

Virginia Jackson: I decided to bring children in and take care of some children. And if I'm not mistaken, [00:00:06 unc. Marvin?] family was the first one that took care of [00:00:14 unc.]. So that's when I met him—back in 1972 I guess.

Marvin: No. I was... We were in the 80s.

VJ: It was in '80?

M: Yeah, Marvin came in '89. No. '90.

VJ: When did Marvin come?

M: In 1990.

VJ: 1990?

M: Yeah.

VJ: And when did I first meet you?

M: 1990.

VJ: 1990?

M: Yeah.

VJ: Okay.

M: 'Cause Marvin was the first one.

VJ: Marvin was the first [00:00:43 unc. one? Warren?], yeah. The first baby to sleep up in my bedroom.

Laura Browder: Mhm. So you were really tiny then.

M: No. My son.

LB: Oh your son!

M: Yeah.

LB: Okay. That makes sense. I thought... I was surprised to learn you were only that young.

M: Yeah. That's my oldest son.

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LB: Okay. So that's how you got to know each other.

M: Yeah.

LB: And you've been friends ever since then.

M: Oh yeah.

VJ: Yeah, that's how we know each other. We family.

M: Yeah, we family.

VJ: They my family.

LB: So Mrs. Jackson, I would love to start off with you telling me something about how you grew up and telling me something about your family.

VJ: I did not grow up in the East End. I grew up in the West End of Richmond on West Moore Street. When I was born, my mother and my father was livin' on Leigh Street in the same area. That was, I think, the 1700 block. My mother and my father... I don't know that much about him but they separated during that time. And he went his way and we stayed on Moore Street. That's where I grew up. On West Moore Street. Right there where... Maggie Walker was not there then... But right in that area. West Moore Street. That's where I grew up. Most of my growth was in that area until I married. And I got married, I think, in... hmmm I gotta think about that. I think it was the 40s. But anyway I did get married. I married a fellow named Robert D. Jackson. And that is how I became Virginia Jackson.

LB: Now can you tell me more about what it was like then, your neighborhood when you were growing up. When you were a little child. Back when you were very young.

VJ: When I was very young...

LB: ... going to elementary school...

VJ: When I was born I was living in the 1800... No... When I was born I was living in the 1700 block of West Leigh Street, which is very close to the 1800 block of West Moore Street. I attended church, the large church right on the corner, West Moore Street. The Maggie Walker School now. And that was our playin' area. Before they built Walker school. But I was livin' in that area as the school was goin' up so we saw that, how they built the school, which was the high school. I'm skippin'... I went to the Moore Street Elementary School which was on Moore Street, just above Lombardy Street. I can't remember the address of that area. But it probably was about 1700 block or something. West Moore School was on Moore Street, but it moved to Leigh Street later in the years.

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We came up... We was a very poor family. But we did not know we were poor. Didn't dawn on us that we were poor. We didn't talk about being poor or anything. We were not hungry. We were well fed. My grandmother, she was born with a handicap condition. My mother was the worker of that family. And at that time her sisters were passing as they were having babies. And my mother became the parent to four motherless and fatherless children. And her mother, which was born with this handicap, she had two... my mother had two brothers. At times they were out of jobs or couldn't find jobs that much so my mother was really the worker and the keeper of a family of about fourteen... thirteen or fourteen relatives like the babies and her two children. She only had two children. But it was about thirteen of us living in a four-room house. Thirteen of us. And my mother was the sole provider for all of us. Mhm. She did a pretty good job of it. At that time, she was working in a factory. My mother always worked in a factory. At the end of West Moore Street going further west, there was a factory there, sort of across the street, at the end of that street. So you had a left turn there and a right turn there goin' to Hermitage Road. You know where that is? And then the left turn took you to Broad Street. My mother worked in that factory. When... I'm thinking about these two factories then... There was a factory up on the... you know where Maggie Walker school is? Right there was a factory called "British Factory." The factory at the end of West Moore Street was called "Taylor Factory." So my mother did work in these factories. And she had a sister and two brothers that at that time was livin' in this house where we were livin' in. This four-room house. And it was about ten of us, maybe more than that, that lived there. Because of the motherless children. They died early. So that's where I was raised. I went to Moore Street school, which at the time was on West Moore Street. That was the elementary school. Eventually Maggie L. Walker School was built right there on Lombardy and Leigh. I went to that school as a high school. That place, I think it was named Hartshorn something. It was a some type of school, but I think a private school.

LB: I think for girls.

VJ: Yes. I think it was.

LB: Hartshorn Academy maybe?

VJ: I'm not sure what the name was... can't even remember the name because I was... I grew up there. I was born up in that area. I was born at St. Philip, at that time hospital. But I lived on West Moore Street in the 1800 block. So I lived there most of my early childhood and I went to the Maggie L. Walker School when they built that. When they built the school, in order to fill, or put students in Maggie L. Walker High School, they brought some of the students out of Armstrong High School, which was then down on Leigh Street. Almost in the area where they are in now. But it was called Armstrong High School. But I went to Maggie L. Walker High School. Virginia Union University—a portion of that started on Lombardy and Leigh before we... I call it, "Moved across the tracks." Moved across the tracks for it is now. But they were those old buildings. I love those old buildings. Old buildings over there where Virginia University is now. They expanded some but it's in the same area. And that's the college that most... those that could afford to go to college went to from up West Moore Street, West Leigh Street, and some from over the West End... we used call that [00:11:53 unc. Sydney?] But that was over in the West End. We saw the Maggie L. Walker School being built. Armstrong... let me see, I'm trying to see where Armstrong was... I think where Benjamin Graves School is now.

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That's where Armstrong was located. So we had only two high schools that was Maggie L. Walker, and Armstrong. But Armstrong was the first high school I remember being down there. The first on Leigh [00:12:51 unc.]... somewhere in that area. Walker was the lady that built... and it seems to me odd that all these things were happening in the 1930s.

LB: Mhm. What else do you remember about Richmond during the 1930s?

VJ: What do I remember about Richmond? I always thought of Richmond as being a very flat city. Nothing spectacular about it. Nothing at all. It really needed development and so way back and then both things started being developed. But I remember the Taylor factory that was at the end of West Moore Street. And then there was a factory right there at Lombardy Street that was called... I think it was called the British Factory. Well one or the other... Both... One was Taylor, and one was British. One was at the end of Moore Street West and the factory, it's rebuilt now, at Lombardy and Leigh.

LB: Now what did you like to do as a child when you weren't in school? Who did you like to spend time with?

VJ: Say that again.

LB: What did you like to do for fun as a child?

VJ: What did I like to do?

LB: Yeah, what did you like to do?

VJ: I was a great reader. And don't ask me how I learned to read. Nobody taught me. It was just natural. So I did a lot of novel reading. And that's what I did. I'd curl up in a big chair and I would read sometime almost all day long... reading novels... I didn't read children's books. I read novels. 'Cause I could read.

LB: And were you one of the older children in your household? Or younger?

VJ: Then, I would think, I might have been the youngest one at that time. But there were several motherless and fatherless children in that household. Including my mother, too, which really was the worker in that household. And the provider sometimes for thirteen people.

LB: That must've been hard.

VJ: Including her brothers! It... I guess it was hard but I always said, "Black folks were the best budgetaries in the world." We have to budget and we have to make it off a little of nothing. The salaries wasn't very good. The women worked in the whites' family. And they had to really do all the work. Because the whites had to work out. And so the black women that was workin' for them, they had to really, if you want to know the truth—black people up there they raised those white children. Because the mothers and the fathers had to to work out, or they had business or whatever. But they would be busy so they needed somebody to cook, wash, take care of their

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children, and do all that kind of stuff. And I think they did it well, 'cause some very fine people came from out of that area [sic.]. We didn't talk much about race or white and black in our family. My grandmother a religious person and we talked more about Bible and educational... We knew there were people that were different people, like the white people, we knew that. But we didn't talk about white people, black people, nothing like that. People was just people, in our family. [00:17:55 unc.].

So all of us, all of the girls, it was a lot of girls in that family now. All of us grew up on West Moore Street. When we went to high school... They built Maggie Walker school during that time. I don't remember if it was 1936 or what it was but they built Maggie L. Walker. And then took half of the students out of Armstrong, which was down on West Leigh Street near 1st or Prentis or something like this, street on... as you go down Leigh Street, you got to the Armstrong School just before that. And where Benjamin Graves... I think Benjamin Graves is still there. Where Benjamin Graves is now on Leigh Street was the first Armstrong School that I knew about. Where the Maggie L. Walker School is right now, is the high school I went to.

LB: What do you remember about high school?

VJ: I loved high school. In fact I like school. I was reading even before I went to elementary school. It just came natural. I could read. So I liked the athletic program and all. Maggie Walker had... what did they call that school... it was high school but it taught all kinds of things that prepared the black students for life or for whatever. And they took part of the students from Armstrong, but at that time that was the only high school we had, and they took part of those students and brought 'em up to Maggie Walker School after they built it there. And that was in the 30s I believe, the 1930s. Right there at the beginning of Moore Street and the end of Maggie L. Walker School, was the church I attended. It was called First Union Baptist Church and we used to walk to school I remember now that I'm thinking about it. We used to have to walk from West Moore and Leigh about three blocks to the elementary school called Moore Street School. The principal, I will never forget him, his name was... uh oh... not thinking of it now... Mr. Moesely or Moseby or something like that. He was such a nice person. I attended that school until I went to high school. They built Maggie L. Walker during that time. We had, I think, four years of high school. So anyway, they built Maggie L. Walker during that time. I ended up being a student at Maggie L. Walker. I like sports so I played a little basketball. But I did a lot of reading. And I didn't do a lot of playing and that and all. My cousins, they would be out there playing 'cause I could hear them, and that was fine with me. But I would be curled up in a chair reading novels.

LB: Who was your favorite novelist then? What novels did you like to read?

VJ: I had a favorite. And I think he wrote some mysteries. I can't think of his name now. But I think he was writing mysteries and other literature too. But right now I can't think of his name. And I think that maybe he's still a little popular but been dead a long time. But I've picked up the paper once in a while and I've seen his name attached to something. Can't think of it right now. But I was there when they built Maggie L. Walker, where it is now. And we saw it going up and all so that was the high school I went to. Armstrong at that time was down on Leigh Street where, I think it's Benjamin Graves there now.

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LB: Mhm.

VJ: Way up Prentis and Leigh?

LB: Now where did you do your shopping? Because my impression is when you lived where you lived in Moore Street, that was a very... there was a segregated neighborhood. Where did you get your groceries?

VJ: Where did I do what?

LB: Get the groceries and things that you needed? Your groceries? Your clothes?

VJ: There were two neighborhood groceries up in that area. First there was only one. And that was called Benny's Store. They were Jews. Trying to think of their last name. They were very friendly. And right now... let me see... it will probably come to me. But I know they had like two daughters and one son. The son was named Benny and one of the daughters, I can remember her well, her name was Dorothy. That's the store that we all shopped at. They would allow them to shop and pay later. They would buy their food and pay on Saturday because most of the time they were being paid on Friday at the job so. So Benny Bernstein. Bernstein is the last name. So the Bernstein's, they were very nice. They were Jewish. They were very nice. They allowed the people to buy the grocery and pay them later. They, they were really into the neighbors and into the neighborhood. I don't think that store is up on West Moore Street now. Maybe.

LB: Yeah, I don't think so anymore.

VJ: A store was there. You know where Maggie Walker is now?

LB: Mhm.

VJ: At the end of Maggie Walker it's still some kind of store on that side where that factory building is.

M: Mhm.

VJ: On the right side going east, right there at the end of Maggie L. Walker School, and that store was called Cantor.

LB: Oh okay. That was Eric Cantor's family.

VJ: And I think one or two... Dorothy married this man.

LB: [00:26:54 unc. His aunt?]

VJ: Can't remember his name now. But she married this man and he opened a store down on Dinneen and Leigh Street right at the... not quite at the end of Maggie L. Walker. Because

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there's a residence going from Moore and Leigh right there at the end of Maggie L. Walker School now. And bypass that and you got down to another street that came from what we called "the hill," up there where Virginia University is. The tracks were then between that and West Moore Street. So we walked to school every day. We walked I don't know four or five blocks from where Walker School is, down to where it is now, going to school. But Moore Street Elementary was on Moore Street between Lombardy and... I can't remember the name... but where the factory is now... It's not a factory now! I noticed that not too long ago. They have built some more onto it siding from Broad Street all the way out to Leigh Street.

LB: And it's apartments now isn't it?

VJ: It's a grocery store now.

LB: Oh okay.

VJ: And it's right at Lombardy. I don't know if the front starts there... I think the front starts...

LB: ... maybe a little further back.

VJ: Yeah, uh huh.

LB: That Kroger, yeah.

VJ: And go to the side and the front of the building, I think, part of the front of that building is on Broad Street now.

LB: Now I know that you said that your grandmother really liked to focus on Bible readings and things like that.

VJ: My grandmother was a very religious person.

LB: Yeah.

VJ: She was born handicapped. She had what they call today "razor legs." You might have heard of that? Razor legs. The legs, the legs was sort of crooked. But at the edge of their leg at the front it was sharp like that, like a... and they call them today, I think they call 'em "razor legs." And my grandmother was always handicapped. She was always a grandmother. You know what you read the stories in the books and you see the grandmothers with the aprons and all and the long dresses and all? My grandmother, because of her legs I'm sure, I never saw her in anything short. It was always long. And she made her... She always wore two pieces. And she made her clothes. She made the skirts and she made the blouses. And that's what I remember her... She was a grandmother from the books, from you know the readers we used to have in the beginning, she was that kind of grandmother. Because they picture grandmother with the long skirts and things on in those books. So my grandmother, to me, although she had a beautiful, young-looking face, she was always old. To me she was always old. She was a real grandmother.

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LB: Now there was so much going on in Richmond in the 1930s, you know, people marching in the streets and the strikes and...

VJ: My daughter did some of that.

LB: Yeah? Zenoria?

VJ: Mhm.

LB: Mhm.

VJ: She marched with some of 'em in Richmond. I... I... Because I was working and all, I didn't participate in everything. But I was in civil groups and things like that. I participated in those things.

LB: So tell me more about that. So you graduated Walker High School and then you got married. Tell me how you met your husband.

VJ: Now how did I meet Bob? He lived not far from me. But he lived down near Main Street. He lived down in that area. There used to be a radio station called WRTD. We were singers and we loved singing, particularly church music and all. So the girls and boys in my family, we used to go down to this radio station that was called WRTD. I don't know if they gotta WRTD now but they may have. And we used to go down there and sing. You couldn't see us because there wasn't none TV's then. But we used to go down there singing, and it would be... you know radio you could hear it in your home. And we did a lot of that. It wasn't a lot going on in the neighborhood except for the church. And then that was First Union Baptist Church, it's still my church. And it's still up in that area right there at the end of Maggie L. Walker School, that brick church was the church and Sunday school and that's where all my religious training, except for in my house, was. Right up in that area. And I was brought up in that area until I got married.

LB: So you were up at the radio station, singing, and is that where you met Bob?

VJ: That's where I met Bob. Because he was living down like near 9th Street. And all that area is all redeveloped and almost like down in there. But he was living down in that area. He was singing in a quartet. And the quartet would come on TV. Every Sunday they had religious programs and all on, called WRTD, I believe, radio station. So we would go down there and we'd be singing and our voices would be in the homes. We loved that, we thought that was great. From that, I always, my grandmother brought us up in the church. You had to go to church whether you wanted to go or not. You had to go. And so we attended Sunday school at that church right there at the end of Maggie Walker School, now, it's called First Union Baptist Church. I still attend First Union Baptist Church but not up in that area. It's over now on Dill Road.

LB: So Bob was in his quartet at the radio station. Bob was singing in a quartet at the radio station.

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VJ: That's how I met him...

LB: Okay.

VJ: ...'cause he was one of the participants down there. He was singing in a quartet... During that time, Richmond... Sometimes it's on my mind and then it—gone. The Harmonizing Four, they were [00:35:27 unc.]. The Harmonizing Four and the Richmond Jubilee, those two quartets was very popular in Richmond. They would be singing in churches mostly and churches all around in different areas of Richmond would get them to sing, to help raise funds for their church. And they would give them a little portion. Sometimes they wouldn't even take the money. But they did it because they liked it. They sang at First Union. We call it Moore Street Baptists on Leigh Street now but it's still there.

LB: I know that church.

VJ: Mhm. But we always attended First Union, which was a brick church there at the end of Walker School. I don't know what they call it now. But it was First Union Baptist Church. I still attend First Union Baptist Church, which is now on Dill Road. Our whole family attended the same church.

LB: So what year did you get married?

VJ: I think it was 1943.

LB: Okay, so during the war years.

VJ: Hmm?

LB: During the... while the war was going on.

VJ: My husband served in the service in the war and he served overseas and he was injured in a [00:37:15 unc. port? board?] accident somewhere they were traveling, the soldiers were traveling. But he was on this boat, or ship, whatever, and it crashed and at that point, after he got so he could travel, they brought him back to Virginia. They had him, I think it was, it was Hampton... I'm trying to think of the name of the hospital. But he stayed in that hospital right along because he was injured while they were on something called maneuver. He was injured then. And it took some time to recover from that.

LB: Did you already have your children then?

VJ: I had two children. I married him in 1944. '43 or '44 I married him so I had two children by him. I'm tryin' to think. I didn't have those children when I was on Moore Street, it was after I had married him and I got married in I think it was 1944 or something. It was in the 1940s when I married him. We stayed married for about five years and that... it was a mutual kinda thing. Times was hard. Men could not find jobs so that's why I think a lot of stealing and stuff went on during that time because they had to feed their family and they weren't about to let the family

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starve. My grandfather and my uncles, my mother's brothers, they all worked at this one place. In fact, most black men worked at this place. It was called [00:39:43 unc. Kyooms? Q's?] Meat Company, over there on near... Overbrook Road somewhere and that's where they were located. I think the George Myers Meat Company or something was developed in one of those buildings and I think you can still get the sausage and stuff over at the market now. I don't know if it's still in their name or anything. Back then. I don't even know if they still have a company. But it was called George Meyers Meat Company located over there on Overbrook Road, over in that area. Most of the men that was lucky enough to get a job then worked at this place called Kingham's. And I think we still have a Kingham's.

LB: Could be.

VJ: Up in that same area up on Hermitage, where the tracks and all are. And most of them, like my mother, worked in a factory. There was a Taylor Factory, a British Factory. Taylor was at the end of Moore Street, that end at Moore Street. Right up there. It used to be a brick wall that came out from... it was situated on the side of Broad... but up there at Broad and Hermitage, it used to be a wall that sort of came out like that and was really obstructed because the cars would have to come and they could hardly see how to get around that, you know, how to get on Leigh Street. They could go straight to Hermitage. But where that factory, called Taylor Factory, they had to make a short little left turn or something up in there. But I remember when they built Maggie L. Walker back in the 30s I believe. Armstrong was still down there near Prentis and Leigh. At the time we only had those two high schools.

LB: Now Mrs. Jackson, can I bring you forward again to the time when you married for about five years to Bob Jackson. And after he got out of the hospital it sounds like he was struggling to find work and you had the two little children, both daughters?

VJ: I had two children then.

LB: Yeah.

VJ: And so we talked about it and jobs was not to be had in Richmond. They had a hard time getting jobs. At one time before Bob left Richmond, he was working at Thalhimers and he was driving delivery truck delivering the clothes because Thalhimers used to deliver people's clothes.

LB: I didn't know that.

VJ: You didn't? Well they used to. You'd go and buy it and set a delivery. They'd take the address and all and they'd deliver the clothes to you, or whatever you bought, they'd deliver it. So Bob was one of those delivery persons. But I actually met him down at the radio station called WRTD. And there was a Mr. Mitchell that started a program down there called "Richmond on the Air," I believe. But a man had just recently died. His father started this program, this radio program. We used to go down there and sing and all and he used to come into the homes in where we were singing. And that was a man that recently died named Tom Mitchell. He just recently died some months ago. He hasn't been dead too long. His father started this program called "Richmond on the Air—WRTD." I remember that was the name of

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the radio station. WRTD—Richmond on the Air. Or something like that. We used to go down there and have our rehearsals. And then on Sundays it would come out on the radio.

LB: So now you met Bob Jackson there and you got married '43, '44. And then he went off to war, was wounded, and came back. Did you have your children before he went to war? Or did that come a little later?

VJ: No. When I went off to work... I'm tryin' to think, how did I get to D.C.? I finished high school. And I think I accepted a job in D.C. or something like that.

LB: What kind of job?

VJ: It was with the federal government. I was a clerk at the time. And at that time they had what I call "antique machines" so I learned to operate one of those machines that was one of the first letter counters. It counted letters.

LB: Ah. So for the postal service?

VJ: Mhm. But this was in D.C. And Census Bureau, that's where I worked, at Census Bureau in D.C. And they had all these different departments and I was working in what they called the business department. I remember my boss saying very well. I remember his last name. His name was Mr. Herbert. He was such a nice person. So they sent me, when I got the job, they sent me to this... to his department and after a day or so Mr. Herbert said to me, "This is not the place for you. I'm not gonna let you stay in here." It seemed that it had a lot of workers in there, they weren't quite too good. They may have been good in there but mentally or something. It was something about 'em he didn't see in me. Because I came from a religious home. He didn't see their disposition or they way they were in character, he didn't see that in me. So he said that, "I can't let you stay in here." So he sent me to another department and that was in Census Bureau in Washington D.C. So I stayed there for about five years, maybe near seven because when I wanted to come back home, then that's what I did, I came back to Richmond. I married Bob in 1944? From there I just went [00:48:14 unc. budding?] or whatever I did.

LB: Tell me about all the things you did after that. So Bob and you separated around 1939 or so?

VJ: Well jobs were not to be had in Richmond at the time. Difficult for anybody to get a job really. The economy was bad and that was during the time, I believe, Reagan was president.

LB: Well that was much later because we're still in the late 40s, right? So that would've been what Truman? Eisenhower? During that time maybe? Wouldn't Harry Truman have been president then?

VJ: I remember Truman as the president but I can't remember whether it was at that time. But I know a friend of ours was in New York and he said there were jobs available there. And that was back in the 40s. So we talked about it. He couldn't get a job here. So he went to New York to get a job because his friend told him there were some jobs available where he was working. So we agreed that that is what he should do. After that I had the two children. One was about two. And

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maybe one was one or three and two something like that. But one walking and all. And so we went to the Broad Street station, saw him off, I packed him up and everything so he could go there to a job. When the train rolled off my little senses spoke to me and said, "This gonna end this." That I didn't think that we were gonna stay married. Not because of what he did 'cause he did the best he could. I just didn't... Something just... My senses told me that we would not get back together as husband and wife at that time. And we didn't. We kept good relationship because that had to be for my two children. But I didn't think that we would be living together anymore. It's just something that popped up in my mind all a sudden. This is the end of this, you know. And not because of anything he did. Or anything I did. That just came into my memory that this is the end of your marriage.

LB: Did he stay in New York then after that?

VJ: Yeah, he lived in New York a long time. He lived in New York for years before he got by. But we always stayed in contact. And my children had to know who their father was so I never let them forget him. He would visit and all like that. They loved him. He loves them. I think he start doin' real bad or something employment-wise in New York. And I was doing so good in Richmond.

LB: What were you doing working in Richmond? 'Cause you had left the Census Bureau...

VJ: Well when I was in D.C., I worked for Census Bureau. And when I left D.C. to come back home, that's when I had my first child, Zenoria. To come back home when I left D.C. I'm trying to think what did I do... and where did I work... I worked in Census Bureau when I was in Washington. I don't think I went straight to work or whatever. But that might've been like 1957 or way back that time. My mind was on raising my two children is all. And I did that. And let me see who did I go to. I did not go to work until after my children I thought they were old enough to leave. I was not going to leave my children with anybody to take care of or anything, not even my mom, wouldn't leave 'em with her either. So I didn't work for a long period of time. And after they grew to the point where I could trust them to be where they were or however, then that's when I went to work. But when I was in D.C. I did work at Census Bureau for about five years.

LB: So you were... so Bob was sort of supporting you from New York. And you were staying home with the children.

VJ: He was in New York and I was in Richmond. And so we didn't get back together. I was doing very well on my own. I... what came to my mind I wanted to tell you and it slipped me just that quick. That's what old age... Don't grow old.

LB: I'm hoping to grow old.

VJ: If you can prevent. If you don't grow old you know what happens, you die young. But anyway, I... we didn't really get back together but we had a good relationship for the children. Not necessarily for the children, but for us. We had very good relationship going on. He would come to Richmond and go on back to New York. He had a job in New York. Later on... Bob

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was injured for one thing, in service. They were on a maneuver somewhere and the ship crashed. But he was lucky enough to be alive. So they sent him back to Richmond and he was in a... what's the name of that hospital over there? Hampton. He was in the hospital. And they called me and let me know that he was at that hospital in Richmond so I went on down there. We didn't go back together. We didn't go... for no particular reason. We just didn't get back together.

LB: So there was the 1950s, you were raising your two girls alone.

VJ: I had a girl and a boy.

LB: A girl and a boy?

VJ: Mhm, a son. That's his picture right up there by that lamp. By that light. He was in the Navy Airforce.

LB: And Marvin you should feel free to ask question too since you know Mrs. Jackson so well.

M Okay. I'll ask as you continue to move forward.

VJ: I met him and Kim... you had one child then didn't you?

M: Yeah.

VJ: His first child. And since I wanted to be home with my children, then I took in some children. So I think your child was the first child I had here.

M: No, he was the first one that slept in the bed with you.

VJ: Huh? Yeah! Yeah. No other child. And I had right many children in this house but little Marvin was the only one. I put a bed upstairs in my bedroom and all so he could be up there with me. I didn't want him to be downstairs or anywhere else. But be up there with me. And we talk about that sometimes now. And Little Marvin was the first child that ever slept in my room. He's a grown man. From there one thing led to another. I'm trying to think what did I do when I first went... After I would not accept a job until my children... 'til I felt safe to leave 'em. Not that it isn't safe, to feel safe with my grandmother or anything 'cause she took care of us very well. But I had to have a feeling.

LB: Now were you still living in the Carver neighborhood around Moore Street back then?

VJ: Where they what?

LB: Where were you living at this time?

VJ: At that time? When I was living up by the school?

LB: Yeah. Where you still there when you had your children?

00:58:33

VJ: 1957? I thought way back in there. When they... Oh, let me see. When they first built... I think they built Maggie L. Walker in 1936.

LB: So when you had your children, they were going to school. I know Zenoria got involved in the Civil Rights movement very early. And can you tell me what was going on, what changes were going on in the City back then?

VJ: In the Civil Rights movement?

LB: Yeah. Back in the 1950s. What was happening in the City of Richmond? What kind of changes were coming?

VJ: And war was going on I believe, way back then. I didn't take a job until I felt safe leaving my children.

LB: And then what job did you take? When you left your children, what job did you take?

VJ: What happened?

LB: Where were you working when you left your children and could go take a job?

VJ: What I did, because of the time frame and all, they had to go to school, I got a job in the school cafeteria. Because in the summertime they were off I would be home with my children. Nobody else gonna be there with my children. You know my mother was there but my mother worked. And I was gonna be with my children. So I worked in the wintertime and I took a job at the school cafeteria. 'Cause that let me go home when my children would be home. And I worked for the Richmond Public Schools. It was City of Richmond Public Schools at that time. Before I could... sometime at night I took college courses or other kind of courses to further my education and all like that. But my mind was always focused on the growth of my children. I did what I had to do that was going to develop my children into the kind of children I wanted them to be, or the kind of adults I would want them to be. My son, he moved an apartment over in the southside area. Philip Morris was then... first Philip Morris was down there on 20th Street on Main Street, East Main. And then Philip Morris built over 'cross the river I call it, goin' into the Southside area, they built a building over there. My mother worked in Philip Morris when it was down on Main Street... on 20th Street, somewhere down in that area. She used to do her shopping and I can remember during that time that I would have to meet my mother every Friday because that's when she would go shopping or something like that. And sometimes I would get there a little bit early and I would just stand on the outside or if the weather is bad I would stand in the door waiting from them to get off so I can be... the streetcars were still running then. Did you know anything about the streetcars?

LB: Yeah.

VJ: Yeah. The streetcars was running during that time. So every Friday I would have to meet her down there at Philip Morris when it was on 20th Street, East Main, down in that area. I would

01:03:04

have to meet her every Friday, and I did that and I was just a little tot. But she trusted me like that.

LB: So was she one of the tobacco workers who went on strike in the 1930s? There were those big tobacco worker strikes in Richmond. Do you remember that?

VJ: She worked there when it was on 20th and Main Street. That was the first Philip Morris I knew anything about. Then when Philip Morris decided to build or go over in the Southside area, she was one of the first they took over there with her... with them. And she always worked in the factory and it was Taylor Factory at the end of West Moore Street when she was working in there. And so when Taylor Factory called it in they opened... Let me see, they opened Philip Morris down there on 20th and Main, somewhere down in that area. And she worked down there. So she worked for Philip Morris for most of her life. I used to have to meet her on Fridays 'cause we would go shopping or whatever you know. I would be there waiting for her on the outside a lot of times, waiting for her to come out. I remember everybody in Philip Morris had to wear uniforms. And that uniform... everybody, all of them looked alike. Blue and white. Had a white collar and a blue body. My mother... boy she kept that... They [01:05:05 unc. didn't] really believe in a lot of starch. The clothes had to be clean and stiff! With starch you know! Everybody in Philip Morris were just as neat and clean. They had to wear those uniforms. At that time she was only sweeping. That was her job—sweeping Philip Morris. She did that for years before... In fact my mother retired from Philip Morris. And this was after Philip Morris, I believe, moved over in the Southside area. That's when she retired. She retired from Philip Morris. My mother, she worked in... most of the work she ever did was in the factory but she was a great seamstress and all. She used to make our clothing. You would've thought that they were factory-made. She was so good at sewing.

My mother's sisters, they died earlier and left babies. My mother had to take care of them. Because she had two children of her own to take care of and three children from sisters that died. All of them became the responsibility of my mother. At that time Philip Morris was down on 20th Street somewhere in that area. They took her on over—she was a good worker—over into the Southside area when they moved for the cigarette factory or something over there on that Southside area. She retired from Philip Morris in... I don't know how my mother made it through but she did. Nothin' but God help her. Because she had to take care of... a lot of time her own brothers because they couldn't find jobs, her sister, and all of those motherless children. She only had two of us but it was about thirteen people in that four-room house. Her brothers and sisters...

LB: That's a lot.

VJ: ...her child, her two children, and the motherless children. But my mother never complained about it. She did what she had to do it and she did it well. But she could sew. She didn't even have a machine. But when she made those clothes you would have thought a machine made it. We had something called back stitch.

LB: Mhm I know back stitch.

01:08:26

VJ: My mother could backstitch and you couldn't tell whether the machine did it or she did it. It was just that good. She used to make our clothes and she bought some too. But there was several girls in the family, motherless. She had to take care of all of them. Even some of her brothers when they were out of jobs. Because back then you couldn't even find a job and men couldn't find jobs. They were firing more than they were hiring because they weren't making the money and all so they had to cut costs, and that's the way they cut it. But we survived. My grandmother... My favorite is that my grandmother could take a couple of cabbage and she had a big pot she cooked in it. And she could feed like thirteen people off that. We never was hungry. I don't know why we never was hungry feeding thirteen people out of one pot of cabbage but she could do that. She was a good cook. But my grandmother was born handicapped. She had now what people were callin' razor legs. And it would be sharp on the front like that.

LB: She must have been born almost before the Civil War. When was she born?

VJ: My grandmother... She was ninety somethin'... I don't remember when she was born. I got the record though. But my grandmother... how old was she when she died? I think she was in her seventies. She had never worked a day in her life because she couldn't.

LB: How old were you when she died?

VJ: I'm thinkin' I had been married. Or was I? It's been so long ago. Probably in my 30s or in my 20s or 30s. And I had two children then.

LB: So let's bring you forward a little bit. You're raising your children. You're working in Richmond at the school cafeteria. What do you remember about the kind of changes that were taking place in Richmond?

VJ: Around that time?

LB: Yeah.

VJ: It was still very... What's the word for it? Discriminating. Very much like that. We could work in the home, take care of their children. They trusted us to... I never worked in a home because I promised myself I wouldn't. My aunts they used to work for some nice people. But they still had that segregated kind of mind. The street cars was running then. They had those things that went up in the air. The street cars they had some kind of rod, that's what they operated by. We had tracks in the street that the street cars ran on. We could not sit in the front. I don't care if it was an empty seat back there and there weren't no seats back there in the back for us to sit... Empty seats could be in the front but we could not sit there because they were... We either stood up, or sat maybe three in a seat, or whatever you know. They had these little rods or something that hung down from the ceiling of the street car and if you had to stand up you almost needed one of those things to keep from maybe falling down in the street car when it'd stop and start off you know like that. If we'd got on and there was no seats there on the street car in the back for us to sit—we just had to stand up... when there empty seats at the front. And I remember thinking to myself... There was a lady that was working in the home there. They seemed to be very kind toward whatever. But I remember getting on that street car one day I was

01:13:55

still pretty young. Getting on the street car. Her boss was on the streetcar at the time. She was just getting off from work. She got on that streetcar and there wasn't any seats in the back for her to sit. But there were seats in the front that she could have sat on but they didn't allow it. One of the people that she was working for was sitting in one of those seats. The seat next to her was empty, but she could not sit there because of the rules and things that we had to endure, you know. I was a very thinkin' child and I didn't like that. I said, "Mnm. I would never work for one of 'em." That's why I said I wasn't gonna work in their homes. And I wasn't gonna take care of their children. I love their children but I was not gonna work and take care of one. 'Cause if they treat this lady, that had just left their home, taking care of their children, cooking their food, and washing their clothes and things... if they could treat her that way—how would they treat me? I decided within myself... I don't know if I even shared it with anybody but I decided within myself that I would never work in a home of that, you know, and I didn't. Whenever I got a job or anything like that I always try to get a job where there was group workin'. And that's what I did. I saw when they built Maggie L. Walker, I graduated from Maggie L. Walker. I spent some time in the Union of...

LB: Virginia Union?

VJ: I didn't finish that because I had to take care of my children.

LB: What did you study when you were at Virginia Union?

VJ: Early Child Development. I like children. And I stayed in that all... That's why I'm here. That's why I start caring for children in my home. Whether I had to psych myself into believing that's what I wanted to do so it took me a while to decide this is what I was gonna do. I knew that once I got children in there there may be children that will break up things... you know how children can be. They're inquisitive. But I knew you could teach them not to break. So I spent time teaching the children the right way. I wanted them to learn everything they could learn about the home and the basics and all. But I wanted them to respect property. So a child that I can remember ever broke anything in my house. So guess who broke 'em? The adults. That's the truth. Whole lotta the stuff you see here and there I had in here when Marvin's child was in here. I see those sometimes and when they come you see them go up to the step and look upstairs and all. So maybe they go upstairs, see if things still the same, and most everything is still the same isn't it?

M: Yeah

VJ: In this house.

LB: How many children did you take care of in this house?

VJ: Oh, many. But the State only allowed you from the very beginning you could keep three. Then they raised it to, I think, five. And then it went up to six. I don't think it got any higher than six. Maybe. Maybe a little higher but I don't know about it. But I had many children in this house.

01:18:32

LB: When did you move to this house? How long have you been living here?

VJ: 1957, I believe.

LB: Okay. And did you start taking in children in 1990?

VJ: 1957.

LB: Oh! 1957, okay.

VJ: Mhm. But I didn't start taking 'em in in the beginning. I lived in here a good while before deciding that... Tiny Angels was closed. That was doing Reagan-omic time. President Reaganomic. The economy was bad then for everybody I think. So when the daycare center I was working at... a center... it was planned right in the South called Tiny Angels Daycare Center and it's still maybe around I don't know because somebody told me that somebody had some center, they was tryin' to name it Tiny Angel Daycare Center. We were up... That was when... when President Reaganomics was still... Reaganomic... President Reagan was still the president. I'm trying to think how I managed it. Anyway, I was working at a daycare development program called Tiny Angels. Me and my best friend, we named that daycare center and it ran on for about... It was a program that the federal government paid for, for better or worse, paid for. We were located right down there on Chimborazo Boulevard towards that center where that store is now. I think when Reaganomics... that's what we called it then... when that sort of ended, things got better.

Then I kept working in child development. I'd say when Tiny Angels had to close down because of the economy and all, that's when Reagan was there... that... Where are these children goin'? I couldn't bring 'em all in my house. But I knew that these children was gonna be without daycare and all the other things that the federal government might have sponsored for them. Where are our children—in Tiny Angels—where would they be going? Then after thinking about it and psyching myself into believin' I could handle it... I opened my house for daycare for children. At that point the State only allowed you to get. I think they allowed you to get three children. But the City allowed you to have five. But I worked with both, the City and the... So I had from time to time anywhere from five to six children in this house. But I had to become a child to take care of them. Because I just want them to grow up basically how a child should grow up. Not put them in the center where they were not getting the kind of home training—they're like openin' the doors, shuttin' the doors, playin' with the pots and pans makin' all that noise and stuff like that. That's after I thought about that I brought some children into this house. And I think the State at the time allowed me to have three children from the beginning, then they raised it all higher. Not only for me, but it was a state requirement and now I think that they can have as many as seven children in their home now. I'm not sure. But anyway, that's what I did. Because I love working with the children.

M: I wanted you to talk a little bit about your work with Model City.

VJ: Model City was a federal government's program. They called it Model City. It was a program designed to help the hard-core people. They put some people in school—some that

01:24:17

wasn't in school they got 'em back into school. Some couldn't go to college, they put 'em in college, gave 'em college education and all. I know a few people that became teachers because of Model City. And I know some of them that didn't even want people to know that Model City did this for them. Now I thought that was terrible.

LB: When was the Model Cities program?

VJ: A federal government project...

LB: What time? What time period was it in?

VJ: 1940... you remember that? 194.... I'm trying to think when it ended really...

LB: Well we could go back to that.

VJ: Right now I can't think of the date.

LB: So what were you doing with the Model Cities program?

VJ: I... when I first went there went from by way of the employment office because then I decided I could leave my children some. But I wanted a job that was going to allow me to be home with my children and all. So I was doing... I had taken a lot of child development courses and all. So I was actually working with children. Tiny Angel was a daycare center, a comprehensive daycare program which included dealing with the parent, training them to take care of their children and all. [**LB:** And so that's...] I was with Tiny Angels and I was one of those persons that had to go into the rooms and train and have training programs and all. These people that thought they knew how to take care of children... you weren't born knowing how to take care of children. So they had to be taught the proper way of taking care of children. So I was responsible for that program.

LB: So you were running the whole program here?

VJ: No I won't run it. We had a director and that director name was Mr. James [01:26:56 last name unc. Dean?]. He's still alive today. He was one of the... as I learned... he was one of the first daycare childcare director in the program and the government was paying for daycare for children, so parents could go back to school or go to college or go to work. It was a great program. I'm sorry they couldn't keep it up. But it started out the federal government as far as I know was the ones that [01:27:43 unc. claimed?] it. But it started out. I know that where I was. A lot of the plan was done right there on my floor. That was during... I'm trying to think of the name of the project that the... it was a federal government project. And we had meeting and worked for hardcore people. It was people that just wanted to learn more, couldn't go to school and all that kinda stuff. It helped to train the hardcore and put students back in school and things. It was a very good program. And it was called Model City. Model City program.

M: Can you talk a little bit about your community and civic work?

VJ: Hmm?

M: Your community and civic work.

VJ: Civic workers?

M: Voters registration...

VJ: I can't hear you.

M: Your community and civic work, the things that you did with voting?

VJ: Voting?

M: Uh huh.

VJ: Come over where I can hear you better. Look, I got my new hearing aid in but it ain't you know. I'm deaf in the left ear, always have been. But I got a new hearing aid not too long ago. I don't know if it's doing me too much good. I think it is because I'm hearing you all better.

M: Can you talk about your civic engagement? The stuff that you did in the community as far as voting? Voter registration?

VJ: The voters registration? What about it?

M: Can you talk about that? And some of the people that you worked with?

VJ: The Voters Registration, I'm trying to think of the names now... John Howlith [unsure of name spellings in this paragraph] was one of them. Charlie Howard was now still... I think Charlie Howard is still working for the City. I'm not sure. Mr. D was one of 'em but he came with us. And... Charlie Howard... Mr. Dean... They used city employers... employees... to help to train the people over in the East End area within the areas that they chose, you know, for what they call "hardcore people," students that they quit school and all—they worked to get all of that taken care of. And I think they gave out... I wish they had that kinda program going now.

LB: And so you were involved with registering voters?

VJ: Hmm?

LB: You were involved with registering voters then.

VJ: Yeah... I used to do a lot of things. I was involved in a lot of things. I stayed involved.

LB: Was this during the 1950s? 1960s?

VJ: Mhm.

01:31:26 **LB:** Were you registering voters during the 1950s or 1960s? What time period was that in? That you were doing the...

VJ: In 19-what?

LB: Well was it in the 1950s that you were doing Voter Registration? Or the 1960s?

VJ: Probably was the 60s. Probably the 60s. But I think I was... Let me see... you remember when... my mind doesn't work like it used to. Can't think of it. I'm trying to think of what it is... When they were voting and all. Zenoria used to take part in the marches and all. But I would be home doing what a mother would be doing and all. She just wanted to do it. That was fine with me. So she would march with them and all—go against Thalhimers and Miller Rhode. They didn't want us to come through the front door. They wanted us to buy their products though. But we had to go around the back and come through the back door. I can remember going down some little steps and all to buy the clothes and we couldn't really buy the clothes, all the nice things that they had upstairs. We had to buy our things from the basement. So you know who wouldn't buy from Thalhimers? Not me, and I was just in my teens alright. So I'm never buyin' from Thalhimers. And they had the kinda clothes I liked. And the only time I would go into Thalhimers to get something woulda maybe been Christmas or something. Because their clothes fitted me. They were selling petites and I didn't have to hem 'em or anything like that, just buy them and put 'em on you know. But Miller Rhode didn't allow us to come in their front doors. We had to go walk around, go to the back door, and come through the back door. Thalhimers was a little better better than it but not much. Consequently they didn't get a lot of my money. And I was like that when I was young. But that was the way I was thinking. They couldn't get none of my money. I can't go in there and try my clothes on if... When they did start letting you come in there, you couldn't even try the clothes on. You had to pick your size out, but you couldn't try them on. Eventually they did it so you could try your clothes on. I don't know what they did with that. What I'm thinking is they took those tried on clothes and put 'em on sale. That was my thought. I know they used to have a lot of things on sale you know. But they didn't even want us to try clothes on in the beginning. But when things got real tough during that time, they were willing for us to come in there and buy some of those clothes and all. Because they were losing money.

M: Okay.

VJ: Because times was tough not only for us, but it was tough for everybody during the time Reagan was president. It was a tough time for everybody.

M: Okay, Zenoria has a question.

VJ: Hmm?

M: Zenoria is on the phone.

VJ: I didn't hear that.

01:35:52

Zenoria Jackson: Hey Mommy.

VJ: Hello.

ZJ: Hey Mommy!

VJ: Hi Doll.

ZJ: Hey Mommy...

VJ: Yes?

ZJ: You didn't tell her about the Model City Policy Board.

VJ: Didn't tell 'em what?

ZJ: About the Model City Policy Board and how you all created Tiny Angels.

VJ: I might hear better without the hearing aid. Hold on! I'm gonna take this hearing aid out my ear so I can hear you.

ZJ: I don't want you do that.

VJ: I didn't tell what?

ZJ: [01:36:27 unc.]

VJ: Hello?

ZJ: Mommy.

VJ: Huh?

ZJ: Okay, So I'm just... I was just asking you about the Model City Policy Board, the Crusade for Voters around that time and Henry Marsh became the mayor and all.

VJ: Henry March what?

ZJ: When he became mayor.

VJ: When he became mayor?

ZJ: And you all were doing the policy board and...

VJ: Well... I was very involved in politics then.

01:37:06

ZJ: Yes ma'am.

VJ: Mhm. No I didn't talk about politics.

ZJ: No. I want you... I want you to... You know when you started to go at it with Tiny Angels and how you all worked, how the policy worked

VJ: How we started Tiny Angels?

ZJ: Yes ma'am.

VJ: I told her a little about how the planning had got started in my living room floor. I don't think I mentioned Henry and...

ZJ: Oh you didn't tell...

VJ: And Elmer C. and all of those people that was in on the plans.

ZJ: Okay. And who else was on that policy board?

VJ: The policy board?

ZJ: Yes ma'am.

VJ: I can't remember all of those people then 'cause it was a large policy board.

ZJ: Okay.

VJ: And the City sent their workers with the expertise 'cause we did not have it. And the City sent their workers there to help us through the Model City program.

ZJ: Uh huh?

VJ: Mhm.

ZJ: Okay. So when you were working with Crusade for Voters, do you remember when they first started?

VJ: I didn't like them too much because I thought they weren't doing what they said they were doing. So I didn't stay with them too long.

ZJ: But what were they supposed to be doing? I think that was when I was in college. 'Cause I wasn't here.

01:39:01

VJ: What they did mostly, Crusade for Voters, was... It was always at voting time when they got busy, and they weren't busy enough, I thought, all the year. But when it was time for voting, that's when they got real active. They would have little meetings and things like that, but I just thought it should've been more than that.

ZJ: Okay. And how about um when you all were... when you were little... I didn't even hear you... When she asked you about your childhood, you always tell the story about the body snatchers and you never, you didn't tell her about that.

VJ: About what?

ZJ: The body snatchers. When you were going to...

VJ: Oh! I haven't gotten to that part yet. I'm gonna tell them that. That ought to be in everybody's book. Okay, well they're still here and I'm still being interviewed. I understand she's gonna interview you. So those things that you remember you can tell her too, it would be a big help.

ZJ: Yes ma'am.

VJ: Mhm.

ZJ: You got about fifteen, twenty more minutes so I'm gonna let you go.

VJ: Tell about what?

ZJ: I'm gonna let you go so she can finish her interview.

VJ: Alright. I think she's gonna have an interview with you.

ZJ: Okay then.

VJ: Okay.

ZJ: Yes ma'am.

VJ: Bye, doll.

ZJ: Bye! Don't hang the phone up. Give it back to Marvin.

VJ: Don't hang it up?

ZJ: No ma'am. Give it to Marvin.

VJ: Oh. There you go.

01:40:52

M: Thank you.

LB: Now, Mrs. Jackson, I am so curious about these body snatchers.

VJ: Huh?

LB: I'm so curious to hear about these body snatchers.

VJ: Politics?

LB: Body snatchers.

VJ: I was very involved one time. Mostly because very few of my people was involved. And what made me get involved was when I went to, after my children I knew I could leave them, I went to the employment office to get a job, and this Mr. Harris, he said, "I'm not gonna give you one of these jobs in here. Said they're doing something over at East End and I think they need you over there." He said, "I think you can help 'em." And I said, "Well, okay." So he sent me over here in Model City, where they were involved in... Model City was just really getting started, and they sent me over 'cause they thought I had something to offer. So I came on over. But there went the job because I wasn't being paid for that but that was alright with me. So that was more of a volunteer kind of thing. They had paid workers over there, but I was a volunteer. I was not being paid so... I stayed over there with them a long time until things got developed. Some projects are still going that was planned doing the Model City. But the daycare development program was planned right here on this floor. 'Cause my best friend, Bertha, and I, at the time, we were plannin' to do a daycare thing. So when I got involved with Model City, and they was talkin' about all kinda projects that was needed to help the people over in this area—I handed our plan over to them for childcare. That's how the childcare program got involved. So the childcare was a comprehensive childcare. It included the family, the fathers, and everybody. We had to do a little trainin' and workshops and things for them. So, you know, everybody that have babies and all don't know about babies. You'll find that out. They really didn't know about how to take care of babies. And so, a lot of 'em was frustrated because they did not know. But we were instruments there for them to learn. So we had workshops and things for them. The program turned out real well. Tiny Angels, I wish they had never closed. But there are people right today that remember Tiny Angels and they remember me and that was way back there. Tiny Angels was... We had a center over in the Northside. Two on the East End. We had 'em in all of what I call "all four corners."

LB: Mhm.

VJ: So, my thing was... the infant care. I want to know why we're not having infant care. Wait a minute. These are children that need training from the very beginning. So we had to have infant care. So I really planned the program for the infant care children. And then I became one of the workers of infant care until it closed. I wish it had never had... I wish they had kept a least one of the programs. But the program... the State was involved in it. The City of Richmond was involved in it. And other organizations and all was involved in this program. Tiny Angel was a comprehensive daycare development program.

01:45:54

LB: And it must have been the first of its kind.

VJ: There [it?] was the first for many states. And or two countries came over to see our program. We gave them our plan to take back with ‘em. ‘Cause one of them, they had never had a program for infants. They never had a childcare program. They said so. And so we had to give them... We gave them our plan. We thought nothing of giving them those plans. ‘Cause if it was gonna help children over there... And they didn’t have no kind of program, daycare program for children, at that time. And we had a comprehensive program most of that comprehensive program was planned right there on that floor. But we weren’t all that experienced if you want to know the truth. But we had people that come from the City like Elmer C... oh what was that boy’s name... Harris... I remember his last name, Harris—he was a City employee. Elmer was a City employee. A guy named [01:47:20 unc. Coral? Cole?], he left Richmond after a while. Coral. Can’t think of his first name. But it was about five of ‘em. We had a lot of help. A lot of expertise by way of the State and the City. It was so helpful. And it put people that had fallen out of school back in school, helped giving college educations to people.

LB: That’s big.

VJ: It has done many things. I hope to see that these people has been successful, will give them some credit toward what you don’t hear them talk about... ‘cause many of them didn’t want nobody to know that they got that education from Model City. They would not have had it if they had not been for Model City. And Model City was a federal government-planned program.

LB: And so you became part of the policy board.

VJ: Let me put this back in. [hearing aid]

LB: Yeah, put that back in.

VJ: This is a new one so I don’t get it right all the time. Can you hear that?

LB: That little whistle? Yeah.

VJ: I had one that used to be out here like they were for hearing their music and all when they walkin’ up and down the street. Well I had this big... I didn’t like it so I didn’t wear it. But this one is not bad. At that time I was wearing my hair shorter than it is now. And with that big thing in my ear, I didn’t ever have to pull down over. So I didn’t wear that either. It’s almost like new upstairs now.

M: Let’s ask the question again about the body snatchers. Zenoria wanted to ask you about the body snatchers when you were little.

VJ: Oh! This was during my childhood. Medical College was down there then. They didn’t call it Medical College, it was St. Philip Hospital. But it became a training program. That’s when they started calling it “Medical College.” For their study—and this was a true story—for their

01:50:16

study, the students had to practice or whatever they were doing on live bodies and things. And during that time, people would be missing. They was missing because of... I can't... These is what I, you know, learned comin' up. Listen because they needed live bodies and things down there at MCV. And it wasn't called MCV then, it was called St. Philip. They needed live bodies in order to learn. So people... You better not get drunk and fall out at that time all... all... all... during that time there was no recreation or stuff like that for black folks. And so they made their own recrea... you know... did things. During that time it seems that Medical College would pay people—mostly men would do it—for bodies... down at Medical College... to practice. And people, especially the men, people who was being missed from the neighborhood, they better not get drunk... that's all they had to do for pleasure on the weekend. They work all the week. On the weekend they would drink and have a good time. And so when a drunken person be, they be so hard they fall out on the street or somethin'. Even their own, not just the students, but even their, our own, people, would take the drunken person to Medical College.

LB: And what would happen to them there?

VJ: They become specimens.

LB: So they would kill them?

VJ: That's what we think.

LB: Oh my god.

VJ: You never saw them again. So that is how the students, the medical students, was getting a lot of their medical training.

LB: Wow. 'Cause I had heard about them stealing bodies from the cemetery, but I didn't realize they were also stealing people...

VJ: They better not get high, and that's all they had to do for pleasure during that time was drinking. During that time they was drinking what they call "corn liquor." Some of 'em was makin' that corn liquor and they would be drinkin' that corn liquor and they would get real high. Some of 'em would be sitting down on the curb or be too high to even move. So they just lay there. And sometime... I didn't see that. But I believe it. Sometime they, the drunkards, ended up not being seen anymore. And it was sad that they were being used for specimens at Medical College training the medical students.

LB: That's horrible.

VJ: You better bet it's horrible. But these are things that... And they had to be true. It had to be true. Because they were usin'... they weren't hogs... what were they using... some kind of animal... they's animals they was usin' too. But they weren't hogs. What were they? Were they rabbits? I can't remember now what it was. But they were using live animals and whatever to study medicine and whatever and it was said a lot of times that people that just had died, they would become specimens. Or people near death, it is said that they allowed 'em to die. That

01:55:07

doesn't necessarily mean it's true, but they said they allowed them to go on and pass. Because they needed these dead bodies in order to learn more about the diseases and things like that. It was a training school, a medical school.

LB: Those were terrible times.

VJ: It was terrible times. And for the black men, it was really bad. Their fun time... They work all the week. They would work. They would work all the week. But on the weekend, that was their pleasure time. And so they would be drinking the corn liquor and all that kind of stuff, getting' high, maybe fallin' out or somethin'. And even then, it looked like some.... Because Medical College will buy the bodies. Not only out of their facility, but from people that'll bring a body down. They would pay them—I don't know how much—for those bodies. So they would have something to train their students by.

LB: That's terrible, terrible.

VJ: Maybe it had to be done, but it...

LB: I can't see why it would have to be done.

VJ: ...but it was a terrible thing.

LB: That's human sacrifice.

M: Yeah. My grandparents used to say...

VJ: And when you think about it they had to use people that was really alive for some of their studies.

M: I was just saying my grandparents used to tell us that they had to be in before the lights came on.

VJ: And let me tell you—my grandma used to say, when we were children we had to attend church, we had to participate in the plays and all. And my grandmother, we had to do it. Whether we wanted to do it or not, we had to do it. But we always did want to do it, you know, participate in the programs at the church. I don't remember going to a rehearsal for a play. And my grandmother would always say, "You all catch hands and come back together." But I guess I was really different from all of my cousins and all because I didn't think like they think. They didn't think like I think. So one day, we was at church for a rehearsal for something at the church. And I stayed back because I wanted to learn more about what... the rehearsal and all. I was in the play. All my cousins and everybody had left the church, gone home. That was not supposed to happen. I was supposed to be with my cousins and all, all of us be together. Because you had something called student doctors. They mostly had wagons and horses. The student doctors would go through the area. And Maggie Walker was not there then. It was a college, some kind of college. I don't remember the name of it. A small college that...

01:58:49

LB: Hartshorn, yeah.

VJ: That. Hartshorn, I believe. It became... over... went across the tracks we called it “Virginia Union University.” Hartshorn Home is what they called it. Hartshorn is the center up there or something that they have up there now called Hartshorn. But it was right there at Lombardy and Leigh Street before it went “across the tracks” we called it.

LB: So the medical students had their horses and wagons and...

VJ: The students had their horses, they didn't have cars much then. But there were wagons and horses. And the students... will pick up the drunken bodies and then you had even some of our own people that will pick up a body that's lying in the street or something, take it down to Medical College. And I think Medical College was paying them for it.

LB: So the one day that you stayed late at rehearsal...

VJ: Hmm?

LB: That day when you stayed late at rehearsal at your church and you had to walk home by yourself, what happened?

VJ: Yeah! My grandmother said we was supposed to stay together. Weren't supposed to stay up there, but I've always been like that. I stayed back. And all of my cousins and all was gone. So when I got ready to come out of the church and go home, I thought I heard the horses' hooves. I could hear them. You know? I didn't look back. I started running. Because they would take live people and take 'em down to Medical College and we knew that. So I got runnin' there and I didn't stop running 'til I got in the house. My grandma said, “Gal!” I told you I was out of breath. We had a great big old round table in the kitchen 'cause there were so many of us there. And I was... running all around up under the table. And my grandmother said, “What's wrong with you?” And all I would could say, “Soo.... Soo... Soo...” She knew what I was talking about. 'Cause the students of the bodies if they caught you out there by yourself... you may not get back home. You may become a specimen. We were a little afraid of that. My grandmother didn't want us out after dark.

LB: It sounds terrifying.

VJ: A lot of times the rehearsal might last a little long. And me, I'm stayin' back. All of my cousins would go home. I got out there one day and I could hear the... They was usin' wagons and horses mostly then. I could hear the horses' hooves. Because then, it was bricks in the ground, wasn't asphalt or you know... it was bricks. So you could hear those horses. I didn't look back. I just ran. I could run, I tell you. And then when I finished running I was up under this big round table my grandma had in the kitchen. Running over, “What's wrong with you, gal?” She used to call us “gal.” “What's wrong with you, gal?” All I could say was, “Stoo... stoo...” I didn't do that no more. When it was time to come with everybody, I came with everybody. But it was a time that, if drunkards would be on the street they'd be there and fell out. And they don't

02:03:12

know what's happening to them. They were picked up. May not ever see them again. They became specimens.

LB: Marvin, do you have any more questions?

M: No, I think that's it. I would like to say this—what would you like people to know about you and your life?

VJ: About what?

M: What would you want people to know about you and the life that you've lived?

VJ: Do about me?

M: What would you want people to know about you?

VJ: Know about me?

M: And your life?

VJ: They know enough about me just now but I just tell them... But that all of my life I have had love for people, love for children. And that's what I spend my life doing, doing for children, and doing for people.

LB: Mrs. Jackson, can I ask you one more question?

VJ: Mhm.

LB: What do you think that we as a community here need to remember that we are in danger of forgetting?

VJ: You gotta say that louder.

LB: What do you think it's important for this generation coming up now to know that they may not know or may have forgotten?

VJ: I think that the children of this generation came up without the kind of love we came up with. We love people. And in my household, although my grandmother took in, she couldn't work because she was born with a condition. They call 'em "razor legs" now. My grandmother used to wash and iron clothes for the white people, particularly the men's shirts. And the men, they loved their collar stiff as a board. And my grandmother used to do that and she could iron those shirts and those shirts, those collars would be so stiff. And that's the way the men used to wear it. They don't like 'em that stiff now as they used to like them. But... I just sort of lost my train of thought.

02:06:06

LB: That's okay. I guess I just wanted to know—what do you think it's important for kids coming up today, young people coming up today.

VJ: What is important?

LB: What is important for them to know about the way things were when you were growing up?

VJ: I don't think that the children today was brought up the way we were. We were a religious family. Most black people was. We learned to love and not to hate. I don't know, with my mother... my grandmother, you know, doing the washin' and all... I never heard her say, "I'm washing this for a white man, or for a white woman." In my house we didn't talk like white or black. Didn't have that kind of talk in there. Not because we couldn't. Somehow... we didn't. You know? People were people. And my aunts worked in their homes. But what made me think that I would never work in their homes was one day the streetcars was running then, they called 'em trolleys they had the big rod that went up on the wires and they operated according to the electrical wires. So I was on the streetcar, and in this neighborhood where I was there... When I got on the streetcar, this lady that worked for one of those families in the neighborhood, she got on the streetcar. But one of the persons that she was working for was already on the streetcar. It wasn't any empty seats in the back for us. 'Cause we couldn't sit on the front. It wasn't any seats back there. But this lady was tired and she had just left a home from working, cooking, taking care of the children, and all that. And one of the members of that household was on that bus. And there was a seat beside her. But that lady had just left that house. Workin'. Cookin'. Takin' care of their children. And this lady could not sit down—she was tired—could not sit down to the person's house she just left. That she had done all this work for. That was the rule I guess. 'Cause the lady didn't tell her to sit down or nothing like that. Because we couldn't sit at the front of the streetcar or the bus. We had to go all the way to the back to one of those seats back there. It could be seats up the front, but we couldn't go take those seats. And they had these things for hangin' down your hand to hold onto. And I was too short to hold onto one. So I had to hold onto the side seat. It was something you could catch on to. But you couldn't really be strong at it. You couldn't really steady yourself so you would be shaking this way and that way and all, like that. But that's the way it was during that time. So we started getting rid of the streetcars and getting buses. The buses wasn't much better but things did start changing then. I'm trying to think about the year that was. It was back in the 40s I guess.

LB: I guess '49 they started getting the buses in.

VJ: Hmm?

LB: In 1949 was when they were starting to get the buses in.

VJ: Mhm. It was back during that time. When so many things was different and where a person... What sort of bothered me... and I was just a child... was to see this lady had just finished working at this home and her employer was on the bus, she was... or the streetcar... whatever we was on, was on there. And there was a seat beside her. But this lady just came from her house. Had been there all day long, cooked, took care of the children and all. And maybe it wasn't because of her but because of the rules that was prominent at that time where the blacks

02:11:19

wasn't gonna sit at the front of the bus. Those front was reserved for the whites. Don't care how tired we was and that there was no seats in the back for you to take—you had to stand up. And I thought to myself—I was a thinkin' person when I was young—and I thought to myself, "This is not right. And I will not go to work for one of 'em." Not that I hated 'em, 'cause we didn't hate in our house. But I knew that I could not work for somebody that's goin' to ignore me and I just left their home workin' for them. But that's what happened to that lady. I didn't know her. But I knew her from seein' her in the neighborhood, you know, workin'. And I thought that was so wrong. That she could cook for them, wash their clothes, take care of their children, and do all that...

LB: But not sit together.

VJ: And then she couldn't sit down beside this lady.

Woman 1: Mrs. Jackson, the van is on its way to pick you up.

VJ: I can't hear you.

W1: The van is on its way to pick you up. The man...

VJ: Ohhhh.

W1: You gotta hop on it. So your daughter want me to go get your bag.

VJ: Look at that, I gotta whole bag there.

LB: Maybe when Zenoria is here, I can interview you two together.

VJ: Mhm, mhm. 'Cause I think maybe she was... she might've been hearing you. 'Cause she can hear what goes on in my house. And she would go on...

LB: Well thank you...

VJ: They thinkin' 'bout my safety girl. They got it rigged up for my safety.

LB: That's perfect.

VJ: Mhm.

LB: Well thank you so much, that was a wonderful interview.

VJ: Really?

LB: Yes.

VJ: Well I hope it helped.

02:13:22

LB: It helps a lot. And I really appreciate you taking the time.

VJ: Okay. If you wanna come back, come back, 'cause I gotta whole lot more. I have lived ninety-some years. So you know I have learned a lot.

LB: Yes you have.

VJ: Mhm.

W1: Mrs. Jackson, where your bag at? Your purse? You wanna go get your purse? It's upstairs?

VJ: I think I brought it down here. Look in this chair right there. Right there at the radiator.

W1: Oh yeah, that's right, that's right.

VJ: Right here, doll!

W1: Oh yeah, I see it. Okay.

VJ: Come back, okay! Zenoria's comin'. You comin' to see her?

LB: Yeah, so maybe we could do that interview here.

W1: She got shoes.

M: Okay.

LB: So I could interview Zenoria here.

VJ: She's gonna come here?

LB: If that would be good for you?

VJ: That would be good for her too.

LB: Good.

VJ: Alright!

LB: Thank you so much.

VJ: Time just flies, doesn't it?

LB: It does.

02:14:29

VJ: It's been nice talking.

LB: It's been wonderful talkin' with you.

VJ: Nice seeing you, doll!

Ariel: Thank you so much for having us!

VJ: She's in college?

LB: Mhm.

VJ: She's learnin' a lot?

LB: Yeah, and Ariel is helping...

VJ: She's interning with Civil Rights movement?

LB: Yes, she is.

VJ: Mhm. Yeah. Some of my friends that was so involved. I may be one of the two that's still living. Some of my friends was involved in that like Rosa Lee Clark and all of them, you know.

LB: I feel like no matter how many people I talk to, I keep learning more about the Civil Rights movement in Richmond because so much happened.

VJ: Mhm. A lot has happened in Richmond and a lot has changed in Richmond. And a whole lot of us... the change *is* because of the Model City program, which was a government program. It wasn't a citizen program. Government thought of it and then they funded it.

LB: That's good.

VJ: And so, different areas had different things going on. They even built some homes, and start some business for people. It was nice.

END TIME: 02:15:54