RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DEBORAH SHUFORD

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview on June 8, 2018, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Deborah Shuford. The interviewers are Kate Rizzi …

Avery Kelley: Avery Kelley.

Daniel Venetsky: Daniel Venetsky.

Anthony DelConte: Anthony DelConte.

KR: Thank you so much for being here with us today.

Deborah Shuford: Thank you for having me.

KR: To begin, can you please tell us where and when you were born?

DS: Oh, sure. I was born in Newark, New Jersey at Beth Israel Hospital in the Weequahic section of Newark, New Jersey, the South Ward, home of the late, great [author] Philip Roth. My mom wanted to buy a home not too far from the Roth child family home, so she bought a home in the Weequahic section, which is a very historic area in the South Ward of Newark, New Jersey. So, I was born and raised there.

KR: Can you tell us your mother's name, for the record?

DS: My mom's name, Minnie Ruth Johnson was her maiden name. Shuford is her married name.

KR: When was she born?

DS: My mom was born on June 30, 1936, in Hayneville, Alabama.

KR: Can you tell us about your family's background, starting on your mother's side?

DS: My mother's side, very simple background. She grew up with farmers. My mom wanted to have a more formal education, but her childhood began with a tragedy. Her mother was killed when she was about, I want to say, seven years old. So, she was raised by her grandmother, and then her grandmother died from grief. My mom was holding her grandmother as her grandmother passed away. My grandmother, my maternal grandmother, who died very young, my mother's mother, she actually worked and took care of her husband, my grandfather, Robert Johnson when he was ill. Tragically, my grandmother, Luvonia Davis Johnson, was killed [in 1943] on her way home from work in rural Alabama. We've never found out what happened to her. That tragedy haunted my mother and continues to haunt her today. My mom will be eighty-two [on] June 30th of this year, 2018.

KR: What are stories that were passed down to your mother and then your mother passed down to you about what she knows about her family background?

DS: Well, one in particular, my mom would tell us that on her side, the Davises were actually related to the activist Professor Angela Davis. Growing up, we were told not to talk about our Angela, as we call her now, because of the activities that Angela was involved in with civil rights and also with the Black Panthers. So, my mother would tell us stories about Angela, but we weren't allowed to share those stories outside of the family home.

Then, she would tell stories about the tragedy of her mother being murdered and never finding out who actually committed the murder. My mom was the youngest of three children. The fact that her dad passed away due to some strange illness, her mom took care of her dad, and then [her] mom was murdered. The grandmother stepped up and then aunts and uncles, and actually it was Dr. Aaron E. Davis, [DDS from Bessemer, Alabama] which would have been Angela Davis' grandfather, who actually bought my mom's prom dress. Family in Alabama [was] very close. All of my extended family, they're there until this day. We would always have family who would come to our needs and to help out because in those days, my mother said, in the '30s, you really didn't have welfare. There was no welfare. There was no Section 8 [housing assistance]. There were no food stamps. Family relied on family, friends and strangers, and they would take in strangers.

During the Jim Crow years, my mother mentioned that they went to segregated schools. My great aunt owned a general store, if you will. So, all of the items that they needed were purchased from my aunt's general store [and] others who had general stores, because these were the Jim Crow [years] during the '50s. So, they were pretty much self-sufficient and very independent. Although they weren't rich, they were rich with land and property, and through that land and property, they were able to feed neighbors, friends, and strangers passing through town. To this day, we still have land. They grew a lot of fruits and vegetables, so they never really had to buy a lot.

My paternal grandmother was also an activist, and she was very instrumental in getting the first African American sheriff elected in Lowndes County. She grew everything. My grandparents, my paternal grandparents, [were] Percy and Elizabeth Shuford. We still have the family property today. Everything they ate, they grew from the ground. It was all organic. My grandfather never used any pesticides. When I hear and I see organic groceries in the grocery store, I just laugh because we grew up on that. I spent all my summers there. Whatever they had leftover, they would just give away. They would give away to strangers driving through, anyone who was in need or hungry.

My grandmother sewed everything. She sewed a lot of quilts, and she told me stories. This is my paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Shuford. She said that she would sew quilts. She would give them away when it was very cold during the winter months, but she would also use these quilts to line coffins. At times when there were African American men who were fighting for their civil rights and human rights, and if it got to the point of being very dangerous where they had to actually leave the county, they would place them in coffins and cover them with these quilts and ship them out of the area. [It was] kind of scary. These are stories that I never knew until I was actually a student at Douglass College. I would ask questions because I was taking history courses here at Rutgers, and I just had a lot of questions as a college student here.

As a child, we were very protected, and my parents, every summer, Mom and Dad would load up the beat-up station wagon with no air conditioning, and we would drive to Alabama so we could spend time with our extended family because we only had one cousin in New Jersey, one uncle, and one aunt. Everyone lived in Alabama, as they do today.

Then, on occasion, growing up, we'd have Uncle George and Uncle Eddie Mack, who served in the military, come through [Joint Base] McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst on their way overseas for deployment. Uncle Mack served in Vietnam. I remember when he would come through McGuire-Dix, we would go visit. He would tell stories about his military service, but he would never give us the real details about the activities or events that transpired in Vietnam because I thought--and I think today--he probably thought it would frighten us. We also had another cousin in Vietnam, and that would be Francis Miles, who served with my uncle Mack. Francis Miles would be on my mom's side and Eddie Mack Shuford on my dad's side, and the two grew up together in Alabama and they enlisted in the military to serve in Vietnam, very close. So, we have a lot of military family members, and after their service they would all return to Alabama pretty much.

Now, more stories are coming out, and I just learned last week that we also had a family member who served in World War I, as well as one family member who was killed in active duty in Pearl Harbor. I am starting to do my own research on our family members who were in the military. My son, as I sit here today, he's serving active duty, U.S. Army Reserves, at McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. So, he's there today, and he will help me with the research that I'm trying to gather.

KR: I know we all have so many questions.

DS: Sure, yes.

KR: I want to ask a question.

DS: Sure.

KR: You were talking about your paternal grandmother sewing.

DS: Yes, sewing.

KR: She was lining the coffins in order to smuggle people to safety.

DS: Absolutely.

KR: What were those people doing that they had to be smuggled to safety?

DS: Well, Lowndes County, that part of Alabama [is] very rural. In fact, some of the first African Americans who registered to vote, with Stokely Carmichael there, were told that if they got involved or engaged in those types of activities, as they were called then, that they could lose their land and they could lose their lives. We had family members who were activists, and my grandmother was an activist herself. My grandfather, I know, during the march from Selma to

Montgomery, Alabama, my grandfather told her not to go and not to get involved because he feared that we would lose our property. So, my grandmother was fearless for some reason. She always said that she was doing the right thing, and it was more about human rights than civil rights. [Editor's Note: In response to the violence inflicted upon civil rights demonstrators by local authorities on the Pettus Bridge in early March 1965, 25,000 people marched from Selma to Montgomery several weeks later.]

She believed in education, and she always said that she wanted all of her grandchildren to go on to college. Most of us have gone on to college and graduated. She lived to see it because she passed away 2002, when I was living in Fairfax County, Virginia, when I was in graduate school at American University. Her activities, she shared with me, she thought it would be helpful during my years in graduate school, which it was, and I used a lot of the information in a lot of my projects. In fact, we'll be using a lot of the notes and information she provided on a documentary that I'm working on, on my family history in the military, going back to WWI [World War I]. She thought then, as I feel now, that there are sometimes you had to take a stand, and you have to put aside your own personal life. You have to get engaged, and you have to feel that what you're doing is right and it's regarding human rights.

If we look at what is going on today, I know if she were alive today, she would be out there front and center fighting for human rights. What she did, it was very dangerous. In fact, there were times where they would have meetings at my grandparents' home to try to get, I guess she was trying to form a union for the farmers, for the African American farmers, and a lot of the farmers would gather in her home. She told us that they called them [the Ku Klux Klan] Night Riders. They would ride around the homes with torches to terrorize them to get them to just disperse and go back home. What she would do, she had this old house with floor boards, and she would lift the floor boards and hide them underneath the floor boards until they could get them safely home or safely out of the county, if it got to that point. My grandmother was doing a lot of things. I think she was way before her time.

Thank God, nothing happened to her or my grandfather or my dad, who was the eldest of nine children, and they didn't lose the farm. Nothing happened to my father's immediate family. The tragedy is on my mom's side, where my mother lost her mother to violence. She had an uncle who was very outspoken, they used to say. He wanted to fight for the civil rights and human rights of African Americans in Alabama, and he was lynched. On my mom's side, she had the tragedy of having an uncle who was lynched, and her mother who was murdered on her way home from work.

KR: What is suspected about your grandmother's murder?

DS: Well, my mom, over the years, she'd tell us, she'd provide what she knows, and, again, she was probably about seven years old, so she didn't know too much, but in conversations with some of her cousins and other family members, it's suspected that it may have been someone that my grandmother knew. She was murdered on a side of a road. If you're in rural Alabama, it could take a long time for someone to find you there. It's not like interstate highways that we have today. We're talking back in the '40s, early '40s, but it's been said that it had to be someone that knew her. They knew her work schedule, and she was walking on the road, leaving work. I

think she worked in some kind of restaurant or diner, and they had an old-fashioned pin that would identify you, so that they would know if you were actually working and walking on the road. Someone actually took that pin off of her coat, so it was said that it could've been someone that she knew. Even to this day, we don't know.

In those types of towns, small towns, in America, it's very difficult. You don't have the kind of forensics and detectives that we have, as they would say, in the big cities. They didn't have that. So, you'd have the local sheriff, and the local sheriff would have so many other incidents to address that in those days. If you were African American, you kind of had to take care of yourself. So, your community would kind of pull together to try to find out what happened and what occurred, and then you'd go as a community to the local sheriff, but no one ever did. They had the funeral. There was gossip and conversations about what might have happened, but I think it pretty much, it was probably someone that knew her. I'm sure if we wanted to have [the case reopened]--it's a cold case--it could be reinvestigated, but I think it would be detrimental to my mother. I don't know if she could handle it. Now, my mom has an older sister in Ohio, Copley, Ohio, who is a retired educator, a retired guidance counselor, and she has an older brother in Cleveland. They have mentioned to me that they'd like to know, but I don't know if my mother could handle it. I don't think she ever got over it. In fact, I think she needed therapy, and I think she, to this day, needs some type of therapy, because she was the baby girl and she had an older sister and older brother. It's something about death that she just can't handle.

Then, three years ago, she lost my dad, March 11th of 2015, and my father was eighty. They were high school sweethearts. They graduated from high school, [and] through the Great Migration of the '50s, they moved to New Jersey for jobs because there were no jobs for African Americans in 1954 when they took the train to New Jersey. They had one uncle and one aunt here, and they said, "Come up here for work." So, they got married. Then, when my father died, my mother felt like she was alone in New Jersey because she came here with my dad and she brought my oldest brother, who was born in Alabama. My father came to New Jersey, found work, sent for them, my mom and my oldest brother, Willie Fred Shuford, Jr., he was a toddler.

Then, sadly, two years ago, on March 19th, my brother, Willie Fred Shuford, Jr. died from heart failure due to complications from cancer. I was his stem cell donor. My mother, it's something about death, and it goes back to her childhood. Whenever someone dies very close to her, she can't recover. This was the worst, losing my brother, because that was her first-born. She had five children. I was his stem cell donor, and we were flying back and forth to Minnesota. It just didn't go the way we thought it would go, even though the stem cells gave him an extension of life. That's what I was told from the University of Minnesota Bone Marrow Transplant Center. I also donated the remaining stem cells that I had to the University of Minnesota Bone Marrow Stem Cell Transplant Center, and I have frozen stem cells in Saint Paul, Minnesota, because my brother thought it would be good for us to remain in the study, which is a study by the National Institute of Health. It's also in the Big Ten Cancer Research Consortium. So, I donated stem cells. They're doing research, and I hope to one day to publish some of that research in honor of my late brother.

Losing my brother and losing my dad, losing my dad in 2015 and my brother in 2016, it kind of set my mother on a downward spiral, so now she's going through a stage of depression, which is

very sad. In that depression, she starts to recall her days in Alabama, and they are very dark days. At times, she will share stories with me, now that I'm older and she's older. When she starts to tell some of these stories, they're very graphic. Then, I try to change the subject to something lighter, because I'm not a therapist. She was in therapy. I had her in therapy when we lost my brother and my dad, and I know that she is very depressed now. We have depression, in our family with my mom. The other family members in Alabama, they seem to roll right along. They just seem that they're survivors. They're very strong people. They're celebrating our family history this weekend, as a matter of fact.

KR: Yes. I wanted to ask about your family member who was lynched.

DS: Sure.

KR: Do you know what year that was?

DS: My mom, because she was a little girl, I know it was during the '40s, and the reason I say that is because my mother, the moment that she was old enough to graduate from high school and get married, she migrated to New Jersey with my dad. This is the reason why she never returned to the South to live permanently, only for visits, to visit family members because she just said that some of the things that she saw, it was just too devastating for her to handle. In fact, when my mom and dad were dating, my father, as a teenager--he was the eldest of nine children--and then he decided to work on the railroad.

At the time, the African American railroad men, they would leave home and they would travel. My father worked in New Orleans and helped to build a railroad there. He would come home on weekends, so he needed a car. You didn't have that kind of transportation in Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama. We had relatives. He had places to stay because during Jim Crow years, you could not stay in a hotel or a motel. So, you would find a family church. We had a family church, Lily Baptist Church, in Lowndes County in Letohatchee, these small towns in Alabama. We also had family in Mississippi, family in New Orleans, so there was always a place to stay. Then, my father wanted to go home because he wanted to return home to give money to my grandparents, the money that he earned.

He thought he would buy a car. My mother said when he bought a car, there was a man who was jealous of him having a car, and this gentleman was Caucasian. My mom and my dad's sister were riding in the car with my dad one day. They ran them off the road, and this man hit my father in the head. My father was a teenager. He went home and told my grandfather, and there was nothing my grandfather could do because if you tried to do something, you could be killed, you could be lynched. My mother never got over that because she was a young girl, a teenager, and she thought it was an injustice, which it was. This was Alabama and this was the Jim Crow South, so you didn't really have a lot of power. There was basically nothing you could do.

When Emmett Till was visiting Money, Mississippi, my parent's had already moved to New Jersey, and I think that bothered my mother as well. She never allowed us to go to Alabama alone, because of what happened to Emmett Till. We'd always have to go with my mom and dad. We'd always go, all five of the children, in a station wagon. We never stayed in a hotel.

We always stopped at a rest area, and we slept in the car. We never understood that. [Editor's Note: Emmett Till was a fourteen-year-old African American who was visiting family in Money, Mississippi when he was abducted and murdered. His body was returned to his mother in Chicago, where she held an open casket funeral for everyone to see what was done to him.]

KR: Avery has a question about that.

DS: Sure, yes.

AK: When your parents were younger, did they use the *Green Book* to guide them on their road trip?

DS: Yes, thank you for bringing that up. Yes, they did. They used the *Green Book*. My mom and dad, they grew up in the Jim Crow South and they were born in the '30s, so you were following the stock market crash of 1929 and the depression in the '30s. People were really poor, not just African Americans, but my father said that there were Caucasian Americans who were just as poor. Sometimes, my grandmother would feed them as well because you were in a small community. They had the *Green Book*, but my father didn't use it because he knew those roads so well. He worked on the railroad. He knew all the backroads. He knew where we could stay if we had to because they had the *Green Brook*. The *Green Book* was a book that African Americans would travel with, a travel guide, if you will, that would tell you the safe places that you could stay while were travelling to certain parts of the country. It's a very historic book. We had the book, but we also had so much family. We had family in Virginia and North Carolina. My father would take [Interstate] 95 south through New Jersey, and we could stop in Virginia and stay with relatives. We could stop in North Carolina, and then he would continue to drive. My mother never drove. He never wanted my mother to drive. He was this old-fashioned southern gentleman who believed in driving the women. [Editor's Note: Published between 1936 and 1966 by Victor H. Green in New York City, *The Negro Motorist Green Book* served as a travel guide for African Americans and provided information about hotels, boarding houses, taverns, restaurants and service stations that were safe and fairly priced.]

My uncle Johnny, who was my paternal grandmother's brother, he was the uncle who lived in New Jersey, and [along with] my grandmother's sister, they were the one who told my dad to come to New Jersey. When they drove to Alabama, [they went with us]. Back then, they didn't check seatbelts, so it was Uncle Johnny, Aunt Sue, my mom, my dad, my brother Billy, sister Trisha, Sandy, myself, and then later on, ten years later, my baby brother Jarrod, all in this station wagon. They never checked seatbelts. Thank God nothing ever happened, but that's how we travelled. We only stopped to get out to go to the restroom.

One incident, my older sister Trisha, and her birthday is tomorrow, she'll be sixty-two. Because we grew up in New Jersey, we could go anywhere. We stopped at a rest area, and it had to be North Carolina. I'll never forget it because my sister Trisha said, "You know we've got to go to the restroom," and she kind of jumped in the front of women who were Caucasian. In fact, we were in the wrong restroom, and we didn't know it. Because we were growing up in New Jersey, you go to the restroom, you just go. The lady asked her, "What do you think her doing?" She said, "I'm taking my sisters to the restroom," and we had New Jersey accents. We never had the

southern [accents]. Certain words were pronounced that we heard from our grandparents. I think this woman realized that we didn't know any better. I remember her southern drawl. She said, "Y'all must be from up North." My sister Trisha said, "We're from New Jersey," and she had her hands on her hips. She was very proud of it, and she's like, "Well, we're from New Jersey. Where are you from?" I guess at that instance, this woman, she felt sorry for us, and she didn't report it. We went to the restroom, and we went back to the car. When we told our parents, the look of horror on my mom's face, and my dad kind of had a smirk, but my mother, just the look. I didn't think of it then, but when I think of it now, I think she was having flashbacks of would could have happened. After that, we never went in the restroom alone. She would go with us. Then, when years passed, you could stop at certain rest stops.

We have to keep in mind that *Brown v. Board of Education* was 1954, and we're travelling in the '60s, maybe ten years later. In Virginia, even though the Supreme Court decision was to integrate schools, a lot of the areas in Virginia and North Carolina were not integrated. In fact, in Virginia, they padlocked the schools because they refused to adhere to the Supreme Court decision. We're travelling in the '60s, middle, late '60s, and you still have a lot of people who still feel very strongly about the separation of the races in this country, in the United States of America. There's still some areas, to this day, if you were to travel, you can still see some of the signs that say, "Colored" and, "White." They're still there. For historic purposes, some have been moved to museums, but the feelings. It's not that long ago. You're talking fifty or sixty years.

Just this week, with the anniversary of the death of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, who travelled throughout the rural communities, the South and the North, he could actually go anywhere, in any community because he was so loved by so many. What he wanted to do then is what we're trying to do now, at least I would say the young people are trying to do that now.

We see that with the events that were unfolding in Washington, D.C. with the students from Parkland, [Florida] coming together and saying, "You know what? We're one country. We need to come together." To have Dr. King's granddaughter there, I thought was just wonderful, because it goes back to what Dr. King said, "Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere." To have young people today fighting for their civil rights, fighting for their lives, that they want to stop the gun violence and stop violence period. [Editor's Note: On February 14, 2018, fourteen students and three teachers were murdered by a former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.]

When you think about the violence that's going on today, it's not just against African Americans. Now, you have violence against immigrants. Everyone here is an immigrant, except for the Native Americans, but some people don't feel that way. What we experienced, as African Americans during Jim Crow, a lot of the immigrants are experiencing that today, which makes absolutely no sense, but it's happening. Now, you have a new type of Jim Crow and this type of Jim Crow is nationwide and it's against the new immigrants, so to speak, that have arrived in this country. Pretty much in the South, it's still an issue of black and white, where there is this crazy understanding that they will accept black and white but no one else.

In fact, when I talked to some of the students here at Rutgers University and they share stories of travelling--and these are international students that I had met in the dining hall at Livingston--and they were saying they were told not to travel to the southern states of this country. [It is a] pretty sad, pretty sad state of affairs. When we look at the Statue of Liberty, it was a gift from France, and when you think about it, "Bring us your tired and your poor," when those people come, the tired and the poor, they don't feel welcome, without going into politics because I'm not a politician and I'm more of a creative person.

This is why I like doing documentaries, and that's what I'm working on now. I'm working on the history of African Americans in the military, as it pertains to my own family. I think it's important because it also shares the history of this country. It is not African American history; it's just history. Then, I am also getting notes and some sound bites from students, who are international students, who are sharing their experience here, and it's really interesting. We have the first Native American who just won the primary in New Mexico. She could be the very first, in her own country, so there's a lot to be said for that. [Editor's Note: On June 5, 2018, Deb Haaland won the primary election to become the Democratic candidate for New Mexico's First Congressional District in the midterm elections in November 2018.]

When I think about my own history, and then talking to my dad, and I think about that day in the restroom in the South, I think he had that smirk because my father shared with me before he passed away--and some family members are not really happy about this--but he asked me to do some research with the Census. I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you'll be very surprised." After that, he said, "I may be gone, but I want you to do our DNA." I had a cousin, who passed away in 2014, who did the DNA, and we traced it back to Sierra Leone. My father said, "That's not it. That's not the only DNA." Then, my father gave me some names of people who had a farm in Alabama who are of Irish descent, and it turns out [laughter] they're part of our family too. Their farm was maybe four miles away from my grandfather's farm, and they had children together and so now we have that part of our family.

Then, my uncles--and they're probably all getting together today--that side of our family, the Caucasian side and the African American side, they're having a family reunion this weekend. You just never know, which is nice. It was a long time coming. They were family. My grandmother used to talk about some of these cousins down the road. They would come over and eat. They would never say we were cousins, but we were. We were related. It was dangerous, my grandmother said, for them to be around, but she never told me why. My father said they're related to us, but back then if that was known, they could have been lynched because they would have been--I won't say some of the terrible names they would have called the Caucasian family members. Some may have been killed and worse, maimed or whatever they would have done to them. They knew they were related to us, but we weren't told until recently. My father told me maybe five years ago.

KR: What did he tell you?

DS: He gave me some names. He gave me a name of Hannah Shuford, who goes back to two of her children, when she married Perry Shuford, well, one was not a Shuford, but her daughter had a Shuford name. The son did not. My father said, "I want you to just look up these names."

One name is Dickinson. So, the Dickinsons are actually related to us as well. It was just interesting my father would share that, but he waited so long. I can understand why. You have to wait. Some family members, you never know how they will perceive it. In fact, today, some of my own family members were kind of upset with me for doing the research and finding out that they're related. My uncles, my dad's brothers, they reached out to them, and now they're all having a big family reunion. Then, someone reached out to me on my e-mail and invited me and said, "When are you coming back to Alabama? We want you to come and meet your cousins." I was like, "Wow." I have family I've never met in Alabama.

This is what I like about the time we are living in now. Now, you can do it and it's fairly safe, but back then you could not. You couldn't do it, certainly not in the '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s. The conversation I think started happening in the '80s, when I was a student at Douglass, and then in the '90s, it started to come out. Of course, in the 2000s, it's out there. You find more people doing that, because now you have all of these commercials with your DNA and a lot of African Americans tracing their DNA. Some people want to know and some people don't want to know, which is very sad because I think we'd all be surprised if we did our DNA to find out. We do know that if we trace the African heritage, that goes back to Sierra Leone, that part we do know, but then there's also European heritage on the Irish side that we discovered.

I always say to a lot of students, when I was teaching "Gender, Race and Class" here in the [Rutgers] School of Communication [and Information] in the fall of 2016, I started with Native Americans because I thought we were going to talk about race, so let's start with Native Americans. Then, I said to all the students, "I'm going to ask or request a little homework assignment. I want you to find a relative that you can call, one that would be probably the oldest relative in your family, a grandparent, a great aunt or uncle, and just talk to them briefly and find out where your family is from." When the students returned the following week, it was amazing the conversations that we had in that class. It was outstanding. I sort of taught it as a Socratic seminar, and I just kind of sat back. It was amazing, and then I said, often times with African Americans, and not African-born Africans, this is an African American issue, where African Americans feel kind of left out because they don't know, but with DNA you could actually find out.

Then, I said, "What I also have to say that oftentimes in fairness to European Americans," because most Americans who aren't African American will just say, 'I'm American,' but where are your grandparents from? Where are your great grandparents from? Possibly Europe." I said, "Well, when you look at the reasons some people don't want to talk about it is because they feel that African Americans, in some instances, not all, will blame them for enslaved Africans in this country." Then, I say, "Well, how is that possible if we go back to Ellis Island and we look at the immigrants who came here after the Civil War?" If you look at some of the names of African Americans, you will not find African Americans with Polish, Italian, German names unless their families married into those families way after Jim Crow, way after the '50s. You will find African Americans with English and Irish last names. That opened up a whole different conversation, but it makes sense. When you think about a lot of the immigrants who came here after the Civil War, and we're talking the 1880s and 1890s--the Emancipation Proclamation was 1863, the Civil War ended in 1865--the other European immigrants didn't arrive until twenty years later, so you cannot blame everyone for the tragedy of slavery in this country. It's just not

possible; they weren't here. When I mentioned that, then everyone opened up, and everyone smiled. I said, "Don't feel guilty with something you had nothing to do with and neither did your ancestors, because oftentimes you'll find this division between black and white and who's to blame for slavery." Well, it's something that's a tragedy, but we need to have a conversation about it. We talk about it.

We look at what's happening now. Without being political, when we think about babies being snatched out of the arms of their mothers going to detention centers and then we're reading reports that already New Jersey has already taken in over 2,300 of these children into foster care, then we have reflections of enslavement again because you're separating families. We don't know what's going to happen with separating those families later on, as in separating the enslaved Africans. When you have African-born Africans and African Americans trying to figure out who did what, it's kind of like you have to sit down and talk about it because you can't just blame European Americans and you can't blame all of them because they weren't even here. You just can't say, "Oh, it's something that happened with the Portuguese and the Spanish going into Africa and carving up Africa." Well, you have African nations who were a part of that as well. It's not possible, it could not have been geographically possible for Europeans to cross the terrain of a continent like Africa without getting malaria and other diseases and dying. Then, you bring enslaved Africans to this country, and they get an extra cell and get sickle cell. The blame, it's not really a blame thing, it's a tragedy.

If we were more educated and have more conversations about it, I think then everybody could probably have a little more insight and be more comfortable talking about it. We talk about the fifty-three, possibly fifty-four, maybe even fifty-five nations of Africa as they become divided, but if you look at the African nations and you look at colonization, then now you're looking at the '60s. What was happening over there in the '60s was happening here. As we received independence during civil rights here in the USA, there was also independence of African nations in Africa. It's great in this country if we have and even include in our history lessons, history, "History 101," and I think it will help a lot of the fear that we have and a lot of the ignorance that we have as a nation. In order for us to come together, we've got to know our history and we have to come together and understand that history and stop blaming people who had nothing to do with some of the tragedies in this country.

KR: I wanted to ask more about your father's mother and her activism.

DS: Okay, absolutely.

KR: You mentioned Stokely Carmichael.

DS: Yes.

KR: It sounds like your grandmother was doing grassroots organization. Did she have contact with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee?

DS: She did.

KR: Can you tell us what you know?

DS: I can't name names, because she didn't name names, but she would cook for them. If they needed a place to stay, they'd stay at her home. She lived, my goodness, it's such a rural road, and Hope Hull, H-O-P-E H-U-L-L, is a small, very small, it's not even I guess a town. The nearest town is Hayneville, and that's where the courthouse was. The Black Panthers would go out to that part of the area, and that's where they hid. That's where they would meet. In fact, the Black Panthers' symbol was a symbol over a barn, of a black panther, and it was used for people who were illiterate or semi-illiterate. When they were voting, the Black Panther symbol was symbolized that they should vote for the Black Panther, for one party, as opposed to the rooster for another political party, [the Democratic Party]. [Editor's Note: In the summer of 1965, Stokely Carmichael and other members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) worked with local residents to register African American voters in Lowndes County, Alabama. With local white residents dominating the Democratic Party, an independent political party was formed as a matter of practicality. The Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), chaired by John Hulett, consisted of local black residents, and, with its emblem of a black panther, became known as the Black Panther Party. In 1967 in California, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton adopted the black panther symbol of the LCFO as the name for their organization, the Black Panther Party (BPP). (From *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* by Clayborne Carson (pgs. 161-166)]

My grandmother understood that in order to make change, you would have to vote. She understood how important it was to get people to register to vote, and once she registered, she never missed an election. Again, she was instrumental in getting the first African American sheriff elected in the county, and she knew that she needed to do that for the protection of the people in the county. You had to have law enforcement that would enforce the law, and if you didn't elect someone to do that, then it would never happen. She understood, just like Fannie Lou Hamer understood, that you have to register to vote, and then when you registered to vote, you can put people in office that will protect your rights. [Editor's Note: After trying to register to vote in 1962 in Indianola, Mississippi, Fannie Lou Hamer was arrested, threatened, forced into hiding for her own safety, and then assaulted so violently that it left her with permanent injuries. The next year, Hamer joined SNCC as a staff member. In 1970, John Hulett was elected sheriff of Lowndes County on the LCFO ticket.]

That's what the children in Parkland are doing today. They're going around this summer, they just graduated last week, and now they're going around nationwide to get young people to register on their eighteenth birthday because they understand that. My grandmother understood that, because, as a young girl, she wasn't allowed to vote. My grandmother wasn't really allowed to do anything until after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. By that point, she was a middle-aged woman.

My Aunt Erma, who was her youngest daughter, she grew up and learned in a one-room schoolhouse, but then she became a chemistry teacher. She graduated from Alabama State, and then she taught chemistry and geometry and also calculus. She said, before she passed away in 2010--she had cancer and passed away with cancer--but she said that education was the best thing that ever happened to her and she was fortunate enough to have teachers who were very

caring and nurturing. They were so invested in education, because they knew the only way to make the next generation stronger and empowered would be through education. My grandmother understood that. She had nine children and she knew then to work on the farm--the last three were the ones who went on to Alabama State, to college--the others kind of made the sacrifice to keep the farm going, to work and help my grandparents and to help their siblings to go on to college. Uncle Mack and Uncle George didn't go to college, but they went into military service. They went into the Army. Everyone went into the Army, except maybe two in the Navy, is what I was told. My grandmother understood that, and she loved teachers. She just really loved teachers. She would say to me, "Teachers will change the world." When I was in graduate school, I told her, "Okay, I'll teach." I taught special needs children in Washington, D.C., and she loved the fact that I was doing that. She just loved it, because she just loved teachers. She thought that they would change [the world] for everybody, not just African Americans, but even some of the really poor Caucasian Americans and there were really, really poor ones there that people don't see in mainstream media. If they were to take the cameras there now to Mississippi and Alabama, you would be shocked, or Appalachia, and they don't have the education. They will never get out of that poverty and that community because they don't have the education and they're not going to get the education because we don't have teachers who want to go there and teach them because the salaries are too low.

When my mom's mother was murdered, my uncle Ralph was sent to Kentucky--they were so poor in Kentucky--and my mom and Aunt Dot stayed in Hayneville, and my mother said, when they would go to Kentucky, they were shocked. They thought they were poor until they went to Kentucky and they saw [how poor the people were there]. Then, my mother said, even more so, she said, "There were white people that were poor. They had less than us." She couldn't believe it. Who understood that? Senator Robert F. Kennedy, who travelled there, and he saw all that in the '60s. He won the primary in California, and he wanted to change it and he would have. I think things would be very different in this country had he not been assassinated in California.

KR: What do you remember about his assassination?

DS: I'm glad you asked that. I remember when President Kennedy--and I was very young, I had to be four or five when he was assassinated--my mom was sitting at the television. We only had one television. My father was very frugal, just one TV, but the black and white image at the funeral and seeing John Kennedy, Jr. salute his dad. I actually remember that. My mother cried all day. All day she cried.

A lot of African Americans and a lot of people don't know this, and you mentioned the *Green Book*, well, this is another thing that they had. If you go to older African Americans, I would say, aged sixty plus, they all have these photos of Senator Robert Kennedy in their home, President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, those three, from the '60s. When President Kennedy died, my mother cried all day. Then, when Senator Robert Kennedy, she thought he was going to win, when he won the primary, I remember her watching, and she was so happy. It was like hope for her, like things are going to change finally for a little girl coming from Alabama.

When he was assassinated, first with Dr. King, she just kind of said, "Nothing will ever change in this country. We'll never change." I was a little girl, I didn't understand, but when Dr. King was assassinated, I remember her crying. That went on for weeks. She told me this recently, she said, "I thought after losing President Kennedy and losing Dr. King," she said, "Well, we had Senator Kennedy," she said, "and he was travelling all over the country and he was going to make everything right." Then, she said, "But when they assassinated him," she said, "well, that's when we just said it's never going to change." I said, "But it will." I said, as an adult now, I said, "I remember you saying that." I said, "But I look at the young people today and I look at the students that were in Washington, D.C. with the students from Parkland." I said, "And it will change, because it will change in November." She was going through this depression again. Every time someone dies, she goes through a depression.

I remember watching her cry in the '60s for President Kennedy, for Dr. King, in that order and Senator Robert Kennedy. It was like it was personal for her, like they were related to her. Again, the depression from death and what it causes and not having therapy to get over it. Yes, so, it's pretty sad. Then, this is the fiftieth anniversary [of Robert Kennedy's death], and so she calls me and she starts talking about Senator Kennedy fifty years later. She still remembers every detail, and she is devastated all over again fifty years later. She's going to eighty-two at the end of this month, and she still remembers it. That's pretty sad.

RZ: I want to ask just a couple more questions about your parents' background.

DS: Sure.

RZ: You mentioned about your parents' families living through the Great Depression and how communities had to rally to support each other. Were there any New Deal programs, that you know of, that reached them in Alabama?

DS: There were, but--and my mom told me this and my dad as well and my grandmother--there were programs, but the way things worked in--and I can say this because I got this firsthand from relatives and I get this from them even today--some of the southern states feel that they have rights to govern their own people as they say. So, it doesn't matter what federal programs are available; they will not adhere to those federal programs and they won't implement those federal programs.

Case in point, even today, if you look at the Affordable Health Care Act, if you look at some of the southern states, they're not providing Medicaid. They don't believe in it, but then in New Jersey, we have it. Even today, you have this, and it will change in November, I'm quite certain. In 2018, there will be a lot of changes, but you have, in some of the southern states, they still have this kind of feeling that, "We take care of our own and we don't need the federal government to come down here. We don't need the people from Washington to come down here and tell us what to do," and you still have some older members in the Senate and in the House of Representatives, they actually believe that.

You had the election in Alabama, a lot of my cousins--again, remembering what my grandmother taught them--started the grassroots of getting people to register to vote, so that

Judge Moore could not win the election. They actually got out grassroots style just the way they did in the '60s, because they realized if he did get elected, they would go back fifty years because that's his thinking. I'm sorry you had another question pertaining to my grandmother. [Editor's Note: Roy Moore served as the chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court from 2001. In 2017, Moore lost his bid for a Senate seat in a special election to Democrat Doug Jones.]

KR: I wanted to ask if you happen to know what year the first African American sheriff was elected.

DS: Oh, yes. I think my grandmother--and I could go back and find out and give you the exact date--but with her activities, I know it was after the '50s. I know my parents moved to New Jersey in '54, and I would say she did this, I want to say, in the '70s. I recall going down there in the '70s, and her talking about it.

With the activities of the Black Panthers, which is on my mom's side, not my grandmother's side, but the activities they were doing and all this happened after the assassination of President Kennedy, Senator Kennedy, and Dr. King. That would be the '60s. Then, the Panthers, they were starting to really, not just become popular, but to start changing the way people were thinking and the way the people were thinking in the South. The Black Panthers actually started in the South. Years later, there was a Panther who actually was fleeing the sheriffs in Atlanta, Georgia who actually drove from Atlanta all the way out to Lowndes County because he knew there were still some Panthers living there that would protect him. This was recent, like in the 2000s. He actually drove from Atlanta all the way out to Lowndes County, and if you know those woods like I do, no one will ever find you. I think it took over a week for them to find him. Actually, someone had to tell them how to find him out there. I would say it had to be in the '70s [when John Hulett became sheriff].

My grandmother was not a Black Panther, but she was fearless. Her way of dealing with the death of President Kennedy and Dr. King and Senator Robert F. Kennedy was to get people to register to vote and that was her way of dealing with it, as opposed to the Panthers' way of dealing with it was to use the assassinations as, "Well, see, they're using violence, so now we're going to pick up our guns." My grandmother saw it as, "No, you need an education and you need to register voters," which is what the students of Parkland are saying. They know that the way to make change is to get people to vote. My grandmother saw it that way.

Then, you still had some Panthers who lived in the community. We were talking about taking care of a community. Well, they did. They would feed people and take care of them that way, but then they could also give them home and protection in those woods in Lowndes County. My grandmother would never protect anyone who broke the law. Neither would my grandfather. My grandparents were true southerners. They didn't believe in breaking the law, but they believed in education. My grandfather also said that we would be stronger as a family, as a community and as a nation through education because he didn't have the opportunity to get one. It wasn't available. If you were African American, you were expected, if you could make it to eighth grade, after that you were expected to work as a sharecropper. You weren't expected to do any more than that. If you wanted a job, they would say you'd have to leave and go to the big cities up North.

Then, they would call the people from the North, "Yankees," and even though we were travelling there to go back to visit our own relatives, we would go in the store and they would hear our dialect change. It would be more of New York, New Jersey, Tristate, and they would call us, "Yankees." [laughter] Then, they would see me, and they said, "That girl right there, she looks like Elizabeth Shuford." That would be me because I look like my grandmother. That was my saving grace, and if I said my name, that I was a Shuford, they knew my grandmother was this woman who took care of the whole community, fed everybody, and then that would kind of be the pass. They would give me a pass, [laughter] coming from New Jersey.

My grandmother, everybody knew her. Her church, Lily Baptist, she raised money for students to go to college and encouraged them to go and leave the state of Alabama if necessary and to go to other schools, not just the historically black colleges and universities, which are in the South and were established following the Civil War. General Oliver Otis Howard started Howard University. Everyone thinks that it was started by a black man. It was started by a Union general. There's a portrait of him hanging there, in his Union garb, his whole uniform, with his sword, and people don't realize it is a HBCU, a historic black college and university. Most of those schools were established by missionaries, Methodist ministers, because they wanted former enslaved Africans, they wanted them to get an education. They knew they couldn't go to traditional schools, or as we call them predominantly white institutions, so they had the HBCUs as opposed to the PWIs.

My grandmother understood that, so they never broke the law. My father used to say to us, "You're in New Jersey, but you have southern roots and we expect you to behave." When we would go to Alabama, we would have to say, "Yes, Ma'am," and, "Yes, Sir." In New Jersey, we didn't do that. We'd just say, "Yes." Well, my parents would have us say, "Yes, Ma'am," and, "Yes, Sir," in the South because that's what you do when you're in the southern states, even today. "Yes, Ma'am." "Yes, Sir." My father would say, "If you get into trouble, you're going to Angola," and that's the worst place to go, Angola Prison, in this country. You go there, my father would say, "You don't leave Angola. They have you dig your own grave. Once you're in there, you never get out." That's how they were raised. [Editor's Note: The Louisiana State Penitentiary is a maximum security prison. It is known as "Angola" after the former plantation that existed on the same land.]

They were raised to respect the law no matter what. Even when the law was not on their side, they never broke the law. They just didn't. Even when my father got hit over the head, my grandfather couldn't do anything about it. He would just tell my father, "Don't drive on that road anymore, and don't drive at night. Don't drive that car because some people don't have a car and here you are driving from New Orleans with a car and they can't even buy a loaf of bread." That was the kind of thinking. They thought my father had become uppity, but he bought the car so he could visit his family on the weekend. He wasn't trying to be uppity. When you have people who are starving, they see you arrive in this fancy car, there is some jealousy. It's not just jealousy from Caucasians, but some African Americans were jealous. They felt my father thought he was better than them.

He was working. He was building a railroad. I think that took a toll on his body, years later, his knees. You had African Americans who would do this; that was hard work. What they would do, so they would get the tracks laid properly, they would sing these chants. If you listen to some of these chants, and they would call them the Gandymen, it goes back to Africa. The chants were like African chants. Somehow, in this country, with the separation and having Africans come here, some of the traditions and the songs are still with us. When they would do these chants, if you listen to some of these chants and you can probably Google it or find it on PBS--because I worked at PBS in the '90s and I would find some of this in some of our documentaries--I'd look at some of the chants of African traditions. That's where it comes from. [Editor's Note: "Gandy dancers" was a nickname for railroad workers because of the chants that they sang to synchronize their movements as they laid down railroad tracks.]

Some of the food, and even some of the stuff my grandmother grew, the way she would cook and grow stuff and then I'd go and I would look at some of the things that I would find in stores, in African stores, when I enrolled in preparing Future Faculty courses at Howard University, I would learn from a lot from a lot of professors who were African-born about, they would say, "You know you're cooking this. Where'd you get that?" "My grandmother." They would say, "Where's your grandmother from?" Some of these things were still passed down, and we don't know it. If you listen to some of the dialects of African Americans, you can hear it and we know it's the West Coast of Africa. Again, it's not possible for Europeans to travel from Europe and make it across the entire African continent [without the assistance of Africans]; that just would never have been possible. It's not possible now. You have to get so many inoculations to prevent you from getting sick and even dying. My grandmother and grandfather would have these traditions of things that they were doing, and now that I'm older I realize this was passed down to them. Some of our relatives who remembered being enslaved passed it down to them, and so they would pass stories down to us.

I know my mother--that's another thing that bothered her--she would listen to her great grandmother and grandmother tell stories about slavery and what happened. For her side, I think, they told her things that basically she couldn't really handle, and they told her at a young age. They were trying to tell her before they passed away. On the other hand, on my father's side, my grandmother used that information in her church, in Lily Baptist Church, so they could preserve it and so they could pass it onto young people, so the young people would feel a sense of pride and empowered and go on to college. There's two families and two ways of dealing with some of the things that happened. My grandmother, my father's mother, I think my father was stronger and empowered because he had his parents until he was in his fifties. They lived to be in their nineties. I think my grandfather had to be over a hundred, but they didn't keep good records then and my grandfather, I know, lived until '92. My grandfather died in 1992. My grandmother died in 2002, and he was older than her. My father could deal with a lot of things. He lived to have five children. We all went to college, and he didn't have the tragedies in his family that my mother had. I think that made a strong impact on her, that she wasn't able to handle things as he did.

When he came to New Jersey, he was very fortunate to meet the Ciocci Family, an Italian American family, and they came from Italy and they were poor. They met my father from Alabama. To this day, the Ciocci Family, we're very close. Rick Ciocci is teaching at Penn

State, and he and I communicate on Facebook every week. They hired my dad [at Apex Gear]. My father worked for them. They said, "We know you grew up on a farm, but we think you should get some kind of training." My father was really good with machines and he was a master machinist, and they sent him for training for that. My father worked for them for over fifty years, and even when he was retired, they would call him in because he was the only one who understood how to make gears and how to cut them properly.

My father taught himself how to use a slide rule before we had calculators. He taught himself. If they hadn't gone through Jim Crow and if he had had the opportunity, he would've been a mechanical engineer, because he was brilliant at it. In fact, some of my friends in the Rutgers Alumni Association who graduated from the College of Engineering asked if I could share his notes, the way he did his math calculations. The way he taught me math when I was six or seven, I never had a problem with math because my father taught me the basics. The way he taught it, it was just so easy to understand.

The Ciocci Family, they owned Apex Gear, and they employed my father. At my father's funeral, their granddaughter and their son, Dr. Rick Ciocci, who teaches at Penn State, he actually came. He was the first one in the church. He travelled from Pennsylvania and came. We're still close families. We have what we call the Shuford and Ciocci family connection, which is Italian Americans and African Americans, and both families are from humble beginnings. My father is from Alabama, the rural South, and the Italian American family, they called him the "Old Man," from Italy, from Sicily. He didn't even have an eighth-grade education, and he came here to help his family, the Cioccis. Through education, the Ciocci family, they're strong, and through education, the Shuford Family, we're strong. The two families came together here in the USA, which is another whole story right there.

KR: How did that initial meeting take place?

DS: With the Cioccis?

KR: Yes.

DS: My father, when he was looking for work, he worked as a janitor for Simco Shoes, and that's another story. This is a Jewish family, the Simons, they hired him and later let him work as a shoe salesman. While he was living in Newark, somebody introduced him to the Cioccis, and they needed a truck driver. Initially, my father was driving a truck for them. They just thought he was too smart to drive the truck, and they said, "We think maybe if you go get some training, you can be a machinist." Well, what they didn't know was that he would be able to cut these gears. He told stories about how he would, I don't know what he was cutting to lay these tracks on the railroad, but he knew how to do it. He taught himself. He did it so well, and they fit. So, I guess they said, "Well, if he could do that, he could probably help us get these gears cut at the gear shop, Apex Gear shop." I can get all the details on the actual meeting, but I know he worked for them for over fifty-two years. The Ciocci Family, they were just so impressed. Right now, one owner, he's in Florida, and they said the way he would just write down these calculations like our engineering students do today, so that he could cut these gears so they could fit. They were so impressed by that. He worked for them for over fifty-two years.

Even in retirement, they would call him. Even [right before] my father passed away, Cathy Ciocci called my dad and said, "We have some work, and if you're out of the hospital, could you come by and consult again?" She had just lost her husband two weeks prior. He had brain cancer similar to the type of cancer that Vice President [Joe] Biden's son had, and Steve Ciocci died two weeks before my father. My father died on March 11th of 2015. Steve was my age. The last time I saw Steve, maybe it was 2013.

My father trained Steve when he was ten years old. Steve kind of looked up to my dad, and even when my father retired, Steve would rely on my dad. Rick is a professor at Penn State, and Steve majored in mechanical engineering. I believe he went to NJIT. He wanted to run the company, so he didn't complete all of his coursework at NJIT, New Jersey Institute of Technology, here in New Jersey. Steve was trained by my father. My father actually trained Steve from age ten. When I was ten and Steve was ten, my dad was training Steve to take over the gear company for his grandparents and for his parents. That's a whole other story that we have between the Italian American family and the African American family, and we're trying to put together a reunion with the two families. We're on Facebook every day. I get messages from the Ciocci Family every day. They just got a new baby in the family, and so they sent me pictures and send me messages. Even though my father passed away, we're still close with his family. They remembered my father trained Steve.

Steve's daughter actually spoke at my father's funeral, and she started talking about how when she was selling Girl Scout cookies, she would go to my dad first. I didn't know why my father always bought these Girl Scout cookies, and I didn't know that he was buying them from Steve's daughter, that he would buy all these Girl Scout cookies and that's where they came from. She said she would call him--my father's middle name is Fred--and she'd say, "Mr. Fred would always buy all of my Girl Scout cookies," and she had us all in tears. What was so beautiful about her speaking at my father's funeral is that her father had passed away two weeks before my dad. She was so sweet, and her mom, for them to come to my dad's funeral and they just lost Steve.

This is why I say, you'd be surprised in this country, like we have tragedies, but then we have some beauty and we come together when we need to come together. This is why I think we could learn a lot from our conversations about race and about gender and about class, because we're all in this together. We're all here in this country together, and we have to find a way to come together and we have to find a way to get along. You'd be surprised, when you get to know people, when you work with people, then you realize, "Hey, they're not so bad after all. They're just like us."

What happened with my dad and with the Shufords and the Cioccis is that we're all from humble beginnings. We didn't have a silver spoon. We just got along like one big happy family. Actually, they're from Sicily, from Italy. The journey, the family journey of Americans, it's interesting how you'll have people who actually arrived after the Civil War with just the clothes on their backs and then they come here and they work hard. We know that the Cioccis, who came here from Sicily, they had nothing. They meet my dad, and they didn't know anything about African Americans [laughter] in this country. They said this at my dad's funeral, they just

said, "We saw something special in him. We knew." They said, "He really helped us build our company." This is why I think it's our history, it's our American history.

We have our military history. We have family members who have served in the military, and if you talk to family members, you'll find out that in their own way they did something, even those who couldn't serve overseas, they were doing things. My mother said they were gathering metal and old tires and things like that. The women would do stuff to send care packages. Things like that she likes to talk about and I like it when she does because I think these are happy times. She had such a rough childhood, because she lost her parents at a young age.

My father had his parents. My grandmother died, I had to be forty-one or forty-two, so my dad was in his sixties, so he had his parents and he was already a senior citizen. That helped him. He had wonderful parents. My grandparents were just wonderful. My grandfather was very quiet, a man of few words. My grandmother was just the opposite. She was more like Gloria Steinem, [laughter] who I love.

I love Gloria Steinem, and I met her here. We had a nice luncheon with her, and I told Gloria about my grandmother, by the way. When Gloria asked, "What are you teaching?" and I said, "Gender, Race and Class." She said, "Oh, thank you for teaching that." We were having lunch with the students. We were over on the Cook Campus, and I told her about my grandmother and she loved it. I said, "Well, she's just like you." [laughter] She was an activist and very outspoken. My grandfather was the total [opposite]; I guess opposites attract.

They believed in doing everything the right way. They never had credit cards, and they paid cash for everything. Then, they grew everything. My grandmother sewed everything. My father said [that] we call them jeans, they called them dungarees. We say sneakers here; my cousins say tennis shoes. So, my father said they would buy dungarees and tennis shoes, but my grandmother sewed everything, shirts, suits, quilts, bedspreads, curtains, so they had no need for credit cards. My grandfather didn't believe in it. They paid cash for everything. They had no debt. It was a way of living, and they were very healthy because they [had] no pesticides. All the food was organic, and everything was fresh. The best part--I'm drinking water here--was the well. I remember my great grandmother, I think I was five or six, we would take a bucket and drop it in the well. The best water is in the well, in the Earth and it's ice cold. In the South, they have that hot red clay, it's very hot with those red ants that bite you, but the water, my father said [that] they dig so far down in the earth it's ice cold and it's fresh. There are no chemicals in it.

I have cousins there now, they're in their nineties. I may not make it to my nineties because I'm here in New Jersey and New York with smog and everything else. None of my cousins have asthma, yet my son has asthma and my son [Miles Quintel Smith, SAS '14, Rutgers-New Brunswick] grew up in Fairfax County, Virginia. He was born in Falls Church. He's actually a graduate of the School of Arts and Sciences here, 2014. He had asthma, and I didn't understand why. I said, "We're in Virginia," but we were in Northern Virginia, outside of Washington, D.C. None of my relatives have asthma in Alabama. I have cousins there, my father's cousins are in their nineties, and they walk everywhere and they drink well water. The bucket goes down, the water comes up. They grow the vegetables, and they don't spray anything. We're drinking bottled water here, because there are some old pipes in New York and New Jersey that are rusty

and they have lead in the pipes. Then, we look at Flint, Michigan. I have cousins in Detroit, and they said they can't drink the water there, not just Flint but in Detroit. When we go to Alabama--and some of them are there today, at the family reunion--they said the first thing they want to do is get some water from the well. It's funny.

When you go to Africa, I know talking to colleagues who travel there--and that's my dream trip when I retire is to go to the film festival in Burkina Faso--I know that they say the issue is when you get there you need water, clean water, things that we take for granted. I will share with them, I said, "Oh, my goodness, when I was a kid, I had all the water I could drink [from the] bucket and it was free and just drop it and drink." I never ate candy. My grandfather told us to go in the field and get sugarcane. If we wanted something sweet, we got sugarcane. He would say, "Oh, I have the best tomatoes." I was thinking of our New Jersey tomatoes. My grandfather had the best tomatoes you'd ever tasted, and I wish I had some of those seeds. You don't think about these things. If I had some of those seeds, I could've given those seeds to the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences today, and we could grow those tomatoes here in New Jersey. When I go back to Alabama later in August, if any of my relatives have those, if they're still growing the tomato plants there, I'm going to bring those seeds back here. I know we have great Jersey tomatoes, but the tomatoes my grandfather grew [were] out of this world.

That's what we would do. We would go in the field, get a tomato, and if we wanted something sweet, we'd get the sugarcane, peel it back, chew on that. Then, the milk, it came right from the cow. My grandfather would have us sit there. We were kids, so it was fun. You were squirting it everywhere. Fresh milk, fresh water, fresh vegetables, and the apples on the trees. They never had air conditioning. When I think about it, my grandparents and my great grandparents and all the cousins, they lived on a road, no pavement. The trees were everywhere, so that's what kept them cool, trees, and that's why the air is so clean there. Then, you look out here, it's pretty, but when we had Hurricane Sandy, we lost a lot of trees. We need the trees to keep our air clean. I said, "That's why they don't have asthma." They've got the trees. They've got the water. They've got the fruits and vegetables, no chemicals. We come here, and you've got chemicals.

This is why you have, and you were asking about travelling with the *Green Book* and why a lot of African Americans would go back, well, now, a lot of them, when they retire, they move back to the South, which is interesting. They left the South for opportunities, growth, development, education, in some cases. Now, in retirement, they return. So, my dad had a cousin, and these were what we call the Brooklyn Shufords, who their dad, a tree fell on him, one of the lumber trees fell on him in the '50s. They moved to Brooklyn, New York, Bed-Stuy [Bedford-Stuyvesant]. Cousin Gator [Clarence "Gator" Shuford], he was handy with flipping houses, when it wasn't even a popular term. Gator would buy these brownstones in Brooklyn, renovate them, flip them, sell them, and he used that money to put his brother Earl through dental school at Howard University and Earl [Dr. Earl Shuford, DDS] became a really great dentist, did very well. He lives in Chester, Virginia now, and he's retired. They always knew how to earn a living. For Gator to do that, he took care of his mom and all of his siblings after his father passed away tragically when he got killed. This is my grandfather's brother who got killed when, because they had all these trees--as I mentioned, they were good for one thing--but one fell on his brother. My grandfather, that was very hard for him losing his brother that way. Then, his

wife said, "Well, I have to work." She couldn't [get] work there, so she had eight kids and she moved to New York and got a job. Gator was one of the eldest, and he found these old houses and he would renovate these houses. These houses in Bed-Stuy and elsewhere in Brooklyn, you can't even afford them now. He used that money to educate his siblings. They just believed in education. Coming to New York and working on these old houses, he started to breathe in asbestos and other things, and so he died way too young, whereas his cousins are in their nineties and they're still alive--thank God and knock on wood--in Alabama because of the way of life there.

There's no smog and at night the trees blowing and there's no air conditioning, but it's just a way of life that was the way of life in the early time in this country [when] you had farmers. The reason why you have kids getting out of school in Alabama, it's early May and in June, is because they were supposed to work on the farm. Our kids in this country aren't working on farms now. They're getting out of school early and they have the summers off, and they're not working on farms. So, my grandmother, later on, said, "They should be in school. They're not working on farms." She always believed in education and my grandfather too. He says, "None of these kids are working on farms." They would sit on their porch with their iced tea and complain about the government. As they say people do in Florida, they do that in Alabama. They'd sit there with their iced tea and their lemonade. It's sweet tea; I don't know how my grandfather could drink that stuff, sweet tea, and live to be over a hundred. Everybody else gets diabetes. They would say, "No, these kids aren't farming. They need to go to school." They always said that. They didn't have that opportunity. The more I think about it, it's like, "Why do these kids in this country get out and then they have the whole summer off and they're not farmers." That was the old calendar for agricultural purposes. If you go over to the Cook Campus, they'll probably explain that even more over there. It's just an interesting way of life.

KR: That is interesting.

DS: Just good family stories.

KR: Let us pause for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

KR: We are on.

DS: I forgot to mention [something about] my mom. There was a lot of tragedy in her family, and she always seems to immerse herself in the thought of death. My mother, she reads the *Star-Ledger* obituary every day. I don't know why, but she does. I always try to change the subject when we're watching the news. I majored in journalism, and I remember my mother, when I was a little girl, probably in third grade, she would always get the newspaper, the *Newark Star-Ledger*, and I think that started my interest in journalism. I didn't know it then, but I know she--we were watching something recently, a documentary on the South, about Tuskegee University--and then she started talking about her days at Tuskegee. It was like, "You didn't tell me about that." She was in the 4-H Club at Tuskegee, and I think that gave her tremendous joy. Even though she didn't go on to college, she felt as though she was a college student at her time at

Tuskegee University in Alabama. She loved Tuskegee. Then, when she was in New Jersey, she was invited by a friend at Rutgers-Newark, and they said, "Did you ever think about going back to school once your children are adults and on their own? Maybe you should major in English." She mentioned that to me at my graduation at Douglass.

At the time, it was Dean Jewel Plummer Cobb, Dr. Cobb. Dean Cobb would have, during senior week, this tea at her home, at the dean's residence. My brother, my late brother, Willie Fred Shuford, Jr., my mom and I had tea with Dean Cobb. Dean Cobb actually attended a historically black college-university, a HBCU, if you will, and they had a conversation about the HBCUs. When my mom thinks of that, [it was] a missed opportunity, because she could have gone on to Tuskegee. It was right in her backyard in Alabama, rural Alabama. [Editor's Note: Jewel Plummer Cobb (1924-2017), who studied at Talladega College for her undergraduate degree and New York University for her Ph.D., spent her career as a biologist, cancer researcher, professor and college administrator. Dr. Cobb served as the dean of Douglass College from 1976 to 1979. Willie Fred Shuford, Jr. died on March 19, 2016.]

In New Jersey, the second missed opportunity was a friend who was her district leader, who was also from the South, Mrs. Emma Turner Herron, who was a district leader, very active. She's now eighty-four, and I was with her during the primary this past Tuesday. She went on to Rutgers-Newark. She said she was much older, but she wanted that education. I told my mom, I said, "It's never too late. It's never too late." We had a student recently here at Rutgers who majored in engineering and he's trying to acquire a bachelor's degree in English. It's never too late. I told her, "It's never too late. If that's what you want to do and you love reading and you love writing, perhaps you could take some courses, just something you didn't have a chance to do."

One thing my mother did and she does talk about this often is that she was so grateful--my father never wanted her to work. She was a homemaker until she was about thirty, and she worked for the State of New York at Willowbrook Developmental Center. That's in Staten Island, and it's now a college. At Willowbrook, if you remember, Geraldo Rivera did an expose, I call it, a story, on the tragedy of Willowbrook Developmental Center, because it was mismanaged and you had the mentally challenged there. My mother worked there for about twenty-four years, and then she had Bell's palsy one night when she came home from work. This is what I love about the State of New York; they told her to retire at twenty-four [years], full benefits. She only worked full-time for twenty-four years and she was in her thirties [when she started working]. Even to this day, she gets her state pension from the State of New York, and she gets my dad's Social Security, so financially she's doing quite well. [Editor's Note: Willowbrook State School operated on Staten Island from 1947 to 1987. It was known for its many scandals, and, in 1972, the reporter Geraldo Rivera investigated the school. Since its closing, some of its buildings were taken over by the College of Staten Island.]

She said to me [that] the reason they left Alabama is because they needed to find work, and if you look at the Great Migration of African Americans during the '20s and then the second one is in the '50s, they had to leave the South for work. Now, in retirement, they can all return [to the South]. Now, they have retirement and Social Security benefits, so they can return to the South to their families.

She did say that she loved Tuskegee University. She loves Rutgers. My father loved Rutgers. He watched every basketball game and football game. He loved coming to New Brunswick when I was a student at Douglass. He said he never thought he would say this, but he missed those milk crates that I had all my books in. Back then, we had milk crates, and we would carry our items in the milk crates. Today, you have those nice Rubbermaid containers, but my father missed that.

My mother said she enjoyed talking to Dean Cobb about the South, because Southern people have that connection. When they meet other southerners, they seem to have shared family values and stories. The same is true for Italian Americans and Polish Americans, and then I've met some of my classmates whose families were from Hungary, it's like you have the family values that they bring from Europe and that they bring from the South. As President Obama said, "America converges here." As a student and even now when I'm teaching as a lecturer, at this campus in New Brunswick and also in Newark--I haven't been to Camden yet--but you meet students and then when they share their stories about their grandparents, it's so interesting and it's so true. When President Obama was here in 2016 and he said, "America converges here," that is so true. What we have in common, we have the family values and that all of the families, no matter where their ancestors are from, they do converge here and we're all seeking the same thing. We're all seeking a way to provide for our families and to live a full and rich life.

I really believe that, and it took all these years for me to [realize that], because I was kind of selfish when I graduated. I wanted a career. When I was a junior here, I was so fortunate to have Professor Roger Cohen in the School of Communications to secure my internship as a producer in New York. I kind of forgot about my southern roots, and I wanted to be this New York woman. I wanted to be like Mary Tyler Moore. I wanted to toss my hat up, and I was going to be a career woman. I totally forgot about my southern background when I was working for ABC Television Network in New York and ABC Radio in New York and WOR Radio. Even when I worked for the Public Broadcasting System, I still wanted to be a career woman, but I think that was the pivotal change. Working for PBS and working with documentaries, that's when I started to go back to my roots, because a lot of the documentaries were about Americans and their roots. It wasn't ratings-driven like ABC Television Network--and that was a great place to work--but I know at PBS, it was more about families and about struggles and the fabric of America. I noticed it, too. PBS, they are not dependent on commercials and ratings, so they weren't ratings driven. Those, for me, were two turning points in my media career. [Editor's Note: Roger Cohen began teaching at Livingston College in the Department of Journalism and Urban Communication in 1975 and became a full-time member of the faculty in 1980. He is now a Professor Emeritus in the School of Communication and Information.]

Then, of course, my academic career, a great friend of mine from my days at PBS said to me, "Are you done with your graduate coursework at American University? I would love it if you would teach a film course on African Americans," because he didn't feel that he could do it. I said, "Of course, you can do it. You have a Master of Fine Arts at USC." He said, "No." He said, "I'm a farmer from Westminster, Maryland. My background is European American." He said, "I want you to do it." That started my journey in academia.

What I've learned in academia is I learned more about our country and the people in our country and about history, I've learned more about that from the students, teaching students. I started teaching at McDaniel College as a visiting instructor in 2006. All these years, I felt like I knew it all, and I learned so much from students. I learned history all over again. The history that I think I missed in K through twelve and perhaps I missed it in my undergraduate years and graduate years because I was not a history major. When you're a filmmaker, and I am--I'm a producer, writer, documentary filmmaker--I need to know history in order to tell the story as a storyteller and to tell a true story and to use historical facts. All the stories that I gather from my grandparents and my parents and my siblings and all the cousins I have in Alabama, it actually made me the person that I am today.

Dean Jewel Plummer Cobb, as my dean at Douglass, she was the first African American dean at Douglass. We lost her in January of 2017. I learned so much from her. She had such a way and it was a southern way. She would invite us to her residence, the dean's residence, and we would sit and have tea. We would talk about our families, and she just had a way of making us comfortable and relaxed on the college level because we were away from our families. When you're away, a lot of students are from out of state and even if you're in-state, you're on campus--and I lived on campus all four years--it was just nice to have that sense of community and to have her to be sort of like the mother figure for us, especially for women at Douglass at that time. We felt so empowered and the confidence that we gained, and that continues today. The confidence I have now that I'm getting from Dean Jackie Litt. Even today, she carries that torch at Douglass Residential College, and she tells us, "We can be anything. We can do anything." I try to share that with the students on campus today as well.

It all started for me here. I have southern roots, but my education [took place at Douglass College]. I had a very good education in the Newark Public School system and at Arts High, Arts Senior High, a magnet school, which is right down the street from Rutgers-Newark, believe it or not, and next door to St. Benedict's Prep. In fact, our very own President Barchi attended St. Benedict's Prep in Newark, and that was a great education as well. Again, education, education, education, and I can still hear my grandparents saying that to me on the farm in Alabama. I think I'm a lifelong learner. [Editor's Note: Jacquelyn Litt has been the dean of Douglass Residential College since 2010. Robert Barchi has been the President of Rutgers since 2012.]

KR: Tony has a question.

DS: Sure, yes.

AD: I wanted to ask about your parents when they moved from the South to here in New Jersey. Obviously, there were a lot more social freedoms for them up here and a lot more they were able to do. Did they really appreciate that? Did they ever express, when they raised you as kids, did they express how much more you could do compared to the South?

DS: Yes, oh, my God, yes. My father was the king of the [Garden State] Parkway. [laughter] He worked at Apex Gear and then Apex Gear was shut down in August because the Cioccis, the Italian American family, they were big on taking four weeks off for summer vacation so they

could be with their families. They were big on families, and some of them would travel back to Italy, so they needed a month off. They would close Apex Gear on Lake Street in Newark, New Jersey, and then their families would be together.

Our family, my father would go down the Parkway, and every week we were going down the shore. We would go to Lake Hopatcong, Wildwood, Atlantic City, because he didn't have that freedom in the South. In fact, he never even went to a swimming pool in the South, my dad told us. When you're a kid, you say things, and you don't understand what you're saying. It probably was very sad for him when I would say this, but I remember saying, "Dad, when you were a kid, did you go to beaches like us?" He would just say, "No." He said, "We had a whole pond behind the house." [laughter] He would kind of shrug it off with humor. My mother, on the other hand, would later say, "No, we weren't allowed." She was very hurt by the fact that they couldn't go to, even if there were a pool in Montgomery, in the city, they couldn't go there. They went to segregated schools, and the pools and everything else, carnivals, they couldn't go to any of those things.

When they came to New Jersey, it was like, wow, they were kids in a candy store. They could go everywhere. My father, we would go to Jones Beach. He went everywhere, Coney Island. Then, we would tell our cousins in Alabama [about] all these places, and so they would say they want to come visit so they could go to all these places because they didn't have that opportunity. When they came to New Jersey, it was like [newfound freedom]. Then, our cousins who left Alabama who lived in Brooklyn, we would go to Jones Beach with them and Coney Island. The freedom they had, it's so hard to describe. They never really said it was freedom, but when I'm thinking of it and thinking of your question now, it was absolute freedom. They could go to any grocery store. They could go to a public library. They could never do those things in the South. It's the same country. That is a great question.

The photos that they would take and send them, my mother and father took photos of everything. We went to the World's Fair, and they sent photos back to Alabama. The relatives there couldn't believe it, because they could never do that in the South. My father would drive from New Jersey [to Detroit]. My mother didn't drive. He wouldn't let her drive, the southern gentleman he was. He would drive to Detroit to visit his brother and cousins, and then we would go from there to Canada. Not only did he leave the great state of Alabama, but then he can go to another country. We had relatives who were afraid to leave the county, to leave Lowndes County, because they were brought up in a time where if you were caught going outside of your domain or where you lived and it was dark, you could lose your life. So, they never really left.

When my parents got married, my father was nineteen, my mother was seventeen, and they married. Here's another thing. You talk about freedom. When they got married, they had to get married in the courthouse in Hayneville, the county seat. My father never said this, but, again, my mother, she said, "Well, you know we had to go in the back door." So, it's her wedding day, and for my father, it was like, "I'm getting married," that was a thing, young guys get married, and he had a car. My mother was like, "Yes, but we had to go in the back door."

When I travelled there after college, I did go in, I went in the front door, and I wanted to make a statement. They were very nice, and they said, "Where are you from?" I said, "Well, my parents

are from here and they got married here and I just want to take some pictures." I asked, because my father was like, "You've got to ask permission. You can't." I said, "Well, Dad, I would ask even if I were in New Jersey. When I'm taking photos, if I don't go through the Film Commission and I don't have a permit, they could take my camera." In this case, I would ask permission, and I would have to go through the film commission, every state has one. As a tourist, I'm snapping this photo as a tourist and I did ask permission. The clerk said, "Of course, you can take [a photograph]. Your mother got married here?" I said, "Yes." I never said to the clerk that they had to go in the back door. I'm more like my father's daughter than my mom's daughter.

The freedom, my father loved being in New Jersey. He loved going on that Parkway, every exit, he would tell his siblings and cousins how we would just go on the Parkway. When they would come here, Uncle George and Uncle Mack, when they were in the military, at Fort Dix-McGuire Air Force Base, then they would get in the car with us and go up and down the Parkway and they would go to every lake, every beach because as kids they never had that opportunity. Their freedom was the military. A couple of my cousins were born in Germany, so the freedom, they all had freedom once they left the State of Alabama. It's funny because once they retire, they all go back because that's family, that's home. It may not be the best home in terms of the politics there, but it's changing. We see that in elections in Alabama, it's changing, and I think we're going to see that in Georgia as well.

To answer that question, my father felt so free in New Jersey. He never said he was free. He just said how much he loved working for the Cioccis and the fact that in Alabama he never met any Italian Americans. There is a great documentary on PBS, there were some Italian Americans who came here, who were working, who tried to establish businesses in the South and they were run out. There's a tragedy there too--a lot of people don't know it--but if you go back to PBS.org and just Google it in, there's a great documentary on Italian Americans. Of course, they came through Ellis Island and through New York, but then it's a free country. You talk about freedom, so they felt, "Oh, the weather is great there. We're going to go there and work there, work hard for our families." Tragically, they were run out of the South. They were murdered, too, so it's not just African Americans. Some were tortured. They destroyed their businesses. Eventually, they left for their own safety. Just as African Americans left and moved north, well, the Italian Americans who saw the Statue of Liberty and said this is a free country and thought they could venture there, well, they ended up just leaving and coming back north. There was a whole Italian American community that was in the South, and we lost that culture because of the violence that they encountered. That's a story that they don't really show on mainstream media, but you can find it in the documentaries. It's a tragedy because that was a whole culture that they were bringing to the South, and the people of the South could benefit from that. Again, that's not what they wanted in some of the southern states; it was just clear cut and dry. At that time, if you weren't, I guess, of English or Irish descent or just African American, you had no place in the South. They didn't want you there.

There's a great documentary that I saw a few months ago, where there are more Italian Americans now in New Jersey than there are in New York. There was in New York, but they're now in New Jersey. That's a whole other American story, but the tragedy I find is that my father said that when he was growing up, they were not there. There were Native Americans in

Alabama and then those of Irish and English descent, but you didn't have Koreans [and others]. It's interesting you bring it up now. My cousin Farris Ball left Minnesota when she retired--she went to Minnesota for work, left, went back to Alabama, like they all do eventually. They have the Hyundai plant. The Hyundai plant is out in Lowndes County. That's probably the only company that ever moved there, and it's been there maybe ten to fifteen years now. Some of my cousins work there. You have Koreans there. They attend our family church, and my cousin is teaching them English. Alabama allowed the Hyundai plant to move in there for jobs. Now, you have a whole new culture there that is necessary, but think about the Italian culture we could have had. They were run out of there, and maybe there were other similar [stories].

I know there were with the Vietnamese moving to the South. I know when I graduated from Douglass, my friend Patient [Wiggins Jones, DC '81] and I went out to Houston because they were telling us, "Go to Houston and get jobs." [laughter] We went there, and there were some Asians who were saying that they were coming back to New York because of the way they were being treated there, which was very sad and sad for us, because, again, I had the freedom in New Jersey. I didn't have that experience. Then, I go down there, and they're like, "Well, we're going to New York and New Jersey because this is just too difficult." They try to open a store or what have you. They could do it here. It's kind of sad, too, because it's not that long ago. People think it is, but you still have descendants from the Civil War. They're still fighting the Civil War. What do you think?

AD: I have seen it.

DS: You've seen it.

AD: Yes.

DS: I think they still have in their mind that it's still the North versus the South. As tourists, you're okay to come and spend your money as tourists, but if you don't have family there, you could have a pretty rough time in the South. You have to have some type of southern connection, or in my case, when I go and they find out I'm a Shuford and they knew my grandmother, I get a pass. Otherwise, I wouldn't get a pass. [laughter] I'm visiting relatives. It's our family home. I have a family church there out in those woods, Lily Baptist Church. That's our family church. No matter where I roam, no matter where I go, that's still our family church, and even if I attend churches here, that's still my family church and I'm welcome there. If there are other people who are outsiders, they consider you an outsider. They call you a Yankee. They want to secede, and we've seen that in politics, where you've got some of these southern states, they still feel like, "We need to just leave the Union." I'm like, "Again? Are we going through this again?" [laughter] That seems to be the mentality.

My father, when he was here, he was like a kid in a candy store. He went everywhere. We went everywhere, and my mom, she enjoyed it, but there's always that sadness with her, whereas my father is more like a comedian. He never talked about it. In fact, he never talked about this man hitting him over the head. My mother is eighty-two. My father passed away three years ago, and she still talks about it. He never told me that story. If he did, I'm more like him, I would just say, "Grandad did the right thing."

I saw a documentary, or maybe it was the piece on NBC's *Who Do You Think You Are?* with Lionel Richie, whose family was from Alabama. Lionel Richie and the Commodores, they formed their singing group at Tuskegee University. He told a story how his father, something happened in the South, and he said this, you can find this, you can Google this, and he said they did something and he said, "Oh, my dad, you shouldn't do that or my dad is really going to let you have it." He said his father did nothing, and Lionel Richie was sad about it and it was humiliating. His father later told him--and he tells this story and you could probably find it on the Internet--he said, "My father said, 'I could be this man who could've defended myself, but then you wouldn't have a dad today.'" So, if my mother mentions that to me again I'll say, "You know, Mom, if Granddad had done something, then we would not have had a grandfather." I would had never had known my grandfather because my father was a teenager then before he had children. I said, "Not only that, but you were a teenager, you were kids, and not only would they had done something to Dad and Granddad but something to you and Aunt Bernice. You wouldn't be here. We wouldn't be here." I said, "Grandad did the right thing." Then, she brought up the Emmett Till tragedy, and this is why she said, "That's why I'd never let you go." She never let us out of her sight. She was a real helicopter mom, until I went off to college, until I came to Douglass.

That was my freedom. You hear college kids, "Oh, I can't wait to get out of the house and go away to college." Well, I could have commuted, but I was like, "Oh, no." I'm number four out of five. I watched my brother, who got a full ride to the University of Minnesota because he was a four-star athlete at Weequahic High School. Jerry Lewis graduated from Weequahic, Philip Roth, so many, that was a great high school. He graduated in '72, my older brother, and he couldn't wait to go to Minnesota. He needed to get away, and he played football there. He was a student-athlete and graduated from there. Then, two years later, Trisha went off to Boston University, and then two years after that, Sandy went off to Morgan State and I came to Douglass. We needed freedom. My father needed freedom, and we needed freedom. My mother, now that I'm answering these questions, I realize that her depression could be depression for us all if we allowed it. Thank God that I came here, and if I had stayed with her, I wouldn't be here today. There's no way. I wouldn't because I would've been dragged down into that spiral of silence and spiral of depression that she is still going through today.

KR: We want to ask about your growing up in Newark.

DS: Oh, sure.

KR: On the topic of your brother at Minnesota, do you know if he happened to cross paths with the Yankee and baseball great Dave Winfield, who was a three-sport athlete at Minnesota?

DS: Yes, I think he did. I know he knew Tony Dungy.

AD: Tony Dungy, yes.

DS: Yes, he knew him very well, and he knew Prince. That's a whole other story, you're right. My brother, when I was donating stem cells in 2015--and Dean Litt knows this whole story of

when he first got really, really sick and I was giving a final exam and I remember it well--December 19, 2014. I have my cell phone off. I never have it on in class. I was at Art History Building 100, and I had an eight a.m. final that I was giving. After the final, I looked at the phone, and then I read the text. He said, "Debbie, it's Billy, call me when you have a chance." Then, I called him, and that's when he said, "You know I've been sick since 2012." He didn't tell us until after Thanksgiving 2012, but then he said, "The University of Minnesota is going to contact you." He said, "They need us to be tested and they will send a kit through Federal Express and we have to swab our mouths, all of us." Then, we did it, and when I flew back and forth, he wanted to tell me these stories that you're asking now. He said he knew Prince, which I knew he lived in Minnesota, but I didn't know he knew Prince. He told me these stories about Prince and Tony Dungy, and he did mention Dave Winfield. Yes, he did. He was giving me family history while we were donating stem cells, while I was transferring cells to him. You mentioned that because of stories about Dave Winfield.

KR: Yes, I was just wondering if he was on a sports team with Dave Winfield.

DS: They weren't on the same team, but he did know him. What he told me is, "There weren't many African Americans moving to Minnesota." At the time in the '70s, they would recruit from New York and New Jersey the top athletes, and so that's how ten students from Weequahic, student-athletes, were recruited and got full rides to Minnesota. So, we lost them. We could have had them at Rutgers. He said out of the ten, two stayed, and the rest they returned here and went to schools in New Jersey because it was too cold for them and they didn't have family there. He met Prince. He knew Prince. He knew Tony Dungy. For him, that was his freedom. My dad's freedom was leaving Alabama. My brother's freedom was leaving New Jersey because my mom depended on him a lot. I think because he was born in Alabama, Billy was born in Alabama, but Trisha, Sandy, myself and Jarrod, we were born in New Jersey. Three of us were born in Beth Israel Hospital and Trisha was born in Saint Barnabas Hospital, which is now part of our RWJBarnabas Health. She was born in that hospital. My mother's life, it was just tragic for her, and we needed to go away to college. Trisha went to Boston University, Sandy went to Morgan State, Billy went to the University of Minnesota. Douglass for me was what I needed.

Growing up in Newark, we had great guidance counselors, and we had Ms. Judith Barrett at Arts High. I know Howard University offered me a scholarship, and I didn't apply there. I had a cousin there, and they wanted me to come there and the University of Florida. Ms. Barrett said, "Get on the train," with a group of students, and these were students from Essex County. We met at Penn Station in Newark, a bunch of us from all over Essex County and Bergen County, and we took the train down here to the train station [in New Brunswick]. I was the only one that went to [visit] Douglass. Everyone else went to Rutgers College, Livingston College for the tour and Cook College, and I was the only at Douglass. For some reason, going to Douglass and meeting Dean Cobb and meeting the Douglass students, it just felt right and that was the start of my journey. My mother said, "Well, you can take the train and commute." I was like, "No, I need to live with these women," because I needed those women to help me grow and develop because I would have been like my mother. I would've been a sad person. To me, she's always sad.

I remember hugging her when President Kennedy died. I remember actually holding her face with the palms of my hand and saying, "Mommy, it's okay. Mommy, it's okay." I didn't even really understand what was going on, but she did. She was always sad, every time. I needed the women at Douglass because I needed their strength, and that's something my mother didn't have. She just didn't have it. She doesn't have it now, and she depended so much on my brother. I think losing my dad was bad, but her spiral started when she lost my brother because she depended on him so much. He was married and had adult children, and he had a whole life in Minnesota. [He was] very popular, because he was a student athlete and he knew all these other people at University of Minnesota. He was very active there.

In fact, they took great care of him, and they actually had him in a study because what we found out is all five of us matched. So, he could've gotten bone marrow from my two older sisters and my younger brother, but the University of Minnesota said, "You are the healthiest" because I've never been a smoker and a drinker. Everybody else smoked, but I've never been a smoker or a drinker, never did any drugs, never had any problems, no issues, no diseases, and so they said, "You're the healthiest. We need you for this study because your brother wants to continue his study with the National Institute of Health and we need your cells." The first stem cells I gave, I gave to the university, and I wasn't thinking. I should have given them to our Cancer Institute here at Rutgers, and I will. If they ask me now, I will. I didn't realize that it was very rare for African Americans to match like that, all five, and I gave the first sample to the doctor, Dr. [Steven C.] McLoon, who was trained at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. I gave it to him, so that they could get the grants that they needed to proceed and to treat my brother. I signed all the documents. I don't have any financial gain from it. I said, "I don't want anything other than that we could use this medical research to help others and find out how my brother got multiple myeloma." It doesn't run in our family. We don't know how we got it.

I know his whole life in Minnesota was great for him, and then a cousin from Alabama arrived in Minnesota. He loved it. Eddie, Cousin Eddie, loved living in Minnesota, because coming from the South it's a whole new world out there. Eddie loved it, and his sister Farris, she was there. We had Farris and Eddie in Minnesota. They have gone back to Alabama. My brother passed away two years ago, but his freedom was Minnesota. He loved it. He loved the university. It was Big Ten. He was recruited here. He could've come here too, but they gave him a full ride, a full package. They wanted him here, Howard University, he had so many letters from so many schools because he ran track. He was six-two, great shape, ran track, a football player, a basketball player, baseball. He did all that at Weequahic High School, so he got letters like you wouldn't believe.

Back then, Newark Airport wasn't really developed, so he had to fly out of LaGuardia, and the saddest thing for us was he was the first to leave to go to college. We went to New York. He used to tease us all the time and we always got on his nerves, his little sisters, but when he got on that jet and the door closed, we were devastated. Everything changed. Then, after that, every two years someone was leaving. The family was still a family, but it wasn't the same. Then, the last time we had a trip together was just before he got married in 1984. We went to Alabama, one last family trip, before everybody gets married and has kids.

My dad's freedom was New Jersey. To answer your question, that is his. Then, he met the Cioccis, and I have to say that was the best thing that happened to him, a family that comes from Sicily and my dad coming from Alabama. The best thing that happened to him was meeting the Ciocci Family, and he said that. He said that to me in the hospital before he passed away. In fact, Kathy Ciocci had just called him in the hospital. That was the best thing that ever happened to him. Who knew that a man from Alabama, from a farm, would meet a family that came from Sicily and they had nothing? Their family came on the boat with the clothes on their back. My grandparents at least had a farm. They left whatever they had in Sicily, and they just said, "We've got to go." His freedom was coming to New Jersey. I think it was destiny, Manifest Destiny, for our two families to come together like that. It was great.

KR: Let us talk about your family in Newark.

DS: Sure, in Newark, okay.

KR: Can you describe what your neighborhood was like in Newark?

DS: They were renting. You could rent these rooms. My mom and dad came here, first my dad, and then he sent for my mom and my older brother. Back then, you rented in the Central Ward, not far from the Newark Campus. Then someone told him about this new housing development, and everybody back then called them the projects. They still call them the projects, but back then, everybody lived there. This is post-World War II. I think that's how they met the Cioccis. There were Italian families there. There were families there from Russia, from Poland, from Germany, from Hungary. These projects were built after the war so people could keep their families together, save money, and buy a house, and that's exactly what they did. So, they saved money, and they bought a house in the Weequahic section because Weequahic High School was one of the best in the country. Again, Philip Roth, the late author, he grew up there. My mother, she was always kind of like, "Well, I want my kids to have what other kids have." My father was like, "We could've moved to South Jersey. We would have been fine with that," but not her. [laughter]

That's when she went to work in New York to help save money for a down payment. After one year of working in New York, my dad said, "Look, I'll take care of the family, I always have," but she said, "I'm going to go work in New York." She didn't drive, so she would carpool when carpool wasn't popular. She would have these African American women, who one person would have a car, and they would go to New York to these jobs. They went to Staten Island, to Willowbrook Developmental Center, and worked with the mentally challenged because the pay was good. They would carpool from New Jersey over there, and she, in one year, saved enough for a down payment. My father was not in the military, so he couldn't get the GI loans that his brothers got. In one year, they saved the down payment.

The realtor showed them houses in the Weequahic section, not far from Beth Israel Hospital. The reason she liked that section was because three of her children were born there. She knew it was a very nice area. It was very affluent at the time in the '60s and the '70s. The whole block, there were teachers, lawyers, doctors on the block, and there was a very strong Jewish

community there. It's right around the corner from Beth Israel, and there were synagogues there. There was one right on the street behind our street. She wanted to be in that community.

When we left the projects--and I only went to Dayton Street School kindergarten and first grade--because then when she bought the house there, of course, you have got to [go to school] in your neighborhood, so then I was at Chancellor Elementary School. Well, those students were two grades ahead of us, same city, right across Weequahic Park. My mother had all of these friends who were immigrants who lived in the projects, from Russia, from Italy, and they would all tell her, "If you move over there, you're not going to have any friends. They're not going to be nice to you." She said, "That's not the point." She said, "I want my kids to go to those schools." We get over there, and they were two grades ahead of us, same city. Chancellor and Weequahic High, those kids were ahead. I remember my mother, they called my mother in, and one teacher said to her, and I think about this now, and I'm like, "Why did she say that to my Mom?" because she could've said that to my dad. She told my mother, "Why did you come here? You need to go back where you came from." I said, "Why did she say that to my mom?" My mother said, "I bought a house here, and I pay taxes in this city and we're not leaving." Then, she went home and told my dad. My dad's like, "Why did you say that? You've got to calm down," because he grew up with his parents and he was always very calm. She said, "I said it because I knew you wouldn't say it." The teacher said, "Well, they're behind." My mother said, "They can catch up." We did. It was just so interesting, across the park, how one school was ahead of the other school, and when we talk about education today and I know our School of Education addresses this, different schools, different municipalities, but it was just a shock. When we moved there, I was seven. How could I be behind at age seven?

I had this teacher, Mrs. Rivers, who was one of maybe three African Americans in Chancellor Elementary School, and she told my mom, "Bring her early. I'll work with her in the morning, and then I'll work with her another thirty minutes in the afternoon." The way she taught me phonics, I remember it to this day. That was the breakthrough for me. The way she taught me, like the way my father taught me math, I never had trouble after that. I was sailing. It was like sink or swim coming from Dayton Street and I swam all the way, but I had this one African American teacher. She later became a principal, and then she worked for the Board of Education. She's retired, and, God, that woman, she saved me. My mother didn't go to college, and she didn't know how to teach me like that. My dad taught me the math, and I remember that first math test and I'm like, "These kids are way [ahead]. I can't do this." My father's like, "Oh, yes, you can," with humor though. He taught me. We sat at the dining room table. My father could calculate numbers. I saved it for our College of Engineering, because they asked for it. I don't know how he learned the math that he learned, but he taught it to me in a way that I went on [and] I had calculus and I had pre-calc [pre-calculus], calculus, trig [trigonometry], all in Arts High School and had no trouble.

My mother had to take a stand when I was seven. What if she gave in and believed those teachers? What if I had to go to remedial reading? Not to say that that's not necessary because for some students it is, but I wasn't a special needs student and neither were my siblings. It was that there were teachers there who didn't want to see the integration.

On a website, there's Weequahic Friends for Life, and now you have all these Weequahic grads who graduated from Rutgers, too. One of my good friends, Cal Schwartz, he lived on Goodwin Avenue. Cal's got to be about seventy, seventy-one, seventy-two. Newark was very integrated until what they call the rebellion and some people call the riots of 1967. My mother bought the house in '66. [In] '67, they had the rebellion, which our history department talks about at the Newark Campus of Rutgers. This was a very diverse city, like the Newark campus, but then everybody started leaving because of the violence. My mother, she just old me this after Queen Latifah received her honorary degree, and she listened to that speech. My mother said, "You know what?" She said, "I thought at the time, when they had what they called the white flight that they should not have left, but now I understand why they left." She said, "But now they're coming back." Our own chancellor [of Rutgers-Newark], Nancy Cantor, lives on campus at 15 Washington.

Growing up in Newark was very interesting. First, you had the Weequahic section, where it was predominantly a Jewish neighborhood, and everyone from that high school, they were doctors and lawyers and they were very prominent. Then, you had this rebellion in '67, and they all left and then the high school took a downward turn. Initially, before that, that one year, it was great, but then after '67, it's like you lost a lot of the middle-class people. They started moving to the suburbs. They wanted to get away from the violence and the poverty and some of the politics in the city, where things were going not so well. As a family, I could understand those families leaving. If it were me and I were a parent, I would've left as well. Even our [former] governor, [Chris] Christie, he was born there, too, but his family, when he was six, my parents stayed, his family left, and they went to Livingston, like so many others.

I was just at our alumni event and we were talking, and so many of us all grew up there, like my friend Tony Zecca [RC '74, GSNB '76], Tony's family. There was an Italian section of Newark, North Newark, and then there was the Irish section in the West Ward, which was on the border line of South Orange near Seton Hall. Then, there was the Ironbound section, the East Ward, where the Portuguese and Brazilian people live. People don't know that, but there [are] Portuguese and Brazilian people there in that area.

I was watching on NBC *Who Do you Think You Are?* and Brook Shields was interviewed. Her mother grew up there. There were beer factories down there, like you wouldn't believe. They had tons of them. Her mother worked there, and that's what her mom did. As she said, "My mom was a broad." They called her a broad. She worked in a beer factory. You have this rich history in the city. It's one of the oldest in the country, and it was like the United Nations. You had every ethnicity, every family there, but then you had this rebellion in '67 and so you lost a lot of those people. When I come to Rutgers Day and I talk with graduates from there, they all were born there like me and they grew up there and they lived in neighborhoods near mine. I met Flora [Buchbinder Cowen] from Douglass, and she's the Class of 1959. Her husband lived on the street that we later lived on. It's that connection.

It's like a lot of people don't talk about it because it was a bad time for the city, but now the city is thriving. Amazon is thinking of moving their headquarters there. You've got Panasonic there, and of course you've got Prudential financial, they never left, and you have the Prudential Center there. Then, you have PSE&G there. Panasonic moved in and a lot of these companies are

coming in because of the proximity to New York. You have the Port of Newark. If you're Amazon, you're looking the port. You're looking at the train station, and you're looking at the airport for goods and services. How do you transport them? You have a port. You have a train station, and you have a major airport. A lot of the families that left, now their grandkids are moving back in. [laughter] You have Shaquille O'Neal, who was born and raised there, who just secured a seventy-nine-million-dollar deal of development because his mom. Tony, do you want to jump in? His mom wants to build condos. [Editor's Note: Former NBA star and Newark native Shaquille O'Neal is funding the building of a twenty-two-story high rise of luxury apartments in Newark's downtown area on Rector Street.]

AD: I read about that in the news.

DS: Did you read that?

AD: Yes, it was online. It was a big story online.

DS: Seventy-nine million. Then, you've got Goldman Sachs who worked with Governor Christie on building a teacher community there and affordable housing, and they put in another 690 million.

Then, at Rutgers, we gave Queen Latifah an honorary degree. I was there. I was invited, and I was so glad to be there. She was born there, and her dad was a Newark detective. She talked about that, and then afterwards we took a photo together. We were talking about growing up in Newark. Then, I'm like, "Wow, you've got Queen Latifah, you've got Shaquille O'Neal." The star of *Black Panther*, Michael B. Jordan, he graduated from my high school, Arts High School,

AD: I did not know that.

DS: He was in *Creed* with Sylvester Stallone, and now he's shooting this summer a sequel, *Creed II*.

AD: They just finished.

DS: It's done?

AD: Yes.

DS: Okay, Tony, so it's done now. He and Sylvester Stallone were shooting that.

AD: Okay.

DS: That's done. He graduated from Arts High School, but then he's much younger. He comes along and grows and develops and goes to high school there when it was very tough to go to high school there, but he's doing great. The fact that Shaquille O'Neal--you know this story, right, Tony--his mom told him, "Now that you're not playing basketball anymore, you need to go back

to where you grew up and you need to do something." He's told this story. He said his mom told him so, seventy-nine million dollars.

When I was growing up there, after the rebellion--I call it a rebellion as our beloved, the late, great Dr. Clement Price called it that because he lived there and the section they lived in, the homes are gorgeous, the Forest Hills section, was not touched by the rebellion because they're private homes and they were well maintained, art deco, beautiful, from the '20s. That's where he lived, and a lot of the professors on the Rutgers-Newark Campus, they live in that North Newark section. [Editor's Note: In 1969, Dr. Clement A. Price (1945-2014) began teaching history at Rutgers-Newark, and in 2002, he became a Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor.]

KR: Okay.

DS: I know that Shaquille's mother, my mother knew his grandmother. All these people in the city, they all know each other. My mother would say, again, when his grandmother passed, my mother starts getting depressed, talked about his grandmother and she helped his mother. His mother felt that Shaquille should come back, because she still loves the city.

I still love the city. Now, I volunteer there as well, and I'm a volunteer with the New Jersey Tree Foundation. The first thing I did was to volunteer, and we are actually planting trees in the city of Newark. That was my way of giving back. Guess who they sent to help me--students from Rutgers-Newark, Kean University, New Jersey Institute of Technology.

For me, growing up there, I love my family in Alabama, but I wouldn't have met the Cioccis. I would not have met Italian Americans. I would not have met anyone from Russia, Germany or Hungary because they just weren't there. The southern people wouldn't allow them to grow and develop there, so I would have had a very closed environment and I would've missed the opportunity of expanding my horizons if my parents had not left Alabama.

I would never have learned to make sauces. [laughter] I was telling Tony that, well, my mother lived in the projects and women would cook sauce. I could smell the sauce. [They cook it for] a week, and it smells so good. [laughter] A week, they'd cook the sauce, and I'm not talking Ragu. [It was] homemade sauce, tomatoes and they were growing these tomatoes in the projects. They had enough; all they needed was a patch.

AD: They will find a way.

DS: They would grow these tomatoes. They would make this sauce for a week, and they taught my mom how to make that. My mother would never have learned how to make that in Alabama. There was no one there to teach her how to make Italian food. My mother makes great lasagna, spaghetti, homemade sauce, meatballs. They never taught her that in the South.

When she was a teenager, she worked for women in their kitchens. They had domestics and they didn't have a union, so they did everything. They cooked. They cleaned. They washed clothes. That's why the left. She wanted a job that would give her some kind of protection in her old age

if she worked that long. She was fortunate to work for New York, and she could retire at fifty-four. A lot of us will never get to do that.

Growing up in Newark, for me, I had the best education. Ms. Judith Barrett, when I had completed my junior year in high school, she said, "We have this great program sponsored by Exxon-Mobil, and it's at Stevens Tech in Hoboken." All I knew about Hoboken is Frank Sinatra. [laughter] Washington Street, Frank Sinatra, I didn't really know. We got on the PATH train, students from the tri-state, from urban areas, we'd go to Stevens Tech for the open house and then spent the summer there before my senior year in high school. I had all the math and science, and back then we didn't call it STEM, science, technology, engineering and math. We just knew you went to Stevens or NJIT, and you would spend your summer. There were no AP classes. You just learned, and it was called, Technical Enrichment Programs. Exxon-Mobil and the National Science Foundation paid our stipends, our tuition and board, and I stayed the whole summer. After that summer, Ms. Barrett told me to apply to [the] engineering department here. So, I came in as a Douglass student, but I was in engineering.

KR: Wow.

DS: Yes, I was an engineering student. I didn't tell you that part. [laughter]

KR: Did you get chosen for the program at Stevens because you were a good student? Did you have to apply for it? How did that work?

DS: Ms. Barrett chose me, because she said I was so good in math. Again, I have to go back to my dad. The way he taught me the math and taught himself how to use a slide rule--back then, we didn't have calculators--we had a slide rule, because I could just whip through that slide rule like it was a toy to me. I thought it was a toy when I was a kid when my father had his own slide rule, but then when I was in high school, we had the official slide rule. I guess she said, "How did you learn that?" I said, "My father, he would sit at the dining room table and teach me this." So, she said, "I think you should go to Stevens Tech." I was in a college prep program at Arts High.

Arts High is the first performing arts school in the country. When you watch that movie *Fame*, even if you watch the original or the remake, *Fame* is based on a school of performing arts in New York. That school in New York is based on the one in Newark, Arts Senior High School, next door to St. Benedict's. President Barchi attended St. Benedict's. That's a whole new history in Newark, where a lot of the affluent kids, they live in the suburbs, but they send their kids back to St. Benedict's, next door to Arts High.

Ms. Barrett said, "You're really good in math and you're good in biology class," and this was after my junior year. She said, "What are you doing this summer?" I said, "Well, I have a summer job," and I worked for this mom and pop store. It was like a Dairy Queen called Aquarius. She said, "No, no, you need to go to Stevens." My mother was furious. My father was like, "Yes, she's going to get more math." She said, "Here's the thing. You've got to stay on campus in the summer." That was my freedom before coming to college. So, I got to stay in Hoboken, and, like I said, all we knew in school [about Hoboken] was Frank Sinatra.

When I was in school at Arts High, Arts High was a magnet school, so you would get students from all over the city. There were students from the Irish neighborhood, the Italian neighborhood, the Portuguese, the Brazilians, so we all went to Arts High. That was like America converges here at Arts High. We all went to Stevens in Hoboken, and all I knew was Frank Sinatra. On Washington Street, all the students go there now, it's a great place if you can get in there. That summer, I was like, "This is great." I remember Fleet Week, when we're standing in our dorms and we get to watch all the ships go down the Hudson. That was a whole new world for me. That's when I said, "You know I need to go away to school."

Ms. Barrett in Arts High, she put me on the path of college prep. Ms. Rivers taught me how to read, and once I learned how to read, I could read anything. I was good in math, but I needed the basics of reading and the phonics that she gave me at age seven. I got that from Ms. Rivers. Ms. Barrett, she put me on the path of college prep. As far as reading and analyzing, that would be Michelle Capers Hollar-Gregory, who is now a judge. She is a judge. She was a graduate of Lincoln University, a HBCU in Pennsylvania that was just featured on CNN. She came in with her fists up and her little afro, and she whipped out the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Well, at this point, I had never read anything like that. I was a freshman in high school, and she threw that out and told us to go home and read it. I have to say, I had these teachers, Ms. Rivers in second grade, I had Michelle Capers Hollar-Gregory, who is now a judge who graduated from Rutgers Law in Newark, and that was freshman year, ninth grade, and then I had Ms. Barrett, the guidance counselor who said, "You're going to go to Stevens and we're going to get you in a program and then you're going to go to Douglass." She knew all of this. I didn't know any of this. All I knew was Alabama every summer.

That was another thing. I couldn't go to Alabama that summer. I had these women through education and through opportunity that helped and shaped me as far as my education. As far as my home family life, we had that too, because no one in my family ever used drugs or anything. My father was so strict, being from Alabama. My mother, the way she would talk to my sisters and I, we were so afraid, the fear. She thought it was a healthy fear, but my father, it wasn't a fear. It was just he was very firm and strict because I think they knew that this is a tough world out there. That's how my father saw it. My mother saw it as far as racism. My father never really said things were racist. He just said, "You've got to work hard, and don't get in trouble or you're going to go to Angola." [laughter] That was his thing.

Even before he passed away, he's watching the news before I took him to the hospital, Clara Maass [Medical Center] in Belleville, not far from Apex. I brought my father in 2013, [when] I was teaching here, and he had poor circulation in his legs. I said, "I'm going to take you to [the hospital]." I just called our medical school, and they said, "Where are you now?" I said, "I have to teach this afternoon. My father's leg …" They said, "Well, just put him in a car and bring him to Robert Wood Johnson, and go teach your class." His vascular surgeon, Dr. [Saum] Rahimi, took care of my dad, and that gave my father a whole new quality of life and extended his life from his seventies to eighty. The medical students at Rutgers, he loved it. He got so much attention. They would come into the exam room, and on his birthday, they sang to him. So, you talk about freedom, he never had that in Alabama, so he loved it. The students here, the medical

students and Dr. Rahimi at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital, gave him what he didn't get in Alabama. He never would have gotten that kind of medical treatment.

That's a whole other thing, that you take care of yourself there, because there were no hospitals to go to unless you went to Atlanta or if you went to Meharry, Tennessee. There were no hospitals for African Americans, so you took care of yourself. In Newark, my father was able to go to Beth Israel, where his children were born, and my sister [was born] at Saint Barnabas, which is now in Livingston and that's now part of RWJBarnabas Health.

With him, it was, he would always take the humorous side. My mother would always talk about the racism side. Thank God that my father kind of taught us the way he did, so that we could go away. He encouraged that. She did not. She didn't want anyone to leave. She wanted us to stay with her, and my brother needed that freedom. My father understood that, because he needed that freedom. His father told him, "Bill, you can make a living here in Alabama. Don't leave," but my father had the foresight to leave. In Newark, my father knew that we would meet people that would help us grow and develop. He loved the Ciocci Family. They loved him. I'm telling you that was the best family for him. Of all the people we met in Newark in the projects, and you met everybody because at the time people were just trying to save money to buy a home and move to the suburbs, it was the Ciocci Family and that's why we're so close to this day. We're like a big family, their family and our family.

Growing up in Newark, I needed that. If I had grown up in Alabama, I would just be focused on the African Americans; that's it. I would not have had the opportunity to meet people [who] have ancestors from other countries. I certainly would never have gotten that from my mother, because she, to this day, has no interest in that. My father did. My father said if he hadn't had five children, he would've travelled more. [laughter]

My father, when he was in the hospital, before he passed away, he said, "Take my wallet and just take it home." Then, he went through the wallet, and I said, "What's that, Dad?" He said, "It's my card." I said, "What card?" "Selective Service." I said, "Selective Service for what?" He said, "It's my military card." I said, "You're still carrying that?" He carried it.

KR: Wow.

DS: I'm like, "Why?" He said, "In case they call me." [laughter] He said, "They might call me." I said, "Dad, I don't think they're going to call you now. You're turning eighty." He's like, "Well, I have to do my duty, my civic duty." That was my father. He still had his Selective Service card in his wallet, because he loved his country. He always said, "If it weren't for your mom and if we didn't have all these kids, I could've served in the military like my brothers." He said, "I had too many kids. They never called me." He said, "But I'm still hopeful." He said, "This is why I carry it." I said, "Dad, at eighty, they're not going to," but he carried that card. He loved the military. Whenever, growing up in Newark, when my uncles would come, we would leave Newark and drive down to Fort Dix-McGuire-Lakehurst, down there.

Growing up in Newark, for me, when I think about it now, [it] was probably the best city for me to grow up in. It was close enough to New York that we could go visit our cousins in Brooklyn.

The richness, the people that I met, and now the people that I meet through the Rutgers Alumni Association, who grew up there as well--they're like ten, fifteen years older than me and we share stories about the old neighborhoods and the bakeries. Calandra's is still there.

KR: Yes.

DS: Calandra's is still there. We talked about that.

KR: The best.

DS: The best. Calandra's, I still go there. I would never have known that if I had grown up in Alabama. I would never have had that opportunity. Oh, my God, the pastrami sandwiches and Italian hot dogs. They don't have that in Alabama. That's a New Jersey thing.

KR: Let us do a time check.

DS: Sure. What time is it?

KR: I am going to pause.

DS: Okay, great.

KR: This ends the interview. We are going to continue with part two in the near future.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

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