

# An Interview with Marzette Lewis

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

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Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
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A Collaborative Oral History Project

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *African Americans in Las Vegas: A Collaborative Oral History Project*.

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October 30, 2012 and November 14, 2012  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Claytee D. White

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WAAK-UP Mission Statement

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## Preface

Marzette Lewis's name is synonymous with Las Vegas community activism. Beginning in the 1970s and continuing to the time of this interview, Marzette has been an outspoken leader with the ultimate goal to provide equal and quality education for the children of Las Vegas, especially those under-served, poorer neighborhoods.

This two-part interview begins with the murder of Marzette's father at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan in Quitman, Mississippi. She talks about her visits and eventual move to Las Vegas in the 1950s. In 1964, she became the first black seamstress at Desert Inn Casino and an executive housekeeper.

As a young mother, she also became involved in the education of her school-aged son. She details the subsequent steps to assure him a quality education. She becomes a vocal proponent to end bussing of children from their neighborhood schools and starts WAAK-UP [Westside Action Alliance Corps Uplifting People] as a part of her mission to improve local education.

**This is Claytee White and I'm with Mrs. Marzette Lewis. It is October 30th, 2012.**

**So how are you doing today?**

I'm great.

**Fantastic.**

**And we're in her home here in Las Vegas.**

**So Marzette, tell me a little about growing up in Quitman, Mississippi.**

I was born and raised there and the year is 1940. My father was killed when I was three weeks old by the Ku Klux Klan because of a bill that he owed. He was his own businessman, a logger, and he had three trucks and six employees. He was working with some white guys that worked in that same general area, cutting pulpwood. And during the time, I guess at lunchtime or something, they'd get together and be laughing and talking, and one of the white guys asked him what did he think of his tires on his truck. And he told him because he had had one truck that had six or eight tires put on it. And when he told him what he paid, he said, "You paid that much?" Well, he got it on credit. And he said, "Yes." He said, "Well, I got mine on credit, but I got mine for half what you got yours for."

I get my personality from my father.

He said, "Oh, no, no, no; this is not going to happen, not like this." So he went back to the service station or tire place where he got the tires from—this is what I heard all my life in my house growing up—and asked why did he have to pay twice the price that the white guy paid. And it went from there.

So it was a great big mess, big thing came out of it. He's bickering that he wasn't going to pay. It was noted in the book about Ruby Duncan. He had a standoff with the service station owner. He went back to work and my father was coming home on Christmas Eve, early,



because I was only three weeks old and my mom couldn't get out the bed to go Christmas shopping. I had three other sisters and brothers. So he was coming home early to go Christmas shopping for the kids and they shot him in the truck as he was making the curve. They call it the Dead Man's Curve there in Quitman now.

She didn't even go to his funeral because at that time a woman couldn't come out of the house until the baby was six weeks old. So he never looked at me; he never saw me. And they said I was born with a veil over my face. I don't know what that meant. To this day I don't know what it meant. I used to have people when I was like five and six and seven years old that would come to our house and I would walk their backs and they would bring their babies and I'd blow in their mouths. They said I was healing some kind of disease they had and I had some kind of vision and some kind of healing going on inside of me that I could heal people. So I would walk these old folks' backs, up and down their backs, up and down their backs. Sometimes they might give me a dime or a nickel; sometimes they didn't give me nothing. I didn't know what I was doing. Then when they'd bring the babies, they said the babies had a disease called thrash. When you'd look in their mouths, they were all blistered. I would blow three times, three times in these kids' mouths, and supposedly I healed whatever that disease was.

**So do you remember any of that?**

I remember. I remember walking the backs. I remember blowing in kids' mouths. I even remember at three and a half years old when my sister was born. The doctor said it was very unreal for me to remember that at three and a half years old. He said, "It had to be very dramatic for you because most times you don't remember things until you're at least five that you can tell the story, about five or six." He said, "What happened that day when [your sister] was born?" I said, "I remember seeing the midwife walking across the field."

We lived in a big white house and there were whites on the right and another white family was on the left side. We lived in the middle. I saw her coming across the field with her white dress on. It was a field where they had cows and horses and stuff and we all played together, the whites and the blacks. There was no such thing as being separated at that time. We still didn't go to school with each other, but we lived in the same neighborhoods, played together, slept together. They'd spend the night with us; we'd spend the night with them.

That morning when my momma sent the other kids off to school—I remember what I had on. I had on a white little pinafore dress with a dress underneath that had the sleeves and the little pinafore dress had lace on it. I thought I was the cutest thing in the world. I saw the midwife coming, but I didn't know what she was coming for. Momma had put me on the front porch. In a little bit after the midwife got there, I said, “What is she doing in there?” And all of a sudden I heard that baby scream. When I heard the baby cry, I said, “I've got a baby.” She was my baby ever since.

**How many brothers and sisters did you have in all?**

By my dad there were four of us. I had one brother, two sisters and myself, which makes three [girls]. Then my mother had seven other kids by my stepfather, who was the best stepfather in the world.

**So after your father was killed, your mother married?**

Remarried. And this was the first baby. She's three and a half years younger than me.

**So your mother married McCarthy?**

McCarty.

**So tell me how your life changed after your mother remarried.**

Well, I couldn't remember when she remarried because I was only eleven months.

**So she remarried before your memory starts.**

Yes. The first thing I do remember is when my sister was born I was three and a half years old. I just loved that baby to death. That was my baby. My momma said, okay, you can have her, because she was always having babies, my momma was. She was glad for me to have that baby.

When I started kindergarten we'd have to walk to kindergarten. My momma and I walked almost two miles. She had to walk me to kindergarten at twelve noon. One day I was almost killed by the train because we had to cross the train track. It was close to a sawmill. When I got to the sawmill, I started running because I was always hyper and I started running in front of her and my aunt and my sister, the one that was three and a half years younger than me. All of a sudden I heard her scream. When I heard Momma scream, at the same time she was snatching me. The train almost hit me. I won't forget that. That was, I guess, one of the biggest things that happened because I knew if I had gotten killed by that train she never would have forgiven herself because she shouldn't have let me get that far in front of them. Every day she'd take me to kindergarten and then I'd stay at kindergarten and walk back with my older sisters and brothers. They would bring me back home. I guess that half-day was going on way back when. I tell myself now they haven't changed, not one bit, and I'll be 73 in a few days. After that we moved. [Recording interrupted]

Then my oldest sister said I was so hyper. I've always been hyper. I just was a little demon I guess, a little devil they called me. They had to kind of take care of me. They told all kinds of stories about when I was little, things that I really couldn't remember. That one time [my sister] was going to throw me in the river, the Chickasawhay River. [Recording interrupted]

Now I'm hearing all the stories that my sisters told me that I did when I was little that I

can't remember. They said before I started walking even they had to babysit me. My older sister said she was so tired of babysitting me because I was so bad and wouldn't do anything nobody told me. So one day she took me to the Chickasawhay River, about three blocks from our house, and she said she went to throw me in. She was going to drown me and tell my momma she accidentally dropped me. She said, "But I just couldn't do it."

Then one night she said I was acting up so bad and they were trying to do homework. So she started to throw me in the fireplace. She said, "You ran me crazy."

I think I was born hyper and nobody knew the word hyper and they just wanted to say I was a little bad girl. And I wasn't bad. Nobody knew what was wrong [for me] to get medication. I probably needed medication. It was just all that energy; it was bubbling over. All my aunts, I'd go to their houses, when I remember getting a little older, and do things for them. They'd come to the house and get me because everybody felt sorry that my daddy was dead. All my mom's sisters and brothers, they wanted me to come spend a weekend, come spend a month, come go to Chicago when I got older. So I just had a ball. I really enjoyed my childhood, even at school.

I had a good time at school because I was one of the ones that all the teachers came to when they wanted the truth, they said. I never would lie to them. When they wanted the truth, I was the one they came to. I was the head cheerleader of the school football team, head cheerleader of the basketball team, even though I played basketball. But when the boys came out, I would change into my cheerleading outfit. That went on for four years while I was in school. I went to a vocational high school. So that's where I learned to sew. That's why I'm fighting so hard to get a vocational high school in Las Vegas. Now, I'm going to jump around. Is it okay?

**That's fine, yes.**

I'm fighting the school district so hard to get a vocational high school because everybody that came out of our vocational high school had a trade. They could do something if they didn't want to go to college. That's why I told myself I could make a living on the sewing machine after I went to Alcorn and I was scared to death to stay down there.

**So after high school—and you graduated from the vocational high school—that was 1959?**

See, I came to Vegas in '53 the very first time. I'd spend every summer in Vegas. I had family here.

**Who was here?**

My biological father's [family] because when he got killed they ran. They were scared they were coming after them. So they left and caught a freight train out of there that night. They went to McNary, Arizona, from McNary to Vegas. My aunt went back to Texas and became a beautician. She went to beauty school. When I turn thirteen in 1953, I came here and every summer I'd come here and work because I was big and I could tell little lies about my age.

**What kind of work did you do?**

I started waiting tables at Johnson's Malt Shop. They didn't sell alcohol in there. They knew I was too young for that, but I could wait tables. I even did short order cooking.

**Tell me where the malt shop is located.**

It's still here. It's a building on Jackson Street, but they work on cars there now. But it was called Johnson's Malt Shop. I went to work there. And the first night I went to work there I made fifty-seven dollars in tokens. People would come—because there was nothing really to do in Vegas. There were no houses. People had cars, but they really didn't have houses. They had

little huts and tents and old shacks. So they didn't have anything to spend their money on but gambling and cars. So when they'd come in and buy a cup of coffee and there you are a little young girl, they'd just leave all kinds of tokens. So I just had money. Every summer I came to Vegas. That's why I tell people I've been in Vegas ever since 1953, before they had sidewalks, curbs, gutters, lights and whatever. Then I'd go back to school [in Mississippi]. I'd buy all my school clothes, and my mom didn't have to buy school clothes. I'd buy school clothes for my sisters and brothers and things and take them back.

Then after graduation I got married and had a baby. Oh, I was married three or four months before I got pregnant. I got married in June of '59 and he was born July of '60. And then I didn't like my husband anymore. And we had been going together, liking each other, not sex or anything, since I was like in sixth grade. I met him in sixth grade. I couldn't stand him after the baby was born. I don't know why. And we had been close since the sixth grade. I asked my step-daddy, I told him I wanted to go back to Las Vegas. My momma was glad because he was a musician. She said that all I would do is stay around and have a lot of babies. She said you're not the person to have a lot of babies and said that's all you're going to do. So Momma was glad I wanted to leave him. While he was gone to play at a dance or something, they took me to Meridian, Mississippi, and put me on a train with a six-week-old baby. I came to Vegas and I said I'd never go back to Mississippi.

**Wow. Some of your family, when they left the first time, they went to McNary, Arizona.**

**Why McNary?**

I don't know. Just that was the first stop.

**So you never heard about the lumber mill or anything there?**

No. I don't know what my uncle did there. But I know when he got to Vegas, he was a dealer

here. Well, I really don't know what he first did when he came here because I don't think the casinos were on the Westside at that time. I don't think they had built them.

**What year was that?**

That was in 1940 when I was born. Wait a minute. I'm not sure about that because in 1940 they killed my dad. They caught the train and they left and they went to McNary, but I don't know how long they stayed in McNary. But when he came to Vegas when I saw him when I was thirteen, he was dealing at the Town Tavern, dealing craps, twenty-one. He had learned all the games. By that time my aunt had already gone to beauty school. So I don't know how long they stayed in McNary, but I know she had gone to beauty school from Las Vegas and went back to Texas.

**Do you remember where your uncle learned to deal?**

They taught him on the job. They were taught on the job because we had no dealer schools for blacks. So somebody in those casinos, I guess, taught them dealing. However they learned it, they learned it. But I know those casinos were owned by Chinese people.

**Do you know any of the actual owners and do you know if they owned all of them or if blacks owned some, whites owned some and Chinese owned some?**

I think they were owned mostly by Chinese and a couple by blacks, but I can't remember right now. I used to remember two or three of the blacks, but it's been so long I can't remember.

**Is this uncle still alive?**

No. He died about ten years ago.

**Are any of your early relatives who came out here still alive?**

The oldest relative I have that came out here early, they brought her out here, which was my oldest sister, the one I said was going to throw me in the river, she came out here and she went to

Westside Elementary School. She's the oldest living relative that I have today in our family. Our family never lived a long time. She's six years older than me and I'm 73, so she'll be 80.

**She's almost 80. That's great.**

So she's the oldest living relative that we have. We have no uncles, no aunts, nobody but her. I have a sister and a brother that passed recently, not too many years ago.

**Tell me about in 1953 when you first came here. Can you remember what it looked like?**

Yes, ma'am.

**Describe it to me.**

Oh, my god, when they came to the train station to pick me up, I wanted to get back on the train and go home. It was in October, but it was hot, it was so hot in October that year. I don't know whether I ever felt the heat like that. Wait a minute. What question did you ask me?

**When you came here in 1953, what did it look like?**

Oh, when I was thirteen. Okay. When I came in '53, I came by train. Yes, I came by train both times. Even after the baby was born I came by train. Fremont Street was maybe five or six casinos, nothing like it looks now, only one-story buildings. They said something was wrong with the soil that they couldn't go up, so all the buildings were one-story. It was like a cowboy town. When they picked me up from the train station and brought me underneath the underpass and got me on the Westside, as they called it. We went across the track to West Las Vegas. I never seen nothing like that in my life. My aunt and uncle were about the only people at that time that I can remember—if my memory serves me right—that owned their own house and they owned a couple of houses in the back where we stayed. Apartments. Just about everybody else was staying in shacks and tents. But every house you saw—a little shack, little apartment, little house, tent—had a Cadillac sitting in the yard.



**So why do you think that was?**

Because they were making good money out at Hoover Dam. A lot of them were working at Hoover Dam.

**BMI.**

Was it BMI?

**Uh-huh. 1950s, World War—**

That's what it was called, BMI then?

**Basic Magnesium in Henderson.**

No. They were building Hoover Dam.

**Nineteen thirty-one was Hoover Dam.**

But they were still working on it—called it Boulder Dam. It was Boulder Dam. But Magnesium was out there. Now, some of them could have been working out there, but some of them were working—I know in the 1940s, my uncle was telling us that they was working at Hoover Dam. They have never completed, so I guess some of them still had a job out there. And some of them worked at the magnesium plant in Henderson. Henderson wasn't nothing but a sage patch with no houses. Nothing out there. But it had little gambling halls. They weren't casinos. They were just little buildings that the people went in and gambled and they made all that money.

**So now, are you talking about on Jackson Street?**

On Jackson Street, Jackson and D, Brown Derby was a little hole in the wall. People had plenty of money. There was just money everywhere.

**What about the Nevada Test Site, did anybody work there?**

Yes, people were working at Nevada Test Site back then. The money was just flowing. There

was money everywhere. But nobody came in here to build no houses for blacks. Whites had houses. Some of those houses you see now on Eighth Street, Ninth Street, over in that area, those was rich white people that lived over there. I guess they were casino owners that owned the hotels and what have you. Some of those houses were there. We didn't have anything across the track. They [built] nothing for us. Cadillac Arms, if I'm correct, and Berkley Square were the first buildings, decent, and nobody could live in Cadillac Arms but lawyers and teachers.

**Why?**

From what I heard, all the things that I heard and believe to this day is because the blacks didn't have any education, some of them was working these little casinos, hotels, as maids and dishwashers and porters, because that's all you would get to do, and they couldn't rent in Cadillac Arms. Nobody was there but doctors and teachers.

**So tell me the cross streets of Cadillac Arms.**

D and Lake Mead. You know where Kit Carson School is?

**So that's in North Las Vegas.**

Huh-uh. That's Las Vegas. You know the old Cove Hotel? You know Jackson Street?

**Yes. So Lake Mead is where Seven Seas is located.**

Yes. Revere is going that way. That's North Las Vegas.

**Right. So it was on the Las Vegas side of Lake Mead.**

Las Vegas side.

**So that was considered Cadillac Arms.**

Yes. It was on the opposite side of Seven Seas. They still call it Cadillac Arms. It's next door to Kit Carson School, those buildings next to Kit Carson School coming south is Cadillac Arms.

**So those were considered—**

Apartments. They were like duplexes.

**So they were nice homes?**

They were beautiful. I lived on D and Jefferson. On Sundays we'd walk from D and Jefferson after church dressed up in our high-heel shoes—you'd only wear those shoes one time, especially if we walked, because there was no streets, sidewalks, curbs or gutters. You had just rocks out there and they'd drive those Cadillacs on rocks. But we liked to walk to go down in Cadillac Arms and to look at Cadillac Arms because they had grass. The yards were pretty. The teachers and the doctors, they didn't want to be bothered with the kids, but we dressed up in our high-heeled shoes and stuff. Then they build across the street, which is Berkley Square. Those homes across from Cadillac Arms. If my memory serves me right, those were the first decent houses.

**So this was D and Owens.**

Yes, D, Owens and Lake Mead, in between. Those are the two cross street on D Street. You've got Lake Mead over here and Owens over here. Now, they were built for other folks like my uncle; people that were middle class like him. By now they were building casinos and making them a little better and nicer and folks was coming in, moving into Vegas and they was buying these houses. Most of them had one bathroom. They didn't think we had clothes. We had one little closet. These closets were small. They kitchens were small. I don't think they thought we were supposed to have pots and pans or dishes. Being 73 now and to look back at it, I don't think we were supposed to have but two or three dresses, a couple of pairs of shoes, if any shoes, because the houses were small.

**So did your parents ever buy—**

My parents never were here.

**That's right. So were you still living with your relatives?**

I was living with my relatives.

**Did anybody ever buy into either of those areas, Cadillac Arms or Berkley Square?**

Yes. My uncle, the one that died about ten years ago, he was in Berkley Square. He went up there, but he owned the house on D Street before he went to Berkley Square—he and my aunt. My aunt died before him. She was younger. She died about eight years prior to his death and he lived about ten years longer. She was the beautician. She died from all that smoke, inhaling all that because they didn't know better. They didn't know to put masks on and they were using all those chemicals and stuff. So she just got all messed up and stayed in a coma in a hospital for years. She bought later on when they started building over towards Martin Luther King. I forgot what they called that. I don't even remember whether they had a name. They just built some houses over there. I don't ever remember the name of those.

Then they built those projects. I think the first projects—somebody told me it was Villa Capri and Sherman Gardens was the first apartments. But I was under the impression it was the apartments by the Boys and Girls Club. Those are the ones that I remember seeing because they were not too far from where I stayed on D Street. When Uncle Stu moved to Berkley Square, then Aunt Sue, who owned the house, big blue house—I'll never forget the color of that—she rented it to us and she bought closer where there was building the houses down by the Boys and Girls Club, in that section. I remember those apartments going up. So when the projects went up, people was coming in now. Things were booming in Vegas because now you're getting the Strip. When I came there was five little hotels on the Strip, one stories, and then the Strip started going up. They started building in the years to come, what, now they're 30, 40, 60 stories

high when they said they could only go one story. Then they went two stories. Now pretty soon they're up six stories.

**Yes, because the Riviera.**

Yes. And then they kept building up, up, up, and people kept coming, coming, coming.

**So tell me about the Moulin Rouge. Do you remember when that was built?**

When I had the baby and came back in '60, I know that Moulin Rouge was there.

**That's right. You were still a teenager in 1955 when it opened.**

Right. I was in and out of here. I was going to school. But when I came back, see, I never was a nightlife person. I never went into the Moulin Rouge. The only time I went in the Moulin Rouge was when Ruby Duncan was having a meeting—and I didn't go in the casino part then. It was like an office building. I went in to disguise myself as my sister because they were trying to put my sister in jail and they wanted them to make a mistake because we look so much alike. They wanted them to make a mistake and put me in jail so they'd really have something to go after them about.

**I want to ask you about that in one second.**

But I never went in the Moulin Rouge.

**When your father was killed, why didn't your mother leave Mississippi? She wasn't afraid; everybody else was?**

My mother was like me; she wasn't afraid of nothing. And she stayed. Really and truly, she had nowhere to go because I don't think she wanted to follow the in-laws out here and had four children and all her sisters and brothers were still there. She had one brother and there were five girls. There was six of them. The five girls all stayed in Mississippi, but my uncle got out of there, because they weren't bothering women.

**Now, that's not Uncle Stu?**

No. That's my momma's brother.

**What is his name?**

Uncle Johnny. His name was Johnny McDonald. I call him Uncle Johnny. He went to Chicago, but the women never left until later on. Then I had an aunt to go up there and live for a while. And they would all go visit him and his family, but they came back to Quitman. So they all died in Quitman except for one of my aunts—this is back when I was in Europe then—she died in California. She went to be with her daughter and she got sick and died over there. Otherwise, they all lived in Mississippi and had homes and all of that, land, because my mom left a house and land for us. So when we get ready to go back to Mississippi, we have that. She just left it to all eleven kids. The oldest one takes over. If the oldest one dies first, then the next oldest one takes over. That's the way it was supposed to go in the will.

**So women never left.**

No. Momma came out here a couple of times to visit. Well, she came out here more than that. She used to come every summer and would stay two or three weeks to visit and then she'd go back. Momma loved her Mississippi. She said it was too hot here. She had a garden and she loved to be outside and she couldn't be outside here because it was too hot. There she loved to fish and there were places to fish all around her. She could get out and walk or get in the car and drive a mile and go fishing because there were lakes, rivers and creeks; that was her lifestyle.

**So in 1960 when you moved here permanently, how had the city changed between '53 and '60? What kinds of changes did you see?**

I saw big changes. There was big changes from '53 to '60. Sidewalks was in, streetlights, curbs, gutters, houses. Like I said, there were houses being built. People were moving in. People

were getting jobs. My aunt, my Uncle Ulysses, my daddy's brother, his wife—I call her Aunt Pearl—she was the first black coffee girl that they ever hired on the Strip.

**And when was that?**

Now, I'm not really sure about the year, but I know it was in the sixties. It was early sixties. It might have been '62, but it was early sixties. She worked herself up from a coffee girl, serving coffee and cleaning tables, all the way up to the top showroom waitress. Then she got so sick that she couldn't work. After she retired she would go back whenever they'd have big events and work the showroom, carrying those trays. They just loved her to death because she just worked from the ground up. After that they really started putting blacks in positions, but not key positions. Blacks were being hired now, not just as maids and floor sweepers and dishwashers. They had cooks. They had a few inspectresses.

**So this was in the later sixties, early seventies?**

Uh-huh. They'd have black inspectresses, one or two here and there, a spot here and there. I call them a spot. I believe it was in 1964 I went to the Desert Inn. I was going to work at the Desert Inn as a maid. But when I got there I couldn't do the work. On my application I had down that I was a seamstress. So that's how I tell people get those vocational schools.

They put me in the linen room to sew. So I was the first black that went in there. I was taking in cocktail waitresses' uniforms, hemming dealers' pants, porters' pants, maids' uniforms, darning sheets, pillow slips and stuff like that. I could work that sewing machine. That had to be 1963 or '64. I stayed there for about—I never worked anywhere long enough to get a vacation check. I just wanted to see if I could do it.

**So once you found out that you could do it at the Desert Inn, why did you quit?**

I went back home to be a housewife.

**So you got married again after you had been here for a while.**

Right.

**So you've been here almost four years at that time.**

Yes. And then I went to Vegas Village. That was a department store and a food store, something like Wal-Mart. It had a department store on one side and a supermarket on the other side. I went in there one day and somebody said, "Marzette, why don't you go and apply for a job because you'll do anything one time? Why don't you go and apply for a job at Vegas Village." I said, "I don't want to go to Vegas Village and apply for no job." My husband was a cop; he was making money. He was a motorcycle cop, the first black motorcycle cop that they had.

**What was his name?**

Hallie Salasse Spears.

**Hallie Salasse?**

[He was named] after him. An Ethiopian.

So sure enough, I went over there and they hired me on the spot, just like that, to be a salesperson on the floor. I also put on my application that I was a seamstress, but I hadn't put on my application that I was a salesperson, but that's what I was applying for. When I went in they put in ceramics. I made all my displays and everything. They just let me have my way in there for some reason. I don't know if it was my personality or what, because I'll talk to anybody. I was cute as I could be at that age. So I guess that was going in my favor.

One day somebody came in and bought some pants and the pants were too long and they wanted them cut off. They came down and said, "Marzette, we looked at your application and you can sew. Would you mind going upstairs and hemming a pair of pants for us?" So I left the



floor, went upstairs, did the pants, then for about three weeks I worked there. I'd sew and then I'd be on the floor. So I was kind of doing two jobs and I was making like ten dollars a day. That was big money; ten dollars a day.

So the housekeeper from the Desert Inn wanted someone in the linen room there. The housekeeper came to Vegas Village. She heard my voice and a man said, "Pearl Bailey is in here somewhere." He said, "Where is she? I hear her, but I don't see her." I don't know why people thought I was Pearl Bailey. Even when I worked in the restaurants and they didn't see me, they'd say, "Where is Pearl?" And I know Pearl Bailey to me had a much heavier voice, I was thinking. When I looked up and I saw Kay [Magoo], Kay said, "Marzette, where have you been? I've been looking for you." I said, "What you been looking for me for, Kay?" She said, "I want you to come to work for me." I said, "Where are you working?" She said, "I'm working at the Showboat." I said, "Why did you leave the Desert Inn?" She was assistant executive housekeeper. I said, "Why did you leave the Desert Inn?" She said, "Because I'm a housekeeper at the Showboat." But she didn't know nothing. She was kind of wibbly-wobbly. But she knew what I had done out there at the Desert Inn, those couple of months I worked there. Like I said, I never work anywhere long. I said, "Kay, I just got this job; I've only been here three or four weeks." She said, "Marzette, I'll pay you twice what you're making here." She said, "I'll pay you more than what your husband is making if you'll come to work for me." She said, "But this will make you and him get along bad." She said, "But I will pay you if you'll come and work for me." I said, "What do you want me to do?" She said, "I want you to sew." Well, that doesn't sound right; you're going to pay me that much money to sew. So I said, "You're sure?" She said, "Yes. When can you start?" I said, "Well, I've got to give these people some kind of notice."

I went in and talked to the guy there and told him I was thinking about leaving and I didn't want to work there anymore and that I had gotten an offer for a much better job. So he understood. I called her and told her when I could come.

So a couple of days later I went to work at the Showboat. I went in and, sure enough, sat down at the sewing machine. Going to sew, right? She came over and started talking to me. She said, "Marzette, I really need you as my assistant." She said, "If you could be my assistant, I would be grateful to you for the rest of my life because I know what you can do." I ended up being executive assistant housekeeper, inspectress over the porters and the maids. The porters there were called housemen at that time. I was over the inspectresses, and I was doing all her work. She couldn't do nothing. So I did all Kay Magoo's work.

They found out how much I knew. By that time, they started renovating. They were going to build two more hundred rooms at the Showboat. So when they built those two more hundred rooms, they say that I was doing all the work; that Kay really wasn't doing anything. I was doing everything. I was keeping all the records, sending out for everything that we needed, hiring, doing the time cards, sending in the payroll. Inspecting the rooms that were completed and weren't completed. I took the reports up to the front desk. When they found all that out, I guess by just looking, they fired her.

So when they fired her she came to me and she said, "Marzette, they're going to offer you the job. But don't you take it under fourteen hundred dollars a month because that's what I'm making." I was making \$450 a month. That's what policemen were making, 400 a month, a hundred dollars a week. That was in 1964, I think. She said, "Don't take it under fourteen hundred." Now, whether they were paying her that or not, I don't know.

But what got me, after she packed up all her stuff and left, I'm in there. I'm doing it all

anyway. Here comes one of the bosses called the linen room down at the office and asked me would I come up to the front desk. And I said, "I've got to get all the maids and the porters out. Once I get them on the floor, I'll be up there." I got all the room reports; the inspectresses brought the room reports and stuff into me. So I take them up every morning. And when I got up there, a man named Mr. Thomas, he said, Marzette—now this was heartbreaking—he said, "I have a man that I'm going to make housekeeper." He said, "And when you teach him to be housekeeper, I'm going to have to bust you back down and I'm going to have to put you as an inspectress because he won't need an assistant." I said, "What did you say?" Because see, I always was crazy and had a big mouth. I said, "What did you say?" He said, "He won't need an assistant," he said, "Because we're not making enough money to pay out this kind of money." He said, "So you're going to be an inspectress." I said, "Oh, okay." I knew exactly what I was getting ready to do.

The man's name was Dale Connors and he had been over the casino porters. So now they're going to bring him in over the housekeepers. I guess they don't watch me. Me not knowing. That's too stupid to see that these folks is watching everything that Marzette was doing. I went back in that office. And when I tell you I pulled a trick on them...I'll never forget it. I had a little black and burgundy Thunderbird, two-seater, and I parked it at the back of the linen room door where we'd come into the office in the morning. This was because I'd open up and get all of it going. And Kay would come in at nine or ten o'clock, because she was the executive housekeeper; I'm the assistant. And I'd have the coffee made and all that, have the maids and porters out on the floor and going on about their business. I went back in that linen room, and all the room reports, everything that I had wrote up and done, I tore them up in little pieces. Got me some scissors and started chopping. And I cut up all the paperwork. I said I bet

you when he come in here, he's going to have to learn from scratch because he won't even know where the rooms are. I fixed it to where he didn't know where one room was in that hotel. I made me a pot of coffee. They had those great big pots of coffee where you put like two or three cups of coffee grounds. I put all that paperwork in the garbage can and poured that coffee and those grounds on top of it. And when I did that, I closed the linen room door, laid the keys down on the table, walked out the back door, left it unlocked, and got in my car and went home.

And by the time I got home, the phone was ringing off the hook. Oh, that phone was ringing. He didn't know who we ordered from. He didn't know where nothing came from. They didn't know anything because I threw away all the records, requisition papers, everybody that we dealt with—the uniform people, the laundries, the people who brought the coffee, the water and everything. I put it all in the trash and threw all that crap on top of it. And they said, “Marzette, if you come back we'll pay you what you were making.” I said, “It's no way in the hell that I'll work for you another day.” They kept calling. They even called my husband and asked him, to see could he make me come back. I said, “That man can't make me do nothing.” Oh, I was crazy.

**So what about the union? Were you a member of the Culinary Union?**

No. I couldn't be a—

**You were too high to be in the Culinary Union.**

Yes, I was too high to be a union member at that time. I had been a union member at the Desert Inn.

So I just went home. I didn't have to work and I went home. And that's where I stayed. The next job I got, if memory serves me right, was in 1964, still 1964 or '65.

**So you did the DI, Showboat, and the next job all in 1964?**

Uh-huh. The next job I got was Child Haven. I was one of the first four—four blacks were hired that day. Myself and three other black girls—I think two of them are still alive, Wedlow—I call her Wedlow—Linda, her husband was a policeman, Linda Wyatt, and a girl named Marilyn Patton. We was four blacks. One white was hired; her name was Martha Williams. We went in with nine children. We were on North Ninth Street in a little apartment building. Had about four rooms and a little kitchen. I forgot the lady's name that was the cook, but she always told her daughter—she worked for the school district for many. She always told her, “Marzette saved my job that day they wanted to get rid of me, but Marzette fought for me.” And when she got on her deathbed—my sister was taking care of her—she said, “Please tell Marzette I'm leaving this world, but I'll never forget even when they built the first room—we had one room down where Child Haven is now on Bonanza.

**So you were like a housemother?**

Yes. We took care of the kids.

**So all five of you—**

All five of us. A couple of us worked nights; a couple of us worked days. I was a day person because that's where I met Harvey Munford. You know Harvey Munford?

**Yes, the police officer.**

No. He's a city councilman, Harvey Munford.

**I'm sorry. Yes.**

He was a teacher. He came here to be a teacher, right? But they didn't hire black men as teachers.

**Munford went to the assembly?**

Not then. I just put Munford in the assembly four or five years ago. I'm the one that put him up

there.

Munford was cutting lawns for the city, with a degree. He and Wendell P. Williams both did that. They would not hire the black men to be teachers in the Clark County School District. I mean that was terrible. We still now don't have a black male principal anymore at high schools in the school district. We had three or four and they got rid of them all about the same time, a few years back, after Brian Cram left, the one that I started a big fight with the school district. This is 2013 we're getting ready to go into and we don't have a black male principal? Something is wrong. And like I told them, racism will never leave; we're just going to be eaten up with racism. I'm ate up with it. I tell people, I say, I'm just ate up with racism. It's done attacked me. It's done attacked my soul. Ooh, Jesus.

But when I met Harvey Munford, I was taking children to the park, because I was working days. A man hired all four of us, he had been a policeman and they appointed him as a judge. His name was Judge Mullen, "Moon" Mullen. And "Moon" Mullen hired the four policemen's wives at Child Haven. Except for Marilyn Patton, she wasn't a policeman's wife. So I worked there I think a total of seven months at both places.

So finally we were getting so many kids they had to build a place for them. So they built one big room down where juvenile was and they put Child Haven up closer to Bonanza. Juvenile was in the back. And we'd have to walk our kids from Child Haven back to juvenile and feed them because juvenile had the kitchen and the dining room. We had a little infants' room where they had a nurse there, an R.N., when they finally hired. She was a white girl. So they hired her as an R.N. for the infants. But it was primarily blacks that worked with the children. We had two or three whites because, like I said, it started getting bigger and bigger. One night I was there left alone by myself. Everybody called me in and I was working nights

then and I had sixty children by my lonesome. That's what I tell the superintendent Dr. [Dwight D.] Jones now, It's child abuse going on in the school district; anytime you put twenty, thirty, forty little five- and six-year-old kids in one classroom, that's child abuse. And I said a lot of times it's not the teachers doing the child abuse, it's the kids doing the child abuse to the (other) children because they're pulling each other's hair. They're beating them. They're kicking them. They're biting them. They're pinching them. They're doing everything.

So when I talk to Dr. Jones and he said, “Marzette, I've got to do something.” He said, “Believe me, I'm doing it today.” He said, “Give me the names of the schools.” See, I'm so nosy. I'm just nosy. And when somebody calls me I'm going to check it out. I don't just go out there running. I check it out to make sure I know what I'm talking about.

At Child Haven, I had those sixty kids that night and I had to bathe those kids, because we had kids from the age of three days, coming out of the hospital, to eighteen. Once they turn eighteen they go to juvi, if they had nowhere else to put them and couldn't go out on their own. Just happened there were two or three girls that I could trust that would help me.

[Recording interrupted]

I had those sixty kids that night. And to have to bathe that many kids...we had one shower for the boys. In this one big, huge room they had a shower for the boys, they had a shower for the girls, they had a section for the girls to sleep in, and a section for the boys to sleep in; the way they broke it down. But there were sixty of them—I'll never forget it—and I was there alone until the next shift come in that morning.

That was the worst night I can remember, I think, of dealing with children in my life because we had all kinds of kids in there—kids that had been burned, kids that had been beaten, doctors' children, lawyers' children, teachers' children, poor folks' children. They didn't care

whose children they brought; they just brought them in there when something would go on at the house. Now they got that Child Haven, so they're going to fill Child Haven up. And they got this little entrance room where you come in and do your paperwork and to check them out of there. If the parents were drunk or something and then beat the kids and the police was called, they'd bring them right to Child Haven. So we'd have to admit them in. I was admitting in children, discharging children, trying to take care of children. It was really crazy.

I think that's what got me so into kids and to seeing what was happening down there. And I said these people think these kids are being taken care of properly? These kids are not being taken care of properly down here. They're getting a free meal and being fed, but they're not being taken care of. They have no bonding. How are you going to bond with that many kids? You can't do it. How are you going to hug those babies who run up to you and want a hug and want to sit in your lap and want to be rocked? You can't do it in handling that many kids.

So I went to "Moon" Mullen and I told him. I said it's just too much. Something's got to give. You've got to get some more people down here or do something, I said, because I can't continue to stay here.

So sure enough, I left. I took off and left my husband, too. Took off and went to California. I almost had a nervous breakdown down there. I couldn't take it. I just upped and left one day. He went to work and when he came back home, I was nowhere to be seen. He went to my sister, he said, "Where is Marzette?" He said, "Her clothes are not in the closet." He said, "Marzette is gone." She told him, "I don't know." He said, "Tommy Lou, you know where Marzette is; she couldn't have left me and not told you." That was my oldest sister; she was like my momma.

I didn't tell nobody. I took my baby. I had that one child. He was four or five, and I put



him in that car and we left and we went to Pittsburg, California, and I stayed over there for about three weeks. Finally I called him and he came and got me. He was so mad. He caught a bus and came over there because I took the new car and drove the new car to California. I had never been on that freeway or anything like that by myself.

### **Where is that?**

That's outside of Oakland, between San Francisco, Vallejo and all that. I went over there to stay with my cousin for three weeks and finally I went back to him. But I just felt like I just couldn't take Las Vegas anymore. I felt like I was having a breakdown. And I got my baby and said I've got to get out of here because I started having nightmares about those kids at Child Haven.

I was the only supervisor that they would let bring children home. I used to bring six and seven home to keep them on my off day and take them back when my off day was over. I treated them like they was my own.

Then when I took off I just couldn't take it no more. I just took off and left. I couldn't stand to see them being mistreated. That's what makes me so mad now when I see a child being mistreated because, see, I was a foster parent for twenty-five years here. I'm still a foster parent to three of them, but they're grown men. They're twenty-seven years old and still driving me crazy.

After Child Haven I went back—I went back to waitressing. I went to Sunrise Cafe and started waiting tables. That was a cafe on F Street.

### **On the Westside?**

Yes, right down from the Town Tavern. I think that's F Street right down from the Town Tavern. It was called Sunrise Cafe. Liz Newman owned it and I worked for her for a while.

Then I'd go home and I'd stay home for a year or so. And then when I'd feel like going

back to work, I'd go and work again for two or three months. Like I said, nobody ever gave me a vacation check. I never worked long enough to get a vacation check.

I went back to the Desert Inn as a maid. I was going to go back there as a maid and see what it was like, could I do those beds, because by now they've got all these big fabulous rooms and big gorgeous Jacuzzis and all these things and I wanted to go see all this. So I went and applied back at the Desert Inn and I went to work.

While I was there working, one day we came out and when we came out—it had never happened before—there was a security guard standing up at the top of the stairs where we clock out at. There were about five women in front of me. When she got to the top of the stairs, the man told her to open her purse. And I said, “What did I hear him say?” He said, “I'm checking purses today; open your purse.” And I screamed at him. My husband was a policeman. He's sitting back out there in the car. I guess he said, oh, Lord. I ran up the steps. I guess he said what is this fool getting ready to do now?

I said, “Where is your search warrant?” I said, “Show me your search warrant.” I said, “She doesn't have to open her purse for you.” I didn't have sense enough to know that we were on private property and that they could do what they wanted to do.

But he was young. He didn't know that he didn't have to have a search warrant. So while he was gone to get the search warrant, I had every maid and porter to check out. I said, “Get up here and check out.” I went back to the end of that line and I said, “Check out and check out fast.” They were getting those cards. That man was handing them their cards.

Because a lot of those people were stealing. They were taking towels, washcloths. And they had discovered that there's too much stuff missing. So we've got to find out is it in these purses, in these bags that these folks got or whatever? Lucille Brown always tell me, she said,

Marzette, my sister told me—my cousin—she said, My cousin says you always fought for somebody; when you did that at the Desert Inn, nobody in the world who has ever thought of that but you, what you did that day, and you saved a lot of people's jobs. Because, see, some of those people had stuff in their purses and things.

I don't know whether I want to put this on tape. But the next day—because I knew by then they would have found out what was going on and would have everything in order, what they were supposed to do—I went to the drugstore. There's a drugstore kind of on the premises of the Desert Inn. I went to the drugstore and picked up a box of sanitary napkins. I got that box of sanitary napkins and I came back and sat down in the locker room. And I got me some coffee grounds. I got me some ketchup and mustard. I don't know what else I got. But I fixed them up a sandwich. I mean I made a beauty. I had it so nice with the foil paper around it, put it open, and I had it in my purse. When I got up to the top of the steps, I said, “You want to see in my purse?” I told the folks, I said, “Let me go first.” I'm going first because, see, nobody knew what I was doing. I said, “Let me go first.”

So sure enough, I got up to the top of the stairs. I said, “You want to see in my purse?” “Yes, ma'am.” I open my purse. And when he saw that sanitary napkin with all that blood, what he thought was blood—I had coffee grounds and mustard, ketchup, everything. I had made it. That man took off.

I don't remember ever being checked anymore because I quit. I said nobody's going to look in my purse and I quit. I put that in that HELP article when we did HELP. I think that was in that article. But that was the funniest thing. And everybody else went through. Nobody else was ever checked. We were not checked anymore. I guess they said these people are not just going to let us do them any kind of way. They've worked hard all day making those beds,

because by now I knew how to make beds. I could make beds. I could clean bathrooms.

Because I'm grown now. I'm a 25-, 26-year-old woman.

**So what is the magic of cleaning a hotel room efficiently, quickly, and getting it done?**

Getting in there and knowing how to do it with one rag.

**So explain that to me.**

My sister said they never saw nobody do it like I could do it. Now, making the beds, you make a bed like you make a hospital bed, same procedure.

**With those corners?**

With the corners and all the tucks. I can do that in three minutes, make a bed. When you get to the bathroom, I can take one towel, wet it and put my little soap on it—unless it was a bad room, but somebody that come in there and just did a halfway decent bath and went in the bathroom—take a dry towel, take that wet towel with the soap and go over everything right fast. Take that dry towel, wipe it down. Take that wet towel, take your foot, wipe [the floor] up. And get out. Hang the towels and you're through. You can do them in ten, fifteen minutes, you can do a whole room because they give you—oh, sometimes because of the size of them, you could have fifteen rooms a day. And some places if you had suites, you might not have but ten. And that was a lot of rooms. So you had to find every quick cut, every quick way. My sister said, Marzette, you can clean a whole house with one rag. I told them, I said, I can break down every room in my house and put it back together at the same time. Every room goes back together at the same time when I was younger and could do it. But now I'm so old it takes me all day to clean the kitchen.

But I would go in those rooms and they tell you to vacuum, I wasn't going to vacuum no rooms. That was something I wasn't going to do.

**Now, I thought the housemen—what do they call them, the housemen?**

Huh-uh. The only time the houseman would do a room is if they were doing like general cleaning and that meant everything was coming out, like they pull the beds, they pull the dressers, all that kind of stuff. Then they come in and vacuum. Otherwise, the maids had to vacuum and they had to use sweepers. They wanted the vacuuming done. I'll hit in the middle of the floor with a sweeper. But getting on my knees, looking up under the bed, I wouldn't have cared what they found under the bed when the inspectress came along. She could have found me under there if she wanted because I wasn't going to get on my knees and look under no bed. And we were supposed to get on our knees, look under the beds, check under to see if anything was left. If you found anything, you turn it into lost and found and all that kind of stuff. But the housemen, the only time they vacuumed was when you were general cleaning a room and you had to pull. They called it pulling.

**So now, when you go into a hotel room today, should you use the glasses?**

No, ma'am. No, ma'am, because all they did was dump them most of the time in the—I have to tell the truth, what I saw, the stuff that I saw was done in some of those rooms. Now, I didn't do this. That was one thing I wouldn't do. But I saw maids would put glasses in the toilet and take them out, wipe them, dry them, and stick them up there. We didn't even have the plastic bags to put them in. So when you didn't have a plastic bag to put them in, they weren't sterilized. They hadn't been scalded. Nothing was clean because you wiped the sink out with an old towel that was laying around. I saw some girls that are still alive that used to do it at the Desert Inn. They'd put those glasses in that toilet and rinse them, well, because people were mad. They were angry.

**About?**

Because there was no black inspectresses. All we had was white folks telling black folks what to do. We're doing all the work. They're making much more money than what we were. And they're coming behind us and if they found one little spot here, you've got to go back in the room and get that spot. They couldn't take a rag with them to get the spot. So black folks was angry, very, very angry. I'm still an angry black woman.

**And blacks weren't using the hotel rooms at the time, anyway.**

You couldn't go in there. We couldn't even cash our paychecks. You'd make your paycheck there, but you couldn't go in the casino and cash it. We had to come to the Westside and cash our checks. We couldn't go in the casino and cash checks on that Strip. It was crazy. And we're going to work like dogs. You didn't work five days a week; you worked six days and sometimes seven. On your seventh day you'd get time and a half, but it was automatic six days. Then finally, years later they said they were going five days and if you go to six days you'd get time and a half and if you went to the seventh day you'd get double time.

**Now, by that time the Culinary Union was really active.**

Yes, the Culinary Union was active then. That's why you got the overtime and that's how you went down to five days a week. But before the Culinary came in, see, a lot of people couldn't get insurance and stuff from the Culinary. Because me, I couldn't get nothing, if I died, from the Culinary because my time working at the Culinary wasn't functioning right. It wasn't there. It wasn't there for me. But now, I've got four sisters that worked for the Culinary all their life. So when they died, they get forty thousand. They get ten thousand for death. They automatically get that to bury you with. You get that that day. You can pick that check up or they send it to the mortuary. And then up to ninety days you get thirty thousand. That's going on now. That's going on today.

**In addition to a pension that you get once a month?**

Yes. Well, what my sister did, my oldest sister, I think she drew her thirty thousand. But still they got to bury her plus she gets a pension. She drew her thirty thousand now, but she doesn't get that much. She only gets like two hundred and something dollars a month. And she worked at those hotels for over forty years, I think. I said how did you do it? But she did get promoted up to inspectress then up to night housekeeper where she sat on her butt as the night housekeeper, just answering the phones and tapping a maid to take towels and stuff like that to the guests' rooms when somebody would call. So she didn't really kill herself all the way at the hotel, but she got her thirty thousand when she retired. Still when she dies there's ten thousand that automatically goes to her. So that's the way that is.

**So that's the way it works. Wow. So once you were a maid at the Desert Inn, did you continue to work?**

No.

**So now, we must be about 1970 maybe?**

Yes. I'm trying to think. What did I start doing in 1970? Because I was a housekeeper most of the time.

**So you worked off and on.**

Off and on. I was just an off-and-on person.

**So after Child Haven you really began to get more involved in children's issues. How did you get really involved in the various schools? Tell me how that started.**

What happened, my son—now, this is where I'm getting ready to get crazy because all this is just minute stuff. My son went to CVT Gilbert. Now, we had a black principal then. His name was Bill Evans. When I got him up there—I had a house on Helen Street in Delmonico in North

Las Vegas. When I drove him up there that morning, I said, Here, give Momma a kiss. He said, Momma, I'm a big boy; I don't give you a kiss now; I'm going to school. I said, Boy, if you don't get over here and give me my kiss. He didn't want to do it. I guess he turned around and looked and said that's my momma; I'm going to kiss my momma; I don't care who is looking at me. So he went and he kissed me. I was back home maybe thirty minutes; maybe thirty minutes I was back home and I got a call and asked me would I please come to the school. I said, For what, Mr. Evans? He said, Marzette, just come up here. I said, What are you talking about? He said, We want to integrate, Marzette, and we want to integrate and we don't want to have no problems. I said, What kind of problems are you going to have? He said, We've got problems with your son.

Well, this child is the quietest child in the world, by himself, no sisters, no brothers, just by himself, never bothered nobody, never had no arguments, never talked back to me, never slammed the door. He's 53 years old now. He never slammed a door or nothing on me. So I know this child hadn't done nothing to nobody. I didn't believe he had done anything, but you can never say what nobody won't do.

When I got up there Mr. Minion, a teacher named Minion, and Mr. Evans came out and met me on the sidewalk and said, Marzette, don't act no fool. I said, What is going on with my child? I said, I just left my child up here. He said, Marzette, the teacher is afraid of him. I said, The teacher is afraid of my five-year-old? I said, What's wrong with you? He said, He's bigger than she is; he's taller than she is. I said, well, if she's that small, didn't she know she was going to be dealing with larger kids? I said she must be a dwarf. He said, All we want you to do, Marzette, is just let us change him out of her room, he said, so things can be smooth. I said, No, you need to get rid of her; if she's afraid of a five-year-old, what's she going to do with—



**How tall was your son at five?**

At five he was taller than most of the kids, because I'm tall. His daddy was tall. His daddy was six four and I'm five ten and a half. So he was probably about that much taller than most kids, like me. I marched in the back, over half of the boys when we graduated from high school.

**So you're talking about two or three inches taller.**

Two or three inches taller because he's not as tall as my granddaughter. My granddaughter is playing basketball down in Alabama somewhere and she's taller than my son.

I was so mad. See, I was crazy. I was absolutely crazy. You bring this little white woman in here and you're going to put my son in a room with her and she's going to holler she's after of him? I said, What did he do? He said, Marzette, you know the child didn't do nothing; he hardly opens his mouth. And I knew he hadn't because I knew how quiet he was. So I said, Mr. Evans, I'm going to do this today, but you're warned; this is not the last of this. So when they did that, that's when they brought those sixth grade centers in here.

**So do you remember how that started?**

Yes, I remember. Dr. James McMillan did it. They was trying to integrate and they was going to bring—the best that we could get was the sixth grade centers. Our children was put on the buses at first grade—some of them was five years old in first grade—and bussed out twenty and thirty miles. Kindergarten stayed in the area for that first year.

**So do you remember when that started?**

That was in nineteen—Lord, how old was that boy? Was that 1966? I don't know. It might have been—we're going to have to look that up.

**But your son was older now?**

Yes, he's older now. He said he got his best education from K through five. When the sixth

grade centers started, a white woman told her son, you find the biggest blackest boy that you can find and make friends with him so he can protect you. Now, I'm telling the God's truth. And Pecker and this child hooked—I call him “Pecker,” my son, but his name is Henry. He changed it; now it's Anyika Kamal because he changed his name. He said I gave him a slave name and he didn't want it and he got rid of it.

But she told this child, she said, You get with the biggest blackest boy you can find to be your friend so you won't get beat up by black boys, because they thought our kids were animals. They thought they were going to come over here in the sixth grade and they were going to get beat up. And the only way that we could get our kids in the neighborhood was in the sixth grade, They went to school in the neighborhood that one year, and bussed back out in the seventh grade. So for eleven years they were out of their neighborhood, one year in the neighborhood. The white kids was in their neighborhood eleven years and out one year. And most of them wasn't out one year; they made private schools for them, for those sixth graders. They wouldn't send them over here. Well, back when I started with this Brian Cram stuff, I went out to Tomiyasu one day and there was a private sixth grade center, right next door to the elementary school. And that was twenty years ago. That was just recently—I call twenty years ago recently.

After this—there's just so much in between. My son got beat up. After the sixth grade he went to Ed Von Tobel and three white kids attacked him. They beat him so bad till they called me and they asked me would I come up to the school. I said, “For what?” They said, “Your son needs to go to the hospital.” Well, they were closer to the hospital than I was. I said, “What's wrong with my son?” They said, “Just come take him to the hospital.” I said, “Mr. Hollingsworth, you better tell me what's wrong with my child.” He said, “Some kids attacked

him and he has a big gash; his eye is messed up, and you need to come and take him to the hospital.”

Now, somebody at that school if it wasn't nobody but the hall monitor or the truancy officer could have grabbed him and brought him up to North Las Vegas Hospital because he was closer. I had to drive all the way out there. I grabbed me a butcher knife. I was barefooted as a cougar. I had some cutoff blue jeans on. I'll never forget what I had on because I was on my knees cleaning my kitchen floor when I got that call. So I didn't have time to put on nothing.

So I got to the school. And when I got to Ed Von Tobel, the school was like I was walking into a mortuary. Not a voice, not a word, not a human body, nothing, not even at the receptionist desk or whatever they call them, the office manager. I said, What in the world is going on in here? I couldn't see nobody. I was looking down hallways and everywhere. So by that time I saw a black man. He's the only black on staff. Everybody else there was Mormons. And I saw this black man coming from way down the hallway. And I screamed and I said, “Mister,” I said, “What's going on? I got a call there's something wrong with my son.” He said, “My god, lady, it's a shame what has happened to that child today.”

So he came. He had a big chain of keys. And he took a key and he opened the door. There was nothing but black kids piled in one room at Ed Von Tobel. The kids that lived across the street from me, they said, “Marzette, it's a shame what they done to Pecker today.” They called him Pecker like I did. They said, “It's a shame what they done did to Pecker.” I saw a girl had taken his shirt off him and she was catching the blood, his blood in her hand. I said, now, what has this child done? Pecker don't bother nobody. I didn't even let him associate with the kids in the neighborhood because he was still the only child.

I ran over there to him. And when he saw me he just broke down and started crying and

I grabbed him. And when I grabbed him he broke loose from me. When he broke loose from me, he ran out the door, bleeding, and he ran down the hall. I guess he was looking for those boys.

By that time, they had got them out of there. And when he came, I said, “What is all these black kids doing locked in this room?” They said, “We're afraid there was going to be a riot.”

Okay. I grabbed Pecker, get him in the car, get him to the North Las Vegas Hospital, get him sewed up, get him bandaged up and all of this. This is when Ruby Duncan came out and we rented some buses and everybody in the neighborhood came out—because they knew that child. Everybody in the neighborhood knew me. I didn't bother nobody. My child didn't bother nobody. Of course, we didn't drink. We didn't do drugs. We didn't hang out. I didn't go to bars and stuff like that. I never did. People would tell them: Don't go near that house. Don't nobody go near that child, because that woman will hurt you about that boy.

They rented buses and we went out to the school district office. I called it Capitol Hill. We went out to Capitol Hill. Kenny Guinn was the superintendent and the one named Bernice Moten—Moten was the board of trustees. I called Moten and Moten said, “Marzette, bring the kids and meet me at Von Tobel,” – “because Kenny Guinn is coming.” So we got the kids. And they had all these white parents in there.

### **At the school?**

At the school, at Von Tobel's. All these white parents were in there. I didn't know what had happened the day before or whenever. My child had done nothing. The principal said he was in the gym after lunch, because like I said I didn't let him associate with any of the kids in the neighborhood. The kids all knew him, but he didn't play with them. He didn't hang out with

them and all that. He had to come home and do homework and whatever. He stayed in the house. Because by the time they got home off those buses, it was almost dark. So he came in, did his homework, ate some dinner, had a snack when he got home and then he'd take his bath and go to bed because he had to get up early to catch these buses to get out of there. So I didn't go for no nonsense with him because I knew by him being a big black boy, because now he's big; he's getting on up there.

**Is he big or tall?**

He's big and tall now.

**But at that point?**

At that point he was putting some weight on. He was getting weight on him and he was getting taller.

He was down in the gym by himself after lunch throwing basketball. These three white boys went down in that gym with nun chucks, chains, brass knuckles, everything, and they attacked him and beat him for no reason. No. It was a reason, but no reason for him to get attacked. But they caught him alone. Because three black boys, they said, the day or so before had attacked a white boy and beat him. And then they're going to take this out on my child and he hadn't bothered nobody?

I was a crazy woman. Like I say, I don't know how I'm still alive what I've gone through. When we got in that room that morning with Kenny Guinn, I was talking to him and then one of the women turned around and said something to me. So I started attacking the women, right? Bernice wrote a note. She said, "Marzette, leave the women alone. Don't say another word to the women. Go after Kenny Guinn. Keep beating him. Just wear him down." And I ain't never stopped talking. I've been talking all my life. I guess that's why my sister

thinks I'm crazy. I told Kenny Guinn, I said, "I'm paying, man; you're getting my tax dollars. This is my money that's paying your salary." The tears started rolling down his face. He said, "Some of it."

Bernice wrote me another note. She said, "You've got him now; stay on him." And I stayed on him and I said, "I want my child out of this school; I want him out of here today." He said, "I can't move him; this is his zone." I said, "Oh, yes, you're going to move him." "Well, if I move him, he can't play sports nowhere else because he's out of his zone." I said, "He's going to play sports anywhere he wants to play sports. He's getting out of this school." I went after Kenny Guinn with everything I had. I guess God was just putting the words in my mouth because I was just going at him.

So when we got out of that meeting, they had a car to come pick him up until such time they could get bus transportation over there for him and they sent him to—what was the name of the school? It'll come to me. Like I say, my mind don't get better with age. It was a junior high school on the other side of town, on the west side of town, a white school. They had a few blacks over there and they rode buses. But mine was out of zone, so the buses didn't come down Helen Street to pick him up. So they sent a car to get him because I had raised so much hell. Finally they got the bus, where that bus would come in there and pick him up.

### **How was the issue resolved at Ed Von Tobel?**

The issue was resolved with Kenny Guinn finding out that it was all Mormons in one school, no other race of people but one black janitor. I stood there and counted. It was forty-eight staff in that picture, no blacks but the one black janitor and everybody else was Mormon. That's when they cut it out that there will never be another school with one race or religion of people in it in Clark County School District.

Kenny Guinn came to me—Kenny Guinn and I became best of friends even when he was the governor. If I called, he answered. When we went to Europe, he said to me—because by now my son is at Western—I still can't think of that junior high school. But they let him come from the junior high school to play with the junior varsity at Western. So from that when he went to high school, he went to Western. He's still out of zone. When we went to Europe, that 1977, Kenny Guinn came to me. I went to a ball game. My husband had already gone. He'd been over there about six weeks and I was getting ready to leave and Kenny knew it. He came to me and he said, “Marzette, whatever this child needs,” because he was a straight-A student, he says, “Whatever this child needs and whatever you want, don't you worry about it, he's going to get it.”

**So you went to Europe with your husband for what reason?**

Military, retired military.

**Ah, I see.**

By now I had a six-year-old daughter. So she went, but Anyika didn't want to go because he said he wanted to graduate. He was a senior.

**So he stayed with your sister?**

Yes, he stayed with my baby sister that was here, for a while. I had taught him—took him to the banks and places. Showed him if he had to get his own apartment, how to pay his rent and how to deposit his money. Well, I taught him everything he's supposed to know as a man. He didn't want to go. He said he'd already been to a foreign country, which was Omaha, Nebraska. He told me I've been to a foreign country. He was in the Junior Olympics. When he went to the Olympics, I couldn't go and I called his daddy in Racine. I called his daddy and asked him could he go because I said me and Lou, we can't go because me and Lou is getting ready to go to

Europe. I said I can't come because I've got a childcare center. And he said I'll meet him there.

So he was late getting to the Olympics. He said after he got off the plane, when the cab got him to the Olympics—by now, Anyika is the biggest thing out there. He's a shot putter. He said he looked and he was carrying the torch. He said that's my child. So he carried the torch in the Junior Olympics in 1977 or '76, whichever year it was.

Then in '76—I've got to back up a minute—in '76 they went to the championship for football up in Reno. They won it. He was Frank Hawkins' blocker. He blocked for Frank Hawkins. So Frank is a year older than Anyika, or two years. Frank went on to Reno. When Frank went to Reno—when Anyika graduated while we was gone, because he was graduating in '76—yes, that's the year he graduated, '76; I had left in '76 and then it became '77, something like that. He got a full scholarship in football and shot put. So he went to Reno where Frank was and he got on the football team. But he couldn't take the cold; he said it was too cold for him. So he left Reno and went to Arizona State. He left Arizona State and went to San Jose State and that's where he got his degree.

How do you spell his name?

Now? The name he got now? Anyika, A-N-Y-I-K-A, Kamal.

**And this is Henry? This is Henry's new name?**

Yes, this is Henry. His name was Henry Lee. He said it was a slave name. Anyika Kamal, K-A-M-A-L, because he's Muslim.

He went to San Jose and when we came back, he came to North Dakota because we were transferred to North Dakota. He came to North Dakota. When the people saw him in North Dakota, they said, Lady, you say this is your son? I said, Yes, that's my baby. They said, You still hurting?



**So how big was he at that time?**

He must have been close to four hundred pounds. He was out for the summer, so he had really stopped exercising and stuff. But he was pumping five hundred pounds; he was a weight lifter. He did everything because I told him you do anything you have to do to never let nobody beat your behind again. So now he has five black belts in karate. He owned his own karate school; twice he had karate schools. He taught karate in two or three different schools. He went to Indonesia two years ago and learned how to teach different languages without knowing the languages. So he's working at the library now because he's a retired firemen.

**He works at which library? West Las Vegas?**

West Las Vegas. He spent 25 years as a firemen. Like I say, we old as black pepper. So when he retired from the fire department, he went to Indonesia for three months and took that training because all he ever did was read and studied.

But anyway, while we were in Europe—let me go back to that—while we were in Europe—because I will flip-flop.

When we went to Europe he came over there that one summer and he spent the summer with us. They wanted him to stay there and play football for them. And we said no, he was coming back to the States. So then when we got to North Dakota, North Dakota offered him everything to stay there and play for them.

**Because at that time he's, what, a senior almost?**

At that time he's going to I think his first year in college.

**Oh, he's at UNR [University of Nevada Reno].**

Yes. That was before he went to UNR. He was getting ready to go. That's why I say I had to back up a little bit. He came to North Dakota and spent the summer and they wanted him to do

his freshman year at North Dakota. He said, “There's no way in the world I'd stay, as cold as it is, that's why I left UNR.” He couldn't take the cold.

**I understand about the cold.**

So he worked up there that summer in construction and got his body back in shape because he had kind of let his body go. He got his body back in shape and he started going to the gym there on base and started weight lifting again. People would just stand around him and watch him bench press five hundred pounds and all this. I mean he could do something with his chest, I don't know what he'd do, but he could put my whole head off down in his chest. He's got these—these. Are these biceps? He looked like a bodybuilder. People were really afraid of him.

He intimidated folks because he was quiet. He never talked. He was never a big talker. Like Marty said, Marzette, you took all the mouth from the child. I said, no, I had to teach him. He's a big black boy and he's going to have problems and he's got to take care of himself because this is a racist country. This is a racist society. It's not going to get any better. I'm not going to lie to my child and I'm not going to lie to anybody else. Racism is eating me up still to this day for what they're doing to us over at the school district now. I can't take too much more.

But anyway, I never had any problems with him. I'm fine with him. Our daughter, she was with me all her life. She stayed with us for forty years, up until we moved over here. She had a baby and named her Ayoola. Her daughter graduates this year from college, playing basketball. She plays for Cynthia Cooper, one of the Basketball Hall of Famers. She said she always wanted to play for a Hall of Fame coach. So she played for her (2011-2012). She'll be out this year.

**At which school?**

North Carolina Wellington.

**Oh. I'm from North Carolina.**

You're from North Carolina? She is smart as a whip. When she took that test in the tenth grade, ACT test or whatever it was, she passed every one of them. They say they don't know how far she would have gone because she ran out of paper before she ran out of X's. They said we've never seen it before. But I put her in the Hebrew Academy when she was in the sixth grade because they refused, after I was the one that got the magnet schools on the Westside, they refused to let her go to this sixth grade magnet, after she had gone to Hoggard Magnet all her life from first grade through fifth grade. And when she got in the sixth grade, they said she couldn't go to Hyde Park Math and Science, because she's in math/science. One teacher said the girl is doing calculus. Said she do all her work and then she jump up and go from—this is the grandchild—jump up and go around the tables and do all the other kids' work. They had to call me to come up there to try to stop it. I had to go to school and go in the classrooms and stay in the classrooms to keep this kid in her seat because she'd do her work and she said this is easy and I got to help them. Well, they wouldn't let her go to Hyde Park.

**Would that be the next step in her education from Mabel Hoggard Magnet Elementary School?**

From Mabel Hoggard. Mabel Hoggard was magnet. When they refused to let her go there, I got her into the Hebrew Academy up in Summerlin. She said, “Granny, when I went off my first year to college,” she said, “what they taught me at the Hebrew Academy, that's what they was teaching in college.”

**And she was only in sixth grade.**

And she was only in sixth. She said I can do all that stuff. And she's so smart. She's like a

genius, right? Well, when she passed the test in the tenth grade in high school here, she felt like, well, why do I have to go to school anymore?

**Wow. Where did she go to high school?**

She graduated out of Cheyenne High School. But she said why do I have to go to school? I passed all the tests in the tenth grade. So my daughter was catching it with her. She was catching it. She was going through puberty, too. Whew.

And that's when it was so bad on me; it had got so bad on me and with the foster kids. I had the foster kids, raised foster kids and been with them for so long. I left and went back to Mississippi for four years and I came back here in 2009. I left here in 2005. I know I skipped over a lot of stuff.

**We're going to go back. But here's what I'd like to do. You've been talking for two hours. So what I'd like to do is when we get back we're going to talk more about your activism and all of the—**

In the schools.

**Yes, all of the things that you did as an activist and your work with Ruby and everybody else. And I'd like to have that part on camera, as well as audio. So that's what I'd like to do when I come back.**

Okay. With the school district, because the school district is a trip.

**Yes. I already see how that's going to be.**

That's going to be a trip.

**\*So what I'd like to do is thank you for today.**

You're welcome.



Marzette Lewis – 2012





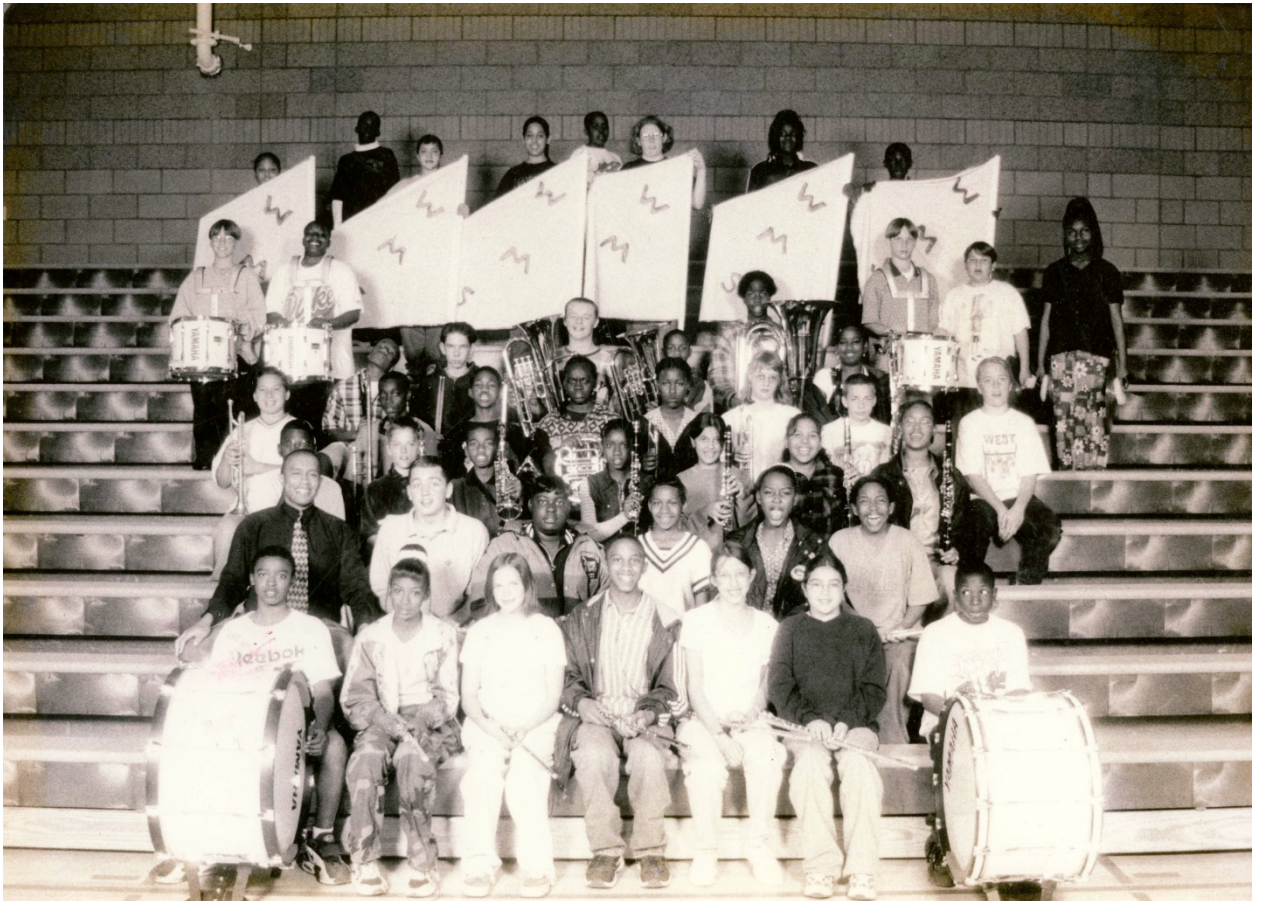
Marzette (far left), Superintendent Brian Cram and others during a Clark County School Board meeting.



(L-R) Tracy Lewis, Senator Joe Neal and Marzette (2000).



Marzette has been actively involved at Westside Middle School, in the classroom, as a band fundraiser and more. Photos taken in 1998-1999 from Marzette Lewis Collection.







Marzette's daughter, Tracy, stands (far right) at Kermit R. Booker Sr. Elementary School. School was a \$500 beneficiary of a Marzette Lewis lead fundraiser.



## ***Session II***

**So how are you today?**

I'm great. I'm just wonderful. All the pain is gone, for now. Let's hope that it continues for this interview.

**And if you get tired, if you start hurting, just let me know. We can stop it; I can come back.**

**It is November the 14th, 2012, and I'm with Mrs. Marzette Lewis. This is our second session. So we're going to try to start talking about school desegregation. We're talking about the early 1970s.**

We're going back to the seventies.

**You might want to go back to the sixties.**

Desegregation started I believe in the late sixties.

**Exactly.**

Because my thing was my children never had to go through the bussing when they were small. My son said he got his best education in the black community, in the African-American schools with the black teachers. They could relate to them better. He went from Head Start all the way through sixth grade in the community, and when he was bussed out into seventh grade, he said, "Momma, I never learned anything else but what I taught myself." He said, "Nobody cared about us."

So he went to Ed Von Tobel. That's where it had to be 1970—how old was my daughter? She was two. It had to be 1972 and 1973, I believe, when he went to Ed Von Tobel for seventh grade. Over there is where he was attacked by three white boys. The white boys attacked him for absolutely no reason, nothing that he had done. It was for just revenge because

a white boy had been attacked the day before by three black boys on their way home from school.

I got a call from the principal. It was about one or two o'clock in the afternoon. I'll never forget it. I always liked to mop my floors because I like to get in the corners, so I do my floors with a rag and water. I had a bucket of water and I was doing my kitchen floor, mopping and cleaning. And when the phone rang I looked like just an old housewife, working. Mr. Hollingsworth—I'm going to call his name because he was the principal over at Ed Von Tobel at that time—called me and said, “Mrs. Durr, you need to come over here to the school and pick your son up and take him to the hospital.” I said, “Take him to the hospital; what's wrong with him?” They were closer to the hospital than me. He said, “Just come to the school and pick your son up; I think he needs some stitches.”

Well, when he said that I knew something terrible had happened. So I grabbed the butcher knife and grabbed my keys. I didn't even take a purse. I just grabbed the knife and my keys and out the door I went.

So when I got to Ed Von Tobel, it was like a [empty] mall when I walked in. You couldn't hear a word. You couldn't see nobody. I heard nothing. The reception desk was right there, not a soul. I said, why did they call me? I wondered, what's going on? Where are all the kids? School is not even out. Couldn't hear a word. They had locked up all the kids (and) had taken all the black children into one room.

By this time I looked back behind me to the west and I saw a janitor. He was the only black staff person they had in the whole school system over there. Everybody else was all Mormons. When he came, he said, “Mrs. Durr, it's a shame what they have done to your son today.” And I said, “What happened to my child?”

He had a bunch of keys and he unlocked this door. There were about two, three hundred black kids in this one big room. I think that could have been the auditorium. All these kids was in that one big room. And when they saw me—the kids in the neighborhood all knew me—they jumped up hollering, “Marzette, Marzette, they tried to kill Pecker today,” because we all called him Pecker. “They tried to kill Pecker today.”

So when I looked, I saw him and he looked over at me and tears was coming out of his eyes. But this girl had taken his shirt off him and she took his shirt and was catching the blood that was flowing from him. And I said they're going to let my child bleed like this? And it took me this long to get way over to Ed Von Tobel and they was much closer to North Las Vegas Hospital than me. They could have taken him, but instead they locked him in. Didn't try to Band-Aid him. Didn't try to clean him up. Didn't try to do nothing. Some child took it upon herself to take his shirt off his body and catch the blood and try to keep the blood from just going everywhere.

So when he saw me he jumped up and he came to me and he just broke, broke away from me. I tried to grab him and I couldn't. I guess he was going to look for them. He just took off running down the hall. I asked one boy, I said, “Try to go catch him.” He said, “We're not going to be able to catch him.” He said, “He's mad.” I said, “Well, what happened?” They really didn't know what happened.

Finally now here come the principal. He said to me that what had happened the day before, a white boy had got beaten by three black boys the day before. So they decided that they was going to retaliate and get them a black boy.

So my son was kind of a loner because I didn't let him associate too much with the kids in the neighborhood because I was in kind of a rough neighborhood at that time. That's when

drugs and stuff started to come into the neighborhood, the gangs had started to come in. So when he came home from school, he had to come home. He couldn't get off the bus and stop at anybody's house. He had to get off the bus, which was about a block and a half from the house, and come straight to the house. And when he did, he came in and ate, did what he had to do, did his homework, and this was where he stayed. Most of the time until bedtime if we had to go shopping or do something, or go to a movie or whatever we did, we did it.

It hurts so bad to talk about this because what happened to him was so—when I got him to the hospital, they sewed him up. And the doctor was my doctor, our family doctor. He said, “I'm not going to even charge you for this because this is a disgrace what they've done to this child.” They beat him with nunchucks, brass knuckles, chains, all kinds of things. He was just beaten and his eye was closed shut. So the doctor had to wrap his head and wrap one side of his face. I think it was his left side. He was on TV for two or three days. They showed him on TV, because at that time Ruby Duncan and Katherine Joseph—Katherine Joseph, I don't know whether you know her.

**Yes, I do.**

She lived right across the street from me. So they rented buses and we got those kids on buses and we went out to the school district. I call it Capitol Hill. We went out to the school district. And Bernice Moten, who was on our board of trustees, I called her and she met us out there. She said instead of here, we're going back to the school. So we took the buses and we went to the school, back to Ed Von Tobel.

**So was this the next day or the same day?**

No. No. This was the same day, because the same day, by the time we had got through and I had raised so much hell over there, the kids set the school on fire.

**Which day was this, now?**

This was the same day that this happened to my son.

**The black kids set the school on fire?**

The black kids set the school on fire. They burned up Hollingsworth Motorcycle. They set three or four cars on fire. And they said I was behind it all. Now, how could I be behind it all when I'm at the hospital getting my child sewed up? These kids was mad because they had been stuck in that room. It was in the wintertime. But to stick some kids in a room with no ventilation and no windows and no nothing that they could see out, a dark room that all these kids was in, these kids were mad. So when they got out of there, they went through that school and I guess they decided, well, we're going to show them what we can do. You did this to us; we're going to do something back to you.

So the next couple of days is when we got Kenny Guinn. Kenny Guinn came over to Ed Von Tobel. We went over there with the buses and the parents from the neighborhood. When Kenny Guinn came in, the white parents, they were so angry. They were just angry because they didn't want the black kids in Ed Von Tobel in the first place when they was integrated. It was just an awful scene. And they were screaming and hollering at me. Well, naturally, I start screaming and hollering back at them. Then Bernice Moten wrote a note to me. She said, "Don't fight with the parents; they can't do nothing. Keep going after Kenny Guinn." She said, "Wear him out." And I just kept working him overtime about what had happened.

**So where were you?**

We was in Ed Von Tobel's gymnasium—not the gymnasium, it was that same room, so I think that was the auditorium, that same room where I found him at the day that he was beaten.

I worked on Kenny Guinn's nerves so bad that when I told him I wanted my child out of

that school and he said I can't do that; I can't move him out of his zone, I said, oh, yes, you're going to move him out of the zone. He's going to go to the school that I want him to go to. That was Garside Middle School. I forgot the name of the school before when we was talking, but it was Garside that he went to. He said, well, we have no transportation for him. I said, well, next you get some transportation for him. You can have a truancy officer, anybody to come pick him up and take him to school, but he won't come back over here. He said, well, then if he got over there, he can't play ball. I said you have to be crazy. You have lost your mind. I just went at him with all I had. I said he's going to play ball at any school in this district he wants to play ball at.

I didn't have a clue as to what I was doing. Like I'm saying, I'm grassroots all the way. I didn't have a clue. But I knew this was my child; I had to help my son.

When I got through fighting with Kenny Guinn that day, he got transportation for him to go to Garside. He had it where he could go to Western and play football. He was on junior varsity. And from there he was supposed to go to I think it was Valley for his high school. So when he left Garside Junior High School, he went to Western High School where I wanted him to go. I didn't want him to go to Valley because that's where all the kids in the neighborhood and all that stuff had started.

So anyway, they didn't want him to play football over there, but the coach wanted him. And I said, well, he's going to play. I said I don't have no doubt in my mind that my child is going to play whatever sports he wants to play. So he wanted to basketball and football. He was into everything, and track and field, because he got a scholarship and all that stuff.

About three or four weeks maybe after he got to Garside I got a phone call from a teacher. She said her name was Manns and she asked me would I come over to the school. She

wanted to talk to me. I said, oh, Lord, what is going on now? So I said, “What's wrong with my child?” She said, “There's absolutely nothing wrong with him. He hasn't done anything. I want to talk to you. I want to see you.” So I said, “Okay, I'll be over there in a little bit.”

So I got dressed and went over there. She said, “I just wanted to look at the woman who raised this boy.” She said, “He's the only child that has been bussed into this school out of West Las Vegas that can read, write and comprehend.” I said, “What?” She said “The kids from West Las Vegas cannot read and write.” She said, “They don't understand. And he's the only one.”

So he had to do a paper one day and we were going to do the paper on Harriet Tubman. So we went to the library. We couldn't find no books, no black books.

**In which library?**

West Las Vegas Library, the one on D Street.

**Oh, the one on D Street.**

Yes, there was a library right there.

**Is this the library that got started because of Ruby Duncan?**

Yes. It was right where the Muslim church is there.

**Where the Cove Hotel used to be.**

Across the street from that. Now, Ruby was at the Cove. But the library started across the street, which right now that building is still in operation because, like I said, the Muslims have it for their church.

We went in that library. We couldn't find any books. I said, okay, I know the story. We're going to go back home and we're going to write from what I know about Harriet Tubman when I went to school. So we wrote it and he made an “A” on that report.

At the bottom of the report I said you put down there that you had no black books; that there were no black books in that library for us to find anything on any blacks. They had little old paperback novels, entertainment novels for people to read. And Ruby, they didn't know no better. They just knew we needed a library. So they had to start from somewhere.

When he wrote that paper and he made that “A” on that paper with them not knowing that I had to tell him everything almost to write because he didn't know anything about Harriet Tubman. He had never been taught all this stuff.

So when she told me that, I just could not believe that our kids are not being educated. What's wrong? But when he came from school every day, like he told me, he said, “My best education came from West Las Vegas,” since he's been grown. He said, “I didn't learn nothing at those white schools.”

### **Why weren't the other black kids learning like he was?**

I think it was because maybe the parents, because most of the parents had migrated in here from Louisiana and Mississippi and all the southern states and they couldn't read and write. So if they can't read and write, naturally they can't teach the kids. So if they can't teach the kids when you've got a white establishment that don't want your child to learn, they're not going to learn.

### **Who were the teachers in the West Las Vegas schools?**

Well, we had a lot of light-skinned—they picked the lightest skinned people they could find when they started building the schools in West Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, because I was in North Las Vegas where they had Kit Carson [Elementary School], Jo Mackey [Middle School]—what's the one where they said he was too big when he went to school?

### **Kermit Booker?**

No. Kermit Booker is in Las Vegas, but I was in North Las Vegas. Jo Mackey. They had



Quannah McCall [Elementary School], which they call West Las Vegas, which I say it's not, and CVT Gilbert. CVT Gilbert is where he started off. He went to Kit Carson kindergarten here and CVT Gilbert was where they said he was too big and was afraid of him. The teacher was afraid of him in her classroom and had to put him out of her classroom because she was scared. He was bigger than she was and she had never taught anybody that was larger than she was. And he was a first grader. Now, she knew that he was a first grader. And when the principal called me to come up there, I was mad. I was mad. You can't believe what I said to the principal because he was—my brother was married to his daughter; let's put it that way.

**Your brother was married to whose daughter?**

The principal that was at CVT Gilbert. So I asked him, I said, “You mean to tell me that you're going to move my child?” He said, “Marzette, we need to integrate and we want this to go smoothly. Just let's move him to another class.” I said, “Why can't she be moved? Move her. She should be out of the district,” I said, “because if she knew she was going to teach somewhere, you'd think that she knew she was going to teach someone bigger than her and especially if she was coming to integrated schools she was going to teach black children.”

So I eventually asked a black counselor why was the white folks so afraid of the black folks? I said, “What have we done to make these white folks so afraid of these children?” She said, “Marzette, anytime you've been oppressed and these people know what they've done to the black folks,” she said, “they're scared of retaliation; the day is coming.” She said, “And they're afraid of black folks because they don't know when it's coming.” She said, “But it's coming.”

**So tell me about—the teacher had told you that your son was the only one who could read and comprehend. So why weren't the teachers teaching all kids?**

Like I say, I don't know because I did my teaching with mine at home. I helped him every night

when he came home with homework.

**I thought the teachers in the Westside Schools were black teachers.**

Most of them were black teachers, but very light-skinned at that particular time and then some of them were biracial. I'm sure they were biracial. But now, Mr. Evans was very dark, Bill Evans, very dark, and he was the principal up there. Like I say, most of those teachers had just got out of college, they just came here, they didn't know what was going on, why it was so different in Las Vegas than it was anywhere else, and why these kids were started being bussed out in the early sixties. Nobody could understand the system, what was going on. My son wasn't supposed to go to Garside. But the kids that were going to Garside where he went, they came out of the projects. So these were projects children that he was going to school with. He didn't come from the projects. He came from a neighborhood, a home.

**Okay. I see what you're saying.**

So these women were on welfare, trying to get food stamps, fighting for everything. I guess they couldn't read and write. They didn't have time to go check on the kids. They didn't help and the teachers didn't help. I guess the teachers said if you can't come to the school—because, see, I'm not going to send my child off to nobody's school if I don't know how to get there myself. I'm going to be the first somebody to go before my child goes. I'm going to check the school out. I want to know how to get there if they call me. Like Ed Von Tobel, when they called me I knew exactly how to get to Ed Von Tobel. When they called me I knew exactly how to go up that hill to CVT Gilbert. I said I'll be there in a few minutes.

**So how did the conversation end with you and the teacher at CVT Gilbert?**

Ms. Manning. Well, it ended with us—she hugging me, me hugging her. She's telling me, Mrs. Durr, keep up the good work for what you're doing with this child because this child—I mean

she just fell in love with him because he could read and write and comprehend and understand. But it was never a problem for him. He was one of those gifted kids, I guess. Some kids got to study, just got to stay in that book to get a “C.” Some kids can look at a book and make an “A,” and he was one of those types of kids.

But my daughter, now, Tracy, had to study. She had to study hard for everything she got. She had to stay in that book. She still couldn't get those A's and B's like he did. If she got B's she'd halleluiah; “Momma, I got a 'B,'” because most of the time she was getting C's.

**I want to ask you another question before we go on. Why wasn't there a school nurse at Von Tobel School?**

They didn't have nurses at any schools that I knew anything about at that particular time. I had never heard of any of the schools having nurses. If they did, she sure didn't come and touch that little black boy. And I'm sure if there would have been a nurse, she was going to be white because every staff member there was white Mormons. That's when Kenny Guinn went in and investigated and found it out and he said there will never be another school with only one religion in the school. The only somebody that wasn't Mormon was the janitor who opened the door to that room where they had locked the kids in. So that's how that got where they started putting a black here and a black there in different schools because most of the schools just had white folks in them. Let's just tell it like it is. Most of the schools had whites. That was in West Las Vegas, also, young white women. It's still going on to this day and this is why I cannot understand it. But my child, he made it through because I had put a foundation on him in early life.

**So you just said something about even today—we're talking about 2012—the same thing is going on. So why do you say that?**

Because I see it every time I go into these schools. I see it with my own eyes. I'm constantly going into schools. And when I go into these schools and I see—you take the first child (sic) that our children have to relate to at preschool, because the white women are afraid to teach the older kids, if they've got to come into West Las Vegas, they want to come into elementary and teach pre-K and kindergarten. So that's their role model. So now kids are emulating these whites. They want to be white. They want their hair straight. They don't want to have kinky hair. They want to know why am I black and go touch the white teachers' skins and want to know why are you this color and why am I black? I've seen all this in these schools. I've seen so much till...

**Do you still see that now, today?**

Oh, I've seen it in recent years. When Fitzgerald [Elementary School] was first open, I've seen little black children go up to the white teachers and want to know why—let them play with their hair, let them pull on their blond hair, and why is your hair this color? Just little silly questions that they would ask them. So they knew then that there was a difference there. I'm one color and then my teacher's another color. And they was trying to emulate their teachers. They wanted to be like their teachers. So this is where we destroy our kids is in the pre-K, kindergarten, first, second and third grade. That's where they got them. By the time they get to fourth grade they don't know who they are. They don't know what race they are. They don't know where they came from. All they know is that—my daughter will tell you to this day she never had a black teacher. She never had a black teacher and she's 43 years old—42 or 43. She was born in 1969. She said, “Momma, I never had a black teacher.” But now, Anyika, he had black teachers, but most of them was light-skinned. That's where he say he got his best education from, before they started bussing them out.

So after Ms. Manning, after he left Garside [Middle School] and went to Western [High School], well, now he gets all these racist coaches. They were racist. They had some racist coaches over there. Those black boys, you had to be ten times better to make the team. That poor child was so sick one day and I said, now, this is my child. I don't care if he is a starter; he can't go to school in this condition. I'm taking him to the doctor, because he had a fever of a hundred and two. He was sick. He said, "Momma, if you make me stay at home, I won't be a starter."

I've got to back up here. Over at Ed Von Tobel [Middle School], if the parents didn't come—he was on the basketball team over there—and if the parents did not come to the games, the black children couldn't play.

**What do you mean couldn't play?**

They wouldn't let them play. They had the games in the afternoon. And if the black parents didn't come to the school, the black children didn't play. So I made sure mine got in two minutes. They called him the 'two-minute man.' I would take off every—I think it was on Wednesdays when they played over there—and I would go to that school to make sure that child got his little time in. And sometimes the school—that was at Von Tobel where he had gotten beat when he played basketball.

**So now, what about the other black kids who were at Von Tobel?**

If the parents didn't show, they didn't play. They sat on the bench. I don't care how good they were.

**So if two or three black parents showed up, it didn't make any difference; that child's parent had to be there?**

Yes, that child's parent had to be out there because they wanted to make sure that those white

kids got the playing time. When I'd be there, mine would get in like two minutes. Sometimes he would go out and he would score six, eight points, and the scores would end like ten to twelve. In two minutes he scored six and eight of the points, almost all the points. Now, I'm not lying. God knows I'm not lying.

If they go back and investigate this stuff or bring some of these people up from the grave and tell the things that I took—and if I took it, I know other parents would take it more than me because I was very outspoken. I wasn't going to let nobody walk on me. And I'd tell them quick, you can mess with me anytime you want because I can handle me, but don't mess with my children, don't mess with my dog, and don't mess with my husband. I can defend me, but I'll fight for them.

When I saw that type of racism going on, that you can't let a child play unless the parent comes—and he practiced with your team, unbelievable. All they wanted was to make sure those white children learned the game. They practiced with those (white) kids, but they had to sit their behinds on the bench during game time because all these white parents were there. They were the Booster Club and they wanted to make sure that their children played ball. They didn't want to see those black kids on the court. But if they looked up and they saw a black parent and they knew that black parent's son that belonged to that black parent, that child was going to play two minutes, two minutes. Ms. White, you just don't know what I've gone through. This story could go on forever, but I know we need to go on to something else.

From that, when he went to Western, after leaving Garside—Garside we had no problems. I made sure he got over to Western because now Kenny Guinn is involved with me all the way. He got from Garside to Western, from Western to home. I either brought him home or they brought him home on a late bus. He played basketball, he played football, and he was a

shot putter on the track team. The night when I got ready to leave going to Germany, Kenny Guinn came up to me and said, "You made a man tonight," because he did an open-field tackle. And I didn't know that much about football, but I didn't miss a game. I didn't ever miss a game. He'll tell anybody my momma was at every game that I had. He came up to me that night in the stands and he said, "Marzette, he became a man tonight." He said, "That open-field tackle that he did made him a man." "That was his last game," he said, "and now, when you leave here I'm going to make sure that this child gets what he's supposed to have because he's working towards his scholarship. I'm going to send you a report, make sure that you get a report in Germany on his progress while you are there." Anyika didn't want to go to Germany. He said he had already been to a foreign country because, like I said, he was out there with the Junior Olympics. And he said I've been to a foreign country; I went to Lincoln, Nebraska. He said so I want to stay here and graduate with my friends. I said fine and dandy. So he lived with my sister and Frank Hawkins' momma for a while and Frank. Then when he graduated he went off on his own. I told him everything he had to do and to make sure your counselor knows where you're supposed to go. He got a scholarship and he went to Reno.

**So Frank Hawkins' mother, Daisy?**

Daisy Miller.

**Now, how is she related to you?**

She's not.

**Oh. Who was related to you?**

The sister that I first left him with. Her name is Bobbie. But he didn't want to stay with her, he said, because coming up time to graduation and the money that I was sending him and the money that he was getting from his dad, he said every time he got money they wanted to borrow

it. See, I was paying her a hundred dollars a month for him to stay there and buying all his food. He said every time he got a nickel in his pocket—and he was working after school—and he said they'd want his money. And he just got tired of them taking his money. So Daisy took him in and he stayed with Frank and Daisy for a while, because he was blocking for Frank on the football team. He was Frank's blocker. But Frank is a couple of years or a year older than him.

**So he just found himself a home?**

Yes. He stayed there. When he got out of high school, he went that summer and stayed with his dad in Wisconsin. The next summer he came to Germany to us. After he spent that summer with his dad, he came back and had a scholarship and went on to Reno.

**And that's where Frank was.**

That's where Frank was. Frank had been there a year. So he went on to Reno and he started playing ball up there and on the track team. He said, “Momma, I couldn't take the cold.” He wrote me a letter and he said, “Momma, I couldn't take the cold; I had to leave Reno.” He said, “It was too cold for me to practice outside.” He said, “So I went to Arizona.” So he went to Arizona for a while and he didn't like Arizona. But the scholarship stayed with him. Then he left there and went to a junior college. Instead of a university he went to a junior college in—San Bernardino? ... Pasadena. He went to Pasadena City College and he played football at Pasadena City College. He started there. When he got out and got his AA degree, he left there and went to San Jose State. That's where he stayed, at San Jose State. He came to Germany and spent one summer with us. Then when we went to North Dakota, he spent a summer there with us. But he was now a man and on his own, working, because he'd work construction during the summer, make money to go to school with, still had a scholarship. So he did all right for himself. Then when he got out of school, he became a fireman and now he's retired at 52 years



old. He retired from the fire department and now he's teaching non-English-speaking students at the library to learn to speak English.

**I would like to interview your son.**

Oh, my god, you would have an interview.

**Okay, great. So now, you came back to Las Vegas in 1982.**

To live.

**But you left in '77. So before you left in '77, did you do anything with Ruby Duncan and her group?**

Oh, yes.

**Explain that to me and tell me what was happening.**

Oh, with Ruby Duncan, I marched with her. I was her Head Start director. She was the only black, I think, that really had a Head Start center in her name. They couldn't find anybody who had a high school diploma or who had graduated high school and started college. So they came to my sister Mary, who said, well, my sister has one. So that's the way she got me as the teacher director and I went through EOB [Economic Opportunity Board]. I had worked with the children. I believe I had worked at Child Haven already with children. Yes, I had. I had worked at Child Haven for some time because I was one of the first blacks. There were four blacks hired the same day at Child Haven and one white. And that was back in 1960 something. I'm not sure about the dates, but I know it was in the late sixties or middle sixties because my son was like four years old or five years old when I went to Child Haven.

After working with Ruby Duncan, I did the after-school program, feeding program for the children. I fixed lunches for them in the summertime. I did the summer program. I even had a swimming pool renovated there at the Cove, the old Cove. They had taken the old Cove

swimming pool and had made a garbage dumpster out of it. It was like a landfill. So I went out and went to all these different swimming pool companies and asked them would they help to renovate that pool so our kids would have somewhere to swim because they were too poor. They didn't want them at the city pool downtown. So our kids needed to learn to swim, too. I went to these people. Those folks did not turn me down. I don't know what they saw in me. But they came and had construction people coming in there, taking out all that garbage and renovating that pool. They had to go in and almost just tear out and do it all over. They taught me how to be a lifeguard, even though I didn't know how to swim. It was so cute. They taught me how to use the net to bring a child in and how to throw a raft, all that. They taught me how to clean the pool, to backwash it, put the acid and the chlorine and all that stuff and learn how to do the backwashing, how long to keep the kids out of the pool to keep them from anything happening to them with that acid and chlorine. So you'd have to bring them out every so often and then you'd have to backwash the pool. I learned to do all that.

So some of the kids, like Ruby Duncan's son, Dave Phillips—he was telling somebody one day, “That woman could make the best peanut butter and jelly sandwiches I ever ate in my life. Those peanut butter and jelly sandwiches—we used to have the best lunches.” I didn't fix the lunches; somebody else was fixing lunches, but he thought I was doing it. All the kids in Las Vegas still know me. The other day I went down a street and some boy saw me and he screamed, “Marzette,” and I stopped and I looked and they come, just surrounded. They've grown up and they've done turned into men and they've got children and all this. I told them I was so proud of them, because some of them was really demons in the neighborhood. I was really thinking they would end up probably in jail or somewhere dead or in some of these gangs and things, the way they was going. And now they got families. They're fixing up their houses

and looking like—they're not sagging anymore because I used to get on them about sagging because there was no way I was letting my child walk out the door without a belt. He had to have a belt on. And even the foster kids, they had to have belts on.

But these were some of the kinds of things that took place. I stayed with Ruby for—I got a stipend of ninety-three dollars a month that was from some—I don't know who paid her, but I think she was paid by the government some kind of way. She had got a grant.

**She had grants.**

Yes, she had grants. And some way they got me 93 dollars. And I said, now, I can't continue to live off of this ninety-three dollars. But now, when I got the Head Start job, that was the most money I had ever made in my life.

**How much was that?**

I was making something like I think it was 12 dollars an hour.

**So that was through EOB [Economic Opportunity Board].**

That was through EOB.

**Now, did you know Lubertha Johnson?**

Yes.

**Now, did Lubertha Johnson also work for Head Start through EOB at one time?**

Lubertha Johnson had her own childcare, but I don't know whether she had EOB because my daughter, Tracy, went to Lubertha's childcare center because she was over there at the Westside School for a long time. She had that center. And Tracy, I know, I took her over there for about a year. But I can't remember whether Ms. Johnson had a Head Start center. Now, that I don't know.

But Ruby, her Head Start center only lasted for about a year or a year and a half or so, if

it was that long. No, I don't think it lasted that long because she got into it with EOB and EOB got into it with them and they was going back and forth with the government grants and the monies and all of this and they closed it.

But I was on the outskirts of town. I was the only Head Start center that had white kids. I had three white kids in my Head Start center. We was at the old Presbyterian church that was on the corner of Charleston and Martin Luther King, well, Charleston and Highland now. You know where it is?

**Yes, yes.**

They have a great big, huge Presbyterian church that burned down years later after we were out there. Now they got a service station and stuff all built up in there. But that's where I was. That was in 1974 or '75, I believe.

**So how much did you know about EOB and how it operated, anything?**

I didn't know too much about EOB and how it operated. All I knew it was government, some kind of way tied in with the government.

That's where I really found a true love for children, to see the type of background some of those kids was coming from. I used to have fundraisers and we raised enough money to take two busloads of those children to Disneyland. I had all the parents and the children. We left at four o'clock in the morning. We got down there. Thank God we had some older kids on the buses with us. But we had all our Head Start children and all their families who wanted to go. We had raised all this money, raffling off this and raffling off that and selling hot dogs and stuff in the community. We raised the money to take them to Disneyland. Some of those kids tell me today they had never had cereal with sugar on it until they came to my Head Start center. They said because their momma always bought cereal with no sugar and I had the sugar. Days that

we would have cereal, sugar was already on it. Like Sugar Corn Pops or something, they'd have sugar on them. When those kids told me that, it's just things that you can't believe, like kids say the darnedest things. Kids will tell you everything.

That's why I learned so much about what was happening in the school district was from the children in the neighborhood because I was a neighborhood candy lady and they would come to me and buy stuff out of the candy store, from hot dogs to hamburgers to chili cheese nachos.

**You were selling it from where?**

Out of my house. I had it in my house. All the kids in the neighborhood, every child knew me from three or four neighborhoods around Helen, Delmonico. You know where Delmonico is? That's right behind the Martin Luther King statue. That's called Delmonico. I lived on Helen Street.

**Oh, yes. Helen Street is where—**

Katherine Joseph lives. Well, everybody over there knows. Anytime you go through there and ask, Have you ever heard of a lady named Marzette? Everybody, “Yes, that's the candy lady,” if they see me in the mall, anywhere. Kids hollering, “That's our candy lady. There go the candy lady. There goes the nacho lady.”

**That's great.**

But that's why I learned a lot of stuff from children coming up in that house when they would get off those school buses and was telling me what was going on. And this is when—we might be jumping a little bit, but I think we're going in the right direction of where we're supposed to be going. When my foster boy got sexually molested on that school bus, it came from a child out of the neighborhood. He told it.

**Okay. So I didn't know about that. You had some foster children; I knew that. So was he molested by another student?**

Yes, three students. On the front seat. And see, I had told him—he had gone through—this was still sixth grade centers. You remember when they brought the sixth grade centers in and our kids were bussed out for 30 years and they only spent one year in the neighborhood and that was in the sixth grade year and then they were right back out to another—

**Before you tell me about your foster child, when they started those sixth grade centers, what did you have to say about that to the school board? Did you fight that?**

I fought that. That's what I went out on, getting them sixth grade centers out. That was the first thing I wanted—

**But during the time that they came in?**

No. I was young and getting ready to—my life, my children. Like I say, they didn't have to go to the sixth grade centers because I was getting ready—Tracy went through kindergarten. She went through kindergarten here. First grade year she spent only about four weeks at Tomiyasu [Elementary School] and I didn't want her to be on that bus. But she was on that bus for about four weeks going to Tomiyasu and I had to go out there and raise cane out there because the first day she was out there she got left. The school bus left her and they called me and told me to come get her.

**So which year was that?**

Tracy was born in '69. That was '76 because we left here in November of '77. No. It was '77 when this happened. This was in 1977 when Tracy got left at the school because in November I left here going to Germany. She was in the first grade, but she only went there for three or four weeks. Like I say, I never had to go through that sixth grade center stuff. When we came back,

see, she was in the seventh grade. She was in junior high, so she was out of that. She never went through it. Anyika never had to go through bussing with the sixth grade center. So I don't know too much about those parents, what all they really had to put up with for 30 years of bussing until the foster children came along.

**Your foster child who was molested on the bus, what year was that approximately?**

That was a sixth grade center thing. That was in 1991. 1991 I think it was. He was ten months old when I got him. He was born in '85. Yes, I think it was '91.

I told them, I said, how you going to send him—because, see, I wasn't really sure what was going on because I had had my own childcare center since I had been back from Germany. I was running a childcare center out of my house. I left my home and had rented it out while I was in Germany. So I built the garage into a childcare center. So I was so involved with the children and the childcare center till I really wasn't thinking about what was going on in the school district because my son was out of school and Tracy was in middle school and high school. So I don't have a clue that these children were really still being bussed out. So when John went to first grade at Booker—not first grade, kindergarten—when he went to kindergarten at Booker and when time come for him to go to his next school, I'm thinking it's going to be Booker. I hadn't really thought about sixth grade centers. So when they told me he was going to Tomiyasu, I said, “He's going to Tomiyasu?” I said, “For what reason?” They said, “Because you have no elementary schools over here; these are sixth grade centers.”

So I found out that they had not done anything in 30 years. Nothing had been changed. These children are still being bussed out and I thought about what I had gone through the first day that Tracy went to Tomiyasu, which was 30 years before. I had to go out there to get her and by the time I got out there, they lied and said I came out there with a gun and all that stuff, which

was a lie—I didn't; but if I had had one, I probably would have used it. But when I got home the truancy officer called. Well, Ms. Lewis, she got left; we're going to have the truancy officer to bring her home, but she won't be coming home on the bus because she got on the wrong bus. By her getting on the wrong bus—little child just leaving her momma going to first grade, she doesn't know anything about getting on any bus. And they probably didn't tell them the numbers. If they did, she probably didn't remember those four or five numbers that they had to remember to get on those buses because you had up to fifth graders out there, see, from first graders up through fifth graders.

They were feeder schools, 65 different feeder schools. This is when the gangs and things started coming. You had buses going north, south, east and west in that neighborhood right where I stayed. They were putting those kids in all these different schools to integrate. They had to integrate. This was the best that we could get with our kids eleven years being bussed out and their kids only being bussed out for one year? That's racism and it's racism in anybody's book. Any way you cut it, slice it, dice it, it's racism and it was blatant racism.

And they didn't teach our kids anything. When you go in those classrooms, I've seen kids sitting in the hallways eating out of plates like they were dogs. I've seen them out on the playground taking care of themselves. Ask him, "Demika, what are you doing out on the playground by yourself?" Because see, I'd walk up on the school; they'd never know when to expect me because I'd just get up and say I'm going to check, just checking. I went to Tomiyasu one day and I saw this little boy from the neighborhood and he was on the playground by himself. And I said, "What are you doing out here on the playground by yourself?" He and my little boy, John, were the same age. He said, "The teacher said I was disturbing the class and told me to go outside and play." So they sent him out, no aide. They didn't know what an aide



was.

I was the one who brought the aides in. I had read a book in Indiana. Before any bus left the bus yard, there was an aide on that bus. That was in a little, small state of Indiana. I think it was Indiana. If I'm correct it was Indiana, small state. But they had an aide on every bus. And our kids were being bussed out 20 and 30 miles. There were 85 kids on the bus that John was on. And you're going to put that many kids on a bus and going that far on a freeway with nobody watching those kids? Now, this had been going on for 30 years. So before the freeways got out, they was going down these back roads, which was taking them three and four hours to get to these schools because they had all these lights and stop signs to stop at and all the traffic they had to put up with before they got the freeway. So I can imagine all our kids raised themselves on the buses. The buses were the babysitters because by the time they get to school, school was probably time for recess.

When I saw Demika on that playground that day, I went in the principal's office and I asked, "What is Demika doing out on that playground? He tells me he's acting up in the classroom and the teacher told him to come out." I said, "But that child is out there by himself with no supervision." The principal said, "Well, I didn't know that." I said, "Well, he is."

Then I looked down the hallway and I saw another little boy. It was close to lunchtime or it was lunchtime. He was sitting in the hallway eating out of a plate like a dog. I said these folks better wake up and come check on their children and see what's going on at these schools.

When I went into John's room, he was the only black child in that room and his face was facing the wall and his desk was facing the wall and this woman was teaching. That's why I told you our kids didn't get no education in these schools. She was teaching all these other children. This was after the sexual molesting thing when they called—was it before? Yes, that was a little

bit after that because he stayed in that school for two more days, or three.

**When you went to the school, had he already been sexually molested?**

No, not then. See, I went to the school before that, before he had been sexually molested, and he was sitting facing the wall. I looked and I saw all these white children and then this woman is teaching them. I said, “What is my child doing facing the wall, sitting over there with a pencil?” “He just distracts the class. He's just fidgety. He's just doing something.”

They made the state put that child on medication. That's how come so many of our kids are messed up, because the medication, five and six different types of medication that these psychiatrists are prescribing for them to take and it's wrong. They got them so messed up and so drained out at school till they're in la-la land. They don't know who they are, where they are. So they can't learn. When you're like this in a classroom, what are you learning?

And she told me the reason his back was to the classroom and his face was to the wall because he was disturbing the class and she couldn't teach the other kids. But they had to integrate, so they had to keep him. That's what they wanted to do. All right, well, he got sexually molested—

**So he was on the bus.**

When the sexual molestation?

**Yes.**

Yes. They picked him up after I told them, I said, this child is not—I told Ms. Wisdom, I said, “Ms. Wisdom, that child is not capable of riding no bus with no 85 kids all the way out to Tomiyasu,” I said, “because I know what Tomiyasu is because my daughter, they sent her there, and she went there for two or three weeks before we went to Europe.” I said, “That was the worst experience I ever had.” I said, “After 30 years you mean to tell me they haven't built any

more schools any closer that these children could go to that's closer than Tomiyasu?" They had built them or it was already there because they was passing eight, ten, twelve schools to get to Tomiyasu. Well, Tomiyasu, nothing but whites lived out there. So they had to get some blacks into those schools for desegregation, to integrate these schools. So our children were just picked on. And I felt like this was just inhumane to what they was doing to them.

And then when he came up a few weeks—he was just in the school a few weeks before he was sexually molested on that school bus. That's when I went out to that school district.

**So how did you find out?**

A child in the neighborhood told the mother. When he got home, he told his mom that a little boy on the bus they call Johnny Be Good—says his momma lives down the street, she's the 'candy lady'—says it was three older boys, because some of those kids were being dropped off at high school. They had high school kids on those buses. They was being dropped off at—what was the name of that school out there going to Henderson? Whatever. But they had high school kids on those buses, everything. They dropped a few high school kids off at their school. They dropped the junior high school kids off. And then if they had to pick up some white kids, they'd keep the front seats for the white kids and all the black kids who got on first, they had to go to the back of the bus. Well, I told them with John in the condition he was in, I wanted him to always sit on the front seat of the bus.

**Now, what condition was he in?**

He had ADHD and all of these things.

**So he was hyperactive.**

Yes. And had learning disabilities and ADHD—all of that. They had diagnosed him and said he'll never learn to read and write. Everybody used to come to the house. He could make him

five dollars just like that by programming their cell phones. The kids didn't know how to program their cell phones, and that child could program those cell phones just like this [snapping]. But this is the child that will never learn to read and write.

When this boy told his momma, the momma came to my house—no, the momma didn't come to my house. I'm wrong. He went and told his momma what had happened on the school bus that day. The next day—now, John was put back on that school bus because I didn't know it. And the next day the woman called the school. They had put her boys off the bus. They had acted up on the bus. They were big boys; they were like in the fifth grade or something. They had acted up on the school bus. They had put her two boys off the bus and said they couldn't ride no more. They expelled them from the bus for a while or whatever. So she went out there and she said a little boy named Johnny that goes to school out here was sexually molested on the school bus by three other boys. They made him perform oral sex on them on the front seat of the bus and nobody told the parent.

So now, after she did that the principal got scared. She knew it all the time. She knew it the day before when it happened, but she didn't call anybody, didn't tell anybody. It was just going to be swept under the rug if this parent hadn't showed up when they put her kids off the bus. And she wasn't going to tell me because she had just moved in the neighborhood and she really didn't know me. But the kids knew me from coming down, buying nachos and stuff. That's the way they knew John. But the momma didn't know me.

I was out in the mall shopping. That was when these big cell phones just come out, like (big hammer). Lou had bought me one, he said, Because you need a cell phone as much as are behind these kids.” See, I'm running to doctors' appointments and all that. So he got me a cell phone. So sure enough, he called. And he never calls unless something is wrong. He's not

going to touch the telephone. So he called and he said, “Where are you?” I said, “I’m at the Meadows Mall.” He said, “Well, come home.” Right away I knew it was something wrong with John. I said, “What’s wrong with John, Lou?” He said, “Marzette, just get in the car and come home.” I said, “Lou, what’s wrong with John?” He said, “Get in the car and come home.” I had all this stuff because they did layaways at that time, right? I had all this stuff piled up there on the counter and I told the lady, I said, “Put it back; I’ve got to go.” And I went out and got in the car and came home.

I said, “Lou, what is it?” He said, “Marzette, you’re not going to believe what I’ve been told today.” I said, “What?”

**Who told him?**

The principal.

**The principal called on the telephone?**

After the parent, because she got scared. He said the principal called from Tomiyasu and said that twelve children came into her office and the bus driver—now, this is just disgraceful—and the bus driver and told her that the day before John had been sexually abused or sexually molested, whatever they wanted to call it, by three other boys out of the neighborhood on the school bus. The bus driver say he could hear it. He could hear all the kids laughing and giggling. John was on medication. Like I say, he was just messed up. I told them he wasn’t capable of riding—he needed to be on one of those little handicap buses and they told me they didn’t have no handicap bus for him. They wanted to get that number up out at Tomiyasu.

When she told Lou to tell me if I wanted to call her—now, if I wanted to call her and talk to her about it that I could. But a parent had come to her office and told her, but she had also heard it the day before by the bus driver and twelve other children came to her office. Well,

right then she should have called the superintendent of schools. She should have called me. She should have called my husband. All of us should have been notified that day if it was at midnight, if it had happened that evening on the bus, but it happened that morning. It had gone all day and she didn't have time to stop. They wasn't going to call. They was going to shove it under the rug. But thank God for that mother and thank God for that bus driver putting those two boys off of that bus because if they hadn't I never would have known it because John was scared to tell it. He was not going to tell it. We took him to the police department.

**Took whom to the police department?**

John, to interview him because of what these boys had done. When John was trying to talk to them, trying to tell what was happening on the bus, they said to me—one of them knew my ex-husband who was a policeman—and he said to me, Mrs. Lewis, working with your husband, I was one of his partners, and he said that man could calm people down better than anybody I ever saw in my life and I know Spears and I know him well, he says, but we need to find out what really took place on that bus. He said and nobody is really talking and this child doesn't know how to explain it. He said but we can assure you—and that was the biggest lie I ever been told—that this child will never have to go to jail or anything, because of what has happened to him at this age in school. If he ever had to go to jail or something. That boy done been in jail three or four times, not for no sex stuff, but just little crazy stuff that he does in the neighborhood since he's been grown. I was out there fighting them last year in Henderson, getting him out of jail. They beat him up, talking about he was breaking and entering. How can you break and enter your own house? That was the craziest thing I ever heard in my life. And they beat that boy almost to death.

Ms. White, you just don't believe what I went through. And I went through about

twenty-five foster kids, but three of them I kept. I kept them from babies until they was grown. One of them was almost grown when he left; the other two were grown. I still deal with them, too.

But when she said if I wanted to talk to her that I could. I said, okay, I'm going to show her how I want to talk to her. I got in my car and I went out there. And when I looked at that black woman's face and saw that she was a biracial black woman—I knew she was biracial when I looked at her because that's all they put in them white schools is somebody that looks as close to them as possible—I said I don't believe what happened and you didn't tell it and you let all this go for almost two days. You got scared because of some parent threatening you about their kids, what you had done to their children. I said, you've got to be the lowest scum on the earth to have let this pass by any parent, especially because I'm a foster parent. What, do you think they pay me for these kids? I said, they don't pay me for these kids. They give me a little stipend of 200 dollars a month. You can't take care of a flea with two hundred dollars a month. I say I keep these kids because this is something I want to do.

I saw on the news one night where they said, Can I clothe my child? Yes or no. It was about foster kids. They said on the news that night that there were so many foster kids down at Child Haven, kids that needed to be out of Child Haven; they needed foster homes. And I said I'm going to give up this childcare center and I'm going to take in some foster kids. I've got to do something because I knew what took place down at Child Haven. I knew the condition of Child Haven because I had worked at Child Haven and I knew what I saw at Child Haven.

So I got licensed for one child. And the day I got the license for the one child they called me the next morning and they said they had a brother and a sister and could they bring them to me? I said I only have a license for one. They said, yes, but this is a brother and a sister and we

don't want to separate them. I got these two kids and I kept those kids for over three years. And during that time I got John. John was ten months old when they handed him to me. I knew there was something wrong with that baby when I looked at him; at ten months he couldn't even sit up. He was a milk baby. All that baby had was a milk bottle. She hadn't tried to feed him, hadn't tried to do nothing with him. He just stayed in a crib, I guess.

So when the caseworker brought him to me, she said, "Marzette, you're just going to love him to death." She said, "There were eight children in the house and something was going on wrong." Now, she was a white caseworker. I have to call names. They're racist with this stuff because the overhaul system with these children, from welfare to the school district to the jails and everywhere needs to be overhauled when it comes to our African- American children. They are putting too many of our children in these white homes, being adopted. And now they are making megabucks off of them; they're making two and three thousand dollars a month off one child. One policeman came to my house one day and told me he had him three and he was buying him a farm and they were going to pay for it. And I said, ooh, my god, what is going on here in society?

And I read a book; it was on the front page of the book. I got it somewhere in some of those books where over 500 kids in foster care have never been reported being killed, in foster care all over the country, but mostly down South. The whites were taking in these kids and getting money, and especially when the government started giving these big raises; that's when the whites started getting our kids. The reason they paid the whites more for taking care of the black children than they paid us, said because it was harder to take care of a black child than it is to take care of a white child. Now, can you believe?

I heard the judge—this came out of the judge's mouth. One day I was down there and he



said, “Marzette, when you comb a white child's hair,” because he knew I had two white kids, he said, “and the difference in combing a white child's hair and a black child's hair, you folks don't wash your hair but twice a week, do you?” I said, “What?” He said, “You don't wash your hair but once every two weeks.” I had an attorney. And I said, “What's wrong with you? What are you talking about?” I said, “You mean to tell me if one of my little foster kids goes outside and gets sand and dirt and stuff in their heads that when we give them a bath at night, we don't wash their hair?” He said, “Do you?” I said, “Yes, you wash their hair. You don't wait no every two weeks to wash a child's hair.” He said, “Well, I was told that black folks didn't wash their hair but once every two weeks.” He said, “It's harder to take care of a black child because black children have to have Vaseline and oil.” You name it, Gerald Hardcastle **Error! Bookmark not defined.** said it to me in the courtroom. It's just unbelievable, some of the things that I've gone through in my life. Tell me that I'm still alive and kicking. I said God must not be through with me yet. He must have something else because I didn't think I'd ever go through nothing like this. I really thought I'd probably end up in jail behind some of the stuff that I've gone through.

So when the judge told me that about the kids and these whites started adopting our children, I mean legally adopting them, getting money—what I couldn't understand is how you legally adopt the child and they still pay you the same thing they was paying you as a foster parent. You still get the same pay because they've done had this child diagnosed with all kinds of different illnesses, all kinds of ADHD, LD, you name it, they labeled them. And when you adopt them you still get your check. So every time you see a white woman that says she adopted this baby, tell her you're a liar. You didn't adopt this baby; you got this baby just to get that money because you're still getting paid by the state for this child. They legally go out and adopt them, just sign a piece of paper and they got them.

**So if a black parent adopts a black child—**

Now they get paid. But they still don't get paid what the whites get paid. If a white adopts a black child, they get paid more money unless they done did a hell of a lot of things from when I was a foster parent, which was just a few years ago. They get paid more, the whites, than we do because our children are harder to take care of. It takes too much time with a black child because you've got to braid the hair. You have to take them to the beauty shop to have the extensions. You have to have perms put on their hair. They said all this to me in the courtroom. I'm sitting there, the only black, and I'm fighting because I didn't care who I fought. I just fought. I just had to talk back. And the judge told me, "I'm going to get you for contempt." I said, "Well, you're just going to have to get me for contempt, because I'm going to have to tell the truth because this is wrong." I said, "It's wrong what the caseworkers are doing. It's wrong what all these bosses are doing." I said, "I've seen it with my own eyes."

I almost had a nervous breakdown listening and going through when foster care got so big and you got all these surrogate parents and then you got—what was that you call it?—CASA. CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) comes in. You don't know what the CASA program is?

**No.**

CASA is a program that these people go to class, go to school, because they want to help a child. They want to come into the homes, and after you done had the child five or six, seven years, and they want to take the child out for an hour or so for ice cream or take him to the park and play with him at the park and pump him for information as to what's going on in the homes and all of this. And they recruit these CASA people over the TV and things, in the newspapers. I had had John so long and they were going to give me a CASA for John. I said, "John doesn't know he's

a foster child,” because, see, I never told any of my foster kids. “This child doesn't know he's a foster child; this child thinks I'm his birthparent.” I say, “And if he has to have a CASA, then you take him out of my house. You take him out of here today.” They gave me a white attorney. I said, “Won't no white man come in my house and take no little black boy that I have raised from ten months old”—and he's now ten or eleven. What's he going to do with a CASA? He's in school. I hadn't done anything to him by now and he done been going to school all his life. No teacher has ever turned—all they have ever did was praise me for what I had done for the children in the district for my foster kids and if they ever needed anything, Marzette was right there. They could depend on me to come and chastise the kids and get the kids settled down because I knew how to work with them. And I said, “And you're going to send me a lawyer, a white man, up in my house with a black husband?” My husband doesn't know nothing about these folks. I said, “Take my child out?” I said, “It doesn't work like that with me.” I said, “So if you want him to have a CASA, then you take him out of here today.” I never had no more trouble with them sending a CASA to my house. Those kids were like my kids.

So now when I get kids, the little girls and little boys that I get—well, I had one little boy I kept three years; he never got a CASA. They never called me about a CASA because I was waiting for them to call about a CASA. I got another little girl—see, at one time I had six or seven in the house. But I never got a CASA after I went crazy on them that time about John, because it was not fair to him. One of the caseworkers told me after these children are twelve, thirteen years old, “Well, Marzette, if you don't tell them they are foster children, somebody has to tell them or you're going to have to adopt them.” I legally took John. I didn't adopt him; I just went down to Legal Aid and filled out some paperwork and stuff and I legally took him. That way it relieved them of a caseworker.

**It was like a legal guardianship.**

Legal guardianship, yes. So that way no caseworker ever came back to see him. I just got his little check every month.

**So what happened to John after you found out what had happened on the bus?**

That's when I went into crazy-ism. I went crazy and that's when I went to the school board. I got me eighteen women and we confronted the school district that night. Well, before that I had got John out of Tomiyasu.

**Oh, good. So how did you get him out of Tomiyasu?**

I told Brian Cram, "You send a limo here if you have to and send him to another school, but he can't go back to Tomiyasu." He said, "We don't have anywhere to send him, Marzette." You know where they sent the child? They did pick him up by car, but they took him all the way out to Kirk Adams, all the way down Lake Mead to the mountains, almost to Lake Mead to the Mormon Tabernacle.

**Oh, yes. I know where that is, Sunrise.**

Yes, Sunrise. You know where that is? From Helen Street. That's where they took that child. When I followed the bus or the car—they had him in a car—I followed the car, right behind them, to see where my child was going. When I got out there, I saw this big beautiful school, just open, really had not too many kids in it. I said I wonder why would they send this child—he's still passing a lot of schools. Don't they have no special ed classes? I mean it was a mess and this was the late eighties—no—this is the nineties. We're in the nineties. They still don't have no aides. They got nurses, one nurse working at three schools; here today and somewhere else two days and somewhere else another two days or something. It was awful. And then you got to send the medication and you don't know whether they're giving the

medication when they're supposed to give the medication or not. You just don't know nothing.

That was when I found out that was the only school that had an underground basement facility, bomb shelter. Like if a bomb threat happens, those Mormons and things could get down into the basement from that church. The church wasn't too far; you could see the church from the school. I mean I was just flabbergasted. I was truly outdone in some of the things that I saw that the school district was doing with our monies. And this is what made me so angry that our children was riding these buses. I stepped out in hell that day after this sexual molestation thing came up.

I called the news channel. The girl came over. They said I had hijacked a school bus. I didn't hijack no school bus; it was just the man across the street's son worked for the school district and he drove a bus. But he didn't live there, but his momma would always fix him his lunch and he'd park the bus and go inside and eat lunch at his momma's house. So when I saw him pull up out there and newsgirl was already at the house, we ran across the street and asked him could we use the bus to take pictures. So he said yes. So he said let me get all my stuff. So we got all his stuff off the bus, covered up his license tag, his number on his bus and everything where they couldn't tell whose bus it was. We got on the bus and I demonstrated to her on the bus—she filmed me—showing what had happened, what the bus driver and what the kids had said that had happened and how these boys had pulled down their pants and made John have oral sex with all three of them. Ooh.

What got me, those kids never served one day in juvenile. Those kids was in the fifth grade. Those kids never served one day in juvenile and kept going to school at Tomiyasu. Nothing never happened to them. That's what made me so angry when I started Westside Action Alliance Corps Uplifting People, WAAK-UP [pronounced wake up]. That's when I

went into action and I never stopped fighting them. Up until now I'm still fighting that district behind that child and what happened to him because I know if it happened to him—like I told them, they was running around talking about our children was having babies, getting pregnant at an alarming rate. I said they was getting pregnant on those buses. Wasn't nobody watching them. Those kids were baby-sitting themselves. Hormones acting up. Those teenagers, at a certain age, and you're not separating the boys from the girls, one on top of this one, that one on top of that one. Everything was going on on those buses. And those bus drivers couldn't see what was going on. I told them 90 percent of those kids who got pregnant got pregnant on those school buses. I guarantee you. If I had to put my neck on a chopping block, I do believe that that's where 90 percent of the children got pregnant from was on the school bus.

**Tell me about WAAK-UP; how you got it started, what some of your campaigns were?**

Well, when we first went out—the first day when I called a press conference for Brian Cram to come over to Booker, instead of Brian Cram showing up at Booker, there was myself, my husband, my son, his wife—I think there was five of us. No. It was four. My son, his wife and myself and my husband and the news media, we met at Booker, on the south side of Booker where the little kids' classrooms were. I had told Brian Cram that I wanted to meet him there, him to meet us there. Instead of him showing up—they wrote it in the paper; I got the paper somewhere in some of those boxes—instead of him showing up, they said Brian Cram sent the police and Ray Willis. So Ray Willis is the spokesperson now. And when we did the interview—and I talked about the school district so bad and what had happened—that's when this little paper where it say those demands that I went to the school district.

**Yes.**

The next week when the school board had the board meeting that's when I went out there with

eighteen black women and sat there. Yvonne Atkinson Gates was on the board. We sat there all—oh, my god, they filibustered for at least three hours after they had got through with the board meeting. They were through; they was just talking about anything. We're still sitting there. We're being patient because I didn't know how the board operated and all this stuff, right?

So finally, Lois Tarkanian—I do believe it was Lois Tarkanian because she was the president of the board at that time—she looked over there at us. All the employees had gone on home. Nobody sitting in there but eighteen big black women and my son with a video camera videoing. Lois said, “Did you folks want something? Did you come out here for something?” She said, “We didn't see you.”

And I jumped up when she said she didn't see us. I said, “What in the hell do you mean you didn't see us? Eighteen big black women sitting here all night long and you didn't see us and it's midnight?” I just went crazy. I started screaming. I started hollering. And I haven't stopped hollering since. I've been screaming and hollering ever since because when that woman looked at us and said that they had not seen us—and when I went to that podium and told them why we was out there and what had happened to my son on that school bus, I said, “We're not taking it no more and you're going to get them off of those buses. You're going to close these sixth grade centers down and you're going to bring our children home.” I said, “These are our schools and we want them back.”

And that's the way we got it started. And I put demands on them. I started reading them off, one by one, what we wanted. Then we called that big church meeting at Grace Immanuel and we had standing room only. They was all outside, everywhere. I invited the mayors, the city councilmen, the county commissioners. We was grassroots; we didn't know what we were doing. I was just grasping for straws. I knew I had to do something. We had to get those kids

off of those buses and back in the neighborhood. We had all those people in there that I had sent letters out to and they came. I guess they wondered who is this woman? Where did she come from? Nobody knew me because I had been gone and I never was a street person. Never did go to bars or clubs or nothing. Didn't drink and didn't hang in the streets and stuff like that. So really didn't nobody know me but the neighborhood folks.

And when I got to where we had the meeting, we had Brian Cram to come up; he was on the stage. James Seastrand, who is the mayor of North Las Vegas, he was there. He came up. I said, "All of you folks that was invited by letters, please come up," I said, "because we've got to talk tonight."

And Chester Richardson, I don't know whether you remember him, but Chester Richardson was a preacher around here. He died a few years ago while I was in Mississippi. But he said when he walked in the church house that night and he looked up, he said, "I saw this tall, beautiful, gorgeous woman, and I heard coming out of her mouth like a lion, and she says, 'I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.'" He said, "I'll never forget when I saw you, Marzette." He said, "You were standing there in that red dress. And when you said you was sick and tired of being sick and tired and you were going to bring our kids home," he said, "Whew, somebody done woke up here in Las Vegas."

We had Wendell P. Williams. So Wendell said, "Marzette, if you try what you're trying, what you're getting ready to do, what you're threatening these folks with, and if it doesn't work, what you going to do?"

I say, "Hell, I can't get no further in the sand than I already am." I say, "So what they going to do to us, shoot us? All they can do is say, well, we can't do it or whatever." I said, "But I guarantee you, Wendell, this is going to work. When I get through wearing them down, this is



going to work because I know how to work on somebody's nerves.”

[Whispering]: You can ask them in there how I know. [Regular voice]: I know how to work on some nerves.

I was so mad that night. And Angie Rodriguez had sent another girl to do the filming for Channel 13. I think it was Channel 13 because they was the one really broke the story. This little girl came up to me after the meeting, because all these folks was in there and the media was there and they had gone on. We stayed in there about three hours and we was fighting backwards and forwards. Senator Neal, he was in there. And he said thirty years is too long they've been on these buses. We've got to do this something. This community has spoken and they've spoken loud. And we've got to listen.

So when the meeting was over and we were packing up, getting ready to leave, this little girl came up to me and said, “Ma'am, can I have that paper, what you have?” I said, “Well, can I get it back?” She said, “Yes, ma'am. I just want to take it to the station.”

And she took it to the station and Angie Rodriguez got a hold to it and Angie Rodriguez went to work on that story. She followed us all the way through with WAAK-UP; even when I think we had incorporated WAAK-UP, she was there, when we called the boycott school, because they had said they had done everything for me that I had asked and I still filed a due process on them about John because they had him all the way out there in Kirk Adams [Elementary School].

So the fifth day or the sixth day that he went to get on that bus when I run him out the door to put him on the bus, he just fell back up in my arms. He didn't want to get on that bus. Now they had this little handicap bus, right? Had special ed out there. He didn't want to get on that bus. And I said, “John, what's the matter? You've been wanting to go to school.” I said,

“How come you don't want to go to school anymore?” “No, Momma, no. No, Momma, no.”

Sure enough, I got up on the bus and I looked and I saw why he didn't want to be on the bus. They had twelve—I counted them—it was twelve Hispanic kids on there. They couldn't speak English and he couldn't speak Spanish. So he didn't know what they were saying and he was scared to death of those Hispanic kids.

Now, I have to tell the truth, the way it is, because this is a little six-year-old child going to first grade. He was scared to death. Plus he had issues. He had all these mental, emotional issues and on medication and stuff. So I said, well, I'm not going to put him back on this bus, huh-uh.

So I took him off the bus. I went and called Brian Cram. I said, “Put Brian Cram on the phone.” I said, “Cram, you've got to do something because John can't go back out to Kirk Adams.” He said, “Marzette, what's wrong at the Kirk Adams?” I said, “I don't know; but that bus is nothing but Hispanic kids on there and John won't get on it.” And I said, “I'm not going to take John to school every day when the school district is getting my taxpayer's money and y'all bussing them.” And I said, “I done told you we want these kids at home.”

So now Brian Cram got to go find me another school. So now he finds Eisenberg [Elementary School], which is way up here somewhere, past Summerlin I guess. But it was in the northwest. These two little schools are twin schools. So I went up there and I got all three of them. They had special ed. And two of these kids were special ed kids; one of them wasn't. But they got all three of them. I said, “I want them all to go to the same school.”

**Good. That's good.**

I say, “I can't take this no more. Wherever one goes I want the other two, these boys.”

So sure enough, Brian Cram got those kids into Eisenberg/Kahre. One day they called

me up at Eisenberg and the man told me, he said, “Ms. Lewis, could you please come up here?” And I mean I've got a long way to drive to get to school. All these schools are way out, because they're trying to integrate these new schools that they're putting all over and trying to put a handful—they're glad to get a black child. They was glad to get these three little black children. This is integrating this school.

So when I got up there, a black teacher came out. She had cancer and had been in remission for a while. She had just come back out of the hospital. She came to me and she said, “Ma'am, I go into Calvin's room every morning and I get Calvin and bring him out of that room from where he is because he's not being taught nothing over there.” She says, “I bring him in my room and I work with him in my room.”

When I saw Calvin, Calvin was sitting on the floor in the office chewing—I had bought Calvin some Fila (shoes). Darnell and John always tell me Calvin got the first pair of name-brand tennis shoes. Calvin was sitting on the floor in the office with the principal and the secretary and the receptionist and all the folks watching this child chew on his shoe. He had taken his shoe off and chewed the tongue out of the shoe.

This man that helped to write that book, that gave me this book that night, he said, “I'll never forget you, how you took care of them kids.” He said, “When I'd call you, you'd come.” Because one of them went and tried to set the fence on fire. He found some matches.

### **One of who?**

One of my foster kids. And they called me. Anything they'd do they'd call me. Here I'd go up there to check on them and chastise them and talk to them and get them settled back down so they could finish the day out at school because the law said they're supposed to go to school 187 days a year. And I don't intend for mine to be out of school; they're going to go to school. So

you're not going to suspend them for no three days when the law says 187 days. So if you take three days from them, they mean they only went, what, 184?

So I went up there. I said, "Darnell, where did you get the matches from?" Because I knew nobody smoked in our house. I said, "Where did you get the matches from?" He couldn't tell me. So I said, "Now, you got them from somewhere. You've got to tell where you got the matches from. Why were you out there trying to set the fence on fire?" So it must have been some dry grass or something out there. So I don't know whether he found a book of matches on the playground or what kids may have been hanging around at night smoking or what.

But I went up there for him. I'm just so tired. Angie Rodriguez, I called her and tell her some of the things that were going on. She came over and interviewed me one day and she put on the news that night, she said, "Mrs. Lewis says that all that she does is stand and wait on buses, watch for buses, putting children on buses, all day long, if the bus is going to come on time, if the bus is going to be late, if her children are going to even be on the bus when the bus show up." She said, "The woman says she's tired."

We started having meetings. I started recruiting anybody I could recruit that I thought had a child that was having a problem. I got on the radio station on Saturday mornings, Larry Weekly. I'd get on that radio station and tell them when we was having a meeting and if anybody wanted to get involved to please do so. If they're having problems with the children in the school district, please call me. This is the way WAAK-UP got started. We got people from all around because they were so glad that somebody had stepped up to the plate and said bring our children home. And I meant I wanted them to come home.

The kids couldn't even use their own playground in the schools. We got eight schools that they lock the gates when the sixth graders go home at night. Our children come home and

they've got no parks, nowhere to go. When I went up to Booker one day, I saw this one boy lift up one child and take him up over the fence; then he'd come back over the fence, get another child, take that child. These are his brothers and sisters and he wanted them to play on the playground. His momma got him baby-sitting.

So I walked over to the child. I said, "Baby, is this the only way you can get into the playground?" He said, "Yes, ma'am." I said, "Well, how often do you do this?" He said, "Almost every day because we don't have no park or nothing." He said, "The kids want to play ball and stuff and I'm baby-sitting them."

And when I told Brian Cram, I said that boy was dropping those kids. He'd go up, go down, pick up one, bring him, drop him over. He'd come back down. He'd pick another one. He'd drop him over. I said, "And I stood there and watched that. It's ridiculous as to what you have done to our children in this district talking about integrating." I said, "I don't give a you know what about being integrated. I don't care nothing about our children sitting beside no white child in no classroom to get no education because they're not getting no education. You're not teaching them nothing." I said, "These kids are not learning nothing but to be fools." I said, "That's all they're learning."

Brian Cram and them stopped and they started listening. And I filed that due process on them with John. I said you didn't give me what I wanted with him. And another one of them girls out there that was over special ed, she said, "Well, Marzette, there's nothing else that I can do for you. I've done everything that you've asked. We've changed these children from school to school. We've done this. We've done that." I said, "No, you haven't given me everything I asked for because I said I wanted the children home in the neighborhood schools. I want the sixth grade centers closed. I want neighborhood schools." And that's what we started fighting

for. And when they wanted to pass a bond, I said, we're going to down this bond and we're going to call a boycott.

**So which bond was this? Which year, do you remember?**

That was in—no, not the '98. It was a bond before the '98. It was 1993, I believe. I believe it was 1993.

**So tell me about the bond. What were they asking for?**

They cut it up to try to make a fool out of people and they cut it up in two parts. They had 600 million Part A and 300 million Part B. I said, now, we're going to go after that 300 million. I said, now, if we can down that 300 million, we're going to get what we want. That's when we started protesting. Marty Kravitz said if we force bus white children into the black neighborhood that the school district is going to turn into a toilet and the tax erosion will go somewhere and there will be no more public schools because we won't have no tax dollars because all the white folks are going to put their children in private schools because they're not going to go. That's when I am responsible for the first magnet schools, which was CVT Gilbert, Jo Mackey and Hoggard, because they had to get these kids in some kind of way, to get the white kids into the Westside so these schools can be integrated now and bring these black kids home. So we started off with first, second and third graders.

So when we got the first, second and third graders back after all this protesting because we had gone through all this protesting with the Clark County school, that's when I presented them with a toilet. I took a casket out there with like dolls dead, full of baby dolls, a real casket.

**So why the toilet and the casket?**

Because the remarks that Marty Kravitz had made, who was sitting on the board, a board member, when he said if they force bus white children into the black schools that the school

district would turn into a toilet. I showed him what a toilet was. I went and I fixed a toilet. We went out in the yard. We got black mud and we made little balls. I got coffee; I made coffee and I got the grounds. Tracy had bought me a wooden flowerpot and it was a toilet for the bathroom. It was a big beautiful plant for Mother's Day and it looked like a real toilet. Kravitz said he still has it to this day. We put it all down in a big box and I bought all these black boy dolls and I put one white girl off in there, white blond. I put this white blond girl off in there and all these black boys, because this is what they were saying; that the black boys are going to get our children pregnant. I'm not crazy. We're not stupid. We know what the hell was going on with the school district, the reason they didn't want those kids mixing and mingling together. And now what they're saying? They're the minority. They said they're now the minorities. I let them know what those black boys was going to do. They going to have them a field day. They're going to have a field day, Marty Kravitz.

So we had that toilet fixed up and then we put the little things that looked like poop, little hard rocks. We baked them out in the sun after we made them so they'd be hard as a rock. Then we put the coffee grounds and the toilet paper all around it. I went and bought me a big United States flag, a big bow over at K-Mart. I just walked in and there they was, these big bows, United States flag colors, right? Red, white and blue stripes with all 50 states. I got this big box and I called and Angie Rodriguez. I said, "Angie, Thursday night you've got an exclusive." She said, "Marzette, what you got for me?" And I told her. She said, "Marzette, please don't give it to nobody else." I said, "I've got to call them, but you've got the exclusive. You're going to go in with me." I said, "You're going to lead the way; you're going to be filming me all the way when our group go in."

And they said in the paper about forty—but that's when the LVABSE [Las Vegas

Alliance of Black Educators]. The LVABSE came in that night and they marched in that district with us. We had all these people. Harvey Munford who's an assemblyman now, when he saw it, what was going to be shown that night on the news, he jumped up. He say, "When I saw you Marzette, on TV, when they splashed your face," he said, "now, I know her," because I had been knowing him since I worked at Child Haven when my son was four years old. Harvey says, "I got to see this tonight." People were coming out there in their gowns and housecoats because they had gone to bed and they came out there to the school district.

When we took that toilet, when we unveiled it—I had it in the trunk of my car and it was wrapped in this beautiful paper and we had the flag on it—when we got into the district and pulled the box up off the toilet and they saw what was in it, that school board, they say they retreated. Say all the school board, they jumped up and they took off. They ran. Every one of them ran but Mark Schofield. He had the nerve to stand there and watch it. He looked at it. Schofield didn't move. He said I'm going to see this through, I guess she say. She said they're not going to run me out. But every school board member jumped up and ran out when they saw what I had in it. And I said, "This is for Marty Kravitz."

And we had this preacher, the one that I see in here that they got way back in the fifties, he was the one read a poem to Marty Kravitz. And that was the ugliest, nastiest poem you ever heard in your life to come out of a preacher's mouth. But he was so articulate. Ooh, that man was articulate. And they gave him a job to shut him up; he went in there with no job and he got him a job with the district. A whole bunch of black folks got jobs.

**So what about Gates? What was her name?**

Yvonne? Oh, we had run her away by then.

**So she ran away, too.**



No, she wasn't—

**She was no longer on the school board?**

She was no longer on that board. At that time John Rhodes had taken her place, I think, or was it Dr. McMillan? Now, John Rhodes was appointed after she left because she couldn't take it after what she had done, because she had told them that she didn't want no schools on the Westside when they got the bond money. They said, Yvonne, you were the first one we asked did you want the schools and you said no. That was the first night that we went out there, when a bond had been passed back in the early nineties, I guess, or in the late eighties. And Yvonne said—that's when they built Cheyenne—she didn't want no schools in the predominate black neighborhood because she felt like, I guess, well, all the black kids is all going back to black neighborhood schools and she felt like they were doing good in the white schools.

They were doing worse. We had gangs. We had killings every night. You could hear guns going off. Every morning you got up, somebody's child was dead. Because the kids didn't know each other. Like when I was telling you you've got buses going this way and that way, north, south, east and west, this child across the street was going north to a school and this child on the north side was going to south somewhere. These other children on the other blocks were going to other schools. Here we were just one big scrambled up mess. Like I say, 65 different schools they were going to out of the black neighborhoods and feeding back into the neighborhoods into the sixth grade.

Prime Six came aboard when Lois asked me please don't bring it in; that was when I was bringing in the casket, I think, when I was showing them how they was killing the kids, with all these dolls. I got all these black baby dolls and put them off in that casket. Reverend Rogers, James Rogers from down at New Jerusalem, he led—no, it wasn't. It was Reverend Wesley

from Bethel Baptist; he led the way and he was preaching the sermon going in. We had the pallbearers and we had a real casket. One lady went to the funeral home. They let us borrow that baby casket, about so long, pink. And we had all these dolls. The woman say, “Marzette, I’ll never forget how dressed you were coming to that funeral.” She said, “That black hat you was wearing, all black.” We were all dressed in our black and black hats. It was a funeral. It was killing our kids.

When we did that symbolic thing, I guess they say we got to act now; we’ve got to do something. Then I turned around and I filed a lawsuit with the Office of Civil Rights and the Justice Department. I just did everything I thought I could do. I didn’t know which way I was going, but I was doing anything I thought I could do to wake them up, to listen.

So when we got that Office of Civil Rights in here and the Justice Department came in—and the Office of Civil Rights was in about three or four times and they rode in our cars around in the community and they said, “You’ve got all these stable communities and no children going to school in them, only out of the neighborhood?” We said, “No.” And the man’s name was John Benji. He said, “I’ve never seen nothing like this before.” I said, “Well, you see it right here in Las Vegas. Our kids are being bussed out for eleven of their twelve years and it’s time to take a stand and stop.”

When we won that, like I said, the first, second and third grades came back and we got H.P. Fitzgerald School. Brian Cram said they were going to build a school. After they had approved the money for the school, he said they were going to build it up on Cheyenne and Rancho. I said, “The day that you put a school on Cheyenne and Rancho and say it’s in West Las Vegas for our kids,” I say, “That’s the day we will chain ourselves to that land and no bulldozer, no construction worker will come through that piece of ground.” I said, “You’ve got

to be crazy, Brian.”

He ran down from the podium. He said, “Come here, Marzette,” and he ran out the door with me. That's the first time I ever heard him cuss because I didn't know Mormons cuss. I thought they was all so holy and sanctified. He said, “Goddamn it, Marzette, there's no way in the hell I'm going to do that, but I'm not going to let them white women kill me.” I said, “What?” He said, “These white women is mad because they don't want you to get this school; they want their kids off the Westside, but they don't want you to get a school because they want a school in Henderson.”

I said, well, all these years they didn't fight for a school in Henderson and I'm out here breaking myself down and all these old black women that I've got with me who don't have kids in the district, we're out here working—I mean we was working. We wasn't taking no time off. We was up day and night writing and having meetings. And these news media, they'd call us and ask us, where you going to meet at tonight, Marzette? I said we're not having no meeting tonight. They would follow us from our house. They would be sitting around the corner watching me when I'd leave the house and following me. And when we'd come out the meetings, there they are with the lights on us. What did you talk about? What did you accomplish tonight at your meeting? I thought you weren't having no meeting. (Erik Pappa), please leave me alone. Just go on. We ain't got nothing to say, nothing to say to you tonight.

This went on for months. Well, it really went on for over two years, I guess, because it started in '91 and we got the first school in '93, which was Fitzgerald, when Fitzgerald opened up. That's when the first, second and third grade came home and the sixth grade centers now became half of the kids. Half of the kids now is sixth graders. Some kind of way they put the sixth graders—started saying middle school instead of junior high school. That's when the

middle school thing came in. They put the sixth graders in with the seventh and eighth graders and that way those sixth graders who had been coming over here and now they're going to—

**So they're going to middle schools.**

Middle schools now instead of junior high.

**I see.**

So they made them middle schools. Oh, they had it all planned, what they were going to do.

So after it went so well the first year, we said we don't want the sixth grade centers no more. We want all our kids back in the neighborhood elementary schools. We want total elementary schools for our children in their neighborhood. That's when the magnet schools came in. That's when all the sixth graders didn't have to come back. That's when they started moving all those old portables out there. They brought portables into those schools. They started moving the portables out. That's when I started fighting for Charles I. West to get that middle school built. All this started coming together, just kind of one thing right behind another one.

**So why did they get the magnet schools?**

Because they could put the white kids in the magnet schools and say, okay, we got white kids in West Las Vegas. But there were no black kids in the magnet schools. What they did, they threw the applications away and wouldn't give (placement) to the black kids. Magnet schools are built for children in poor neighborhoods to go to, and if there are any seats left over after the children in those neighborhoods get their seats, then the white children can get the leftovers.

**And these schools are supposed to be high-performing schools?**

High-performing schools with everything—computers, labs, you name it. They had everything in them, news media. They're teaching the kids how to do the morning news and all kinds of

plays. Each school had a different—

**So we're talking about Agassi Academy and schools like that?**

Yes. But you had science and math.

**Mabel Hoggard [Elementary School].**

Mabel Hoggard. You had communication and performing arts up at CVT Gilbert. You had global world at Jo Mackey. All these white folks was pushing our black kids out. They pushed them out into these little nasty other little elementary schools that was left. All our children was piled into them. The white kids got the seats in the magnet schools and our kids all was sitting up in these schools.

**And what did WAAK-UP do?**

That's when WAAK-UP—one teacher had the guts enough to call me. She said, “Ms. Lewis, none of those applications went out to the black parents.” And you had a deadline to get into the magnet schools. You had to go into a pool and you've got to be picked out of the lottery. So naturally, our kids weren't coming out of the lottery, because they never got in the lottery; they never gave them the applications for the parents to fill out. So this woman went and door knocked herself in Carey Arms in Winslow Park. She found them hid in the office, the applications, where they had hid them in the office in a box underneath the secretary's desk. She found them. She knew they were there and she looked until she found them. That weekend she went through the neighborhood putting out those applications. They couldn't fire her from the district because she had too much time in, but they put her in the worst school in Las Vegas, which was Matt Kelly. Matt Kelly, they've never done anything for. They put that woman over in Matt Kelly when they found out she was the one that got those applications.

**So what is her name? Can you tell me?**

I don't think she would care because she's retired now. Her name is Anika Johnson. And Anika Johnson, she said, "Ms. Lewis, it was wrong what they did to those kids." She said, "Applications didn't get out."

And I called Brian Cram and I told him. I said, "Brian Cram, our kids never got applications because I didn't get any application for my kids to go." "Well, Marzette, you know your kids are going to get in." I said, "I know well they're going, mine are going."

So all three of mine went to CVT Gilbert and I don't even remember filling out an application. That was their zoned magnet. That was the closest magnet to them. So they picked all three of them up and took all three of them to the magnet school at CVT Gilbert. But it wasn't about maybe twelve black children and nothing but white. Same thing at Mabel Hoggard. Same thing at Jo Mackey.

Now, that was just wrong. And Brian Cram say, "This is one way, Marzette, but please do me a favor and don't tell anybody how we set this up." Well, anybody with common sense can see what you've done. And he didn't want it to be known the way we integrated it. Now we can say we got as many white kids in the black neighborhood as you do black kids. But they're in the magnet schools; they're not in the regular schools. So they took all the seats. The same thing they did with Advanced Technology Academy for the high school kids. Our kids couldn't get in there. We only had eleven kids to go into Advanced Technology Academy. We had about a hundred buses coming in.

And Senator (Joe) Neal—I have to give that man credit where credit is due—he protested and marched with us that Sunday morning because we were going to shut it down. We were trying to shut it down. We didn't want these kids to come in on Monday morning, right, to that magnet school.

And Ms. Barber had said she was coming.

**What is her name?**

Shirley Barber.

**Shirley Barber, okay.**

She was over at Fitzgerald. She's the one that became school principal at Fitzgerald. But she got kind of upset and angry at us because they wanted to turn it into a magnet school. Ms. Barber really didn't want to be bothered with black kids; I'm just going to be fair. She didn't want it because she had been used to the sixth grade centers. She came in as a sixth grade center principal. So she had white kids all her life. When we got all our kids back, she closed the computer lab.

So I went one day and it was something came up. The woman said to me, she said, "Marzette, that computer lab is dead." I said, "What you mean that computer lab is dead?" She said, "There's no computer labs in West Las Vegas in these schools, nothing but the magnet schools." I said, "What happened to them?" I said, "There was 30, 40 computers in the computer lab." She said, "They're dead." I said, "What you mean they're dead?" She said, "Nobody's in there working them." She said, "We don't have no computer teachers here."

So I called Brian Cram. I said, "Brian Cram, if you don't get some computer teachers and get them into those schools," I said, "I'm going to get you fired." That's when I started working on getting him out of there. He got a computer teacher at H.P.

Ms. Barber said, "I don't know nothing about computers." Well, she's the principal. So you don't know nothing about computers, but you've got computer teachers out there. I said, "Ms. Barber, I don't care whether you could—like me, I don't even know how to plug one up or cut it on, but those kids can do it." John and them had already learned how to do it when they

was up at Kirk Adams and Eisenberg/Kahre. They had learned a lot on computer and they had gave John a laptop computer to bring home every day with him. When I called that due process on them and they had to pay all those attorneys for coming in here, John got everything that I asked for. I mean he got it. They gave him laptop computers. Anything I asked for John, John got it.

So Ms. Barber say, “Well, Marzette, those black kids can't learn computers.” I said, “Ms. Barber, since you don't know”—that's when she and I kind of—because we had been tight. We had been like two peas in a pod. When she told me that, I lost all respect for her. I just lost all respect for her. I said, “Ms. Barber, we're going to have a computer teacher over here.”

Those kids were doing so good when they opened up those computer labs. Those kids was learning and she couldn't believe it. So she went back to community college and took a class in computer to learn computer because the kids were outdoing her. Well, she wasn't teaching; she was a principal. But she went and took a computer class at the community college.

After that, Ms. White, all the schools got their computer lab open. That's when our children started learning computers. I bought each one of mine—they're called Speak and Spell from Texas Instrument. I ordered them. They're little computers that do everything—teach them all kinds of games, all kinds of words, spelling, arithmetic, English and stuff.

When we do a fundraiser, we give each school some monies. So when I took a check to whatever the principal was at Madison, I took a five-hundred-dollar check over there from Ms. Muhammad, the woman that did this book, and I said I want her class to have this. So she said okay.

**So this is through WAAK-UP?**



This is through WAAK-UP that we had a little fundraiser. We had five hundred dollars left over after all the expenses. So we gave the five hundred dollars to Madison for Ms. Muhammad's class because we knew Ms. Muhammad was into writing books and she did a book called *Let the Dew Drops Fall*. I got it somewhere in one of these boxes, but it's called *Let the Dew Drops Fall*. She's working out at that Paradise [Elementary] School that they got on the campus at UNLV, that elementary school out there. Her name is Romona Muhammad. I wish you could interview her.

When I took the money, I went down and told her that the teacher had the check. She said, "Ms. Lewis, do you care if I buy each one of my kids a computer, the little hand or laptop computer?" I said, "Ms. Muhammad, thank you, please do." So Ms. Muhammad went and got all those kids a little laptop computer with that five hundred dollars and she paid any difference out of her pocket to make sure all those kids had those little computers to start teaching them computer.

Then when we did the telephone thing, that's when we had Sprint to pay us something for what they had done to our children with that child.

**So for the tape, tell me the story about Sprint and what Sprint did.**

Sprint went out and on the back of the telephone book cover they put this little black child.

**Was it on the front cover or the back cover?**

It was on the front cover, front cover of the telephone book. They had three—I think it was three; we got the picture here somewhere; we saw it a little bit ago—three white kids was standing over this little black girl and they was playing in a tree. And while this little black girl was digging down, the rest of them was standing up over her, looked like they was laughing at her. And she was digging in the mud and dirt, making a hole for the tree to go in. Chester

Richardson, the man that said when he saw me standing in the church saying I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired, he was the one called my house and told me, "Marzette, go look at your telephone book cover and see what you see on it."

**And the little girl has those pigtail things.**

Pigtail things looking like little pickaninnies or something. I don't know what they call them. Some of the kids I think might kind of wear their hair like that. But that wasn't only about the hair so much; it was about the condition they had her in. But see, they didn't put all that in the paper. They really went for the hair.

**Yes, because it was like a pickaninny.**

But the condition of that child's eyes was like she had worked so hard until her eyes were bulging out of her head, her sockets, and she was digging and the other kids were standing up laughing at her.

When we went to Sprint—we collected telephone book covers. We got on the news and asked everybody to please pull their cover off the telephone book and we were coming by and we'd be picking them up; we'd be in the neighborhoods picking up telephone book covers. Drop them off at the library, churches, anywhere, so we could have them. We had stacks, stacks of covers from the telephone books and we went into Sprint, about ten of us. And when we went into Sprint, the woman said—we had called a meeting with her. Tried to be decent. Tried to reason with Sprint. Sprint wouldn't listen. We asked them to recall those books and they said there's too many of them; they're all out in the hotels in every room. I said, "You put them in every room. Every year you put them there; two and three times a year these telephone books come out. If you put them in there, you can take them out because when they go and put new ones in, I'm sure they take the old ones out." They said it was too much money. I said, okay,

we're going to make them pay for this.

So we went out there that day and we took those telephone covers. We went in with armloads. And we took those telephone book covers and we just threw them all across that big room. That's why Sprint—because they fired the director from over there. She got out of there quick; they got rid of her because she didn't negotiate with us and I'm sure that's why she left. But when we went in we just threw them all over the room, just everywhere we could throw a telephone book cover we threw them.

We really didn't even call the news media, but they heard about it and they showed up, two news media. They said, “Marzette, why didn't you call us?” We said we was trying not to publicize everything that we did. We wanted to keep something for ourselves. But we couldn't keep nothing from the news media. Somebody called them and told them. And they came out there and they took pictures. One woman say, “We knew that's what they would do; we knew they would act like this.”

When we got through with them, we called in one of their computer experts and had him to go over to Madison to one of those schools and took him to the Advanced Technology Academy. Every classroom in Advanced Technology Academy, every child that sat down at a desk had a full-fledge computer sitting there at their desk, right? Our kids had nothing—old sixth grade centers, dilapidated computers that was out of whack with life; they didn't know what next garbage can they were going into. So we demanded that Sprint rewire Madison and put computers into that school. And that's what we got from them. All those kids got computers over there and they rewired Madison and put computers in Madison. After that, it wasn't too long when I came back here, Sprint was closed.

**What do you mean closed?**

Don't you remember they had that big Sprint office there on—that Sprint is not there anymore.

**That building is not—**

Huh-uh. That building is not functioning. That building is closed up.

**I didn't know that.**

Oh, yes, out in front of Meadows Mall, that great big beautiful building. And I know we had something to do with that because I got calls all the way from Hawaii, everywhere because that went nationwide, what we did, because that was in that Jet. So Jet is everywhere.

**That's right. That was Jet magazine.**

That's Jet magazine. And when we called down and told them that we was going to protest on the Strip because we was going to get it nationwide, Ralston—was it Ralston? I don't want to call the wrong newsperson's name. It was Jon Ralston or—

**John L. Smith.**

It wasn't Smith. It was one of those guys that do those special reports. He said it's no way they can get national news if they go on the Strip with this, because Tyson was going to be fighting and we were going to go out there and we were going to break up Tyson fighting with protesting Sprint's telephone book company. Sure enough, we didn't do it, but we got national news coverage because of Kim Bailey. Kim Bailey saw it and she called Johnson.

**Oh, Publication.**

Publication. And they said send it and send a picture of me and we couldn't find a small picture of me to send. Because there was a deadline, I said, “Kim, don't worry about a picture of me. I don't care. Just get the stuff out.” So I got my name in there and all that, how we did it. But we wanted that cover to be seen. Sure enough, I got calls from all over—from New York City, Hawaii. Everybody was calling and saying, thank you, thank you for what you did to Sprint, for

exposing them for what they have done because Sprint is a racist—they said Sprint was just a racist company. I guess Cox Cable took most of Sprint's customers. Sprint doesn't have too many customers anymore because that big building they had over there when we went through all those telephone book covers is closed down. It is closed.

**Wow. I had no idea.**

Go drive by there.

**This is amazing.**

It's crazy what we went through.

**This is amazing. I love all this information. This is wonderful.**

And there's so much stuff that we did from the city council to the county commission, that library district, making them closing that theater down before they had the first show in there and tearing it down and had to put three more million dollars into it.

**Tell me about the library district.**

The library district, we wanted a theater like all these—Summerlin and Green Valley, they got theaters and things. And they said, well, who's coming to them? Who's going to come to West Las Vegas to play in the theater? So finally we fought and fought and fought till we got them to okay the theater.

Well, when they built the theater, eight hours before opening time for whoever was going to perform there that night, a play or whatever was taking place, there was no bathrooms, there was no runways, there was no dressing rooms, there was nothing but a theater like you walk into a movie theater and go sit down and a stage. We said there's no way you're going to open this, not tonight. This won't be open. We're closing this. This is going to close down. So we went to Hunsberger.

## **Went to whom?**

The man's name was Hunsberger, who was the director of the library district. [Charles Hunsberger, Executive Director Las Vegas Clark County Libraries until 1993.]

Reverend [Marion] Bennett was sitting on the board. And I just couldn't believe that Reverend Bennett went along with what they had done, or did he even know what they had done? You just don't know because when you only have one black on a board and you know they can't be at every board meeting and they do so much devious things behind their backs on the telephones and what have you, these little board members. As long as they don't have a quorum, they can discuss things and it's not against the law. But as long as they got—there's seven on the board and if they got four people that they're talking to, it's against the law but as long as you're just talking to three, you can do it. So they got all their little loopholes you can jump through. Hula-hoops I call them.

When we saw what was going on, we went down to that library district and we went stone crazy. The girl that worked for the library district, Deborah Jackson, who was the one I said had that picture in the paper. She was the one that made that sign and called the school district the Clark County District. She worked for them and she went in there and she beat—a great big girl—and she beat that table, she beat that table, and she talked about Hunsberger. And I had a camera. And we took all these little kids up in there with us and we were showing them what they was doing to your neighborhood and to our children. Didn't have any children's library; the kids had to be in with the adults and all of that. That's how we got the children's library, fighting that district. Like I say, we done fought every entity in this city.

So they didn't open up that theater that night. So now they got to go back in and figure out what it's going to cost to put in some bathrooms. Hunsberger told us to go rent toilets, to

rent toilets from whoever rents them and have them out in the back so people can go out there.

This is just insulting that we're just like animals; we don't need nothing. But you can go into a library in Summerlin and you've got fifteen stalls and twenty face bowls and you've got a green room and lobby and everything else, what you're supposed to have in a library. But we didn't have it. But I bet you it's up there now.

**Oh, yes. It's beautiful.**

I bet you it's up there now.

**Thank you.**

We got dressing rooms. We got the model runway. And we've had beautiful plays and things in there.

**Yes, I know. I go there often.**

Beautiful plays. The lady that got that dance group, Ms. Austin; four of my nieces and nephews have been in that dance group since they was knee high to a duck's tail. And one of my sister-in-law, Evan's daughter, she used to do some beautiful plays with them.

And for them to say for us to rent toilets because nobody would come, we'd never fill it up, every time they have something at that theater that theater is filled. You very seldom have anything at that theater that people is not all outside wanting to get in. But we weren't going to have nobody. Wouldn't nobody come to the Westside to the theater. But we showed him something.

So we sent him back up to Mount Charleston. They got rid of him. I said, "Now, you go up there and roast your toes at your fireplace at Mount Charleston," because he built him a big mansion up at Mount Charleston with our tax dollars. I'm sure they gave him money for that. And see, this is the way our monies go. Our tax dollars are just given away and nobody is over

these folks. These people don't have nobody in control over them. And Steve Schorr one night—

**Cox Cable?**

Cox Cable's Steve Schorr. When we went in one night—he was on the board at the library district—he said, “Marzette and Deborah, if I find out that you guys are telling the truth, I will resign from this board.” And he resigned because he found out we was telling the truth.

**Is this about—**

This was years before the incident with the theater and other things that they were doing—nobody black getting promotions and no black administrators. We had one black administrator. That was Miss—Marie Jordan. The West Las Vegas Library received a much lower budget than the others.

**Now, we're talking about with the library district?**

With the library district.

**So it was more than just the building; you fought for other things as well?**

Yes. We fought for getting blacks employed. We fought for raises. We fought for books, hardback books because Hunsberger said we didn't need nothing but paperbacks.

We checked out almost every book in the library. We had a checkout Sunday and everybody came from church. You could check out up to 50-80 books at one time. We had so many books that we cleaned the shelves. The news media came in and Hunsberger was scared to death. He didn't know what we was doing. I was hurting then; I hadn't had this knee replaced and that knee was caving. I was on a walking stick. And I took that walking stick and I was beating on the table at him. He was peeking through the blinds in a room back there. And Deborah says, Marzette—and she was working that Sunday, right? She was on her job. She



said, “Marzette, Hunsberger got the shade peeking at what's going on.” And they had brought other administrators from other libraries over there because there were so many black people there checking out the books. I said, “We don't have time to be standing in line to be waiting to check out no books. You get some people in here or we're just going to walk out with the books.” So Wendell P. Williams came in and he said, “Just take the books.” And we took books. We loaded cars. We took books, we took books and we took books. Most of the books never got back. They had to go buy books to put back in there.

**These were all the paperback books?**

These were paperback and they had some hardbacks.

**So now, what was the purpose of that, then?**

Because they said black folks didn't read and we didn't need tapes and we didn't need books, all the books and things that these other libraries had. If we wanted one, we had to order from another library, right, to get a book sent over to West Las Vegas. It was absolutely crazy what we went through. And nobody can believe how we fought.

When did you sleep?

Somebody asked Deborah—and they put it in the newspaper—they said, What was the worst that you've ever seen Marzette? And she say the night when we had the boycott school and say we had a meeting over at New Jerusalem Baptist Church and say we had to go upstairs to have the meeting and say Marzette had to crawl on her knees. And say I never felt that bad for Marzette before in my life because Marzette is such a strong somebody. I've always said this was the strongest black woman that I had ever met. And they put it in the newspaper. She said when I saw her crawling up those stairs that night on her knees—and we were so tired. We weren't getting any sleep because we had the boycott school and we were trying to figure out

what to do with all these kids because they said we would only have about twenty kids.

**So tell me about the boycott and what that was all about.**

That was about them not doing what they had promised us with the schools.

**So was that the time when they were opening the magnet schools?**

That was during the time—no. That was before the magnet schools came along.

**This was when you wanted the kids back in the neighborhood?**

Back in the neighborhood.

**So one of the things you did, you actually boycotted.**

We did a boycott. We did the first successful boycott that they ever had in the Clark County School District.

**So tell me all about that, the boycott.**

We organized. We got together with people out of Henderson, the people out of Summerlin.

And those women, some of their husbands were printers, had printing shops. We had no monies. Like I say, black folks just don't donate for some reason. But the whites had the know-how, the equipment, the stores on them. So they did the printing of the fliers and all the things that when the bond was getting ready to come through and for us boycotting the schools. They made all the signs and the papers, got all the information to us.

We got kids out of the neighborhood. I would pay those kids four and five dollars and then I would take them to McDonalds and feed them breakfast or lunch for them to put fliers out about the boycott schools; that we were going to call a boycott, and told them what churches to meet us at, come to on Monday morning instead of going to school. We felt if we could keep them out until head-count day was over and when head-count day is over, we could put them back in—and what happens at count day, if the kids—the only monies that the Clark County

School District gets is for the kids that they can literally touch their heads and say they was in a seat.

**On that particular day?**

On that one day. So we started to boycott schools on a Monday. We knew when count day was. So the LVABSE had these attorneys working for them. So that's when the LVABE got deep into it...

**Las Vegas Alliance of Black School Educators.**

Okay. And they call themselves the LVABSE. That's their pin name, I guess little nickname for it, like we say WAAK-UP and it's Westside Action Alliance Corps Uplifting People.

**Right.**

When we called that boycott school, every Sunday morning we would get those kids and sometimes we'd have five and six thousand fliers.

**So you boycotted more than one day?**

Oh, yes. We kept the kids out of school for almost two weeks. What happened, they didn't know the whites were working with us...So those white women were working with us in Summerlin because they were tired of those sixth grade centers, too. They wanted their kids at home; they didn't want them coming over there that one year. So when we called that boycott and we got them on our side, some of those organizations that's in that little biography thing, those are white organizations that I had joined up with, they did the paperwork, they did the signs and all of that. We got all that stuff out. We'd get the kids out of neighborhoods and they would go out with us on Sunday mornings and put them on the church cars. One Sunday we know we had five thousand fliers and we ran out of fliers before we ran out of churches and cars. We were putting them out. And those people responded. And the whites was in their

neighborhoods. You know, they can get on the phone call and hook up phones and all this stuff and they was telling folks to keep their kids at home. So the white kids was staying at home.

With our kids the school district was saying it wouldn't be no more than twenty. And Ms. White, when we looked up that Monday morning and all those kids was piling in at those churches, we didn't know what to do. We didn't have a clue. Like I said, we were a grassroots organization, scratching for anything that we could do. So now we had to start calling up retired teachers, any retired teachers, anybody, please come help us, because we felt like we had to educate them. We couldn't keep them out of school without educating them. So we put them in those churches. Those retired teachers started coming in.

We fed them three meals a day, snacks. My son, myself and my husband, we bought all the food. People came in and volunteered to cook. Some would take off sick days from work and they would come in and hide from the news media when the news media would come in so they wouldn't see them in there helping. We did just like they did in the school. We had break time. We had class time. We had naptime for the little tiny ones, the little pre-K, kindergarten, what have you, because they were getting money for these kids.

When count day came—the first church we went in—and it was so pitiful the way they showed it on TV. Because we had nothing else to do, we were trying to separate the little kids from the older kids, right? So we put up sheets and old curtains and things in the churches, trying to separate the kids in the one big sanctuary part and in the kitchen part, to try to keep the kids in some kind of order. When the news media came in, they talked about how many kids we had at these churches.

We finally ended up with Second Baptist. Grace Immanuel was the headquarters. They were really good to us. Most of the kids came to Grace Immanuel that morning. So we got

Second Baptist—Second Baptist or was it Victory Baptist? I don't want to lie. It was either Second Baptist or Victory Baptist. Mr. and Mrs. Baucus, these were two old people that came here; he had been in the military for forty years and he said thank God I'm out the military and I can talk to you white folks like I want to talk to you.

He said, "I've never been so proud of a woman in my life as I am of Ms. Marzette Lewis." He said, "This woman has worked her heart out for this." He said, "As long as I live I will be with her." He used to stand up at that school board and he would talk about them so bad and what they had done to our children and how they had mistreated them and mis-educated them all down through the years. He was a very educated man because he worked in high security or something in the military.

But they came in. They taught—he and his wife. Like I said, a lot of the teachers who had retired, they came in. They taught. We had white people coming over helping out. Old white men, they would come in and help. They would bring books. They would bring pencils and paper, construction paper, glue. Anything they thought we needed in a school, we got it; it came to us.

But the only thing happened, we couldn't continue after count day. When count day came the LVABSE attorney called me from New York and said, "Ms. Lewis, you won." He said, "You won; call it off." He said, "Send the kids back to school." He said, "Because if you don't send them back after they've counted the kids and you don't sent them back, then you've lost." He said, "But you send them back now because you've won because count day is over."

It was a whole bunch of kids. Brian Cram had it all in the newspaper saying that the chairs were sliding around in the floors empty with no children in them. Please, children, come back to school. Oh, they was begging. We had them begging. Please, children, come back to

school. The chairs are empty. There is no kids in the classrooms.

But we cost them because every child that they didn't have cost them \$5,000 and that was a lot of millions. And then we downed the bond the same year, 300 million. So we took probably over 10 million, 20 million from them because they didn't do the right thing by us. They should have did us right. We wouldn't have done all this. I said it wasn't called for, for how I tore my body down.

But I had to do something to let them know because the one phrase that was made by a black man, said to me, Ray Willis, who was the spokesperson for the group, the school district, he said, "Marzette, you know what they call this?" That was the night that we went out there. He said, "They call this a nigger night." I said, "What?" He said, "They call this nigger night." He said, "The parents get mad once every two or three years and they come out to the school district and they raise hell about something and they push it under the rug because they know they're not coming back."

I said, "Let me tell you something, Ray Willis." I said, "You go back and you tell them Marzette Lewis said it will be nigger night every other Tuesday night. It will be nigger night; they will see my face."

How I stood up, I don't know, because sometimes I didn't even go to bed at night. The little time that I'd sleep, I'd sleep in the recliner sitting up in the chair because I didn't want to miss not getting the kids when we had the boycott schools going. I'd sit up in the chair and maybe nap an hour and get up, put on some clothes. We'd pick the kids up from people who didn't have cars to get their kids. My son, he took time off from his job. He was a fireman. He took time off from work. Deborah Jackson, who work at the library, she took vacation time. We worked them kids.

And the LVABSE—when I was out there, in five years I missed three meetings. They said Marzette Lewis was at the school board meeting more than people who were getting paid to be there. See, I learned every hole, every crook. I know all the crooks out there. There's ones we still got. Like I told Dr. Jones, I said, “You got rid of the wrong crooks and kept the ones that should have been gone.” I said, “But you got rid of the wrong crooks. The ones that you kept is the crooks that should have been out of that district. And I tried to tell you that, Dr. Jones, but you wouldn't listen.”

I asked him, I said, When you go home at night—because you've got a taste of racism. One of the white superintendents of schools asked me to go investigate Jones to see why did he divorce a black woman and marry a white woman. I said, “That's not my business.” I said, “Because you can never go with this no more because the world now is where people marry anybody. If the gays and lesbians are getting married, surely a black man can marry a white woman and divorce a black woman if he wanted and marry a white woman. They do it every day.” I said, “Because the population now, you are the minority. We are the majority.” And that was just recently when Jones came in. Jones hasn't been here two years—well, it's two years this month, I think. He came sometime in November two years ago. I say, “You can't send me nowhere to Colorado investigating this man.” I said, “You know what? I'm going to ask him.”

So I asked Jones. I told him what the man had said. I thought surely he would have got rid of him. But he kept him, but he moved him. He moved him out of where he was. And I think he was going to let him break his own neck.

So one morning Dr. Jones and I were having breakfast a few weeks ago and I looked at him and he looked so pitiful, like he wanted to cry. So when I got home, I called him. I said,

“Dr. Jones, tell me something.” I said, “When you go home at night and sit across the table and you and your wife are eating, what do you feel? How do you feel?” I said, “Because they done beat you down. I know you done got a taste of what racism is.”

But he said he never been around blacks. And he said whoever said that I divorced a black woman and married a white woman lied, he said, because if I had married a black woman, I would have married my sister or my momma because we was the only black family in the city from where I came from, the town. He said so I had no other choice but to marry a white woman because I wasn't going to marry my sister or my momma.

Then when I asked him how did he feel—one man asked me, “Marzette, you didn't say that to that man.” I said, “Yes, I did, because I just wonder now that he's gotten here and got a taste of good racism”—because I told him, I said “this is Mississippi of the West.”

This is worse than Mississippi because in Mississippi they don't care, down South. They ran the Ku Klux Klan outfits and go about their business. But now they're wearing three-piece suits; you don't know who they are. I said but you can look at them and almost tell by just looking at them which one is the wizard. [Laughing]

I said you never did tell me how you felt. He said, “Ms. Lewis, I don't know.”

But, Ms. White, when I tell you we put up a fight here in this city to get our kids back...And now the fight, the battle continues with these children still trying to get good schools for them. Charles I. West [West Preparatory Academy] got fifty-six portables that I'm fighting now. You might have (read) that in the Sentinel this past week.

**Exactly. Yes.**

Where fifty-six portables they put up over there for a high school. They weren't put up there for a permanent building. Portables are just what they said; you use them for a while and you get



rid of them. They put the portables down to see if—because I asked for an elementary school and a high school to be in the vicinity of West where when one child left home, all children would leave home, a vocational high school, so every child would get some kind of trade. So when they left school if they couldn't go to college or some kids don't want to go to college, some kids can't go to college for different reasons, we don't know, but if you go to a vocational school, you can come out with some kind of trade that you can use in life because I went to a vocational school. That was the only high school we had was Shirley Horn Vocational High School. I said and every child that came out of there came out of there and did well for themselves, some of my classmates, filthy rich.

One is sitting there in California on a gold mine making computer chips in his garage. He comes up and lives in Las Vegas. I said, “Boy, you live in Las Vegas more.” I said, “When do you make the computer chips?” He said, “Oh, hell, I'm rich now; I don't have to be making no computer chips.” And he's sending them out all over the world, his computer chips. But he went to a vocational school where they had shop.

I remember one of the guys, he was a mechanic. They taught him how to work on cars. He never went to college or nothing to learn to work on cars. He ended up with his own dealership in California. It's just amazing what a vocational school will do for people.

I learned to sew. That's where I learned to sew. When I went to the Desert Inn, I put on my application that I could sew. So that's how I got the job as assistant housekeeper and the sewing and all that, all from a vocational school.

My daughter, Tracy, she can't thread a needle. She cannot tack. But I wouldn't let her take home ec. I wouldn't let her take it, and now I'm sorry that I didn't let her take it. I told her I don't want you to take it because I want you to do better than what I did. You do something

else. I don't want you in no home ec room with no sewing machine and no washing machine and someone teaching you how to make biscuits and cupcakes and pies. I said I can teach you that. I know how to do that; I can teach you that. You find something that I can't teach you to do.

But all of what we've done, the struggle is still out there. We still don't have half of what the white schools have. I told Deborah, I said, "Deborah, I want you to go to Coronado High School with me and I want to go to one of the Summerlin high schools because I want to go to their labs and see what's in their science labs compared to what we got at Charles I. West." Because when I go into—I won't call the teacher's name—when I go into his classroom, and he's a science teacher, I don't see a tube, I don't see a microscope, I don't see nothing in there that says this is a science room. I don't think I ever saw a computer in the room. The kids are just sitting at a desk, he's standing in the middle of the floor reading and talking or writing something on a blackboard. I said, but I know a science lab when I went to school, they taught us how to dissect and all that and look for the molecules and all that kind of stuff. And these kids, I don't think that West have this. I'm going to West and I want to find out. Would you please show me a science lab? I've got to find it because as long as I've been at West I haven't found a science lab. So now, how are you teaching high school students?

It's in the paper today, but West's name is not in there, about somebody's giving 300 million—

**Wow. I didn't read my paper this morning, so I'll have to go home and read it.**

Three hundred million dollars for six schools, which would be 50 million dollars apiece for science and math. But West was not on the list. They had Western. I think it was Western—what did I do with the paper? But it was yesterday's paper, and I think I threw it in

the trash.

**I'll look. I still have mine.**

But it's six schools that they're getting some money, 300 million, for science, math and one other subject.

But West is not included. Now, we are a high school supposedly. Now, after six years that that high school has been over there—and that's why I went out and supported that bond, I said, because I don't want them to say, well, the West Las Vegas parents didn't support the bond and since they didn't support it, in case it passed—because I knew it wasn't going to pass. I told Jones, I said, “Jones, it's not going to pass because the paperwork that you put out there is wrong.” I say, “You put nothing in there for students and teachers because most people don't understand that a building where water is falling from the top and coming from the ground up when it's raining and the children's tops of their shoes is being soaked in water that's a part of that classroom.” They don't understand that. They feel like the reason they weren't going to vote for the bond was because it was nothing put in there for computers and teachers' salaries and stuff like that. But these raggedy buildings, you look up and a roof fall in on your child when a storm is out there, you're going to wish you would have passed that bond.

**That's exactly right.**

They're going to wish they had passed it.

**I think so, too.**

So now I read, I think it was this morning or I saw it somewhere where they're trying to get some other way to get this 800 million dollars in if they can do it. But somebody's going to be sorry that that bond was not passed because when they started—because I told them you're going to have to sell off some of these schools. You're going to have to close the doors on some of them.

You're going back to double sessions. You're going to go back to year round thing. Thank God, Ms. White, I don't have a child in the district because to put a child on year round school, those double sessions...Year round is okay to a point. But a double session that a child's got to get up at three o'clock in the morning and be put on a bus at four o'clock in the morning and shipped off twenty, thirty miles out, that's wrong. That's child abuse.

I told Dr. Jones, "Dr. Jones, these kids are being abused in this district." Some is being abused by the teachers, but most of them are being abused by children because one teacher cannot teach thirty, forty, fifty children in no classroom, no little children.

I got a call yesterday. One of my schools was fixed, Kit Carson. "Ms. Lewis, we got a counselor and we got a teacher in that classroom with that kindergarten teacher." That woman came to me and she had tears in her eyes and she said, "Ms. Lewis, please, I've got to have some help." She said, "I cannot teach thirty-nine children."

How are you going to teach thirty-nine five-year-olds? You can't even keep law and order with thirty-nine five-year-olds. And I called Jones and I told Jones, I said, "Jones, this is child abuse. This is the worst I've ever seen." I said, "And the woman, she didn't know me from Adam." I said, "Now, my daughter works over there, but I can't let nobody put this on her because I was leaving my daughter's room because I had taken her something." Because they done moved my poor child so many times. I said, "Tracy, they can't do nothing else to you. As long as they don't take your money," I said, "They can't do nothing else to you than what they done done."

**So when you call him like that, how does he respond?**

He's on his job. So I said, "Dr. Jones, a lot of people don't know me," because I left and I was gone for quite a while and they've got a whole bunch of new folks. He said, "Marzette,

everybody knows you.” He said, “They still you. I don't care where you've been, these folks know you. When your name is called, these folks go crazy.”

He said, “What school? Will you tell me what school it is?” I said, “Yes, I'll tell you what school or how are you going to fix it if I don't tell you what school it is?” I said, “Because when I come to you, I have to have my facts.” I said, “It's at Kit Carson.” I said, “And the teacher, I don't know her name; I didn't ask her name.” I said, “But I was coming out of my daughter's room.”

And my daughter, I had taken her something. I don't know whether I had taken her some papers or some food, because sometimes I'll take her something to eat and sometimes she'll tell me, Momma, please go get me a cup of coffee and bring me some Starbucks, because she loves Starbucks coffee, if you're coming this way.

So I don't know what I was taking Tracy, but I went up in her room. And when I was coming out, I saw this woman trying to get these kids in line. She looked at me and she said, “Ma'am, are you the lady that be on TV and in the newspaper?” I say, “Sometimes.” She said, “Are you Tracy Lewis's momma?” I said, “Yes.” She said, “Would you please help me? I need help.” And I said, “What's the matter?” And she looked like she was just getting ready to just crack. I said, “What's wrong? Is it that bad?” She said, “It's badder than you think.” She said, “I can't teach thirty-nine kids nothing.” I said, “What grade level are you teaching?” She said, “Kindergarten and they have no limit.”

### **Oh, no limit to the number?**

No limit to the number in kindergarten because, see, kindergarten is not mandatory in Las Vegas. You can put sixty, seventy kids. But how the hell one woman going to teach them, or one man? Then you got no aides with them because I was the one that made them put aides on

the buses and in the classrooms. It tells you in that little biography of mine where certain schools put aides in the classrooms and on buses because I demanded if mine got on a bus, there was going to be an aide on there. So then they started picking these schools that were so far out they were putting these kids and put aides on these buses. So I caused a lot of people to get jobs.

**That's wonderful.**

Because they weren't hiring. Then they got to the aides thing, most of the aides without degrees on the buses, like the mother-type person who the kids would normally respect more so than they would a little teenager or somebody being on a bus. So they either have a man or older woman on those buses. Then in the classrooms, they started putting the aides in the classrooms because I told them this is a disgrace what you've done to these poor women. And the folks want to keep those jobs, so they're scared of retaliation.

So now I hear retaliation has already started at Kit Carson. And I told Jones, I said, "Dr. Jones, don't you retaliate on that woman." He said, "I'm not going to retaliate on her, Ms. Lewis, because this needed to be done." He said, "I didn't know nothing about it." I said anytime—the principal told me herself; it came out of the principal's mouth that she would pull a hall monitor, a janitor, a cook, a secretary, anybody who had fifteen or twenty minutes to go in the room with the woman. I said, "Do you realize how much abuse that is and how frightened those children must be because people do take off from work and they call these subs in? Then you got a sub janitor, a sub hall monitor and they're going in the rooms. Every day these children are looking at four and five different people. Can you imagine what kind of shock might be going on in these children?" I said, "You don't know how you're destroying these children."

He said, "Ms. Lewis, I just can't believe you're telling me that." This is Jones; he said, "I

can't believe you're telling me this.” I said, “Well, Jones, it's going on and the woman had no reason to call me and lie to me about it because I sure didn't call her. I didn't know her number. She got my number from somebody else.” He said, “Well, I'm going to send somebody over to investigate.” He said, “No, I'm going to fix this because I know you're not lying.” I said, “I don't have no reason to lie; I talk too much to lie.” I said, “So I talk too much to lie.” I said, “You won't find nobody to tell you, well, Marzette lied about this.” I said, “Now, the woman told me this; it came out of her mouth.”

So I got a call Monday—what's today? Friday. I got a call Friday at five o'clock. It was Dr. Guise. He said, “Ms. Lewis, I know you and I know you well.” He said, “Do you know me?” I said, “I know the name, but I can't place you, where I know you from or what you look like or nothing, but I know the name well.” He say, “You were the parent that everybody loved because when your children would do something and we'd call, you were right there at that school.” He said, “And you came to Cheyenne so much behind Johnny.”

And John had an aide. I insisted. When I filed that due process on them, I insisted that he had an aide until he graduated. So he had somebody walking with him every day. If the person got sick or called in for a day off, they had to find him an aide to put with him. I said, “Because I don't want him one day on the campus by himself for somebody to abuse him or to lie on him because I know the condition he's in.” He's hyper. He's on that medication. We don't know what that medication is doing to him. But the law says I must give him the medicine and all this because of the psychiatrists.

Ms. White, it's just ridiculous what they have put those foster kids through. Now, that's the system now that needs somebody. I said, Lord, do I have the strength to fight these folks? I don't know whether I have the strength left in my body to do anymore. Maybe when I get my

knee fixed and they go in my back and help me, I might be able to come out and say I've got a little left. I got to do something with that welfare department. That welfare department is out of control.

**Well, we can stop there. But what you just told me about the school system and the library, your fights have just been phenomenal.**

**You mentioned earlier a couple of times the name Ray Willis. Now, when he told you about “nigger night” and you told him what to go back and say, how did he take that?**

He just kind of laughed like I was joking; that I wouldn't be coming back. And when he saw that I was coming back, I'll tell you what he did do when I called the boycott schools. When I said that nobody really gave us any money, he went to Sam Smith's bookstore. I don't know whether you know Sam. You know Sam?

**Yes.**

He went to Sam's bookstore and gave Sam fifty dollars and said, “Give this to Marzette to help on the food or the gas or whatever they're doing.” He said to me one day, he and Sid Franklin—do you know Sid Franklin?

**I don't know Sid Franklin.**

Sid Franklin was over the chief of police, but he was assistant superintendent of schools with Brian Cram, a little, short, dark man.

**No, I didn't know him.**

And he told me, he said, “Marzette, you are our Mother Teresa.” He said, “You're all we got.” He said, “You're the only somebody that came out and broke this school district and you almost single handed done it by yourself.” But I didn't know what I was doing, whether I would get results. I was scratching. I'd get knocked down over here, but I'd get up over here.



**How did you meet the new superintendent, Dr. Jones? How did you meet him?**

It was kind of cute. I went to a meeting at Cimarron High School. They had called a meeting about the Prime Six schools and the schools on the Westside, right, these Westside Schools and stuff. And he wanted to meet the black parents coming out to the meeting. My name wasn't on the speaking list. Now, I'm the one invented Prime Six. I know everything about Prime Six from the day one; it started because I was the one that started it. And they had a speaking list, so they said. And Deborah, myself and Beatrice, we went in and sit down. Deborah sat one place and I sat somewhere else and Beatrice sat somewhere else. So he looked over and saw all these women in red. He said, "What are these women in red doing in here?" Black women, right? So somebody said, ooh, the sororities, those are Young's sorority sisters that wear red.

**Delta Sigma Theta.**

I said, "Oh, so Dr. Young brought them in here." So they was calling them by name to get up and ask Dr. Jones questions, right? So I jumped up. I said, "Stop it right now. Don't say another word because you don't know what you're talking about." I said, "Now, I'm the person who knows about Prime Six because I'm the one invented Prime Six. It was sixth grade centers for thirty years."

And I started asking Jones questions because Jones had made some good, pertinent statements when he was talking. And I started talking and I asked him how did he do this and how did he do that and where did they get the monies and all this kind of stuff.

When I got through talking and he went out—Deborah got up and said something, because I had taken up a lot of his time—the news media came to me. I didn't know who they were. I hadn't seen them before because I'm kind of new back on the scene and I hadn't seen too many. They've got so many new news media. I hadn't seen anybody out. I didn't know these

people were from Texas and Oklahoma. They came all the way in here to see what was going on.

So the next morning there were articles in the newspapers in Texas and Oklahoma. He said somebody called him and said, “Jones, when you get to Las Vegas if you don't have but one friend, you've got a friend.” So he said, “Who is it?” They told him. So he said, “Wait a minute, I know exactly who that woman is.” He said, “That's the only person at that meeting that I went to at Cimarron that made any kind of sense as to what was going on in the school district.” He said, “She's the only one that had any questions or anything to say about Prime Six; the other folks didn't know nothing.” So he say, “Well, when you get to Vegas, you better look her up.” So when Jones got to Vegas, Jones called me for breakfast.

**That's great. Now, explain Prime Six to me, the whole concept. Are you too tired?**

No, I'm not too tired. But the concept of Prime Six—and I don't know why they call it prime because there's nothing prime about it. Prime to me is the better part of the cow, prime beef. Now, they named the schools Prime Six, the school board. Instead of sixth grade centers they decided to call it Prime Six because they were going to do so much renovation and Prime Six was going to still have sixth graders, remember?

**But kindergarten through sixth now.**

Oh, no. They were going to have kindergarten through third and keep the sixth graders. Remember I told you how they split it up and took some of the sixth graders out and was going to keep some of the sixth graders? So that Prime Six came. They were going to renovate all these schools for the little kids' part and then they were going to keep the other half for the white sixth graders and they were going to make this prime where all these white sixth graders would still want to come even though you were in the school from little pre-K, kindergarten and first

through third. You didn't have to be bothered with no big black kids, fourth and fifth, because the parents were scared of fourth and fifth graders. So they were going to let the sixth graders come on.

Well, when we said we wanted all our kids to come home, they left it. They just left it at Prime Six. When they brought all the children back, it was just left at Prime Six. But Prime Six was because of white kids in the sixth grade centers.

**So where were the other kids going to go to school, the fourth and fifth?**

Out at the sixty-five feeder schools.

**Okay. So they were going to still be bussed.**

They were still being bussed to the same schools. They were being bussed for thirty years. And I said, huh-uh; it's time to bring them all home. So they left it; they never changed the name.

**They just left it Prime Six for the name of this new system.**

This new system. And then they had paid somebody ten thousand dollars to come in here to study it—Doctor Somebody out of California. They studied it and they said something had to be done. Said you can't leave a district like this; you just can't leave these children like this.

So the president, she jumped up and said, “We got to work and we've got to work in a hurry.” And I remind her of that every time I look in that woman's face. I said, “Now, it came out of your mouth that we've got to do it and we've got to do it in a hurry and it's been three or four years and you haven't done nothing yet.”

**So right now this is what system we have. We have the Prime Six system.**

Prime Six. Now, West is not a part of Prime Six. West is out there in la-la land, in nobody's land, all by itself with them fifty-six portables sitting out there. That's why Senator Neal asked the NAACP, say, “Why, Frank, why don't you with the NAACP work Prime Six? Let Marzette

take West and let her run with West, and you guys come in because the woman can't do all this by herself. She needs help.”

When I was in Mississippi, the man told me, he said, not one person—this came out of [Walt] Rulffes' mouth when I went out there that night. I had been here three months. I told my kids and my husband, I said, “Don't tell nobody I'm back in Las Vegas because I'm going to ride.” And I rode and I saw all these new schools and all this stuff that had been built up around here. After three months I went out there and I stood up that night and I said, “How did you hire Rulffes to be superintendent of schools? This is a disgrace.” I said, “You've got to find somebody who can run these schools who can be a superintendent. This man is not a superintendent; this man was in finance.” I said, “And he can't even do that; he need a dollar calculator.” I was so angry. I was so angry and every time I went out there I was on Rulffes.

And Rulffes told me one night we were in a meeting and he came down to talk, he said, Marzette—no. He had got up that night and he said, “I was here when you got rid of Brian Cram, I was here when you got rid of Carlos Garcia, and now you came back here to get rid of me.” And I said, “You're right as you can be because you haven't done nothing.” He said, “But have nobody since you left been out to this district and said one word about West Prep or Prime Six.”

So I called Frank[Hawkins]. I said, “Frank, you mean to tell me you're sitting on that bond oversight committee and a two-billion-dollar bond was passed. When I left here it was two billion dollars to be spent on schools and they built schools. One school cost 96 million and one school cost 93 million and we couldn't get a school over at West Prep for maybe 20 million?” I said, “What in the hell happened to you?” I went out to Frank like a vicious bulldog because he told them I was a pit bull in the paper one time. He said, “She's like a pit bull; she

ain't going to turn it loose.” I said, “Frank, I just don't believe that this has actually happened; that nobody's been to that school district and said nothing. You've been the president of the NAACP. Now you've been over the bond oversight committee for seven or eight years.” I said, “And you're sitting on that?”

He said, “But Marzette, every time I'd go to think about asking for some money for West Prep school, they'd say all the money is gone.” I said, “But they're still spending it. Every time I go in there and read through that agenda, five or six schools are being—new roofs are being put on.” I said, “And you put on a roof on one of these schools and it's going to take you ten million dollars to put on roofs and air-conditioning.” [Recording interrupted]

**So Marzette, your career has just been amazing. It's just been amazing.**

Well, I tell myself, Did I do any good? Was it good what I did or was it bad what I did? I know we hadn't had a house built in thirty years in West Las Vegas and North Las Vegas. We didn't have a casino over here. I went to North Las Vegas City Hall one night and I stood up—and I acted a clown over there; I really showed my butt—and told them when our families come to town they have nowhere to go but to the Strip to stay if we don't have room in our homes. We don't have a two-story building in North Las Vegas. We don't have a mall in North Las Vegas that has two stories to it. We don't have an indoor mall.

When I got through with them and I clowned them that night so badly, it was a company came in here and I think the company's name was Rhodes. Yes, Rhodes, they was the one who built houses in North Las Vegas. And Wendell P. Williams—I think the years I was the grand marshal or the year after that, he put it in one of their books that I was responsible for the first nine hundred homes being built in over thirty years in North Las Vegas.

**So where were those homes built?**

Right there by Fitzgerald, in that area, Fitzgerald School, on Revere Street. Those homes down Revere Street coming back up toward Martin Luther King.

**Revere Street is where—okay. Seven Seas is on one end of Revere Street.**

Seven Seas?

**Yes, you know where Revere Street starts. So we're talking about all the way on the other end of Revere.**

We're talking about Cheyenne.

**Oh, okay. So you're talking about the homes in this kind of development out here where we are now.**

Huh-uh. Huh-uh. I'm talking about the homes over there on Helen Street where I was.

**Oh, okay. Okay.**

Back in that area. Off Revere.

**Okay. I know where that is.**

He said I was responsible for those nine hundred homes. Then when I went out there and I fought with them about the casinos, that's when a couple of years later the Cannery came in.

Nobody had never—Brian Cram told me this. He said, “Marzette, you're the only somebody that ever came across that railroad track from the Westside and asked for anything.” He said, “Nobody from across that railroad track has ever asked for anything.” And I said, “You thought we were satisfied?” He said, “Yes; nobody asked for nothing.” I said, “Common sense would tell you I'm paying my taxes.” Because, see, I can talk about my taxes. I've been paying taxes ever since my momma used to send me to the store when I was four or five years old and say go get a piece of salt pork for me to put in my greens. We had to pay some taxes on that. Momma had to pay a penny or something and I was giving it to those people. So I knew

taxes a long time ago. Like I tell him, “You can't make no fool out of me when it comes to math.” I told him I needed—I want (indiscernible) that district. And I told him I'd be the finance person. I'd do it for free just to see who was stealing the money and who was taking it. I said, “Because somebody can't count, multiply, subtract and divide.”

It's ridiculous what we as a people have let white folks—and I'm going to have to just tell it like it is. We let these white folks do this to us because we have not had the guts enough to come out and say we've had enough. I stayed on the plantation too long to tell me that I'm still on the plantation. Like my friend Deborah Jackson always holler, you ain't sending me back; I'm not going back to the plantation. And I always tell her I've never seen a plantation. I don't know what one looks like. But I heard about them. I said because we lived in a sawmill town and my daddy wasn't going to let us go pick no cotton and work on nobody's—in no fields or nothing. My step-daddy because my daddy was killed when I was three weeks old. And my step-daddy worked three or four jobs to keep Momma at home with the kids and us from working. Now, I worked in a white woman's kitchen. I did things like that, baby-sit, iron, stuff like that.

But as far as a plantation, the first—I'm lying. The first plantation I saw I was going to bury my father-in-law in Illinois. And my girlfriend, which is my play momma, lives here. She lived in Tallulah, Louisiana, and there was a town called Saint Joseph, what really was her home. And she wanted to go and we put her in the car with us. She was going to stay in Saint Joseph till we went to Illinois and buried my father-in-law and we were going to come back through and pick her up. But when we got to Saint Joseph, we were going through Tallulah down the road to Saint Joseph, she said, “Marzette, you see that little house out there?” She said, “That's a plantation house.” But there wasn't no plantations then. They had stopped all

that. It was just green grass. But they still had the little houses. I said, "What's the little houses for?" She said, "That's where the sharecroppers stayed." She said, "And the big house you see out there, that's the master's house." She said, "They owned the slaves and the plantation workers."

So I saw that, but I didn't see anything growing out there but grass. Well, now all the plantations that's down there is trees, woods because all the farming—I haven't seen too much farming going on anymore in the South because they used to say that's where all our cotton and stuff came from, which is the South. Well, all the jobs been shipped everywhere else. So there's nothing down there now but pulpwood and trees and stuff.

And I said, "If I'm the only somebody that will ask for anything"—and Senator Neal told me, he said, "Marzette, you are probably the only person"—and the man is right—"that has asked for anything."

When John Rhodes got elected to the city council board in North Las Vegas, I went down there one night and I called Senator Neal and told him to come go with me. And he did; he got down there after they were swearing John in. Because I had told John when he wanted me to help him get back on the school board, I said, "John, I can't do it." I said, "Dr. McMillan got us into this mess with this bussing and you was a baby crawling around in a diaper on your momma's floor; you don't know nothing about it." I said, "So he put us in it and he's going to get us out of it." I said, "I'm going to have to help to get him elected." I said, "But anything else you run for, I'm going to help you." And I did. I helped him to get on that city council.

So Senator Neal went with me that night when they were swearing him in and Neal stood up. He said, "He's a young boy." And Neal shook his finger in the face of the city council. And he said, "You better treat him right; you better not hurt him down here."



And that's the way—well, Neal and I, I've known him since I was...a young girl. I think I knew him before he went to the senate. And Neal has always been nothing but good. A lot of people hate him. They don't like him because he's always been fair and spoken the truth. He said one night in a meeting, he said—when Arberry said what he said in that meeting about the monies that come in in the envelopes, Neal got up in that same meeting and he said, “I will not go to no penitentiary behind no sixty-seven thousand dollars.” He said, “Ain't nobody going to put me in no jail for taking no money and stealing no money.”

And Neal has stayed in the neighborhood. He's one of the only politicians that's been in that house where he is now, never moved out of it and have no intentions, I don't think, because his daughter is a pharmacist and she moved in with him after his wife died and she's staying there now. She's working on doing a lot of remodeling and stuff. He went back and had his leg fixed and he's going back and having another one fixed.

But he's the only politician that I've ever had any confidence, any trust in to do the right thing because all the rest of them, when we got them elected, they filled their own pockets. You've seen some of the dirt that's come out on them. One, swimming pools. One, patios built on to their houses. One, family rooms built on to the houses. That's what they was getting.

**So what do you see as the future of the Westside neighborhood, of the all-black neighborhoods in this area, North Las Vegas and with the Westside?**

And with the Westside? The Westside, I cannot see too much improvement ever being done to the Westside unless we come out in a massive, I mean a massive drove of people to get contractors and builders, like when no houses had been built in North Las Vegas in thirty years or Las Vegas or no hotels, we had no hotels. But now we're going to have to come out in a massive protesting to get anything done for West Las Vegas because West Las Vegas is not a

flooding area and the white man wants West Las Vegas for themselves because I've seen the book.

**Tell me what you mean by the book.**

It's a book out. The man that I told you, Reverend Jefferson who read that poem to Marty Kravitz that night at the school board when we had the boycott and we were presenting the toilet and all that, he showed the book in a meeting one night where they was going to take West Las Vegas because downtown was going to come across that railroad track with an underpass and come across that railroad track. That's how come the Moulin Rouge is gone. They're going to rebuild and all that mess over there is going to be torn down and they're going to make parking lots and condominiums. Now, this is what was shown in that book. I saw it with my eyes.

**Where is the book because I would love to see it?**

I don't know. I don't know where Reverend Jefferson is. I've been trying to locate him since I've been back and I haven't seen him. I don't know whether he's still in Las Vegas. I saw his ex-wife one day. She didn't know where he was. He had married somebody else. But I just wished I knew how to get a hold of that book. The book is about—well, it's bigger than this educational book here. I wish I knew how to get that book, but it tells everything in that book as to what they're going to do with West Las Vegas, all the way up past the Cove Hotel. That's where our Strip was.

**Jackson Street.**

We had Jackson Street, everything up there. So I just can't see us going anywhere with West Las Vegas. North Las Vegas, yes, I can see North Las Vegas improving, but not West Las Vegas.

**But you see West Las Vegas improving but not for blacks, but for the downtown area.**

But for the downtown area.

**Well, when we look at the Smith Center, I mean that's right there.**

Yes. But that's not considered West Las Vegas.

**I know. But what I'm saying is I understand why they would want West Las Vegas.**

Right. You understand?

**Yes. Oh, yes. It's obvious.**

The malls and all of that. So it's coming. It's coming.

**Oh, yes. Oh, yes. So do you think that they're going to open F Street?**

Do you?

**Why would they close it because I think they're going to take all the Westside? So why close it?**

It was just something to do to get the black folks riled up. They just wanted black folks to have something to go to meetings about to keep from messing with them about other things, the things that they knew they should have been doing. And our elected officials let them have their way and they had money to throw away. So when they closed us off down on F Street—and do you think that they'd ever tear that kind of money down? Not until they get ready to build what they want to build over here. Then they'll tear the whole freeway out. That whole freeway will be gone because they're going to put what they want to put in West Las Vegas, Ms. White. It's just as simple as that. And I believe it from the depth of my heart that that will happen.

**I think you're right.**

And I saw it in the book.

**Well, I really appreciate everything you've had to say today.**

And I'm so sorry I haven't offered you a cracker or nothing.

**Oh, no, no, no. This is fine. You have candy here, my favorite food. Thank you so much.**

You're welcome. You're quite welcome.

**[End of recorded interview]**

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