

TRANSCRIPT: PARNELL JONES AND WILLIE MAE JONES

Interviewee: PARNELL JONES AND WILLIE MAE JONES
Interviewer: Kimberly Hill
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START OF CD 1, FIRST TRACK

KH: This is Kimberly Hill, and it's August 9, 2006. I'm speaking with Mr. Parnell Jones and his wife, Mrs. Willie Mae Jones, in the Titusville neighborhood of Birmingham, Alabama.

START OF CD 1, SECOND TRACK

KH: OK.

PJ: Before we was here, I lived in Titusville all my life. My father, his mother moved here when I was about eight years old. They moved out here in Titusville when I was about eight years old. At that time, Titusville wasn't anything like it is now or it has been. By that I mean houses and everything. I never will forget I used to tease my mother and father, which are both dead now, but I used to tease my mother all the time. When we moved out here in Titusville, there were no paved streets, there were no houses along here, and my dad moved. So I said, "Mama." She said, "Yeah." I said, "Daddy carried us to the *country*, Mama." [Laughter] And so I laughed about it. I used to tease her about it all the time. We'd have a good time talking about it. And that's how long

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we've been out here in Titusville.

KH: Can I interrupt you for a minute?

PJ: Titusville.

KH: Mind if I put this microphone on you?

PJ: Oh, yeah. OK, fine. Thank you, thank you. That's all right.

KH: There we go.

PJ: So. When we first moved out here, as I told you just a moment ago, I moved out here, and Washington School now, the same school right down the street from Leonard's BBQ where we were at the place, I think I mentioned that city at the table. I was talking about one or two individuals there. I finished the eighth grade. That's where I finished the eighth school, from Washington School, the same school where my wife has taught at. My wife can tell you something about teaching the students and some of the individuals that are now here in Birmingham that are outstanding, that you've probably met. She can probably tell you about those. But I've seen this place grow. There was vacant land; nothing but vacant land was in here. Across in front of this house, all the way to the freeway now, was vacant land. At that time out here, there wasn't what you might call now Eighth, Sixth Avenue, Seventh Avenue. Every street out here was named after an alphabet, like Omega, Delta, and so forth.

KH: Um-hmm. I was wondering about that.

PJ: The streets, all the streets, every street out here at that time, was named after an alphabet. The only thing in between this house and those houses that have been built was Elwood Cemetery. That's how far back there were no houses at the time that my family moved out here. To give you the idea, the only paved street was the street where

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Elwood is. I was telling my wife not so long ago, I often time think about it and I was telling my wife, I said, "You know what, the only street that was paved was the street in front of Elwood Cemetery all the way back up this way to Eighteen Street. That was the only paved street out here. Even the street where I started and finished the eighth grade over here, it was paved. Those were the only streets. All the rest of the streets out here were not paved. This street was not paved. All the way back up here to the top of the hill to the freeway, it wasn't paved through here. There were no schools; there was nothing in here but vacant land.

KH: So how many people lived here back then?

PJ: Huh?

KH: How many people would you say lived here back then?

PJ: Lived here?

KH: Uh-huh. In the neighborhood. It sounds like there weren't that many houses.

PJ: I imagine about fifteen or fifteen to twenty people.

KH: Wow.

PJ: Because the houses were so scattered, you see. We moved on this street. At that time, when I was growing up, there were no houses on this street hardly, because it was just recently built since we moved in here. So they was very small, few people at that time. And the streets above here, there were only about every block at that time made off that were not paved. There were about one or two people that lived you would see at every block. All the way from here to above the city jail, as far going up Sixteenth Street, Sixth Street now, Sixth Avenue. That street was Avenue F. That's what Sixth

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Avenue—. Sixth Avenue was Avenue F, Avenue F. And Avenue F ran from Elwood Cemetery all the way to now the hospital.

KH: OK. The UAB Hospital.

PJ: The UAB Hospital, and where the basketball gym is now for the school, vacant land, there was nothing in there but vacant land. So later on, as I grew up and finished, then people began to move out here. Black people began to move from down in the low part of Birmingham. They began to hear about a new section that's being built called Titusville. That's when the name Titusville began to take hold of people coming to this new section called Titusville, and they began to move out here. As they began to move out here, then this area out here began to grow and houses began to be built. That's when the people started coming to Titusville.

KH: Around what time do you think that was, the fifties maybe?

PJ: I have to put it approximately when I was in elementary school. That was in elementary school, so it had to be around about the eighth grade, eighth grade for me, because the school I finished eighth grade from, it wasn't even built [about 1920s]. Across the street from this school, there was little double houses. Black people lived in double houses, one little room with two bedrooms. You know those houses. That was what was here, and they were all across the street from the school now. The school building's that built now is the school I finished from in the eighth grade, that same building. What had happened, I finished my class was the first class that finished in that new building when it was built. I finished in the eighth grade from it. As I was saying at the [Titusville Day] meeting, trying to tell them what was up to the meeting here, Leonard's Hall, where you were, that I cannot remember all the little classmates I had. I

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was talking about one little classmate I had. Name was Jess C. Jess C. was in my class with me. He finished Washington School and also one lady here.

WJ: Larry C. Hollins.

PJ: Larry C. Hollins. We talk back and forth; my wife taught with her. That's a teacher down at Washington School. We were in the same grade, eighth grade, and that's the only person that I know of here in Birmingham or anywhere else that was a classmate of mine, the first class in the new building, which is the same building now, in the eighth grade. And before that time, as I said, there were a lot of little shotgun houses all across the street, everywhere. That was our classrooms.

WJ: Potbellied stoves.

PJ: So I remember one of my teachers—I was small—in the classroom, we had big potbellied heaters that heated up the classroom, big heaters. The teachers had little boys helping them out, would go out, have shovels, coal shovels, with shovels. We would go out and get the coal, bring it in, put it in the heater, to keep warm in the classrooms. That's how we kept warm in the classrooms before the new building was built. And that is what happened before the new building. As I said about the new building being built, then we moved over into the new building. And the new building, we got into it and I was one of the first to graduate in the eighth grade out of the new building. We had been going to school prior to that time in all these little shotgun houses all across the street. The teacher's classroom was in there, and the teacher couldn't get nothing in there but a desk to sit down. That's all the teacher could get in there. You didn't have nowhere to put books. Half the time you didn't have no books. You had a notebook that you kept the teacher's notes in, but so far as class books.

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WJ: Who was the principal? Tell her the principal.

PJ: The principal was Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown was the principal of the school.

KH: Who were the teachers?

WM: Name some of the teachers.

PJ: I cannot—.

WJ: Ms. Leggett.

PJ: Ms. Leggett. Who else, Willie Mae?

WJ: And Ms.—. She was there when I went. Ms.—.

PJ: Was there. Now you can—.

WJ: Ms. Newsome.

PJ: Ms. Newsome was my eighth grade teacher.

WJ: That was a playground and a music teacher.

PJ: Yeah, she was a playground and music teacher.

WJ: Ms. Higgins.

PJ: Ms. Higgins.

WJ: Auditorium.

PJ: Auditorium. But see, until we moved into the new building, we didn't have all of that. That came when we moved into the new building, and they began to hire these teachers to come to the school. That's how the teachers started, because we had nothing but shotgun houses, nothing, but the teachers sit up there with a desk.

WJ: And Ms. Ledger's the only one living now.

PJ: And she's the only one living.

WJ: She's way up in her hundreds.

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KH: Wow.

WJ: She came here last year, uh-huh, to visit her daughter. She lives in Washington. Her daughter brought her; she lives with her daughter. Titusville had a big name. Everybody called it "Mudville" because it was so muddy out here.

PJ: We didn't have no streets out here. It looked like—.

WJ: Did you tell about the first building of houses was built by Mr. John Commons, a black man.

PJ: Yeah. This section of housing's over here now.

WJ: Cicola.

PJ: Was called Cicola Village. All these houses. Now over here—.

WJ: Honeysuckle Hill.

PJ: Honeysuckle Hill, back here now—.

WJ: Was built by—.

PJ: Was built by—.

WJ: John Commons.

PJ: A black man.

WJ: Lived over there by Mason.

PJ: Who lived over there by Mason Davis. Now, no, it's not.

WJ: He lived one block from us.

PJ: That's where my wife came from, in her section of town.

WJ: I came from Eden Village.

KH: OK.

WJ: And we call this Titusville—.

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PJ: At that time, they called Titusville what?

WJ: Slum Negroes.

KH: What?

PJ: We were the slum Negroes.

KH: Oh. [Laughter]

PJ: The better class Negro lived over there where my wife lived. We out here, we were the slum.

WJ: "Mudville."

PJ: "Mudville." They called us niggers from "Mudville," and when we went to high school—.

WJ: Didn't have any buses or—.

WJPJ: Didn't have no bus. I told her from Elwood all the way up. We had a shove bus. I was telling my wife the other day.

WJ: If you told her, she has that on the tape.

PJ: Not what I'm fixing to say.

WJ: Oh, uh-huh.

PJ: There was a bus that ran from Elwood Cemetery up to Sixth Avenue. That's the only transportation we had, was this little shove bus. It didn't go all the way to town. It went up there. You would have to get off of the little bus. The bus just ran out here for Negroes in Titusville. You would have to get on a streetcar line—.

WJ: Streetcar here was a little bit nicer.

PJ: Yeah, and you'd ride until you get downtown. That was our mode of transportation.

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WJ: Now did you tell her about the factories that was out here, the mop factory?

PJ: And just over here back of my house, our house now, when we first moved out here, over here was a cigar place, made cigars. Was right over here where Center Street School is now. All that land was vacant, so this was where, I can't think of the name of the place, but it manufactured, they made cigars.

WJ: And mop factory.

PJ: And one of my friends now had died, Rick over there, they had a broom factory over there. That was where they made brooms and sold brooms.

WJ: And mops.

PJ: And one of my friends who is passed now, he worked over there in the broom factory. Right up the hill now above me, if you go up that way going up to the highway, you see a big house sitting right up there, the biggest house going up that street up there, up to the next corner where the freeway is. That house was owned by Italians, Lusko. Italians. And at that time, Lusko had all this property out here, and this is where he raised all his garden stuff out here, sweet potatoes.

WJ: All kind of great vegetables.

PJ: All kind of vegetables. Lettuce, tomatoes. Lusko. That's what he did. This was all out here then. And Lusko—. That big house, same house right now, is right there. And that was the house for Lusko.

WJ: I don't think it's been fixed up since then either.

PJ: Now in between that house and coming back down here to my house, I don't know, I don't think it was about—.

WJ: Three houses.

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PJ: Three houses between my house right here now and all the way up to where the freeway is. There were only about three houses.

WJ: No houses back ().

PJ: I told her, nothing back here. All of this was nothing.

KH: So when more people started moving in, did they start paving the streets then?

PJ: Yeah. That's when things began to pick up, when people said there's a new section for black people now moving. They're going out to—.

WJ: Titusville.

PJ: Titusville.

WJ: "Mudville."

PJ: Titusville. Everybody going to move to "Mudville" then. [Laughter] As they began to move out here, the city began to pave the streets. They began to pave the streets as people began to move out here. They began to pave the streets.

WJ: Tell her how our house was moved.

PJ: This house—.

WJ: Was even with the street.

PJ: Was even with where your car is now. This right here was even up this high. What they did, they came out here and cut this street from about Sixth Avenue all the way back. It's been cut down at least that high [Their house and yard sit on a steep hill].

WJ: The highest house ().

KH: Why did they do that?

PH: This was the highest house on this street one time, because all the rest of it

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was cut down. So what they did, they started from Sixth Avenue and cut this down, all the way down. Then that's why this house is as low as it is now, because the streets were cut down (), were cut down at least about three or four feet.

KH: Why did they do that?

PJ: I don't know. They just—.

WJ: Say what?

KH: Why did they cut the streets?

PJ: I don't know.

WJ: Because that was improving—.

PJ: Called it improving the neighborhood.

WJ: The area () for people to live, because there weren't many people—.

PJ: Out here. This wasn't nowhere out here, honey. Just like I told you what I just said. I told her about my mama used to tease me.

WJ: What about the cemetery on out? They had a cemetery; I'm talking about on out of Catholic.

PJ: Oh. Now where I lived, my home house, my home house is still up the hill. Right now.

WJ: By the Catholic church.

PJ: By the Catholic church. That's where my home house was, right up this street by that Catholic church. The only thing then along that and my home house was the cemetery. That was a cemetery.

WJ: And a pond.

PJ: A Catholic cemetery. Where the school is now, and all the way back to Sixth

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Avenue, that was a Catholic cemetery. That was the only thing out there, Elwood Cemetery this way. The Catholic cemetery was right up here.

WJ: They're still have some people there.

PJ: They still have some stones up here now, graves where the cemetery was, where the elementary school is right now, where the Catholic school is right now, up on the corner here, across from Leonard's [BBQ]. Where Leonard's is, across the street from Leonard's, coming back this way. Where the Catholic school is, all along in there.

WJ: It was only white.

PJ: Only white.

KH: Um-hmm.

PJ: That was where the cemetery was. All that land was cemetery land in there. So eventually what happened, the south Catholics bought that land in there and they already had the cemetery in there. So they bought all that land in there, so my house was sitting where all I had to do was walk out my front door and look at the cemetery. Catholic cemetery, right up here now, the house sitting right up here now.

WJ: It's the highest house.

PJ: Highest house on the hill right now. That was my home house.

KH: I'll go take a look at it.

WJ: They sold it not too long ago.

PJ: Sold it not long ago. But you see it. It's the highest thing sitting right up here. Can you imagine it? The land was up to as high as the house sit now. That's how much it was cut down, because when we first moved, the house was built level with the ground.

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WJ: Well, when we moved in this house, this was a chicken—.

PJ: All back here was chicken house.

WJ: Chicken houses on to the house and right there where the arc is behind you, those were windows. That was ().

PJ: We have done so much to this house.

WJ: —the back of your head.

PJ: We have done so much—.

WJ: This was out back. Those were windows. And they had a little porch with three windows and a little porch like about come out to here and the steps would come down—.

PJ: The back steps were right here. The back steps were right here. We built all this ourselves. This is some of the improvements that my wife and I have done.

WJ: Been a long time; it needs improvement now.

PJ: But what we have done to this house. This house wasn't nothing but a shack when we moved in it. It really was, wasn't nothing but a shack.

WJ: But it had a chicken house—.

PJ: Chicken house back out here.

WJ: —all around the side.

PJ: All around the side. Raising chickens.

KH: Did a lot of people raise animals here back then?

WJ: Uh-huh.

KH: Did a lot of people raise animals here back then?

WJ: Everybody out here had—.

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PJ: Everybody out here had chicken houses.

KH: OK. [Laughter]

WJ: That was one the things, they had chickens and a garden.

PJ: And a garden. That's the only thing Negroes had out here then; it was chicken houses and gardens. [Laughter]

WJ: We ourselves, we had a potbelly stove in the bedroom, and—.

PJ: I had a pot belly stove in the bedroom because we didn't have no heat.

WJ: When we'd go to school, I would put my peas or something on for it to cook slow on top of it. So you don't know nothing about it.

KH: No.

WJ: But most of the people—.

PJ: We had it up here in our bedroom that we have now. That's where my wife is talking about. We had a potbelly stove, because see, we didn't have no heat like we got now. Noooo. So what she would do in the morning when she first started teaching and I started going to school, I was teaching myself then, and she would put on like she said her peas on top of the potbelly stove. I'd bank the fire so it wouldn't catch fire and put it on for the dinner, so when she come from school—.

WJ: Everything was just about done.

PJ: Everything be done.

WJ: The neck bones were done.

PJ: Neck bones. [Laughter]. () Now that's the part of Titusville I don't want to talk about.

WJ: And fireplaces.

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PJ: And fireplace. We had a fireplace. You didn't have that; you made a fire in the fireplace.

WJ: People have it now in new houses. We have a fireplace where years ago we had them and we would bag sweet potatoes.

PJ: We would roast them in the ashes.

KH: In the ashes?

WJ: In the ashes.

PJ: In the ashes. Sweet potatoes.

WJ: That's when you get to be ninety years old. [Laughter]

PJ: I was telling you about Titusville. This is the Titusville that we know and we have gone through.

WJ: But you know more about it than I do.

PJ: I said I knew more about it. You know just as, almost as well as I do, and I was telling her about I was born out here and how look out here, because when I moved out here --

WJ: Well, Mr. Commons was one of the most—.

PJ: One of the most prominent Negroes during that time, black man.

WJ: Mr. John Commons.

KH: Who was he again?

WJ: John W. Commons.

PJ: John W. Commons.

WJ: And he built all of those houses.

PJ: He built all those houses back over here now, all the way up Sixth Avenue.

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Not Sixth Avenue, but—.

WJ: Honeysuckle Hill.

PJ: Honeysuckle Hill. That's what it was. That's what he built. He named it Cicola Village.

WJ: Cicola Village. He had an ice—.

PJ: He name it Cicola Village.

WJ: He had ice; he sold ice.

PJ: He was the only black man in Birmingham that had an ice house where we had to go and buy ice. You didn't have no other where to get the ice from. Over there where my wife lived, in her section of town. Because, see, I lived in "Mudville." She lived with the aristocratic Negroes. [Laughter]

WJ: He had three daughters.

PJ: He had three daughters.

WJ: One of them living now.

PJ: One of them living now.

WJ: And all of them, two finished Tennessee State, one of them was in school with you.

PJ: One was in school with me. One of the girls my wife is talking about now, she was in school with me. I finished Tennessee State. That's where I finished from, Tennessee State.

WJ: And then you'll see on the [biographical] sheet you make out for him his other, how far he went in school.

KH: OK. Why did you go to Tennessee State?

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PJ: Huh?

KH: Why did you go to Tennessee State?

PJ: I couldn't go to no school in Alabama.

KH: Just had to ask.

PJ: I went to Tennessee State. I wanted to go the University of Alabama. At that time, Bull Connor and the dogs were running, and Lucy was trying to get in down at State Alabama. That was during the days.

WJ: And one of our friends, Arthur Shores, he has a letter from—.

PJ: I got a letter I'll show you from Arthur Shores.

WJ: Uh-huh, in 1960, I think. He was the one who opened up integration for our kids.

PJ: I'm going to show her that when she got through, show her that, too.

WJ: Maybe she'll ask some questions.

PJ: I'm going to show her about the bombing, too. I'm trying to talk about all the early part; then I'll tell her about this. But that was my reason for going to Tennessee State, because I wanted to go the University of Alabama, but Bull Connor and the dogs, and in Birmingham, it was a mess. Segregation. It one of the worst things. I can't describe it to you. And while we're talking about that, I'm going to tell you what went on.

KH: OK.

PJ: My wife and I during that time, we used to get out my car. Bull Connor was putting all the little children in jail. All the children got out from school and started to walking. What did they do? They got them little children, honey, carried them out here

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to state park. The jail couldn't hold them because the jail was [not] too big. So they had to carry them out to the park, put them in the park.

WJ: All in the yard.

PJ: All in the yard. And the black parent, that's the way you go out there to get your child out there.

WJ: And see, my school at Washington School was close to the city jail, and my principal, well, it was so much going on, until the children just walked off all from everywhere. Segregation was really terrible then.

PJ: It was bad.

WJ: They was putting children in jail.

PJ: Putting them in jail, little children.

WJ: And we as teachers, we would get bologna that was so—. Not only us but others, parents with children. It was hundreds and hundres and hundreds of children in the yard, thousands of children out, because nobody was having school then.

PJ: Nobody. Wasn't no school then. Them children just left. And my wife and I, I had a little old car, the same jail up here right now, my wife and I would get in that car—.

WJ: Like other parents, too.

PJ: Like the parents, too. We bought bologna—.

WJ: Bread.

PJ: Bread, and everything.

WJ: And throw it over the fence.

PJ: And go up there to that jail. I'd drive up the back of that damn jail around up

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there where they had them children, and I'd drive up there and throw bread, bologna, and stuff over the fence to the children they got in that jail.

WJ: That's what all parents did.

PJ: We did that.

KH: Were your kids in jail, too?

WJ: No, we weren't in jail. It was dangerous for us to be doing that.

PJ: It was dangerous for us to do that, but we just did it. We had to do it; we had to do something, and it just – it's a wonder that we didn't get put in jail. But see, we would go around there where they wouldn't even see us, slip around in the back, and just throw the stuff on in, then get away from there. We wouldn't stay at all. We just run by there and never stopped, just keep going, just throw stuff over there and keep going.

KH: Were there kids from your school in the jail?

WJ: What?

KH: Were there kids from your school in the jail?

WJ: Yes, a lot of them, the whole school would run out, even the teachers in there. Um-hmm. Yes. It was something in those days. That's when—. You weren't born then, but I know you've heard about Autherine Lucy and Bull Connor and so forth.

KH: Uh-huh.

WJ: George Wallace standing at the front door. Now Parnell and my club . . . They [terrorists] bombed Arthur Shores' house more than once. His daughter was over here last week. We're in the same club, and two of them were in Links together and another club together. The wives would fix dinner for the husbands, and they would go and protect his house. After segregation and everything was over, he wrote all the men a

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letter and she brought that letter over here last week. She couldn't find one, and Barbara came over here last week and said that the letter was in the room; they were making scrapbooks and things years ago, and that's one of the letters that he wrote thanking him. I think it was 1960, wasn't it?

KH: 1956.

WJ: That's it.

PJ: That's when it was.

WJ: George Wallace was standing in the door, and Arthur Shores went every morning.

PJ: That's what I did because they wouldn't let me in University of Alabama, and I had to go to Tennessee State.

KH: Um-hmm.

WJ: You went to Columbia.

PJ: I went to Tennessee State first.

WJ: But see, that was college. You could go to Tennessee State.

PJ: I'm telling about the letter.

WJ: Oh.

PJ: The letter has to do with the time, of that time that I left Tennessee State. That's right.

WJ: And you could go to Tennessee State then because—.

PJ: I just wanted her to see the letter he wrote me when I was going over to his house because of the Ku Klux Klans and things.

WJ: That's where we met Thurgood Marshall was there.

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PJ: I had the privilege of meeting Thurgood Marshall.

WJ: Yeah, he came down to investigate.

PJ: I met—.

WJ: Martin Luther King.

PJ: Martin Luther King, too. My wife can tell you about Martin Luther King.

Tell her your experience.

WJ: Well, the three little girls, one of the little girls that was killed in the bombing, I taught her.

KH: Oh.

WJ: And her father taught at my school, too. When the killing of the girls, and Martin Luther King and Abernathy and all of them—.

PJ: Shuttlesworth.

WJ: [Chris] McNair . They were down—.

PJ: All of it was right here. Down the street.

WJ: One block on the corner, McNair—.

PJ: McNair.

WJ: Lived there, and one of his daughters was killed in the bombing.

PJ: And that's where they had the meeting.

WJ: And that's where they had the meeting.

PJ: I went to the meeting. My wife did, too. And Martin Luther King did what for you, baby?

WJ: Uh-huh. Helped me cross the ditch they were having the funeral and it was—.

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PJ: Was a ditch down here then.

WJ: He helped all of us. He stood there and helped all the ladies across the ditch.

PJ: Martin Luther King.

KH: That's sweet.

WJ: I said we'd never forget that.

KH: Martin Luther King helped you cross the ditch.

WJ: Uh-huh.

PJ: This where they used to have their meetings at, down at this boy's house.

WJ: Down to McNair's house.

PJ: Shuttlesworth, Martin Luther King, and that all of them, meet down here. I was big enough I was going to run down and see what's going on. I'm keeping up with what's going on here in Titusville.

WJ: She can tell from the letter that you worked hard.

PJ: Yeah, you saw what was on the letter.

KH: Were you actually there when they bombed Arthur Shores' house?

WJ: No, they were trying to bomb it.

PJ: They were trying to bomb it.

WJ: After they bombed it—.

PJ: That was after.

WJ: We went there the next morning because we had a little son, he was little, he lost his eyeglasses while you had him in your arm.

PJ: My little boy, that was the size of my son then. I had him in my arm. I was running to get in Shores' house. Thurgood Marshall was there.

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WJ: Everybody was there.

PJ: And I was running to get into the house and fell with my little boy on the street out there and broke his eyeglasses. I never forget that. And finally I did get into the house. And that's why I thought—, Thurgood Marshall. I saw him. He was there sure at Shores's house.

WJ: All of them came down because the bombing was so . . .

PJ: And Bull Connor was out here running with the dogs and things. We couldn't go nowhere. That's the early history of Birmingham.

WJ: And that's why Martin Luther King was in jail here.

PJ: And that's why Martin Luther King was in jail right down here.

WJ: And all of—.

PJ: All of -- They were here, had the meetings right out here.

WJ: And we were young then.

PJ: Yeah. But we have always tried to keep up with what's going on. We wanted to be a part of what's going to happen. This place Titusville was growing out here then.

WJ: And growing.

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PJ: And everybody out here was interested then.

WJ: And the day of the bombing, we heard it right—. My mother and father, we went to Sixteenth Street Church, and Mama and Daddy was at church at the bombing. And Parnell was out there.

PJ: I was standing right here at this place right here. Right here.

WJ: *Time* magazine came and interviewed him, and what is it?

PJ: *Newsweek*.

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WJ: *Newsweek* been here. They interviewed him. They mentioned the bombing. They talked about it. *Time* magazine was here the week before last. They asked about the bombing, and he told them all about it.

PJ: I told them all about it.

WH: They didn't come to ask about the bombing.

KH: They came to ask about Condoleezza Rice.

WJ: About Condoleezza.

PJ: They was talking about Condoleezza.

WJ: But they asked all about the bombing.

PJ: This says right here right now I was standing right there at that fence, right there. I looked that direction.

WJ: Sunday morning.

PJ: One Sunday morning. I looked in that direction. I heard something like thunder, lightning, thundering, clouds of smoke back that way. I called my wife. I said, "Oh, Lord, something done happened. Look back over there! What done happened over there? Something's going on!" And folks started to calling, hollering, "They done bombed Sixth Avenue Church!"

WJ: Sixteenth Street Church.

PJ: Sixteenth Street Church. Then that's when you said, "My mama and daddy, they at that church." And they were at the church.

WJ: Daddy was a deacon.

PJ: Her daddy was a deacon over there, and they were at the church when the church was bombed.

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WJ: And just like we was dressed, we got in the car. We couldn't get nowhere near the church.

PJ: We couldn't get nowhere near the church.

WJ: They weren't hurt, though.

PJ: They weren't hurt.

KH: How long did it take you to find out they were OK?

WJ: Oh, we were there just like all day, because they had it roped off, and they had found the girls dead.

PJ: They found the little girls dead in the church.

WJ: Everybody was there. Elderly people and people who were not hurt, they were coming in from another section coming to the park and they let them come to park there.

PJ: Trying to see. And see, we knew the parents of all the little three girls. All the three little girls, we knew the parents. One of the fathers was the principal with me. He wasn't my principal, but he was a principal.

WJ: That's Alvin Robinson.

PJ: Alvin Robinson.

WJ: That was his daughter. He was teaching then.

PJ: I'm going to show her the pictures of those in just a minute, what we talking about now.

WJ: OK. And what else you want to know about Titusville?

PJ: Anything about Titusville. [Laughter] I don't know unless you to ask me.

WJ: The history will come out.

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KH: Were there other houses around here that got bombed?

PJ: No, uh-uh.

WJ: This wasn't the section.

PJ: This wasn't the section.

WJ: It was where I lived—.

PJ: Where she lived.

KH: Oh.

PJ: That's the section. She lived over in that section where the church was bombed. My wife did.

WJ: We lived here.

PJ: But your family lived over there. She lived over there where Arthur Shores back of that area back over there.

WJ: Yeah, where John Collins lives and all of them.

PJ: Where Collins lives, one that does all of these houses and things. They live across there. That's where—. It's true. That's where our better class of black people lived at that time.

WJ: At that time.

PJ: At that time.

WJ: Not that he's saying that I was . . .

PJ: Not that I'm saying that, but I'm just saying it because it's true. At that time, we're talking about now early on, the better class of blacks lived in that area over there, and not in Titusville.

WJ: Then they started moving—.

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PJ: Then they began—. That's when they started moving, they heard about Titusville. Let's go and move out in Titusville. That's when the blacks began to move in this area out here that's known today as Titusville. Now that's what I know about Titusville. When it was founded, who found it, and all of that, I don't know.

WJ: You can find that in the library.

KH: Yeah. I can find that out. But what kind of community activities did people do back then?

PJ: Church. That was all. That was about all. The biggest thing was church.

WJ: Church, um-hmm.

PJ: That's the biggest change. And the school.

WJ: Well, there was some clubs.

PJ: As Titusville began to build up.

WJ: Um-hmm.

PJ: That's when you began to have those clubs.

WJ: Our club, because we celebrate that one.

PJ: Y'all were about one of the first in the city of Birmingham.

WJ: Seventy years ago, and bridge clubs, bridge.

PJ: They played a lot of bridge there.

WJ: Yeah, um-hmm.

PJ: That's one of the main games – hot dog!

WJ: Bridge, and it was a little social club. We belonged to one with C.M. Harris, Mrs. Harris.

PJ: Funeral home.

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WJ: Funeral home. She organized Les Jeunes Dames and we are going to Les Juenes Dames today. I have the book over there, and her daughter has one daughter living now, and that's Sadie. And her daughter-in-law and I, Billie, and she married Virgil Harris, and that was my best friend. She was born May the tenth, and I was born May the ninth. She finished Talladega and she met Virgil, but he was at Talladega then. But she's from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and now she has Alzheimer's. She just started, and I just worry so much about her I don't know what to do.

PJ: She's the only one living. No, she and Sadie—. [Telephone rings]
Telephone.

WJ: Um-hmm. To my bridge party. We played bridge and we socialized and we still do. I have my book over there, right there, with what we're doing. I'm going to show you the pictures in just a minute. I'll be back.

KH: OK.

WJ: He had a fraternity.

KH: What fraternity were you in?

PJ: Sigma.

KH: OK.

PJ: Sigma fraternity. I was made Sigma at Tennessee State. And the family she's talking about, their only living sister now in the Harris family that owns the funeral home now in Birmingham, she was a classmate of mine at Tennessee State. She was a classmate of mine, and she's still living now. She's about the only one that I know of that I've ever kept in touch with. That was a classmate from Tennessee State.

KH: Um-hmm.

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KH: Sadie. Sadie and I was good running buddies at Tennessee State. We were both from Birmingham. One of my wife's workers, she was at Tennessee State, and she was the cause of us getting together.

WJ: You've heard of the Links.

KH: Yes ma'am.

WJ: Uh-huh, and it's still going on, and here's some of the plaques that I've got from Links. I've been in Links for eight years. I'm one of the oldest ones in there now. She and I—. This is the one that I told you, right here, that's Billie.

KH: OK.

WJ: Uh-huh. That's Helen there. She's one of our new lawyers here, and she's on the Birmingham Board of Education, president. That's Margaret's; she's dead, and all of these are. That was my sister, and this is Shores' daughter right here. She's over the senior citizen. This is Mrs. Shores, and this is her other daughter who was a lawyer here, one of the young lawyers here. Les Jeunes Dames, the Links are still going strong. We have young members there for eight years.

KH: Well, when I was back in North Carolina reading about Titusville, I read one article that said folks around here didn't get involved in the Civil Rights Movement because they were more interested in building alliances and taking things slowly. Is that just wrong?

WJ: Well, they are interested now. But that's what we're saying, that years ago that bombing and all was over on north side.

PJ: There wasn't nothing out here in Titusville.

WJ: It was most of the people over on the north side at that time were lawyers or

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doctors. Most all of them came from over there. People in civil rights or the white men didn't care for the black people over on that side, because they thought that they were trying to integrate.

PJ: Better than everybody. That's where it come from. We out here couldn't do nothing because we didn't know nothing. [Laughter]

KH: You didn't know what was going on?

PJ: We weren't part of the city.

KH: OK.

PJ: We was the butt "Mudville." [Laughter]

WJ: Very lovely people out here.

PJ: Most lovely people you ever want to meet in your life.

WJ: Roger White's mother. Of course, after she taught me at Miles, well—. They are old settlers out here. Lovely. Ira Williams, I think you met him. Ira and—.

PJ: You met them at the thing where we had down in Birmingham.

KH: OK

WJ: Ira and Roger, I think you said—.

PJ: They were the two in charge of the program. That's who Willie Mae was talking about she knew him when she used to carry him to school because he's too little to go by himself. Carry him to Washington School.

WJ: I think you said you had interviewed Roger.

KH: Yes, I did.

PJ: Well, that's the Roger Willie Mae's talking about she carried him to school. And she said Roger was—what kind of little boy he was, Willie Mae?

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WJ: Devil.

PJ: A little devil.

KH: [Laughter] Yeah, I remember you saying that.

PJ: Roger was a little devil. Willie Mae carried him to school. [Laughter]

WJ: Ira was the light one over there.

PJ: Ira was the lightest one sitting up on the stage.

WJ: They've always been buddies.

PJ: They've always been buddies. And Willie Mae would carry both of them.

Carry them both. Their mamas would turn them over to Willie Mae.

WJ: Even the sisters.

PJ: Even the little sisters.

WJ: Now this is Les Jeunes Dames, the one that Miss C.M. Harris started.

[passing around scrapbooks]

PJ: Harris Funeral Home down here that's owned by blacks now. That's the funeral home we talking about. She's talking about the parent, the people—.

WJ: We had the seventy anniversary about four years ago. It tells you here when it was organized, and we still going strong. We have real young—.

PJ: That club is still operating, and they have taken in the better class of blacks now in this area out here and the area where she lived. Because kids are going to school more now. They're going to college more now. These people have always want their kids to go to school. They want them to go to college. They have always wanted to do that. I don't care what area it was in Birmingham where blacks were. The lower blacks that didn't have—.

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WJ: This was the purpose of the club right there.

PJ: Excuse me, Willie Mae. Can't—.

KH: I can get it. Well, it seems like this neighborhood has produced a lot of really remarkable people.

PJ: It has. I can name them. It has. That's what we're saying now. That's how Titusville has changed and what has been happening in Titusville. Titusville now, this city, it's well-mixed, and you have a lot of kids out here now. And still in her area—.

WJ: And doing well.

PJ: And doing well. A lot of them. Even the president.

WJ: Yes, uh-huh. JT's—.

PJ: The president of the—.

WJ: Of course, this is the first City Council president.

PJ: Council. City Council of Birmingham.

KH: No, I haven't.

WJ: Uh-huh. This is the first time they've had a woman president.

PJ: And she's black. And she lives right up the street here.

KH: OK.

WJ: I gave you a paper last night. What did you do with it?

PJ: I don't know what I did with it.

WJ: I told you you could show it to her, because—.

PJ: Oh. Lord have mercy. Oh, here it is. And you may have this if you would like to have it.

KH: Oh, thank you.

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PJ: If you would like to have that, if you'd like to have it.

WJ: It's the first time that we have had—.

START OF CD 2

WJ: —a woman as council president, and all of those, and she's very smart.

KH: She—?

WJ: And her grandfather, that was Parnell's best buddy, JC.

PJ: We finished Washington School together. [Laughter] I've been () about all these little folks. You find more about what been happening to me. Yeah, so you know

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about that writing something down. You'll have the whole thing after writing it down.
You'll have it all down.

KH: Uh-huh.

WJ: And I tell you, I have some of these, that's Odessa Woolfolk, she's very —

PJ: I'll pass it over to her.

WJ: She sent me this. "Hello, Willie Mae. Just wanted you to see the little
booklet. I'll be at the brunch." And this is all about the Civil Rights Institute.

PJ: Let me pass, pass it to me. Pass it her, and I'll give it to her.

WJ: You can have that one.

KH: One of my co-workers interviewed Odessa Woolfolk.

PJ: Oh, did?

WJ: That's my good friend.

PJ: That's my wife's friend that interviewed you.

WJ: Very good friend. We're in the same club.

PJ: They're in the same club.

WJ: I put her name into Birmingham Chapter of Links.

KH: Oh.

PJ: That's collection with whoever you interviewed.

WJ: You said one of your friends interviewed her.

KH: One of the other people who works for the oral history program.

PJ: Anyway, now you know the connection between that person and that person.

WJ: Do you want that book for yourself, or does she have it?

KH: I don't think she has it. I'd like to have it. Thank you.

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PJ: You can have it. You have it.

KH: Thank you.

WJ: Now, the manager. Not the manager, but what's his name? He's over the Civil Rights [Institute], Pijaux.

PJ: Pijaux. I don't know if you've met him or not.

WJ: That's one of his club members.

PJ: That's one of my club brothers. Pijaux down at the Civil Rights, down here. Have you been down to the Civil Rights?

KH: Yes, sir, I have.

PJ: Have you met the gentleman down there?

KH: I haven't met him.

PJ: Well, he's the one that's in charge of the civil rights thing.

WJ: He's Parnell's—.

PJ: He's one of my frat brothers.

KH: OK.

WJ: Uh-huh. And we've given a lot—.

PJ: I've given a lot of stuff to the Civil Rights.

WJ: Old furniture.

PJ: Old furniture. Old things. My father's brother—.

KH: Lawrence J. Pijaux.

PJ: Yeah. My father's brother was a musician, and he used to travel around with these shows they had at that time. He had instruments and all the stuff, I gave that to Civil Rights Institute because I had no need for it. And my father had saved it. That was

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his brother, his oldest brother.

WJ: Antiques.

PJ: Antique. So I gave it to them. I said, "Man, y'all take this down to Civil Rights." I gave it. And also at that time, I used to do a lot of writing. I used to do a lot of writing. I've always loved to write, and we had a black magazine here in Birmingham at that time, one of the first black magazines that was printed—.

WJ: ().

PJ: —in Birmingham by Leo Fontes. I was the writer for the magazine—.

WJ: Did you keep one of them?

PJ: I don't have a copy.

WJ: You sent about twenty down to Civil Rights.

PJ: I sent all of them down to the Civil Rights Institute. If I had one, I'd give it to her. But I did the writing, and I wrote articles about Negroes; I wrote articles and sent them to Ebony. I wrote articles about black policemen's organizing in the state of Missouri. I wrote them to send me the articles so I could put them in the magazine, and so I had it in the magazine. I had a copy in the magazine every month. I had a copy. I was one of the writers to get material to go into the magazine, and I did. One of my brothers and working with Ms. Mills' finest, she had the shop and he had wrote for the magazine. So they knowing that I had been to school up to Tennessee State, come back with a little sense, I guess, so I used to write articles for the magazine each month.

WJ: Did you tell her you went to Columbia, too?

PJ: Oh, no, I wish I had my things out. No, I'm going to show her his.

WJ: ().

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PJ: What my wife is saying that she want me to tell you where I had gone to school other than -- .

WJ: Because it asked that on the biographical form, right?

KH: Yes ma'am.

PJ: Yeah, other than Tennessee State. I finished Columbia University.

WJ: He got his master's.

PJ: I got my master's from Columbia University in New York.

WJ: You got your A.A.

PJ: That's where I got my master's from.

KH: Is that in education?

PJ: Yeah, education program. Also, I got my A.A. from the University of Alabama here in Birmingham. So that is—.

WJ: Then you went on studying, but you dropped out.

PJ: I went on studying on a doctorate and—.

WJ: And he got promoted as, into one of the bigger schools, and he stopped it after he got his double A.

PJ: I had gone into the graduate program, and something came up. I don't remember now what it was.

WJ: You know that lady there in the corner over there.

KH: This one?

WJ: Um-um. Up to, over.

KH: Oh. No ma'am, I don't.

WJ: This is she.

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PJ: That's her.

KH: Oh.

PJ: You see how she looked? She wanted to be a tough number. She was miss so-and-so then.

WJ: I was just showing you that, not to write anything for this magazine, and I did fashion for that one.

KH: Uh-huh, and that's yours. You wrote a fashion article.

WJ: I kept one of mine.

PJ: Oh, that's the magazine. All right. And you see my picture.

WJ: Are you in here? I don't think you was writing for this one then.

KH: So you both got into magazine writing?

WJ: Um-hmm. It's an old picture.

PJ: No, I don't think I'm in that one.

WJ: This is the Deltas.

PJ: Looking from over here, that's not their magazine. That's some other magazine.

WJ: This is *Brown Magazine*, 1951.

PJ: OK. Take your time and look there. Might not be no picture of me in there, might be my article.

WJ: You hadn't started writing for it then.

PJ: Maybe I hadn't—.

WJ: You hadn't started then.

PJ: Maybe I hadn't started.

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WJ: That's my sister right there. She was right there.

KH: OK.

WJ: She's dead now. 1951.

PJ: I guess I was writing for the magazine; I don't know. I don't know. Been some time ago.

WJ: You wrote for that one, but that's one of the first ones.

PJ: Well, maybe I did.

WJ: Minnie Fisher brought me that from the library. She let me have one.

PJ: OK. Well, maybe I hadn't started writing then.

WJ: Excuse me one moment. I'm going to the kitchen.

KH: OK.

WJ: I got to get Parnell. You said we'll pick the boy up at two-thirty, and we're getting ready to get ready.

PJ: Yeah.

KH: You have a lot of good memories of people in Titusville being really nice. But you mentioned it before, do you think people are as nice now?

PJ: Yeah. But now that all the people of that color of what we're talking about, they have either moved away, they've gotten old, and the younger folks have moved out and carried them with them living or something. So Titusville today, this Titusville is not like the Titusville I'm talking about. It's still Titusville, and it's still some beautiful people who live in Titusville, but it's still not nothing like the Titusville community used to be. Because everybody out here was homeowners, everybody had their lawns they keep mowed, everybody had beautiful homes and everything. That's the Titusville that

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Titusville was that is not today, due to the fact that the older people that lived out here, that first started to building out here, moved out here, they have either died or their children has taken them as old people and moved to a different state. So that's what has happened to Titusville.

KH: And they were just replaced by people who don't own their homes?

PJ: No. I don't even know people next door hardly. That's how it has gotten in Titusville now.

KH: Wow. Why don't you know your neighbors?

PJ: Because it's Section Eight housing.

KH: Um-hmm.

PJ: You see, people done moved, sold houses, and that's a transient housing almost. I hate to say it like that, but that's it. Not that people I'm so much more than anybody, but my wife will tell you next door, that's a Section Eight house. And they having problems over there in the house over there. They had to call the law over there, police over there, fighting and going on. That has never been in Titusville, because the homeowners, we didn't know that kind of stuff. Our children didn't know that kind of stuff. They didn't come in contact with that kind of stuff. And that's why most of the children now that lives in Titusville, like Roger White and all those kind of folk, that's why they went to school, because they were the kind of children that lived in Titusville and the parents lived in Titusville at that time. But now it's altogether different. And that's why we have this kind of confrontation now, because—.

WJ: I had to wake my grandson up. He was seventeen years old Friday, and my son went and got him a job the next day. So he's going for an interview.

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PJ: For the new job.

KH: OK.

WJ: It's for McDonald's.

PJ: McDonald's. You'll see him when he come out this way.

WJ: You've seen these children when they are way out --

PJ: He one of them kind.

KH: Yeah. I know what you're talking about.

PJ: She knows.

KH: Gold teeth, you mean?

WJ: Yeah, honey.

PJ: ()

WJ: My son just finished paying over three thousand dollars to get his teeth fixed. And he's involved in Upward Bound and one of my friends went to Lawson State, and went to Upward Bound at Lawson State. We had given him some money, and when he came back in, his teeth all around here.

PJ: Said you done got old, you better get with it.

WJ: You got to get with it.

PJ: Y'all done got old. Y'all don't know what's happening. I don't want to know what's happening.

WJ: Let her finish. Let her fill out your application.

KH: OK.

PJ: She has it. I gave her everything she gave me.

WJ: Uh-huh. You don't mind filling it out, do you?

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KH: No, I don't mind.

PJ: I gave that to her—.

WJ: Well, you have to give her the answers.

PJ: Yeah, I'll give her the answers. She'll have that to take back with her that I was supposed to send you.

KH: You were describing what the neighborhood is like now and how you don't like it as much.

PJ: Yeah. How it was and how it is now.

KH: Um-hmm. Well, what are the biggest problems now?

PJ: Because, I told you, houses are being sold and all type of people are moving into the community.

KH: Um-hmm.

PJ: I want to start to tell about—

WJ: Yeah, the one right next door, Section Eight.

PJ: You tell her about that, Willie Mae.

WJ: Um-hmm. You've heard of Section Eight?

KH: I know what Section Eight is.

WJ: Well, every empty house now, there's someone moving in from Section Eight. They seem to be younger people, and they're not married and just—.

PJ: Shacking up, you're going to call it.

WJ: Um-hmm. We have one next door to here.

PJ: Right next door here.

WJ: Uh-huh. And the second door, too, and one across the street. It's about in

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every block now out here.

PJ: Every block going down the street now.

WH: Just about every block in Titusville now you'll find a Section Eight house.

PJ: Because I told her the older people had died out, and the young people done carried their parents, their mama or their daddy, somewhere else to live.

WJ: Um-hmm. If they are living.

PJ: If they are living.

KH: Is the neighborhood still mostly black?

WJ: Yes, it is black. Mexicans moving in.

KH: OK.

WJ: That's lightning.

PJ: Oh, lightning.

KH: It's a thunderstorm.

WJ: OK to ask you some more questions?

PJ: Whatever she asks me, I'll tell her. What else she wants to ask me, if I know, I'll tell her. Whatever information she need to know, I'll tell her, that she doesn't have.

KH: How much do you know about the Titusville Development Corporation?

PJ: I have worked with different programs in this city to advance Titusville section out here.

WJ: The Boys Club.

PJ: Boys Clubs, I've worked with helping to organize Boys Clubs.

WJ: Boy Scouts.

PJ: I worked with Boy Scout units. I worked all civil rights units, and I still, up

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until the present until I got hurt, I worked with the museum.

KH: Um-hmm.

PJ: And that has been my—.

WJ: College Fund.

PJ: College Fund. That has been what I have tried to do, work with the organizations to help uplift Titusville because I've lived in Titusville all my life, and I want it to be an outstanding community. I have worked in all [types of] organizations. In my church, I work through my church for Titusville. I travel for my church in Titusville.

WJ: He was the first president of the Sara club.

PJ: Which is a Catholic white organization, and I was the first black president of that Sara club which is predominantly a white club for Catholics.

KH: Um-hmm.

KH: And why did you want to be involved with that?

PJ: Because I was Catholic, and that was the church organization. My being Catholic, I wanted to join everything that was Catholic, and that's why.

KH: Um-hmm. What would you like for Titusville to be like now?

PJ: I would like that whoever own this property in Titusville, I would like to see the real estate people, black or white, get together and try to develop and rebuild houses. All torn down dilapidated houses, tear them down and rebuild new houses, so that the black youngsters now that's leaving Birmingham and going somewhere else, they can look back and say, "Look, Titusville is being revitalized, so I'll just move back to Titusville." That's what I would like to see done.

KH: Because instead people are moving elsewhere because they think the

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neighborhood has nothing to offer.

PJ: That's right, it doesn't. It doesn't have anything to offer.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Transcribed by Carrie Blackstock, October 2006