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**Laura Browder:** So I was happy that I finally got to meet her and I'm even happier that this led me to you. Zenoria, can we start with something very basic, which is just you stating your full name and today's date?

**Zenoria Jackson:** What's today's date?

**LB:** I think it's June 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**ZAS:** Is it June 3<sup>rd</sup> now?

**LB:** Or June 4<sup>th</sup>... Just so I've gotta... Don't even worry about it, June 4<sup>th</sup> is fine.

**ZAS:** June 4<sup>th</sup>. Okay. My name is Zenoria Abdus-Salaam and this is June 4<sup>th</sup>. Let's see... This is 2018.

**LB:** And now that we've got that boring formality out of the way, can we start off with you telling me something about how you grew up and your family?

**ZAS:** Well... how I grew up... I was born here in Richmond. 'Course I was born at what they called "St. Philips." Because at that time that's where African American children were born. So I was born there. And when my mother and father took me home, they took me to Calhoun Street which is what we now call Gilpin Court—of course after Charles Gilpin. I lived there, you know, I didn't know that existence, because I'm an infant, so we moved from there. I think my mother moved to Ninth Street and of course I'm still little, so I'm not really remembering although I do remember some of the people. I remember Aunt Bertha because she was just our friend and she was just always there so I remember Aunt Bertha. I... my first memories, really, of living on Moore Street, in what is called New Town, or as we say "the real New Town." It was named New Town when African Americans moved from the country to the city. My family has lived there and I still have relatives there. And they have lived there for over 115 years. My granny told me that when they moved there, they moved from Broad Street Road and my grandfather had a lot of property up there. He had a store and... In fact that's what he... When they were grown they all started to migrate toward the city for jobs. My granny said, when they came there, they named it "New Town." That's why it's New Town because it was a new town to them. So that's why it's New Town.

I lived on the corner. Let's see... Benny Bernstein was like midway down the block. That was the store. It was... you know, they used to have the little... They called 'em a "corner store," but Benny's was never at the corner, he was always in the middle of the block. And we lived on the corner. My godfather, who is also the superintendent of the Sunday School that I attended, Mr. Andrew Moore, I don't know if you've heard his name before or not, but Mr. Andrew Moore was my godfather. He lived on that corner, and he owned three or four pieces of property right in there. And so we lived in the one next to him.

I'm tryin' to think... his wife's name was Rachel. Ms. Rachel was my godmother. They also owned the little restaurant that was right behind their house. We called it "Andrew Moore's." And then after a while, when Mr. Moore rented it out, he rented it out to two brothers—Charlie

00:04:35 Chamberlain, and... what's that other man's name? I think his name was Sylvester. I'm not... I can't really remember right now but anyway, they would call it, we called it Charlie Chamberlain's for a while and then we just started calling it Charlie's. So Charlie's was our hangout as we grew up to be teens.

I went to First Union Baptist Church. This is on the corner, right behind Maggie Walker High School. I have really fond memories of going too. Even, I mean most of 'em now, but that was our foundation in faith at First Union Baptist Church. We had... When I went there... When my mother went there, I think, Reverend Constant and Reverend Fountain were there. I remember Reverend Fountain and I spent some of my time under him. But then Reverend Fountain passed and when he passed then Reverend W. L. Henderson Jr. came, and that's who really I got most of my sermons from, was W. L. Henderson Jr., who also happened to have married my cousin. Well, his brother married my cousin. And so, you know, we always said we were cousins, you know, so...

But I have very fond memories, I was in the ju... I went to church every day for something. We went to church every day for something. Monday you had maybe choir rehearsal. And then Tuesday, you were there for your usher board. Wednesday was youth, the youth group would meet. And then if you were in any other group, bible study or something, you were there. And we were there *every* day. And sometimes part of Saturday. But you had to go home and get ready for church for Sunday. So I was there. I remember I had my first concert at First Union Baptist Church. I was present in concert and I was in high school. And young guy I had met in high school, James Lewis, played the piano. He was my accompanist. He was—aw, he could play the piano. He was very good. I haven't seen James in about four or five years. But he was very good. And my mother put on all of the youth programs. And so, I'm sorry, I'm dry, 'cause I'm not drink... when we fast we don't drink late, okay? So... my mother threw most of the plans and most of the fundraising things that happened at First Union Baptist Church. That was my mom. She was doin' it all. And, of course, that meant I had to do it too. So that's how this concert happened. She said, "You know, I think it would be really nice if we had a concert, and we did this, you know we had three different... we had soprano, we'd get an alto and we'd get a... well we didn't say, "alto," we said, "contralto," because African American women used to sing contralto and not really alto. So she did that.

I can remember that scene because my dad was a gospel singer and Daddy was in a quartet. And so when Daddy would sing and they would go to WAMT or W... I wanna say WRPV... WRPV... we would go. And I had a cousin... her father also sang. He sang with the Singing Stars and they all would sing sometime with the Harmonizing Four and I think there was another group called the, "Golden Jubilee." And all of these gospel groups, and we would be at the radio station. They would say, "Okay, we got girls with us and they're gonna sing." You know. And my cousin had this much lower soprano voice that was just amazing for a little girl. And she would sing the Lord's Prayer. Every time that's what her daddy wanted her to do. And daddy was always with—"You and I have to sing "It is No Secret." We used to sing it together, me and my dad. So I remember those kind of things about my childhood and being a part of the church.

00:09:47 I remember the church... First Union Baptist Church was the first group I know that had fireworks in Virginia at a community affair. We had a festival every Fourth of July. And Mr.

Andrew Moore, who was our superintendent of the Sunday school... Mr. Andrew Moore would, he would get the fire department. We had the hydrant on all day on the Fourth of July. And we had all of these games like, you know, what do you call it... the sack race? And pie eating race, and watermelon race and... [phone ringing] I thought I cut this off, but actually I guess I didn't. Okay. So! Anyway. It would just be so amazing. 'Cause people would come from all over Richmond and it was... We didn't really mingle as races then. So it was just... any time people of color had an event, other people of color would come from their neighborhoods to be a part of it. It was just an amazing thing happening then. The fireworks would just be... it was the last thing we did before it was over, and it would just be so amazingly beautiful displays. At that time, where the government school had... They cut the hill. That hill used to be a very high, steep hill. And we would all sit on that hill and watch those fireworks. Mr. Moore always hired some professionals to do it. They would come out and set it all up and we would just... we would just be so... we had such wonderful experiences because of Mr. Andrew Moore. We had wonderful experiences with him. He always helped us. Everybody who came made something out of plaster of Paris before they left. So you took something away. And it was just... it was just great. I mean really great. Being there behind Virginia Union, we were also connected to them. And their students from the seminary would come and teach in our Sunday school. So we had a lot of contact with Africans. A lot of contact with them. Because they would come to be our Sunday school teachers. Again—just the richness of living and work... Everybody say, "Okay, you're in the ghetto, this weird place," you know? "You're all poor and you live in shacks." But we never felt like we didn't have. You know? We always felt like this is an amazing place to live.

We played on the dump. And we thought it was wonderful. We actually played on the dump. The dump was behind our houses. And right behind my granny's house, this is my great grandmother, right behind my grandmom, Abby's, house, there was this huge tree, and we put a rope in the tree. It had this great big old knot on it like this. And all of us used to swing on it. We would see how many of us could get in somebody else's lap and swing. We had like five folk on this little knot. And we didn't think about: "Okay, if we go down this hill, we better hope it's not a train right there." You know, we'd not thought about that. We, you know, that's how we played. We jumped off the trestle on top of trains. We didn't think that was dangerous.

00:15:38

We roller-skated. It used to be... and that's not there anymore either... where Maggie Walker is, and right past Virginia Union's building right there, it used to be a factory, but now it's a building belongin' to Virginia Union. And going toward Broad Street, that street used to go almost straight down like a hill and under... it was a railroad trestle there. Under the railroad trestle, and we would get on our roller skates, at the top of Maggie Walker where that flat space, that great big flat cement space is, we roller skated. From down there we would go up to the steps that were near the door, we'd roller skate from there. We'd jump down the steps on our roller skates, and then we started up Lombardy Street and we would roller skate and we'd have a snake. We're holdin' hands, we goin' down the hill like ninety. It'd be like twenty of us and we all holdin' hands and goin' down the... we had a ball. We had a really nice, very wonderful, faithful and loving kind of neighborhood. We all knew each other. We went from house to house. Our parnets did the same thing. We just all were one... It was like a village. It was a village. And the village took care of itself. We took care of each other. If somebody didn't have

food they were going to eat. It was no such thing as not eating in New Town. Because you just went somewhere else.

**LB:** Was that also known as the Carver neighborhood later on... on Moore Street?

**ZAS:** Actually, that was not the Carver neighborhood. Until somebody else decided to name our neighborhood Carver neighborhood.

**LB:** Oh—Sheep Hill first right? And then New Town. And then...

**ZAS:** Okay. Sheep Hill was when the Jewish families lived there. Because that was the Jewish and German community at one time. And then when I guess they decided they wanted, you know, a better community, they moved to the houses or the places they rented. These houses...

**LB:** Okay.

**ZAS:** So, most people, except for, except for Mr. Andrew Moore, a friend of ours named Payne Eldridge, and Haywood—he owned a little store we used to hang out in called, “Blue Star.” And Mrs., the Jacksons, because they were related to Reverend Fountain. And they lived in Reverend Fountain’s house. So they owned that house. The Thompsons, who were Reverend Thompson’s family, owned their house. But everybody else that up there basically rented houses from these Jewish real estate agents. Well... we.... my mother went to Moore Street School. My granny went to Moore Street School. So we actually had, let’s see, 1, 2, 3, 4... 4 generations? At Carver. It’s Carver now. They named it Carver in the 50s. So there was never a Carver anything...

**LB:** ...before then.

**ZAS:** ...before the building of George Washington Carver Elementary School.

**LB:** I worked on a play once with the help of Ms. Marguerite Austin. If you knew her?

**ZAS:** I know Ms. Marguerite.

**LB:** Yes!

**ZAS:** Yeah! I love her! She did a lot of that.

**LB:** She really did. She and her daughter, too.

00:18:51

**ZAS:** She’s awesome. And she had a nice... She had a center in Church Hill. You would not believe. I have a friend, who was one of her protégés. He studied under Mrs. Austin. And he did very well with acting. He really did. There was no, no, no Carver until we named the school “George Washington Carver.” That was the Moore Street community because of Moore... the Moore Street. But it was New Town. It was New Town from the bottom all the way up to Hull Street. That was New Town. In between that and Jackson Ward was called “Hell’s Kitchen.” And then from Hell’s Kitchen, which stopped right there because you couldn’t go across

Belvidere—that was Jackson Ward. Then just where the coliseum is was Navy Hill. Things change, you know. But those things don't change for people who called it home. They don't change.

**LB:** It sounds like an amazingly rich neighborhood growing up.

**ZAS:** It really was. It really was. I went to teachers that taught my mother and my grandmother. You don't find that kind of thing now. I was really amazed because I went back to college to teach. When I came back from South Carolina to live here again... that was in '86, I believe, '85, '86... When I came back here... Well the first year I was Benny Lambert's liaison, then I... uh... uh... uh... politics. Mnm. So, I went... I had a degree in education, so I went to Richmond Public Schools. Funny thing... this is how I was interviewed: "Can you read?" Haha. That's how I looked. I was like, "A little bit."

"If you can read that's all I need."

I said, "Why would that be all you need?" I said, "I thought you needed a teacher. You need a reading teacher? Or you need a teacher?"

"I need a... I need a teacher. I need a teacher." Said, "Nobody wants to go there."

I said, "Why?" I said, "Why are you sendin' me somewhere nobody wants to go? What is it?"

"Well... you know the parents, the children."

I said, "Really? You not talkin' about my relatives are you?" And the face went like "Oh my god," you know? And I'm like, "Let me tell you something. That's a very special place. And they have very special teachers. And if people don't want to go there that's fine because that mean God doesn't want them there. And He puts there who He wants there." I said, "And I would be happy to go." I said, "You just hurt my feelings. I went to Carver." And they were like, "Oh..." [00:22:08 microphone drops]... get my foot out of my mouth. You know it really hurt me that they would say something like that in an interview because that means they say that to other people. Not just me. There were some people they said, "Oh no, you don't wanna go there." You know what I'm sayin'? They did that. I know they did it.

So I get to Carver. You know, I'm five years old. I'm going to school, I have three cousins the same age and we all start to school together. It was a thing—everybody walked to school together. We didn't have buses. So we walked. When we walked, we always walked Moore Street. We came through the [00:22:59 unc. recording skips] ...Dyson first. Ms. Dyson was the first person in Richmond Public School to teach phonics. So I learned to read by phonics.

**LB:** That was so new then.

00:23:24

**ZAS:** Yes. But I already knew how to read when I walked in there. My mom was like, "Okay. Here are the books..." So when I went to school, I could read. I could write in cursive. I didn't know how to print. I wrote in cursive. But Ms. Dyson was the best phonics teacher anybody

could ever have and I still use—today—the phonics that Ms. Dyson taught me. Same thing I went to... We left Ms. Dyson... At that time, I don't know if you knew but everybody went... the whole class went... to the same teacher. So we left Ms. Dyson, and my whole class went to Mrs. Vann. Laura Vann McDowell, who was head... She was head for a long time of the teacher union here. Her mother was Mrs. Van, a little lady. But that lady could teach some literature. I mean she put books on us that you wouldn't believe any second graders had. I read *Invictus* in the second grade. Who tells a second grader to learn *Invictus*? Mrs. Van. And then when I went to Ms. Peyton, Ms. Peyton said, she told me when I came back to Carver, she said, "You know nobody wanted you all don't you?" And I said, "What do you mean!?" She said, "You all were the sweetest." She said, "But Ms. Dyson just spoiled you all and couldn't anybody do anything with that class because you all expected everybody to do what Ms. Dyson did." And we did. You know? 'Cause she was good. She was a good teacher. So I modeled myself as a teacher from Ms. Dyson, Ms. Van, and Ms. Peyton.

**LB:** It's amazing to get the template for your life when you're five years old.

**ZAS:** Isn't that something? They were just wonderful, wonderful teachers. And they weren't the only ones. All those teachers up there were good. Mr. Morton, Oscar Morton, was the principal for my grandmother. He was the principal for my mother. And he was the principal for me.

**LB:** That's crazy.

**ZAS:** And you were like... You know, before you could get home... if you did something wrong in school... everybody knew it. And everybody didn't have a telephone. But it was in... When I... If I got in trouble, when I got to my granny's house, my grandmother's mother... When I got to Granny's, she would say, "Girl, I heard you... You wait until your grandmother gets here." And then my granny [00:26:23 unc.] Then my granny would come: "You did what?" Now I have to wait on my mother.

**LB:** That's tough.

**ZAS:** So you know. I was a very good child. There was no way I was gonna get three spankings in one day. So if I saw you do something wrong and you got the spankin', I was like, "Okay. I'm not doin' that. That gets spankings." And I really was that kind of child. I just didn't do that. You know, Carver School, that whole experience... I can remember Hurricane Hazel. 'Cause we were having a play. And my mother bought me this just awesome... it was one of those plastic raincoats with the matching hat and it had the little boots, you know? And the umbrella? And I had to be April in the play. And I had to sing, "Just walkin' in the rain... gettin' soaking wet..." And it started storming! It was all... just when that storm came up. The hurricane came up. And we had to rush home. They closed school. And of course, again we had no bus. So we were all running home.

**LB:** That's dramatic.

00:27:56

**ZAS:** Okay. I was on the bridge between Maggie Walker and Virginia Union. My umbrella gets the wind up under it from the hurricane. I had to decide if I want to keep my pretty umbrella or

go and let it go. So I let go. It went down the railroad tracks. The next day I found it in one of my friend's yards. It was just... I was like, "Ooh, wow! All the way from Lombardy Street, all the way up to Bath Street. How'd you get up here? But you know... just things come back to you. About how wonderful it was, to be there.

**LB:** Now, I remember John Dorman who I also interviewed and I'm sure you know him.

**ZAS:** Okay, yeah.

**LB:** ...telling me that he first became political when the VUU students were coming and teaching karate at the YMCA there.

**ZAS:** Wow.

**LB:** And I know Josine Osborne became political through the NAACP as an eight-year-old.

**ZAS:** Okay. Yeah, we were in the same NAACP group.

**LB:** So tell me all about how that happened.

**ZAS:** Okay. For me... the NAACP... well everybody belonged to the NAACP. My mother always kept me involved in something. Mommy had been a member of the Penny Bank. She used to go to those meetings with Ms. Walker and they would have to take their little bank book and go with their little pennies and say because my granny would send her. So my mother was looking for something. I was like, "Oh I really don't want to be in any group. I just wanna hang with my friends. I just wanna just, you know, ride on the rope on the dock. I don't want anything to do with this." And I pushed it off and pushed it off. I was ten, I think, when we moved to Church Hill. As a child in Church Hill, when I moved there, there was... let's see... Charles Bonaparte was my first friend in Church Hill. He lived cat-a-corner from us. And then my Aunt Chloe, who they had torn down her house. They bought her house to build Hartshorn. So when Chloe lived one door from where we live now, where Mom and Dad's now. But guess what? We were the only ones. Everybody else in that neighborhood was Caucasian. So it was really... culture shock.

**LB:** What year is this?

**ZAS:** Let's see that was '57?

**LB:** Okay.

00:32:03

**ZAS:** '57. '58? That was when... We moved because 95 was built. My granny owned that house. We lived on Bath Street, right behind Virginia Union University. When they came, asking to buy the house, my granny refused. She said, "You're never gonna pay me enough to buy another house. Why would I do that? That doesn't make sense to me." So, needless to say, my grandmother was the last person to sell to 95. And she only sold then because they threatened eminent domain. So she said, "Okay. We'll sell." I was just really upset that we were moving.

Not so much to be moving... I guess I felt the loneliness of missing all my friends and family when I did get over there and then found out there was nobody there for me to really be united with. I wanted to bring... We had fruit trees. We had one particular fruit tree... My grandfather used to sit under that tree. It was a peach tree. And my grandfather had cancer of the colon. And Papa used to take his pocket knife and he would cut the bark from that peach tree and he would boil it and make a tea and he'd drink it to soothe whatever was happening. He knew what to do, you know he'd take 'em up that way. So he knew herbs. So that's what he did. When Papa died, and I was... you know, I'm a nine-year-old. I lived in the house with him and was in the house when he was dying—the day that he died. And I missed my papa. Because we were tight. When he died I wanted the tree. 'Cause we didn't have any peaches 'cause he cut on it so much we didn't get any peaches. The year after he died, right after he died, the peaches came. So that made that tree real special. And they said, "Oh no, you can't take that. Because we bought this property. Nothing leaves it." So we couldn't take our flower gardens, we couldn't take our nothing. All you could take were your belongings from out of the house.

So we moved to Church Hill and my first experience with true racism happened to me right there at Oakwood Avenue. There was a little girl. She was Italian. She lived down the street and her name was Gina. Never forgot her name. Gina was crying. And I'm always the empath. That's me. So I'm like, "What's wrong?" She said, "Some boys took my bike." I said, "Well... get on my bike, we'll go get your bike." Because now, see, I'm a different little girl now. I grew up in New Town. So nobody takes your bike. You know, 'cause the neighbors get together and go get your bike. So "Let's go get your bike." So we go down for her bike. They're like, "You [00:35:42 unc. n-word?]." I said, "You're callin' me the what? Don't make me get off this bicycle. Don't ever call me that."

**LB:** Gina did?

**ZAS:** No. She didn't. The boys...

**LB:** The kids who took the bike.

**ZAS:** ...that took her bike did. Well, we get her bike. We're coming up the hill. And I hear somebody calling her, calling... we're coming back down the hill. Somebody's calling up the hill. Saying, "Gina! Gina! What are you doing with that n\*\*\*\*\*?" I'm like, "What?!" She's like, "That's my little sis... brother." He was like, "I'm gonna tell your dad." Her daddy, I heard, he grabbed her once she get out on that porch and I felt so bad for her. But I was goin' home. Because I know they can do worse. Because I've heard it. I just had never experienced it. So I went on home. But that was my first time that someone did something of that nature to me and called me that.

**LB:** Before that, had you basically just been in the neighborhood the whole time, in this kind of all-black environment?

**ZAS:** Sure. That's what we did.

**LB:** Yeah. 'Cause you didn't...



**ZAS:** We didn't venture out. We...

**LB:** ...to Broad Street or?

**ZAS:** Oh yeah, we went to Broad Street. Everybody went to Broad Street. We went to all the parades. We lived right there. The parades started at the DMV. We lived in New Town. How you gonna come into our neighborhood and we not gonna come to the parade? So we... yes we went to the parades.

**LB:** So for parades but maybe not for shopping? Or?

**ZAS:** Oh yes, we shopped on Broad Street.

**LB:** Okay.

**ZAS:** But, you had special doors that you had to go to. You had some stores you couldn't even go into. And I didn't bother to go into stores because that's the way my mother raised me. If I couldn't try it on or I couldn't touch it—I couldn't buy it. That was my mom. So I ended up... We ended up going through back doors of stores. In Thalhimers you shopped in the basement. In Miller & Rhodes you shopped in the basement. You got all the things nobody else wanted. They put them down there. It was like the bargain basement. Except that the bargain basement was for you. You know, you were the bargain shoppers. You know? And I remember very vividly, the water fountains with the signs, and not being able to drink out of one or the other. [00:38:35 unc.] That was Ms. Jenny. That's how she did it. We never, you know, she never allowed us to lose our dignity. That was very important to her, that we have this dignity. But yes, we did shop on Broad Street.

**LB:** But just in a way that you didn't get into the worst of the worst.

**ZAS:** But it wasn't like we do now. Yeah.

**LB:** Yeah, yeah.

00:40:54

**ZAS:** So that, that was Richmond. That was our culture. We're the Capitol of the Confederacy. That's what we did. You stay in your place. We stay in our place. And everything'll be fine. Now when you cross the line, you know maybe [00:39:27 unc.]. I'll never forget, I had a friend... Oliver Hill Jr. was my friend. We went to La Carrie together because we both were very active in our church. So we went to La Carrie conventions that was a church convention for children who went to black Baptist churches and we went every year. I remember the day after they had burned crosses in their yard. You know, because of... Oliver Hill. I was like, "Oh my god, my friend, is he okay? What is wrong with these people?" It just was unreal. It was surreal. You know? You see this on TV. You hear it on the radio. But you didn't have it in your neighborhoods. And we didn't live that far from them. It was just really kind of unnerving kinda thing. In terms of how people treated people, it was just a... I guess kind of like a mutual admiration society. You know what I'm saying? We come to your house. We clean your house.

You're nice to us while we're there. But we don't mingle. I had several aunts and cousins who were domestics. And they would come home sometime and they would have horrible stories. You know if [00:41:38 unc.] heard you listening, you gotta listen from the other room because you couldn't sit in the room with the adults. We're listening but you know it's some really crazy things going on. These things, I think, grew in me. Until finally, I'm starting Armstrong High School, and I'm thinking... 'cause we were... okay... Nathaniel Bacon school was integrated the year that I moved to Church Hill.

**LB:** That's early.

**ZAS:** It was. It was integrated then. East End Junior High School was. But they was... what we didn't know or realize, as a people, is that it had... it was on the plan. It was on the city plan. It was what was happening. Gentrification was happening. And we didn't have any idea of those things. So that side of town was becoming increasingly black. And their children weren't goin' to school with us. And so, that's what they did. They said, "Okay, you all can have it. And we'll build us another one." So they built new schools for them, they's in those. So my brother went to Nathaniel Bacon. I had gone to George Mason. Third and fourth grade I went to George Mason. And then fifth grade I went to East End, fifth, sixth and seventh grade. Went to Armstrong eighth through twelfth.

So when I was in Armstrong that year, several things happened. Really... they were talking about trying to integrate the schools. This whole precedent with everything jump off. Everybody's comin' to Armstrong from Prince Edward and going to Maggie Walker because no school's up there. And at the same time, they're tryin' to figure out what can we do to not have the same situation that they had up at Prince Edward. I mean, Richmond Public School board is thinking, "What do we do to diffuse this? 'Cause we don't want ours (meaning us) to act up like they did." So Thomas Jefferson, I think, John Marshall, they were thinking they would put some test students in these schools. So they came to Armstrong and Ms. Grace Pleasant, who was the best counselor anybody could have in the world. She was an awesome school counselor. Ms. Pleasant was also... She was my counselor, but she was my mother's English teacher at Maggie Walker.

**LB:** That's connected.s

**ZAS:** Yes, so anyway. She came to me and she said, "Zenoria... would you give consideration to going to John Marshall or T. J.?"

"For what?"

00:46:10

She said, "They're looking for students but they only wanted the honor students." They didn't want anybody else. You had to be an honor student. You had to live in certain parts of Church Hill. You know, meaning I live on Oakwood Avenue. I'm over by Oakwood Cemetery. I'm in a nice house. So I can go. But if you lived in the Buchanan Street area—you didn't get that opportunity. I turned her down. Simply because by this time I'm to a point when I'm saying, "Okay. If you don't want me. You don't want me. And you not gonna come over here and ruin

our grade point average and everything that we have done as a school by taking every one of us, who's good, out of the school."

**LB:** And this would be what, 1962? Around there?

**ZAS:** '61, '62. Yes. Mhm. And I was just like, "No. I'm not gonna go." So I don't think any of us went. None of us would go. There were 595 students at Armstrong at that time... in the graduating class. We were jam-packin' 'em jelly tight in that building over on... over there... the one they just tore down. When we graduated we had ten merit scholars. We actually, we have an awesome class. And all of us have really done well.

**LB:** So were you Class of '66 then?

**ZAS:** '65.

**LB:** '65.

**ZAS:** Yes. Class of '65. Largest class. Best students. Every time Ms. Rosa Dear [unc. name spelling] sees me, she always says that. She says, "You all were the best. She said, "You all put Armstrong on the map." But we had scholarships up the yang yang. We had more scholarships. And they'd never put it in the paper. They never talked about it. We had scholarships to Harvard, Yale. We had students, guys who went to West Point. James Minor was his name. James Minor went to West Point. Dennis Stevens went to Harvard. I went to Howard. Because by that time that's where I was.

**LB:** And Howard must've been an incredible place to be...

**ZAS:** Wow.

**LB:** ...in the second half of the 60s.

**ZAS:** Yes. Yes, yes. It was really awesome. But the caliber of education that we got at Armstrong High School... 1. Because we were told that we were a part of... You remember when Carl Young said that African Americans could not think abstractly?

**LB:** When was that?

**ZAS:** That was back in the early 60s. And he did this theory... that we could not...

**LB:** And who was he? Like a sociologist, or something?

**ZAS:** Psychologist.

**LB:** Psychologist.

**ZAS:** And he was saying that African Americans could not think abstractly. And to prove that, they gave these different places, that they didn't name at the time. But it turns out Armstrong was one of them. So we got this fabulous foreign language lab. 'Cause we can't learn foreign languages. And we had math teachers come from Hampton Institute. When I was in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I took calculus and analytic geometry at Armstrong in '64.

**LB:** It's so different now.

**ZAS:** Yes. It just... it was just that kind of time when, you know, it was like a period of desperation for some and then for us it was a period to get ready. And that's what Ms. Pleasant kept telling us. She said, "Get ready. Get ready." Ms. Pleasant never had an African American school taught how to take the SAT. We didn't have those little classes, like a... Ms. Pleasant had us... We were sometime at Armstrong High School 'til seven o'clock at night. She was like, "Okay we gotta do these practice questions, come on."

**LB:** I still wanna bring you back to the early days. Because everything you're saying is taking me in a new direction. Which is a good problem.

**ZAS:** Okay.

**LB:** But I wanna bring you back to when you first become really politically active. You're in the NAACP, you're ten years old and that's where you meet Josine Osborne?

**ZAS:** Yeah.

**LB:** Okay.

**ZAS:** What happened is this: my granny sent me to Thalhimers to pay her bill. Like she did whenever she got paid she would send me to pay her bills. And so I'm going. I'm on the bus. I'm on the [00:51:35 unc.] When it was a Roseneath one coming that way. I'm on the Roseneath one and I get off at 7<sup>th</sup> and Broad. And I see all my friends—Josine, Harold and Herman Cook, Leonard Edloe else was out there? James Elon, Marcellus Wilson and Lessie... what was their last name? Grant? Lessie Graham? Lessie Graham I think. But anyway, they were all on the corner... in this line. And I'm like, "Why are you all standing on the corner in this line?"

**LB:** And this is what, like 1960?

**ZAS:** No, this is... this is... let's see, '61? And they're saying, "Oh, we're getting ready to... we're getting ready to go to the National Theater." I said, "Mnm. Can't go over to the National or the State." They said, "But we're gonna... we're gettin' ready to have a march. We're gonna march over." And they were like, "Come on! Get in the line!" Now I'm supposed to be payin' some bills. I'm in big trouble, okay. I got in that line. That's how I started. We were paired. You had to be male and female when you went to the window. There was this lady there. I've never forgot her face, poor thing. That lady cried every time. Because we never stopped coming. We just circled around. It kept... It was like a thousand people coming to this window asking this lady for tickets. And she's having to say, "I'm sorry, I can't serve you. I'm sorry I can't serve

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you. And that lady was just... I mean just tears. She was so scared. She was so scared. She had no idea that it was a peaceful demonstration. But we did that. And they never... they didn't let us. They never let us in. But we... after that... they said, "We're meeting at Third Street Church." The A.M.E. church?

**LB:** Mhm

**ZAS:** On Third Street? Okay. That's where we met. And they told me when the meetings were and I started going to the meetings. I never stopped. I think my senior year I was Junior Miss NAACP. My whole team, that whole group, they held all kind... I didn't even know they were doing all these things and when it was time to collect the money and all... 'cause it was a fundraiser... and when it was time to collect the money, they were all there and Marcellus was like, "I had all these dinners and I sold these dinners for you and here's my part." And everybody did so. And so when we went to the convention, then I had no expectation of winning. But they had done so much that I actually won the state. They were really good. They were good friends. They're still good friends. That's how I got into it, by joining that demonstration. So we did that demonstration, and then we went to the church. When we would go to the church, SCLC would send people in to train us. So we had people in like Mr. Farmer, James Farmer, came and his daughter and Ms. Myrlie Evers came. Mrs. Rosa Parks came. Ms. Parks taught me how to sew my first dress. She had the dress on. I had just brought [sic.] the pattern. And I was showing it to my girlfriend and I'm saying, "I got this assignment for Home Ec. And I don't know how to make this dress and I looked at this pattern and it's crazy." She said, "Oh, honey. Why would you buy McCall pattern?" She said, "You need to get a simplicity. You tell that teacher I said don't ever let you all buy McCall's patterns. Buy Simplicity. These are too hard for beginners." And she had that little jumper on. And she said, "Easy way." She taught me how to put my interface in there without looking at the pattern and hiding my sleeve in. And she taught me to do the sleeve and take it there, do it with my hand, and gather it, and then put it in, and pull it out, "ease it out," she called it. But she taught me how to do my first dress. My first dress I made.

**LB:** That's amazing.

**ZAS:** Yeah it was. Who ever thought? You know.

**LB:** I know.

**ZAS:** And I... you know... when you're a child, I was never really amazed by other people. I was amazed by my mother. That's an amazing woman. She does this all by herself. She's a... you know. Other people, you know, okay, I met you. I never took pictures with them. My other friends did. I never said, "Oh I gotta have a picture with you." I never said that. And I'll never forget, we did a demonstration in City Hall. And I think Mr. Lydin... What's his name? Lydinger [00:57:59 unsure of spelling]. He was, he was a member of city council. And he was another... Then he went to... He was doing something on... He did something on the state level. Anyway... Henry Marsh was there, but Henry Marsh was a college student then. He had been working with Mr. Hill and all when they were doing the school board initiatives you know. That case? So we were on the steps in the old City Hall, those beautiful steps up there. And I'm thinking how beautiful this place is and all. And he was asking Mr. Lydinger about a law. He

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said, “Do you remember this law? And he gave him a number and I was like, “Wow. He remembered the number?” You know. And so he said, “No, I don’t.” He said, “Well you should because you wrote it.” I never forgot that coming out of Henry Marsh’s mouth. That’s what he told me. He said, “You should. You wrote it.” And I said, “Okay. He’s gonna be a smart person. He’s goin’ somewhere. You know?” He became the mayor of Richmond. Who know? We had those meetings there at Third Street Church and just amazing. We got trained. You didn’t just do demonstrations. Everybody couldn’t just do them. There were certain things that we had to know to do and they had a certain training that you had to go through to do that. They kept telling us saying, “Okay, you know there’s always a possibility you’ll be locked up.” And I was thinking in my head, “Oh my mom’s gonna kill me if I get locked up.” But we had to... We wore skirts. And people would say, “Why they wearin’ dresses when they doin’ all of this?” But we always had shorts on under. And that was a two fold thing. You fall, you’re not exposed. The other thing was that if you were locked up, the jails just had like these kind of, maybe something a little bit longer than this hanging off the wall and they were metal. And they didn’t give you a sheet or pillow or anything. So you took your skirt, you pulled it up around your head to keep the filth off of you and you rolled your jeans down so that your legs would be covered too. So those were just things they taught us, you know, to do these things. And you know what kinda looks to have on our faces, and...

**LB:** What kinda looks were you supposed to have on your faces?

**ZAS:** Well, you weren’t supposed to look like this was a joke. Because it wasn’t a joke for us. It was life. So you had to have a serious, stern kind of look on your face to do that. I remember when we went in Woolworths to do the demonstration and you would like sit down at the counter (‘cause you couldn’t sit at the counter) and they would come and ask you to get up. Or they would ignore you until you got up. So we’d be sitting at the counter saying, got the menus, and, “I’d like so and so and so and so.” And they’re like, “Oh, I’m sorry you’ll have to go back there and get yours for the takeout.” I’m like, “Okay, well I don’t wanna take out. I wanna eat in.”

“No, we can’t serve you here. We can’t serve you here.” And the poor employees were just so distraught. You could see it in their faces that they just didn’t know what was going to happen. And so they were very concerned. And all we wanted was a meal.

**LB:** You know you never hear about the kind of violence against Civil Rights protestors in Richmond that happened other places—did you experience confrontations?

**ZAS:** Maybe words. But Richmond... I guess it... You know... We have a very strange culture here. And we knew what kind of people we were dealing with. Because we lived in Richmond all our lives. We know what they like, what they don’t like. We know what would trigger them. And so we picked places that we figured that kind of trigger would not go off—1. And... we were just very classy. Very, very classy people during this time. It wasn’t about, you know, getting on their nerves. It wasn’t about upsetting anyone. It was about “I want my rights.”

**LB:** But you know, I think of those images from places like Greensboro, where equally classy people were demonstrating...

**ZAS:** Yeah! Yeah, 'cause they were college students.

**LB:** They were. They were college students in their suits and their dresses and looking perfect. And yet they were still getting stuff dumped on them, and abuse, and all kinds of stuff.

**ZAS:** But that's a different mentality. That's a different mentality from a Caucasian in Richmond. Very different. It was a very different mentality. The mentality in Greensboro 'cause... See I moved to Anderson, South Carolina. My ex-husband, who's also a Civil Rights worker, kind of always said... the day we moved he said, "This place has not even had any black power." Different mentalities. Very different. You know... When we walked into those places and they saw who the group were, 'cause they knew the group leaders, okay? So when they saw our adult leaders—then they said, "Okay. It's goin' down." The managers were up... Woolworth's used to have a upstairs you could look over. And they were up there. It was the folk in the trenches that were having all those feelings, you know? I think we didn't have that kind of situation, basically because we had always known who they were and how to act.

**LB:** 'Cause I think about Robin and Tap Mines, who moved to the neighborhood around George Wythe, and they were having crosses burned on their lawns. Right?

**ZAS:** Mhm, mhm.

**LB:** And it sounds like—yes, Gina's father, Gina's brother, in Church Hill. But it sounds like when you moved into a white neighborhood, you didn't get that same level of violent threat.

**ZAS:** Oh no, mmm. I think...

**LB:** Even though the Klan was still parading up and down Broad Street.

**ZAS:** Sure, but they weren't coming over on Oakwood Avenue to do that. The Confederate cemetery down our street... They had their parade up and down Oakwood Avenue. There used to be a parade.

**LB:** I've heard about it.

**ZAS:** Yeah!

**LB:** Isla Booker told me about it.

**ZAS:** Yeah. That parade used to come up and down our street. We used to sit there on our porch and look at it. You know? 'Cause children love parades.

**LB:** Oh yeah.

01:06:54

**ZAS:** Yeah... So... But... I think... I think it depended on what kind... economic levels... it really... of the Caucasians that we were dealing with... mattered.

**LB:** Okay, so, where you were on Oakwood was a little bit more affluent maybe?

**ZAS:** On Oakwood?

**LB:** Yeah.

**ZAS:** Where they took her bike—very different. Okay? They were very different. They were dirt poor. They were poorer than me.

**LB:** It's these micro-neighborhoods.

**ZAS:** Yes. I think it depended on, too, how much *they* were neighbors. Because you know people feed on other people. And so I don't think there were enough folk in that area to feed on that. Now we had a neighbor—I don't know if Mommy told you about it—she lives... let's see... let me try to remember in my mind... 12... 13... 12... 15...? 1215. In that little... Did you know just a little white house, looks like it doesn't belong, in that neighborhood, right there? This lady was so funny. She had a parrot. And she talked about us. The parrot heard it. So the parrot told us. Because the parrot would repeat what she was saying. She said—and she cursed—she said, “Ain't them n\*\*\*\*s in our neighborhood?” And so went the parrot. The parrot would repeat it. She called her husband, “Baldy.” And used to tell him, “Get his egg down.” And the parrot would say it. You could hear it. You could hear it all up and down the neighborhood. Parrot would repeat what she was saying. If there had been a lot of her in my neighborhood... then I think yes. But there weren't.

And then, like I said, because it was gentrification time—we were moving in fast. And displacing them, or they were displacing us. We were either displacing them or they were displacing us. Pretty soon my neighborhood had the Browns across the street. Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Bonaparte were best friends. Because of the same reason, you know, we kind had to stick together. So next to me was Mr. Jefferson lived next door. The Jeffersons lived downstairs, and the Taylors... You may have heard of Irvin Taylor, he was one of the big Griffin Park people here in Richmond. He moved to Norfolk. I think he's back. But I babysat for them and Irvin Taylor Jr. was Chief Officer at AT&T before it closed here. They were just, we were just, moving in. Moving in. The Robinsons moved behind us. And that whole neighborhood filled. It was so fast I was just like, “Oh my god, look, I got friends.” It was really amazing. I don't think... By the time I was 9<sup>th</sup> grade, maybe 10<sup>th</sup>, it was an all-black neighborhood. It was an all-black neighborhood by then. I think they were so busy with the plans of getting us in these clusters, which is what they did, you know you lived in New Town, you lived in Randolph, you lived in Navy Hill, you lived in Jackson Ward...

**LB:** And certain areas of Church Hill.

01:12:17

**ZAS:** And certain areas of Church Hill. You couldn't live all over Church Hill in that time. Very few of us on Broad Street. Ralph Samuels, the real estate agent, lived on Broad. He lived there. Emmett Burke, whose grandfather was a person of great stature in history, with Maggie Walker,



And the Egglestons, and all those folk right there. He bought a place on 29<sup>th</sup> and Broad. So he was there. But not many folk were on Broad Street.

**LB:** Now, when you were at Armstrong and you were already very political. You were out demonstrating a lot, were you surrounded by friends who were doing the same thing at Armstrong?

**ZAS:** Oh yes. That's where all of us came from.

**LB:** Interesting.

**ZAS:** We were all at Armstrong. Few at Walker. But most of us were from Armstrong. And I guess we kinda had like the same kind of parents. It seems.

**LB:** Tell me more about your mom. Because I interviewed her but I would love to have your perspective on her and what made her so amazing.

**ZAS:** Oh gosh. My mom... she was the kind of person who knew how to bring peace to any situation.

**LB:** That's a rare gift.

**ZAS:** She could do that. When my father he was going to get a job somewhere... I don't remember any arguments in the house. All I remember is his telling me he was going to New York. And I said, "Mmmm okay... when are you coming home?" You know. I was used to him traveling because he sang. So I was used to him traveling. But I think, this time it sounded different. So he said, "Okay." So we went down to Benny's. We always say his whole name—Benny Bernstein. We went down to Benny Bernstein's and he bought me some animal crackers. He gave my brother a box. And we went back to the house and Mommy said, "Okay it's time to go." So we went up to Broad Street Station and we just waved goodbye. My mother never said anything disparaging about my father. Never. She said, "It's Dad's birthday. Let's go get a gift and send it to him. It's Father's Day—get a gift send it to your dad. It's Christmas. Get gifts, send 'em to your dad." I'm like, "What? This guy..." But we did it. He would call and say, "Okay, I'm gonna come. What do I need to bring you?" And you'd be sitting waiting for him. And he didn't show up. And my mom would say, "Well you know what something probably happened. You know, it's gonna be okay. So we'll call him and you'll be able to talk to him." We'd say, "Yes ma'am." That's the kind of person... not just with my father, she was that way with other people.

01:17:03

I used to say, "Why you let them treat you like that, Mommy?" And she said, "You know, I don't like what they do." She said, "But if I act like them, I'm just as bad as they are. So my mother, and everybody who knows her... Listen—Frank Hall told me one day in the legislature building, we were on the elevator, he said, "Aren't you Mrs. Jackson's daughter?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "That's the most amazing lady." He said, "You have a wonderful mother. She is so kind and with such grace." And that's what she is. My mother is... And I don't even know where she learned it. Really. Because I don't think she came up that way. My mother lived in a

house with so many people... My daughter looked at the census, for that year, and my mother said... my daughter said, "Mommy," she called me, she was like, "Mommy—did all these people really live in that house?" Said, "Yes." She said, "It didn't have but three or four rooms." I said, "Yeah. It actually had three rooms, and a shed kitchen." People even slept in the shed kitchen. They slept in every room and..." So she learned these things because my mother is a person who would read. And I think she saw in her reading things that she would like to aspire to. And that's what she did. So, my mother... I'm a child at Carver School, and I'm talking about encyclopedias. And my mother is like... My mother was making \$45 a week at Benjamin Grave's Junior High School. That's the old Armstrong building. She said, "Well, I guess I have to talk to somebody." My mother bought encyclopedias. How did she do that? She's a magician. I was so sure I... I was just like... She's a miracle worker. And that she would care that much about my education that she would buy me a set of encyclopedias... I think... Do I still have them? Or I gave them to my grandson I think. The same set. I actually... It was hard for me to tear myself away from them because I knew what the sacrifice was for her. I ended up becoming a World Book Encyclopedia salesperson myself. The person who is now the president of World Book was my team leader. I did that... You know, you do things to take care of your children. And that's what I did during the summer.

**LB:** So there you were back at Armstrong. You're very involved politically. You're looking ahead to Howard. Many questions come to me. Where does your conversion to Islam come in all of this? Right? Because...

**ZAS:** It came after that, after Howard.

**LB:** Okay, so it's at Howard then.

**ZAS:** It's at Howard that I did that.

**LB:** So tell me about Howard.

01:22:27

**ZAS:** Going to Howard University. My mother didn't have a dime. I had not even put in an application for college. Ms. Pleasant came to me. I didn't even realize, understand that I'm the first person in my family to go to college, on either side. So my... Ms. Pleasant comes to me and says, "Zenoria, are you planning to go to college?" And I said, "Yes ma'am." She said, "Well when do you think you're gonna fill out an application?" I said, "Application?" She said, "You have to fill out an application." I said, "For what?" She said, "If you want them to let you come to their school you have to fill out an application." So I said, "Okay. I'll fill out some applications." She got me the applications. I filled them out. And then she said... she gave them to me, and she said, "You have to mail these in," and she told me how much the fees were for each application. And I said, "I think I'm gonna have to make some choices." She said, "Well why?" 'Cause I had no money. And I said, "Well, because my mother can't afford to send me all these applications." So I said, "I'm going to choose two or three colleges and I said, "I guess I'm gonna have to stay close to home so it'll be cheap for Mommy." So I applied to Hampton, I applied to VUU, and I applied to Howard. And I was accepted at all of them. I still don't have any money. So she said... I said, "I don't have money to go to these schools. What else can I do?" Ms. Pleasant said, "Well you know what, I know some people that will offer you

scholarships.” She said, “Let me get the place, the colleges, and you have to go on campus and have interviews.” I said, “I don’t have a car. You don’t have a car. How am I gonna get to a campus? I know I can’t afford Greyhound for me and Mommy. So I don’t know what we gonna do about it.” She said, “I’ll bring them here.” I’m telling you, she’s the best counselor that ever lived.

**LB:** She sounds amazing.

**ZAS:** Ms. Pleasant brought colleges to me. And set them up in her office. I talked to... Ooh, I forgot the name of that college... They wanted me to come to West Virginia. I said, “West Virginia? I asked the guy I said, “How many black people livin’ out there?” He said, “We have black people.” I said, “How many of them on your campus?” I said, “You want me to come?” He said, “I’ll give you a full scholarship.” They wanted a contralto on their choir. He said, “I’ll give you a full scholarship if you come.” “I don’t know about that,” to Ms. Pleasant. She said, “You tell anybody yes. Tell everybody yes. Then make your decision.” I said, “Okay.” So I told him yes. She did that for four or five different colleges. When Ms. Pleasant finished, when I graduated, I had ten scholarships. None from Howard. I wanted to go to Howard. So I said to my mom, “I don’t like these other schools. I wanna go to Howard.” She said, “Well, we’ll have to find a way.” I said, “That’s an [01:25:03 unc. unreasonable amount?]” She didn’t say, “We can’t.” She didn’t say, “We don’t have the money.” She said, “We’re gonna have to find a way.” The church raised money for me to go to Howard. First Union Baptist Church. I’ll never forget them and I’ll always give back to them. Lot Carrie, fraternity I was a member of, when I got to Howard University I had a Lot Carrie scholarship. Whoever was in the financial aid office said to me, “We oughtta see what we can do to help you.” And they told Mommy, they said, “What we can do... is we can map out a payment plan.” She said, “I would really appreciate that.” And my mother registered me at Howard University, summer 1965. I went to Howard University. I loved it. I lived 311 Truth Hall. I loved Howard University. It was just amazing. I was there when Donny Hathaway was there. Roberta Flack. Jackie Robinson’s son. Just amazing people on this campus.

I wasn’t really... It was kinda like being out of place, really. But because I had this mother, with this class, I continued. But I was really out of my league at Howard. Not here... but here—okay? These kids had cars. When we went to Penn Relays, I can remember, it didn’t bother these girls to spend their meal ticket to get food because, “My mom is gonna see this. Or my dad will do it.” You know? These were children who were... I guess looked like middle class or as we used to say, “the black bourgeoisie,” you know? That’s what they were. So... September, October... we couldn’t go home ‘til November. I cried September. I cried October. I cried, “I want to go home.” Because it wasn’t... I could feel the stress of what I was dealing with. I wanted the education. That’s what I went to Howard for. Not the socializing. But I met amazing friends. And I still have those amazing friends. Some of them now have passed away. But really we had a great time on that campus. We were the class that sat in Dean [01:28:30 name unc.] office. That was our class. So still being political right? People like Ron Karenga and Stokely Carmichael and all of those folk were always on campus. That was really amazing. I loved it.

01:28:58

I met a guy. His name is Fred McDowell. Well it was. It’s [01:29:06 unc.] now. He actually lived with me when I went to 4<sup>th</sup> Street. And he’s still Muslim. I married him. But he told me... I met

him at the freshmen boat ride. They always have a freshmen boat ride at Howard. And so you do the Potomac... for freshmen. We talkin' that day and laughin' and jokin'. He says to me, "You gonna be my girl." I said, "You're not even my type." You know? We still hung out, but we hung out at his group. There was a dance and he asked me if I would go. We went to the dance and then we went out... you hear people talk about "The Valley" at Howard. Down in the valley is where all of the sororities and fraternities go and they do the stepping and all of that down in there. So way up on the hill at Founders Library. That's the name of the library at Howard, "Founders." So Founders Library has this huge clock, kinda like Big-Ben-looking clock, and we're standing under this clock and he says, "Next year this time—you're gonna be my wife." I said, "I'm goin' to college. I ain't gonna marry you." He said, "I'm tellin' you. You're gonna be my wife." And next year that time I was married to him, and I left Howard. He's my children's father. He was very much an activist himself. You know, I was like right in good company. You know... "Hey, let's go over to the dean's office and sit in." "Okay! Let's go!"

We went to Philadelphia to live. He was an engineering student. As a matter of fact he has a degree in engineering. And he got his master's in education. He ended up teaching. Because that was his love and you know... and that he wanted to do something to give back in his neighborhood. So when we went back to Philadelphia it was because someone... He lived next door to the alderman of his district, and he told him that he wanted him to come back and see if he would like to be the aldermen when he gave it up. And so that's why we went back to Philly. Ultimately, he didn't like politics. He liked activism, but not politics.

**LB:** Especially in Philadelphia at that time.

**ZAS:** Yeah, yeah. At that time, Cecil Moore... I don't know if you know about Cecil Moore? Well Cecil Moore was there and Cecil Moore was doing things. You know they had that college there in the black neighborhood that had these signs on it: "No dogs. No n\*\*\*\*\*s allowed."

**LB:** What college?

**ZAS:** The name of it was Girard College. It wasn't really a college.

**LB:** What was it?

**ZAS:** It was a school for boys. And Stephen Girard had given them an endowment and part of his reasoning was that there would be no people of color at all there. It was a boys' school. Nobody of color.

**LB:** So you were there in 1969... '70. And it was still...?

**ZAS:** It was like that. They had done a big... They had a big... It was supposed to be, by that time, integrated. Because they actually had gone to court and all about it.

**LB:** I'm sure they did.

**ZAS:** Yeah. But they kinda did the same thing that they did here. You know? So it took a while to get those there. But they opened the school. They'd get 'em from the school. But he went on to teach for Philadelphia Public School. He became a principal. So now he's retired and he's doing other things. He's Muslim too.

**LB:** Did you...

**ZAS:** Back to 4<sup>th</sup> Street? We went to 4<sup>th</sup> Street and we sat there and I'm thinking, "My mom wouldn't like this. I don't know why I did this. I don't know why I came here." But I'm there. [group chats about excited little girl overheard in the next room] So anyway, I went into the masjid, at that time they called them "the temple," and the minister there was Minister Lonnie Shabazz.

**LB:** I've heard that name.

**ZAS:** He's a professor now. Math, I think.

**LB:** At VUU?

01:40:19

**ZAS:** Not at VUU. The last time I heard he was somewhere in Southern Towers. But he's been several places. He's a good mathematician. He was a great teacher. He was a good teacher. He was an orator. He had that tone. I listened to what he was saying about the things that were happening in our lives. I'd been in the Civil Rights movement and so I know these things he's saying were real. So I'm thinking if he could do something... if he could do something, you know, to help our people... then maybe this is something that I need to really listen to. And as I listened, these... the lessons... that were being taught in my mind were very good lessons for us. It made the things that we felt real. Whereas, before you just kind of had a kind of feeling of hopelessness. Especially after the death of Dr. King. That was just horrible times. I was in D.C. when Dr. King was murdered. His assassination, I'm sure you know, wreaked havoc on Washington D.C. I was in southeast D.C., right by the airbase and all that, so the tanks were on my street. So I'm walking... you know, there are soldiers... By this time you get disillusioned. You've done all of this work, you think, trying to help your people. And then it just looked like because one person... And I, like I said, I've never been a person, who was about one person. It seemed that once something happened to Dr. King, that everything just went downhill in turns of the Civil Rights movement. People became... Those that got the privileges, I think they became complacent and kind of forgot. You know you can't forget where you come from. And you can't be afraid of poverty. I think more of it was that fear of poverty, you know going back to where you were and then you know maybe never being able to pull yourself out of that again. We didn't... We did not give back and pull other people up. You know? And that's a part of what happens to your mentality when you are an oppressed people. What Elijah Muhammad was saying made sense. I had issues with some things. And when I met him, it was funny because I became an officer, in the nation, in Philadelphia, and so I was a member of what was called Vanguard, which meant, you're fierce. And so, he said, "You know?" He said, "You're hardheaded, stiff-necked, and rebellious." He had a way of saying that. That was one of his sayings. But he reserved it for certain people. I was one of those people he reserved it for. Because I... What I don't believe in, I don't believe in. But that doesn't mean I can't function in

this arena. It just means that you and I have a difference of opinion. So, fortunately for me, the things that I differed on were the things that I should've been differing on.

**LB:** What did you differ on?

**ZAS:** Farhad Mohammed. One... I didn't... If he was god, he was god, you know? But I had a problem with him because he looked just like Jesus to me. And so I was like, "Okay, well, if Jesus can't be my God, he can't either." But that doesn't mean I can't read my Qur'an. That doesn't mean I can't pray. It doesn't mean I won't have my people. I'm gon' work. And I became a great worker in the Nation of Islam. There were weeks that I cooked for 250 people. I made 100 cookies every week. I sold over \$1,000 worth of dinners every week. I was an ardent Muslim for the Nation of Islam, just like I'm an ardent Muslim in my community now.

**LB:** When did you shift over from the Nation to...

**ZAS:** When everybody else did.

**LB:** Yeah.

**ZAS:** In '75. I was in Chicago when the honorable Elijah Muhammad returned to Allah. He died and that meant we couldn't leave Chicago. We were there for what we called, at that time, Savior's Day. It was so cold. Gosh Chicago was cold. It was barely 26. It was cold. And we were standing outside waiting for his janaza and to hear what was going to happen to us as a community. We went in and they had the janaza and then... They said his son was the... It wasn't really a surprise. It wasn't a surprise because it was a part of the lore of the Nation of Islam. His mother told him, when he was a child, his name was written on a door in her house—what she should name him. And it had been put there by Fard Mohammed. And he told them that he wrote his name there. That he was going to be the ultimate leader of the community. Anybody who says they did not know that Wallace Muhammad was going to be the leader—tellin' a lie. I don't care who it is. They tellin' a lie if they say they didn't know. Because it was a part of what we were taught. Anyway... he came in and... When I was a little girl, at First Union Baptist Church, I asked Reverend Henderson one day, I said, "If in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... how is it that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth?" I said, "You can do one thing in the beginning, one. He had to do the word, or he had to do... What'd he do?" So Reverend Henderson looked at me like, "Child... where did you get that question from?" And he told me, he said, "When I find the answer, I'm going to tell you." But Reverend Henderson didn't tell me. Wallace Muhammad did. That first day he spoke, he said, "In the beginning was the Word." He said, "Because there's always a concept before there's creation." Simple to say. And I said, "That's my man." I'm here. And I've never left.

01:46:04

So, I raised my children in this town. They've been Muslim longer than I have. My son has boys. He has two boys, two girls. The two boys were raised Muslim. He remarried when their mother passed, when one was two and the other was just off the breast. She weaned him the week before she passed. So those boys have always been Muslim. When he remarried, he married a Christian. Kailah, his daughter, his birth daughter, is both. She always says, "I'm both. Sometimes I go to

church. Sometimes I'm at the masjid." Okay. You make your decision when you get older though. Taylor was his wife's daughter before she has another father. And her father did not want her to be Muslim. There's nothing compulsory in Islam. People think there is. But there's nothing compulsory. So we did not force that on her. She does go to masjid with us. She hangs with us. She does what we do. But her dad wanted her to remain... And that's why... that's why, in Islam, women are told to marry Muslim men. The men can marry outside of the religion, but it's not the best for them. And the Qur'an tells them that. You know, that—you can do it, but the best for you is to marry in your own faith. That's because children should, according to these regulations, follow the diem or religion of their father. And the mother teaches it. So, you know, he had to... he had to adhere. That's not his job. He had to adhere to that. And he does. He's a good Muslim father. He's a good Muslim husband. I'm very proud of him and my daughter. My daughter is also in education. She's a principal of a school, charter school, in Delaware. She was also assistant principal, until last year, of KIPP School in Philadelphia. She was with KIPP for about twelve years.

**LB:** That's a long time.

**ZAS:** She started with KIPP. She had been there longer... Only she, and the guy who started it, and the guys who started it, had been there that long.

**LB:** Wow.

**ZAS:** But Islam... when I became Muslim, and I told my mother... My brother was also Muslim. Yeah. So when I told my mother, I said, "Mommy, you know [01:48:58 unc. name]?" She said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." I said, "Well, I became Muslim." She said, "Do you believe in God?" I said, "Yes, ma'am." She said, "Then I don't have a problem with it."

**LB:** Did your brother become a Muslim at the same time? Around the same time?

**ZAS:** Around the same time I did. He was somewhere else. We didn't talk about it. I didn't know he was doing it. He didn't know I was doing it. We just ended up being Muslim.

**LB:** That's interesting.

**ZAS:** Yeah. I think that's... you know sometimes I say that there are things that happen in our lives that led us there. My granny was always up before sunrise. So it's easy for me to get up and we bless Allah and stuff like that. I'd always been... My family is a family of faith. My mother's family, the Flemings—preachers everywhere. And they were very big preachers here in Richmond, Virginia. Emmett Fleming. Marilyn Fleming.

**LB:** You're not related to Glennys Fleming, are you?

**ZAS:** Glennys? Why do I know that name?

01:50:23

**LB:** Her father—and her sister Renée as well—their father rose up to become president of the Consolidated Bank.

**ZAS:** Oh, I know who you're talking about.

**LB:** Yes, they're in the exhibition as well.

**ZAS:** Oh, okay. You know what? Very good friend of my mom's. But they're a different family. We were Flemings from Francis Town Road, Broad Street Road, Hungary Road...

**LB:** I feel like we're playing six degrees of separation.

**ZAS:** Wow. Yeah.

**LB:** You'll see. When you see all the portraits, you are gonna recognize so many people who you've known for so long.

**ZAS:** Wow. That's amazing. So did you interview Leonard Edloe?

**LB:** I do not know him.

**ZAS:** Oh, really?

**LB:** Yes.

**ZAS:** How could you not know him?

**LB:** I don't know.

**ZAS:** Leonard's father owned a pharmacy at 26<sup>th</sup> and King Street in Church Hill.

**LB:** Okay. I've heard of Edloe's Pharmacy.

**ZAS:** That's it. It belonged to Leonard. His father died. He took over. He went to Howard when I went to Howard. Leonard was one of the people that said, "Come on get in the line because we're..."

**LB:** I should talk to him too.

**ZAS:** Hey. Leonard know... He remembers every detail. He is so detail-oriented.

**LB:** I love interviewing people like that.

**ZAS:** He's very detail-oriented. We talk about what was happening. He said, "I'm so glad you remember this because I was thinkin' I was goin' crazy. Everybody else was telling me something else." We really had an amazing group of young people.

01:52:30

**LB:** It sounds like it.



**ZAS:** He's probably our wheel for that group. He remembers...

**LB:** ...everything.

**ZAS:** Everything.

**LB:** Okay, now can I stump you with a question?

**ZAS:** Mhm.

**LB:** I may not stump you. What... the essay that I'm gonna be writing for the introduction to the show has to do with the Southern Negro Youth Congress, founded in Richmond in 1937 by James E. Jackson Jr. Does any of that sound familiar to you?

**ZAS:** Wow. I had a teacher named James Jackson. He taught me at George Mason. Tall...

**LB:** It would not have been the same guy. Because this James E. Jackson, he was a communist. So he became a lifelong communist. He was imprisoned during the Smith Act times in the 50s. Yeah.

**ZAS:** Oh. I wonder... Did you ask Mommy that question?

**LB:** I did but you know her memory's a little...

**ZAS:** Yeah, it gets fuzzy.

**LB:** It gets a little fuzzy so I didn't get too far with that. If you could think of anyone because...

**ZAS:** If somebody knows him...

**LB:** ...it would be Leonard Edloe?

**ZAS:** It's gonna be Leonard Edloe.

**LB:** Also because Jackson's Pharmacy, right?

**ZAS:** Yes.

**LB:** So that was James E. Jackson Sr.

**ZAS:** I wonder was he... I wonder was he related to, there was a Jackson that had a funeral service here. Down in Jackson Ward.

01:54:10

**LB:** He was the son of Jackson's Pharmacy Jackson. And he was supposed to be a pharmacist. He trained to be a pharmacist but then he became a full time communist instead.

**ZAS:** I bet you Leonard's dad has talked to him about him. I'm pretty sure.

**LB:** I'm sure he has because he went to Virginia Union in the 30s. He went to Armstrong and then Virginia Union, and then he founded this Southern Negro Youth Congress right here in Richmond, W. E. B. Dubois came to the first meeting. Everyone was there. And then they came up with a black theater troupe out of that. Eventually it moved, the headquarters moved to Montgomery, Alabama. But for a number of years it was here. I feel like that's the lost Civil Rights history of Richmond.

**ZAS:** Wow.

**LB:** It's interesting.

**ZAS:** Yeah it is. I'd like to know that myself. Hm. Who else? '37...

**LB:** I know it's so long ago. It feels recent to me because I'm always reading about it and talking to people from that time and I'm working on a...

**ZAS:** Mhm. 'Cause I'm thinking Mommy would've been about ten.

**LB:** Yes.

**ZAS:** Yeah...

**LB:** I think, maybe, Marvin said if I had talked to her a couple of years earlier, her memory might've been a little better.

**ZAS:** She might've been a little bit... And actually, here's the deal. It's her short term memory that gets away with her. She has to think about the other things a little bit longer.

**LB:** Yeah. And you know, I mean I had my list of questions. But I also know from interviewing people that sometimes if you don't know the right way to ask the question because you don't know that particular person. Like when I make up my list of questions, I always get input from whatever community I'm interviewing, right? About how to phrase the questions, but that still doesn't cover individuals sometimes. Especially old ladies...

**ZAS:** I noticed that when you were asking her questions, I was like, "Okay... that was the wrong way. She's gonna tell you that same story over again."

**LB:** I know. But I didn't know her before, so I just... I couldn't quite figure out the way. See, I should've interviewed her with you in the room.

01:54:10

**ZAS:** Probably would've triggered. Because then you know there are things [**LB:** I mean I still could...] that she has told me that maybe would've come to mind for me and it would've triggered her...

**LB:** Like the body snatchers.

**ZAS:** Oh, the body snatchers. She was so funny tellin' us that story about how she was running from the body snatchers. And that seemed so unreal. Until they dug up that well at MCV.

**LB:** I know. I know.

**ZAS:** And I was like, "Oh, hey, that wasn't a ghost story. That was real." You know?

**LB:** I know. But I still... Like I had heard about them digging up graves and desecrating the corpses, but I never heard before of them just taking people off the street, like people who were passed out.

**ZAS:** You know Shawn Utsey?

**LB:** Yes.

**ZAS:** Shawn did that documentary on that you know?

**LB:** I saw his first documentary, but I haven't seen that one.

**ZAS:** Oh.

**LB:** Is it good?

**ZAS:** Yeah. It tells that story. And he interviewed a lot of people and did a lot of research on that. That second documentary is only about the graves... the... the body snatching. So I would talk to him.

**LB:** I will talk to him.

**ZAS:** Maybe 'cause yeah, maybe he could give you some information. But Leonard... He's on Facebook.

**LB:** I'm not on Facebook.

**ZAS:** Okay. I can understand, with all you do. Oh my best friend called... I need your address for a reference... Okay.

But I will see. What I'll do is I'll contact Leonard, and I'll ask Leonard if it's okay to give you his information so you can call him. But he's a minister now. He's retired from his drugstore.

01:58:46

**LB:** Where's he a minister?

**ZAS:** Near Gloucester.

**LB:** Okay.

**ZAS:** But he's up here... Well he just got his, I think, doctorate from a seminary.

**LB:** Oh, wow.

**ZAS:** Yeah. So I think by now Leonard's got probably two or three doctorates. He's, you know, he just tries to keep his mind sharp. Leonard, like I said, probably has that information you're looking for on that pharmacist.

**LB:** 'Cause next year with Armstrong, because my friend Patricia Herrera and I teach together all the time at University of Richmond. We do a lot of plays and exhibitions. And we've been working with Armstrong for three years now.

**ZAS:** The high school?

**LB:** Yeah.

**ZAS:** Oh, okay.

**LB:** We did the play that Josine was in. And Dennis Harvey. That was what me and Patricia...

**ZAS:** Dennis Harvey and I lived... He was on the foundation, in the foundation with us.

**LB:** With the Armstrong Classic?

**ZAS:** The Armstrong Classic, yeah.

**LB:** Yeah.

**ZAS:** Doug Wilder's sister. She has a lot of information too. She has like all of the class list and things from like back like when Doug was in school up until...

**LB:** Well we're gonna be working with the Armstrong Leadership Program students again next year and we're gonna be focusing on... how to put this... You know East End Cemetery, right?

**ZAS:** Uh huh.

**LB:** And Evergreen Cemetery. Brian Palmer, who took the photograph, he and his wife are really involved in restoring the cemeteries.

**ZAS:** Oh is he involved with that?

02:00:34 **LB:** Yeah.

**ZAS:** ‘Cause we’ve been trying to fix my husband’s mother’s grave. It’s all...

**LB:** Well you just said the magic words because what we wanna do is bring some of the family members who have people in those cemeteries together to meet with our students and the Armstrong students and then to have them write a play about some of the people who are in the cemetery.

**ZAS:** Oh that’s nice, that’d be nice.

**LB:** Yeah.

**ZAS:** That’s wonderful. Jerry’s sister and his mother. We could find his sister’s grave. We couldn’t find his mother’s grave because they had let it grow up so much.

**LB:** I know.

**ZAS:** And we had put a stone flat. It’s not there. We don’t even know where it is. So we’ll have to see. He said he has a... the guy who bought it...

**LB:** Oh, in Richmond?

**ZAS:** Yeah, in Richmond. He said that he has the plots. He has the numbers.

**LB:** Okay. Well that’s a good start.

**ZAS:** That’s a place to start, yeah.

**LB:** Now, of course I have seven...

**ZAS:** Did we do any of these questions?

**LB:** No.

**ZAS:** I didn’t think any...

**LB:** Which is okay, which is okay. I have a feeling we could either do another interview, or I could just ask you a couple more questions. ‘Cause I know we’ve got a huge volume of material.

**ZAS:** Okay. Either way is fine with me.

**LB:** So, let me ask you these questions. Are there things that you would like the generations of kids, of youths, growing up in Richmond today to know?

**ZAS:** Funny you should ask that.

**LB:** Yeah.

**ZAS:** I am right now... I took a... I'm doing something online. Because I said to a girl that, you know, the masjid, where I am, is the first masjid in Virginia.

**LB:** I haven't heard that word before. Can you explain to me what it is?

**ZAS:** Masjid is the Arabic word for mosque.

**LB:** For mosque? Okay.

**ZAS:** So, this... here in Richmond. Okay? When Islam came to Richmond, it was in the 50s. And it came by way of a brother who was a part of the Ethiopian church. Which was historical for blacks across the country, had different types of Ethiopian churches. The brother was on the train, or a bus, and met... I can't remember now... but he met someone who told him about the Nation of Islam. He had a very small church. It's still over there on North Avenue. When he heard it, he liked it. But he wasn't sure he wanted to do it. Like me. Then he talked to... at that time his name was Minister James Shabazz. He talked to Minister James Shabazz. And when he finished talking to Minister James Shabazz—he made up his mind that he wanted to be a part of the Nation of Islam. So he goes over on North Avenue, right there near the cemetery right there? It's about a block up the street that church is, a little white building sitting there. He goes into this church and he tells his congregation how much he loved them and you know, all about everything that they've done together. And he tells them that he had found some new knowledge. He shared a little of it with them. And he said, "I don't think it's fair that I remain your minister. And so I'm going to leave and you have to choose a new minister." And all but thirteen people in his congregation said, "We're goin' with you." First temple. Number 24. That was the number of their temple. Temple #24. All the temples were named in numerical order.

**LB:** Which is... how old is the one that's on 34<sup>th</sup> and Marshall? How long has that one been there?

**ZAS:** Same minister.

**LB:** Oh, okay.

**ZAS:** Same minister.

**LB:** It was started by Brother Dawud and his wife, Sister Shukriya, she passed about two years ago. But Dawud died maybe about eight years before she did. But he brought his whole church, except for thirteen people, to the Nation of Islam.

**LB:** Wow.

**ZAS:** I mean amazing history. And the who go to the Masjid Bilal which is at 34<sup>th</sup> and Marshall, don't know the history. So, for me, this is what I said to the lady I'm talking to about what direction I should take it, and kinda mentorship kinda thing—I need them to know. I need them to know their history. I need... When I taught at Carver, when it was African American history

month, I taught my children about New Town and Jackson Ward. Because that was their history. They lived in Gilpin Court and didn't even know who Charles Gilpin was. They didn't know that Bojangles was not chicken. For real. They did not know who that statue on Adams Street was. They were like, "Okay." They said, "That's Bojangles. Did he make the chicken?"

"No, baby. Let Ms. Salaam tell you some stuff about livin' in Richmond, Virginia." Because we have a wonderful history. A very rich history here in Richmond, Virginia. There are... Other historians have come in here and found gravestones in Virginia, in Richmond, of Muslims. You know how they tell? There are certain different forms of the names that we have. And so, when you go back to the old African way of speaking English, you know this is a language they didn't know, and so they said it as well as they could, and so now going back linguistically, they're finding that some of these folk actually had Islamic names.

**LB:** So the enslaved people who were brought here were Muslims?

**ZAS:** Yes. And if you watch, you'll see, on headstones, old ones, 16 and 1700s, you may see on their headstone a finger like this—which means "One God." Which is an Islamic concept. We do this during prayer—One God. So they need to know that, you know? Our children need to know. We used to have something in Richmond called "The Queen of May." We had that at the church. A lady at... Sixth Mount Zion is the one on the bridge.

**LB:** Yeah.

**ZAS:** A lady who went to Sixth Mount Zion... [recording skips]

**ZAS:** It was real funny, we had this lady at our church and she used wear these hats and we used to call her Mae West. Every time we had the Queen of May she would come up with one of her hats and one old bustle dresses and say, "Save your nickels and dimes boys! Come up and see me sometime." She was so funny. I loved her. She passed. I loved her. She was quite a character, you know. But there are different things like that. And you know just the people. I know some people who actually knew Bojangles. And they're dying out. So now you can't really get real history because people who have it are taking it with them to the grave. So you'll never get it. For me, I think what the children need is to know that they have a rich history. I don't want it to define the human that they are. But I think they have to know about their own tribe. They have to know their tribe. And hopefully that they can take this information and increase their own humanity. That's what I'd like to see happen for children in Richmond, Virginia.

**LB:** That was beautifully said.

**ZAS:** I don't know.

**LB:** Thank you.

02:11:26

**ZAS:** You are so welcome. I'm glad you asked. 'Cause I've been talking about that all week. It's something that's near and dear to me.

**LB:** I just feel like... you remember how in the early 1980s, '82, Akida Mensah did that whole series of oral history interviews?

**ZAS:** Ooh.

**LB:** Do you know about that?

**ZAS:** Yeah.

**LB:** They're all online now.

**ZAS:** Is that right?

**LB:** Yes, through the VCU Library Special Collections.

**ZAS:** You know, somebody did a history... Somebody from there, an African student at VCU, came to the masjid, and I believe that was in the 80s. And he did his dissertation, I believe, on that masjid.

**LB:** Interesting. Wow.

**ZAS:** I read it. I actually purchased it for \$25. A lot of it wasn't exactly right, you know. But it was a good place to start. So I did this play at the masjid with the children. I was principal then of Clara Mohammed School and so I did this play called "Masjid Bilal, One of a Kind, by Laws and Design." Because any time a whole church becomes the foundation for a masjid—

**LB:** That's intense.

**ZAS:** Yes. And many of those elders there now were children then.

**LB:** Wow. So Zenoria, have you spent most of your adult life really focused on your Islamic life? You know, being a principal of the school, and doing other things?

**ZAS:** I've done a lot with my... 'Cause that's me—community and community life. That's important to me.

**LB:** Mhm.

02:14:09

**ZAS:** So I spent a lot of time there. I kept my children focused so that I could move them the way I wanted them to move. I kept my... my children went to Clara Mohammed School. They went to Clara Mohammed School 'cause they had a teacher for a mother and I could fill in the holes. I didn't tell everybody to do that because when they first started... it meant, you know. But hey, Imam Wallace Dean Muhammad, his mother, when Chicago Police came to her door and said to her that she had to send her children to Chicago Public Schools, or they would knock her up... she said, "We're not sending them. I'll be dead as that door knob." I always think about Sister Clara. She was like my mom. She was that kinda lady, you know? The pearls, the little



gloves. Sister Clara, she was just a sweet person. And Sister Clara was determined that no one should be teaching Muslim children because what they thought in terms of Christianity was diabolically opposed to what you think of as Muslims. And so she was like, "My children not going there." And so Sister Clara may have been the first person to homeschool her children. She did that back in the 30s. None of her children ever went to a public school. They didn't go. These are people who ended up... Imam Mohammed spoke five languages, I believe. He was an excellent student of Islam. There is nobody who has taught Islam in the world like W. D. Mohammed. That includes any Arab that has known it for centuries. Nobody ever came to this country and taught Muslims. They didn't get... Islam was established by African American ex-slave children in America. And nobody did that before. Nobody could come and teach it. And he figured that out. He never went to those kind of schools. He went to college. But he never went, in his basic education. He learned his Arabic at what then we called the University of Islam. So he was taught at the university. He changed the name to Clara Mohammed when he became the leader after the death of his father. And he did that because of how much he honored his mother for the sacrifice that she made of being willing to go to jail that somebody wanted to teach her children in a public school. So all of those things made me want to... it's important to me... legacy. That's what it is. It's important to me. Legacy is important to me. Legacy of my family. The legacy of my schools. The legacy of my community. And the legacy of my faith community. They're important to me. So yes, I do that. And I've done that since I was a teenager, I guess. I've done that since I was a teenager.

**LB:** It's amazing.

**ZAS:** Yeah. Hadn't thought about it like that. But I guess that's right. I've done it since I was a teenager. And I always... I had all these notebooks. I'm always writing something down. I hear Mommy say something and I either put it in the phone or I get out a book. Sometimes I send it to the kids and say, "Let's get this on the family tree." 'Cause my daughter's been doing the family tree. So all of those kind of things. And we have to get it. We have to get it before...

**LB:** ...it's too late.

**ZAS:** Yes. That's it. That's why. My mother talks I'm like [sound of scribbling on table]. You know? 'Cause I want to make sure that her great great grandchildren and her great grand children know what kind of grandmother they had. And what kind of community we lived in. And what this city was like. I remember when I moved to South Carolina. I moved to Anderson, South Carolina.

**LB:** What brought you there?

**ZAS:** A husband. Of course. He also left me there. But it's okay. 'Cause I do what I do. So when we went to Anderson, like I said it was this one-horse town. He said to me, when he came back to Philadelphia, "We just bought a house so we gotta move."

02:20:11

**ZAS:** "Okay." So he said, "You know, that's the nicest town." He said, "I love that town." He said, "We went to..." ... you ever been to a Po Folks? Restaurant? Po Folks? Oh the cutest little concept in the world. So Southern. You drink out of Mason jars. Nobody's cup matches any

plate. The lights in the ceiling, the chandeliers, were flower pots turned upside down. It was just too cute. But good old Southern cooking. Southern kinda good. So he and his friend had gone to Atlanta and they come back through Anderson via 85, you know. So when he gets there and he tells me he wants to move to Anderson. He said, “You know what?” He said, “We went to Po Folks.” He said, “When I left, you know what they said?” I said, “What?”

“Y’all come back now, ya hear?”

I said, “I heard that all of my life.” He’s from Philadelphia. I’ve always heard, “Y’all come back now hear.” But he was like, “Okay, this is the greatest.” So we moved to Anderson. All in God’s plan. Because if my children had not been there, I think they’d be different children. My children went to school with Chadwick Boseman. Radio? My daughter drove his school bus.

They were in a place where they were a minority but that gave me a chance to teach them how to block vote. I taught them and their classes, all their friends, how to block vote. So they’d be the president and the vice president of the student council. I said, “Otherwise, you gonna have to do everything they wanna do. So we gonna block vote. They don’t know block vote because it’s a one-horse town. They don’t know block vote. I’ll teach you that.” So they did it. My daughter and my son ended up being president and vice president.

**LB:** That is hilarious that you took the lessons that you learned.

**ZAS:** You know, those were the things that Dr. King and all those folk, Adam Clayton Powell, when he came through here. He talked a lot about that. That block voting, you know? That was something that was important in the position that he was in. Because I think at that time he was, like, he was the finance committee or something like that. And he was like holding things, you know, until they did some Civil Rights stuff. He was telling us about being in a position of power. So those were good lessons. We had the use of that. Both of my... all my children... I ended up adopting some boys because their mother had been murdered. They were very good friends of my children. And my daughter called me from school and she said, “Mommy, Lacy and Frit’s Mom has been murdered. I don’t know what they’re gonna do.” And I said, “Oh, that’s...” I said, “Lord have mercy. What in the world are they gonna do?” She said, “Live with us.”

02:25:24

“Live with us?... Okay....” So Frit and Lacy came to live with us. And you know, they all played in the orchestra. Zachiah was first chair. And they were supposed to go to Europe. At that time was when I was getting a divorce. So he left, and now I’m like, “Okay. All the bills are on me, how am I gonna get four kids to Europe?” So the boys say, “We takin’ all of our money that we’ve raised, we’re gonna give it to Zachiah ‘cause he’s first chair.” And so Zachiah went to Europe and he went to six different countries. He played in temples in every country. They were... just the things that they were learning as we were going on, you know, how to be community-minded, how to be family-minded. My children have stepbrothers and sisters. You’ll never hear them say that. You heard me say that. But you’ll never hear them say that. Those are their brothers and sisters. And their mom and I are good friends. And my husband and him are good friends. So when we go out, we go out as a family. We do things in Philly, we go to the masjid—‘cause we all Muslim—we go to that masjid. We all sit at the same table. We just laugh

and joke and have fun and we're a family. We do family things. I think those things were important. I think other children need to know how to do them. All of this that's going on in our country right now has really brought that to a head. My point right now is—I'm not even caring about other people. I'm about—we gotta get these children straight. And set them on the right path so that they can have fruitful lives and understand that they're not black, they're not white, they're human. And we all have to come to a point where we know that we are one humanity. God never said all this other stuff. We did. To use these things to oppress people is... that's just been going on too long. I guess God is tired, 'cause it's really coming to a head.

**LB:** Yes it is.

**ZAS:** Everybody's. I mean, you know, hey, the promise is there. If you don't do it right, I'll give it to somebody else. I'm just hoping, because we have all enjoyed the spoils of war here in America. We have all enjoyed it. We could've been living in another country that didn't have the wealth and the...

**LB:** ...power and all that...

**ZAS:** Yes. All of the.... all these worldly things, we have them. We have everything except, what? Humanity? The easiest thing to do. The other things are hard to get. Being a human is easy. You were born with it. Father was in you.

**LB:** That's the thing people lose.

**ZAS:** Yeah. First. Don't they.

**LB:** First.

**ZAS:** It's something that happens. We just keep praying. It'll be okay.

**LB:** Thank you so much, Zenoria.

**ZAS:** It's gonna be okay. It's gonna be alright. Call me if you need me.

**LB:** I will.

**ZAS:** And I'm gonna call them. And see what...

**LB:** Maybe an interesting thing would be to have you and he sit down together. Because seriously, that's the way I like to do it a lot. Because I can...

**ZAS:** I'm trying to think who left.

**LB:** Yeah.

**ZAS:** In that group. ‘Cause I think Leonard, and I, and James Elam. And James Elam had polio, but he walked those walks with us. He was... and James Elam, you know something, we’re all on Facebook talking, Leonard and I, sometimes, James will put something in there, these things happening. But I think he may... because the last time... [recording skips time] there were a set of twins...

**LB:** Tell me about Mr. Briggs because that’s crazy.

**ZAS:** Yeah. Mr. Briggs was a slave. And he lived next door to us. On one side was his house. On the other side of us he had a stable. He had been a blacksmith as a slave. And so Mr. Brigg could shoe a horse.

**LB:** He must have been so elderly.

**ZAS:** He was. Mr. Briggs must have been. Because his son passed maybe about eight years ago. And Mr. Gary Briggs... his name was Gary Briggs, the son, Mr. Gary Briggs died at a hundred and some years old. And Mr. Briggs was like that. And so Mr. Briggs... People would bring their horses. Because people were still using horses then. And they would bring their horses.

**LB:** Is this in Church Hill or when you were on Moore Street?

**ZAS:** This is in New Town.

**LB:** Okay.

**ZAS:** This is on Bath Street, right behind Virginia Union. So Mr. Briggs is shoeing horses. He would sharpen people’s knives.

**LB:** Wow.

**ZAS:** You know, he had one of those wheels. All that old stuff was... I remember Mr. Briggs had a grape arbor. He had a grape arbor and we used to eat his grapes. Mr. Briggs used to plant sweet potatoes under his porch. He would plant sweet potatoes. He would dig ‘em up and he would give people sweet potatoes. My mother has a picture of Mr. Gary Briggs, ‘cause a mule got away one day. And Mr. Gary Briggs used to drink. Mr. Briggs was running behind the mule down the street and my mother ran in the house and got her camera and took a picture of Mr. Gary Briggs running behind. The mule was going! He was trying to catch the reins. Mr. Briggs, he didn’t really talk a lot about slavery. If you looked at his eyes... I can always remember that his eyes always looked sad. His eyes looked very sad all the time. You know? They said that Mr. Briggs had been castrated. I don’t know how true it was. Those were the stories in the neighborhood that that had happened to him.

**LB:** Although if he had a son?

**ZAS:** Right.

**LB:** Oh. Mmm. That's terrible.

**ZAS:** He must've been... Mr. Briggs must've been [02:32:38 unc.] I'm just saying that's what happened. You'd go running or you know they didn't like the way you looked at somebody or whatever. But yeah. And there are a lot of Briggs still in New Town. There's still some Briggs up there too. He was so sweet. I loved Mr. Briggs.

**LB:** I think we should get you, and Leonard Edloe, and maybe your mom together and anyone else you think who might be good to be part of a conversation. Because sometimes what I do—I call it an interview but I don't actually say anything. I mean it's more people talking to each other and remembering. I will send you a link to the exhibition that I worked on called, "Made in Church Hill," where I did those recordings of people at Fourth Baptist.

**ZAS:** Right, okay!

**LB:** And then edited down their interviews. So you'll see what I'm talking about.

**ZAS:** Okay.

**LB:** And I just got wonderful, wonderful stories because they all knew what to ask each other.

**ZAS:** Yeah. Did you do... When you were doing that, did you ever look at the narratives, the slave narratives?

**LB:** From the WPA? Those ones?

**ZAS:** Mhm.

**LB:** I looked at them, but I haven't looked... I mean I looked at them years before I moved to Richmond.

**ZAS:** Okay.

**LB:** I haven't looked at them since.

**ZAS:** You know what I've noticed?

**LB:** What?

**ZAS:** When I looked... when I went into these narratives, and this has been many years ago, too... I never saw that any slaves were in Richmond.

02:34:31

**LB:** Well, do you know what's so interesting is one of my former colleagues, when I taught at VCU, Kathy Bassard... a couple of years ago, she found the only existing slave narrative that's ever been found written by someone who was still in slavery. And you know where that was? Richmond.

**ZAS:** Oh, okay.

**LB:** Because a lot of slaves in Richmond lived independently.

**ZAS:** Yes. The other part of that was, as I went through them. When you read they'll say, "Mama said we came through Richmond."

**LB:** Well, that makes sense. A lot of people came through Richmond.

**ZAS:** But then I said, "Wow," you know, "We're still this place that covers up what has happened." When they talk about 17<sup>th</sup> Street... I have a problem with everything they want to say about 17<sup>th</sup> Street. Simply because nobody wants to say that that was the largest slave market...

**LB:** Slave market. Absolutely.

**ZAS:** That whole part of Main Street was... my mother said, "part and parcel," in that slave industry.

**LB:** One of my friends at University of Richmond did a fantastic project with his freshmen students where they researched what was where and then they went around and took pictures of what these things are now. Like a Buffalo Wild Wings, which used to be a slave jail, or something like that. Right? All of this history. You know? The courthouse. All of these sites. Right?

**ZAS:** Exactly. Exactly. People talk about Charles City. But you know, who was it? James Madison, the president, took his slaves out there to the harbor. My husband's a part of all of those people. His family... we were... I told him the other day—"We have to go and take pictures of this graveyard." He has relatives in there who were 1600s, 1700s, in Gilfield Church Yard.

**LB:** It's amazing.

**ZAS:** Yes.

**LB:** Do you know Myra Smith? She runs Leadership Metro Richmond? She's also with the exhibition. Anyway, she has a family church that she goes to and the graveyard is all her family just going back centuries and centuries.

**ZAS:** What part of the city?

**LB:** I'll have to look it up. I think it was outside of the city. 'Cause she commutes to the church.

**ZAS:** Wow.

**LB:** But now it's a church where 200 out of 260 people who belong are her cousins.

**ZAS:** Wow! 'Cause the Fleming... There's one in Glen Allen, next to the church with a lot of Flemings.

**LB:** Well I should see whether Renée or Glennys. Well you'll meet them. You'll meet them when the show opens in January.

**ZAS:** Okay. Wait a minute. That name just keeps... I don't know why. What does she do now? Is she a teacher?

**LB:** I don't know whether she was.

**ZAS:** Or a counselor?

**LB:** She's had a lot of problems. So she's not been able to work for quite a while.

**ZAS:** I understand the feeling.

**LB:** It's tough.

**ZAS:** Yes. I was so glad I was retired. I didn't know what to do. I really was.

**LB:** It's gotta be scary.

**ZAS:** It was. It was very scary. But you know, when you have some faith, it snaps you back and you say, "Okay, wait a minute. God got this." You know? So I told Jerazz I have to go to the hospital, I gotta find out what this is. Got to the hospital. They couldn't get me up on the table. They wanted me to get up there by myself. You know? He couldn't lift me up there. He had just had a heart attack.

**LB:** You'd think they would've dealt with this situation before at the hospital.

**ZAS:** You know you go into a hospital you say, "Well okay they got me." Nope. Don't believe the hype. And it took me maybe six months to get a MRI because they did not want... They said I couldn't make a sound. But it was very painful because all of my pelvic was very painful.

**LB:** Ouch.

**ZAS:** All in here. So I finally... I went to... You know where Apex-MD is? It's in Short Pump, up near Short Pump. Twin Hickory Road, up that way. I went there. Doctor's name was Rumki Banerjee. I sit on my computer when I'm trying to find out something about this. So I saw her, she was a holistic doctor. And she did western and eastern medicine. And I said, "Okay. I'm gonna try her." So I changed my primary care doctor. Because this woman was trying to give me... what's that medicine they're telling people not to take now? Tramadol or something like that? They sayin' it's killin' people. She gave it to me. Gabapentin. She gave it to me. Me? I told

02:40:23

her, I said, “Honey, I don’t take medicine. You got herbs? I might deal with that. I’m not takin’ this.”

“Well I have to give you prescription because they’ll say I didn’t do what I’m supposed...”

I say, “Okay, okay, okay. You write your prescription up then because I’m not gonna get it. Go on and write it. Put it in your record.” Then I found Rumki . I was so happy. When I went in there, she said, “Honey...” She said, “You can’t get up here?” I said, “No.” So she told... she called her nurse. She told my husband, she said, “Can you help us?” And he said, “I will.” She and her nurse and my husband got me up on this bed and she was... she said, “I think you got inflammation in here.” She says, “Somebody should’ve seen that by now.” So she said, “I think, I think maybe we can...” She started to do something else and then she said, “Okay, let’s help you down.” As I was getting down she said, “Oh, okay.” She said, “Yes, you have a pelvic inflammatory problem.” She said, “I’m gonna give you a shot of prednisone.” She said, “Now I don’t give medicine. You can tell that from my write-up. You knew when you came here.” She said, “But if I can clear this up, and we get you on some turmeric. Might take a while for it to kick in and really do what I want it to do.” She said, “But it will help. I know that because we don’t have prednisone in my town in India.” She said, “So what I give them is turmeric.” And she said, “That’s what I’m gonna give you.” So she gave me the prednisone shot. I was almost walking out of there.

**LB:** It’s amazing isn’t it?

**ZAS:** Yeah. But I had...

**LB:** It makes you very zingy.

**ZAS:** I could not deal with prednisone. But we did that. I used turmeric, flax seed oil, ginger, and cinnamon in my coffee in the mornings. And I’ve been having... She found me a therapist. I’ve been having the therapy. And believe me, you see how my mother walks? I couldn’t walk as good as my mother is walking. I was shuffling.

**LB:** Well thank goodness you’re better.

**ZAS:** I thank God. Yes indeed! That was a terrible thing. So what kinda time we got. You don’t have your watch on either, huh?

**LB:** We’ve got...

**Woman 1:** It’s a little after 7...

**ZAS:** Okay.

**Woman 1:** 7:07. Yeah.

**LB:** Okay. Let’s see.

END TIME: 02:43:58



