't like that. She came against that. That's what gave her national prominence. But the Republicans lost. The Democrats came in. And C. Delores Tucker, just as I was recruited, talked to the governor and said for my participation I want 10% of recruitment to all of your departments. So that's how I got there. You know. 'Course I talked to so many people then, now, that knew me then and said, "When you came you didn't know the lay of the land." In other words—that's pretty much up north. That's not south. And people say little things in a different way, like for instance they said...they wanted to tease me about watermelons and I said about what black people and it went right over my head. I said, "I don't know about that. I don't see too many black people around here. And I see a whole lot of watermelon in the cafeteria. Now I know you all don't put all that watermelon in the cafeteria unless somebody'll eat it." And they shut up. You know? But I think, there again, if I didn't have enough assurance of who I was, I would've been very intimidated. That's what they meant. "You just didn't know the lay of the land. You didn't know what not to say." Plus, when I went there, because of her request the retention was also strong to keep me there. So I went through a whole lot of different kind of funny kind of ways that they wanted to kind of exclude me. 'Cause that's when they had affirmative action and they had their affirmative action personnel too. I became very close to her. Another thing...that was the difference...back then if you were in those positions, and you were black, you also knew how hard it was so you were gonna be right there to help. And she was right there to constantly make sure that I understood the way things are played and for me not to go in one of those holes. Yeah. It was a different kind of... It was a different kind of reaction, a different kind of fight. 'Cause you always had to watch your back. I learned well how to document every little thing. But that's the way it was.

01:27:17

LB: So did you stay there in Pennsylvania for most of the rest of your career?

JO: I stayed there for ten years. The big thing that happened... I probably would've stayed longer, but [01:27:33 unc. Chap? Shep? chapter?] was there for two of the ten years that I was there. I mean, I'm sorry, every two terms of the... which meant eight years. When the change of power came automatically your desk it put right on it nicely in the corner and they can't throw you out because you've got that status and you've got that protection there and all. But things began to get very... I didn't want to be there. And when my father got ill I came home. When that happened that's what drew me here. I did a lot of long term subbing. Because it meant that I would have to requalify for... And I really didn't want to do that because I really didn't know whether I wanted teaching as a profession or I wanted something else. But the thing that hit me, the thing that really really hit me, was the fact that when I came back here I was overqualified. That's the first time I heard that. The other piece of that picture was that not only that I was overly qualified for it—you had a sort of clique-ish type of thing here. Nepotism. I started seeing all of that and it was a different world for me. The other piece is that I've done a lot of work with adoption. That was Father Clemens. I don't know whether you are familiar with that. So I did a lot of work with them, whatever projects would come up with different organizations. The other piece of how I... I basically was employed by my family because then at that time it was a lot of people passing off the scene, even after my father passed. So I pretty much was a caregiver up until I would say about...the last person that really...2011...family caregiver.

Now I'm helping my sister with...we still have the family farm, or the family place in Buckingham. We are transitioning it. We have it as an LLC and we're transitioning it now. We want it to be like an open house experience...open air experience for our kids that are in school. That's one of the things that we've want to do. We've wanted to do it in heavy agritourism. I had formulated a group called "Gems and Jewels." It was God Empowered Men Seminars and Jesus Enlightened Women Educated by His Love Seminars. And what that is small seminars to educate. That's more in helping to empower young women, keep conversations open in terms of what's going on today and how to kind of troubleshoot situations. It still has a lot to do with the critical thinking and bringing together older, more involved, people in the community with the younger kids that wanna know. A lot of people that I have worked with are more culturally connected. They are interested in the African culture, global commerce, those kinds of things that, I think, will help this next generation take advantage of the rest of the world. You know, various venues. But that's what I've been doing.

LB: Now...I'm so frustrated that it's over in ten minutes. But there are three big questions that I wanna make sure we get in.

JO: Okay.

LB: First of all...actually there's ten questions that I wanna get in. What do you think were some of your personal turning points during the Civil Rights era in Richmond?

JO: That's kind of hard. When you said turning points I wanna make sure I'm answering this...

01:33:16

LB: Experiences where there was a distinct before and after, if you know what I mean.

JO: I think when... Okay. When I really made my decision to be very serious, that's when I went to the conference, the same conference that was held at the hotel in Roanoke. And we had what they call a "Freedom Dinner," the last of the conference. I saw, just for a little while, I saw Ku Klux Klan come out of nowhere and I didn't know where he was going quickly. The men that were up the front, the black men that were up the front, snatched him and pulled him back 'cause he threw... I don't know exactly what it was, but he threw something onto the desk. And it was such a shocking kind of thing for me and I think that it was visible. It was up in your face. There again the crowd was kind of horrified at it, because it caught the people off guard. I'll never forget, that was the year that I was voted in as a president...state NAACP. That was really during the time I was... I wasn't in college. I was in Richmond. All of the actions and everything...I think it was where people were looking at me. People were... I don't know that I'd said all that much but I knew that it seemed like all of a sudden that I had strong convictions and I have been said that if I feel strongly about it, it just runs out of my mouth. I'll say it. I'll react to it. And so it was a turning point. Up until that point I was just basically going along.

And I'll never forget too, Mayor Kenny. Well, I call him Mayor Kenny. He was not Mayor then. He was like just another person in the crowd. And he came up to me and said, "Are you alright?" I said, "Yeah, I'm alright." I think it was at that particular time that it may have been shocking to me to step into sort of a leadership role. I know others began to see me in that role.

LB: And you were still a teenager.

JO: I was still a teenager.

LB: So you became president of the Youth Council then?

JO: Not of Richmond. Of the state.

LB: Of the whole state?

JO: Mhm. And see that's what I'm saying. I don't know whether I'm making that to you vivid enough. That's what I'm saying that everything I do now, even just my feeling about certain things, my looking at things politically, came out of the basis that people were around me and making me feel strong in what I do.

LB: No, that's coming through loud and clear.

JO: You know. And so it's like... Nobody was competing back then. It's like everything was not a social...it was social, but it was like if you stepped to the plate, the other person would get behind you. That kind of thing.

LB: I'm sorry I wanted to ask you a couple more questions.

01:38:09 **JO:** Oh, that's alright. I wish you... I'm sorry that this...

LB: I know. We may have to do Part Two. Is that okay?

JO: I don't mind.

LB: Because I wonder, are there things that you would like the generation of kids growing up in Richmond today to know?

JO: A lot of things. That's one of the things, one of the models if I had money or if I had the wherewithal... One of the models come from my experience with Ed Peoples. Because what Eleanor Roosevelt was trying to do—she was trying to give people a much cross-the-board vista of issues. Now what I see today is, especially with the project and that's what gave me so much passion about Armstrong. Yes, personally, it hurts me that the school has gone and the politics and all like that, knowing that. But it hurts me that that was the preparation ground for when I went and... still in high school coming up... that I in the probably second year was able to go to Barbourville, Kentucky, was able to be around. Even though I didn't go to the schools, integration schools, the experience was the same. At that time we dealt with issues and we had people's different views. Just like today, we have young people who don't want to fight those battles that those that was before them, but yet they're still in a maze and they need to have the forms that we had, the talking. So I wanted them to know, in many venues, that they don't have to repeat what has... It can be a clean slate, but they gon' have to fight.

LB: Do you think there are things that you feel we as a community need to particularly remember that we may be in danger of forgetting?

JO: Yeah. We may be in danger of forgetting that there were a strong a community of people that not only said they were Christians, or whatever faith for that matter, they were accountable to each other. They dealt with the ethics of Christianity or the basic ethics of Islam or any of the other—not the radical one though. Anyway they are their brother's keeper. They are in relationship, human relationship, with one another. And they need to know where we can be at each other's back in times of crisis. And see... that was there. Even in Richmond, even as Richmond is, that was there for us. Schools were safe, even though they didn't want you to go to... They wouldn't dare do some stupid stuff. People ate. There was no poverty to the degree that we were starving. They might've done some things better for, but... Oh, okay! But anyway. That's what I'm trying to say. That's what I'm trying to say. Did I answer that?

LB: Yes, absolutely. How do you think the experiences of the Civil Rights era changed your community?

JO: Well, we do have a lot of things, a lot of operations on the positive that we are privy to that we weren't privy to before. You know? Education, definitely. It's like kids can do and they can see things they never saw. I see all kinds of things that came on the positive, but I can also see, equally, things on the negative. Unless you have the politics and the economics to go together with the social programs being in place—you can't move forward. There's a lot of things that was madeshift [01:43:35 sic. makeshift?] before didn't have to be madeshift after because

01:43:46

monies were going all... But we look like we're going the opposite direction now without that community. That's the mixed bag.

LB: What do you think the big turning points for the community were during the Civil Rights era?

JO: The turning points...during the Civil Rights era...

LB: ...in Richmond.

JO: ...in Richmond, yeah. Richmond was very conservative. Pro and con, when I said that. It's conservative to the point that it's gonna protect. It's not gonna let a lot of things...you do a lot of things. But then... I think we got people involved on a massive scale. I think people in Richmond, still, are like constantly asking, "Have we done a good job?" You can't... It's not that easy to say. You know? But you have to be vigilant. It's almost like Frederick Douglass said, "You gotta agitate, agitate, agitate. Somebody else attitude, you gotta educate, educate, educate." So that's where I am on that. You gotta constantly look at people. What you want for somebody else...you gotta want it. What you want for yourself you gotta want for somebody else and fight for that or we are not safe. So that's what I would think.

LB: Well, thank you so much. This has been an amazing interview.

JO: I was glad. I wish I could've answered all your questions.

LB: Well, you know, in a lot of ways you did but there are still more I wanna ask.

JO: We can do more anytime you want. I'm sorry that my home is not to where I want to entertain right now.

LB: That's totally fine.

JO: But some of the things came and I said, "If I just really had that foresight and was not... my mind was not in several other places... I would've have brought other pictures and things like that or added to..." But I see now what you want and all.

LB: You know, I shouldn't say it's a tragedy because it's not, but the difficulty for me is always taking this interview transcript, which is going to be ten to fifteen thousand words, and for the exhibition—taking three hundred words.

JO: Mhm, right. Yeah! I know.

LB: It's drastic, drastic.

JO: Writing for your paper.

LB: But the plus side is—now there’s this rich oral history archive. Right? About Civil Rights in Richmond. And your story is an incredible contribution to that.

01:47:04

JO: Thank you. I’m glad.

LB: And I would love for you to be involved in the programming as we do the show because we’re going to be doing things like...we’re publishing a book out of this...

JO: Okay.

LB: ...to go along with the exhibition and we’ll have an event at Armstrong next spring.

JO: Oh, okay.

LB: ...with a panel discussion.

JO: And I’ll be 70!

LB: You’ll be 70. You’ll be on the panel.

JO: Oh, boy. Yeah.

LB: And that’ll be amazing I think.

JO: Yeah, yeah. I would love that. Anytime you need to call me and you need to...

LB: Well I have a weird question, if you don’t mind.

JO: Okay.

LB: So you’re #30 out of the interviews, right? We wanted 30 people. We got 30 people.

JO: Is that why your eyes popped open when you came down?

LB: So...but we just had someone drop out because she just didn’t want to be in it. A white woman. Of the thirty now we only have four white people. Was there anyone who was in your cohort, involved with Civil Rights, but white, who is still around? ‘Cause Ed Peoples is too [1:48:26 unc.]

JO: I can check on that.

END TIME: 01:48:28