AN INTERVIEW WITH JOCELYN OATS

An Oral History Conducted by John Grygo & Claytee White

African American Collaborative

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A Collaborative Oral History Project

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

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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PREFACE

Jocelyn Loretta Oats was born on August 29th, 1952 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Her family moved to Vegas when she was two years old so that her father. Jocelyn's father, Abner James Thompson Sr., founded Victory Baptist Church on the Westside of Las Vegas. Jocelyn grew up in the church her father founded, and her faith drove her to become an active force in her community.

She details what growing up on the Westside as a young African American was like, and how it has shaped her views today. She discusses her experiences in middle school and high school, as well as her relationship with her family. She reflects on what having a community and church leader as her father meant to her while growing up.

Jocelyn first began giving back to her neighborhood through her involvement in the PTA. She advocated for black students during the first steps of school integration. She worked for Nevada Partners as a volunteer, helping to prepare people to enter into the workforce. Nevada Partners asked Jocelyn to come on as a paid employee to develop a youth program to help kids get summer jobs, which she named Youth Employment for the Summer (or YES.)

Jocelyn ran the youth program for five years before moving to the Women in Transition program, which assisted underprivileged and disadvantaged women to get back on their feet. She speaks about the difficulties that such programs face in society, and how the changes in the welfare system affected Nevada Partners.

In this interview, Jocelyn reflects on her experiences in Las Vegas and the black community. She provides insight into the structure of churches and community on the Westside in the 1950s and 1960s, and tells the story of how Victory Baptist grew as a faith center. Jocelyn shares her views on developing strong community, family ties, religion and faith, and the development of the black community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Jocelyn Oats
November 20, 2012
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by John Greggo

My name is John Greggo. It is November 30th, 2012. I am here with Jocelyn Oats. Could you please spell your name for me?

Do you want the one on the birth certificate or the one I use regularly? I'll give you both. My mother named me J-L-O-Y—God, my mind's a blank. Okay. Let's do this again. But don't turn off the recorder, just laugh about it later. J-O-C-Y-E-L-Y-N, Loretta Oats. I spell my name J-O-C-E-L-Y-N. I dropped the first Y. It was just too much. Loretta, L-O-R-E-T-T-A. Last name O-A-T-S, like the oats horses eat.

All right. Could you tell me where you were born, when you were born?

So I was told, August 29th, 1952 in New Orleans, Louisiana in the Charity Hospital—that's what my momma said. Moved to Vegas when I was two, though, so I don't know anything about that.

When you moved here what was the main reason for your parents moving out here from New Orleans?

My daddy said God told him to. He had never been to Vegas. In fact, we originally moved to L.A. My father had a heart attack coming down the steps of my aunt's apartment. My mother told me that after the paramedics got there, he got up and said that we had to go to Vegas. The first three nights we lived in Vegas, we slept in a car.

What were your parents' occupations at this time?

Daddy was a laborer and Momma didn't have an occupation.

She just raised the kids?

Yes. She worked at the hotels for a while. I think Momma was a maid. When we were little, I remember her going to work at night to the Stardust Hotel. During my formative years, though, my mother was home.

And do you have siblings?

There are six of us.

Oh. Brothers? Sisters?

I have three brothers and two sisters. There's six of us. My oldest sister is not my mom's, but Mother raised her. She currently lives in Mexico, and everybody else is here.

Excellent. Could you tell their names? Do you remember them? [laughing]

Well, let me think here. Duh. My oldest sister's name is actually Eloise. She changed it to Tina when she was sixteen and we've called her Tina ever since. She is living in Mexico. In fact, she's married to a character actor, Woody Strode. Her name is Tina Strode. My oldest brother's name is Myelus. My next oldest is Ielus. They're not twins, but I think my daddy was on a Viking thing. My mother named me after some soap opera on the radio, so she tells me. She named my sister Henrietta. My baby brother is Abner James Junior, A.J. Junior.

All right. So your family moved out here. You were very young. Some brothers and sisters a little older; some were younger. So you were kind of in that middle.

I am the middle spoke, yes.

What was it like early here, like with schools or early memories that you have?

Okay. I'm a storyteller, so bear with me.

Please.

My father was a laborer and Momma was home. I don't remember her working, but they say she did. Daddy worked construction. He tells us that when he went to work for Pardee Construction, who at the time did not hire blacks, Daddy just went and started doing stuff until they hired him. I remember before he started working construction, there was scarce food. Momma would call us in. Daddy would tell us to eat. He'd tell Momma to feed us kids first and let us eat all we wanted—get all you want, but eat all you take. He would never eat until we

were through. When Daddy started working for Pardee, we moved to a house on Alexander. My sister still has that house. That house is over 50 years old. I used to think everybody went in for dinner at five thirty, because that's what we did. Five thirty, dinner was on the table. We sat down at the table and ate. Then one of us had to run Daddy a bath. I thought everybody was in their houses at five thirty, because we were in our house at five thirty. Daddy would come home, so it was time to eat. We set the table, and then the food was ready. Daddy had a bath afterwards. Then we were in for the night. We had to be in by dark. Momma didn't care what we were doing. I thought that was everybody's routine. It wasn't what I thought it was.

I remember getting up going downtown to the parade. On Saturday mornings, my daddy and my brothers would go rabbit hunting. Momma made this rabbit sausage and tell us, "If you don't eat the sausage you can't go to the movies." We'd give the sausage to the dog, eat the rest of the breakfast, and we would go. They would give us 50 cents. It was 15 cents to get into the movie and we'd have 35 cents to spend. Every Saturday we did that. I have wonderful memories of growing up. You know what? I know now that we didn't have a lot, but it seemed like we did. We didn't eat a lot. There was a whole bunch of us. My mother had my youngest brother when she was older—she was almost 40 when she had AJ. There was always four or five of us in the home together. We lived in Cadillac Arms. It was a two-bedroom apartment. My sister and I slept in one bed and my brothers slept in the other.

Our neighbor was Sarann Knight Preddy. My sister was in love with her son Glen because he was a pretty boy. They had this big dog named Chinook. He was an Alaskan husky. I would ride her like I was riding a horse, because he was a big dog. The neighborhood was wonderful. Reverend Gilmore was my neighbor. He's the founding pastor of Bethel Baptist Church. My father originally was the assistant pastor at Bethel. My childhood memories are

wonderful.

I remember us moving on Alexander. It was a home. It was part of one of the first sets of homes for the black neighborhoods. We had lived in Cadillac Arms, and when they built homes, we got the second set. Berkley Square is older than the development we're in. We had our own house. Man, it was wonderful. Our neighbors down the street got the first color TV. I wanted to go to Ms. Mary Jane's house because I said, "Daddy, they got a color TV." It was just a little box. It was fascinating.

When I grew up, the neighborhood was quite different. We were a community then. When there was an issue, everybody helped each other. It wasn't what church you went to. When I was older, I think I must have been about sixteen, our neighbors across the street were in a domestic violence situation. Ms. Velma Shot and Mr. Charlie. My mother was burning my head right over here. I remember seeing it, and we all jumped. The straightening iron went that way. He threw his hands up. He had went in the house and apparently had jumped on her. He beat her and she came out. I think she said she was trying to scare him. But the gun jumped. They came and got Dad. Daddy went down to the police station with her. Ms. Velma spent about seven hours at the police station. They sent her home. When I grew up, it was about community. Now it's what church you go to. Everybody acted together.

I remember they were building streets in Vegas Heights and there was an activist named Albert Dunn. Everybody hated Albert Dunn because Albert Dunn says we need sidewalks like everybody else did. Albert Dunn got about thirty people and they locked arms. They wouldn't let them build the streets. He told them that we need curbs; we need neighborhoods like the white folks got. But they put streetlights in the sidewalks because they were just going to pave the streets. Albert Dunn said, "We pay taxes. We want sidewalks and we want lights." That was

not what they were going to do, but they did it. They did put those streets in. Daddy came home and said, "Reverend Dunn is right." But Albert Dunn had about 20 people that could not tolerate him. He was the early day Charles Richards. He just died recently. Is it Richards or Richardson? Very intelligent man, oh, man. But you pay taxes, and this is what you need.

There were a lot of sharecroppers in Vegas when I moved here. Daddy told us a story. He said he left Rayville, Louisiana going to New Orleans because he was going to become a gambler. He met God in Tommy's Place, in a juke joint. That's Daddy's story and he's sticking to it. Now, here's the interesting thing. My father saw my mother in a dream before he met her, and my mother saw my father in a dream the year before she saw him. My father was a sharecropper and her family said, "Hell no. You will not date." My mother was a debutante. She married this man against her mom's wishes.

My mom said that they asked my grandma to watch Tina, Myelus, Ielus and me for a week while they moved here. Her mother told her that she absolutely would not. So my mom packed everybody up, and we got in the car and moved to L.A. My aunt Wilma was in L.A. We moved to L.A., and we were there for about two weeks when my Daddy just dropped. He left because God said go to Vegas. He told God that he didn't know anybody in Vegas and he wouldn't do that. But he came to Vegas. My oldest sister remembers the first night in the car. I don't remember driving.

My father was not an educated man. My father had a fourth-grade education. But my father had a photographic memory. I don't think I've met anybody as smart. He was just a smart man. He was a smart man.

The more involved he got in the church, the more it shifted in stages. I liked it better when it was a smaller church because it was family.

What is the name of the church?

Victory Baptist, 1305 North E Street. In fact, he was a member of Evergreen and they had a power struggle there. Evergreen was on H Street. Now it's another church, but it was on H Street. They were in there, meeting to discuss what direction they were going to go. Daddy asked them to get on their knees and pray. Several of the deacons and trustees, who I will not name, started kicking people telling them to get up. They said, "We're not praying about nothing. It's our way or the highway." My terminology, not theirs. One of the members who is now at Victory, told me that her mother kicked her and told her to get up. Daddy took seven members and walked out. That's when they formed Victory Baptist. Reverend Marion Bennett gave them a place to house. The first organized church for Victory was at Reverend Bennett's cafeteria. Reverend Marion Bennett, who was the pastor of Zion Methodist—he's retired now, but he's still got something going—he gave them their first place to house a church and then they went to the carpenters' union. Now it's a shelter, Owens and Las Vegas Boulevard. They had church there for three or four years and they met there every Sunday.

They organized a church. The deacons and trustees of the church were: Will McDowell, who is now deceased; Albert McCoy, who's now deceased; Ed May, who is still living; Mr. E.D.; Judge Smith; Deacon Harvin; I can't remember his first name. They went to a juke joint, literally. It was a club on the corner of E Street, right there at E and Monroe. Daddy said, "This is where God said the church is going to be."

The guy that owned it wanted money. He wanted $5,000. A lady named is Jiles gave them the $5,000. She said God told her to give them the money. They had made arrangements to pay her back, but after that she said "I don't need for you to pay me back. God told me to do it." But that was the money they paid to get the place. That was the first church there.

That was Victory Church?

Yes, Victory Baptist. I'm a member, but I don't attend now.

[Claytee White] How old were you then?

Ten, about ten I think. I might have been a little older. I need to get the book because the 50th anniversary of our church was just last year. The church secretary called, so I took the book to her and told her to make a copy of it. They didn't use any information, but I gave it to her. But it talked about the founding members like Mrs. Jiles, and had pictures of them and of Daddy. There are pictures of the first deacon of the board, the missionary board, the usher board, the trustees and deacons, the first musicians. It had a picture of all my family when we were children. I'll get that for you.

My father was a dreamer, and we grew up in that environment. The things he knew were the things he knew. He said God said he would establish a church on that corner, and God did that. It was a vision that God had given Daddy. We're talking back in the sixties. I think back then, too, there was relationship. Reverend V.C.L. Coleman was at Second Baptist. Reverend I.W. Wilson was second pastor. Reverend Addison at New Jerusalem. Pleasant Grove, Pilgrim Rest, Reverend Cline. There was relationship between all those ministers. Most of them were like my father, not educated men. Like Daddy, they made it to the fourth or fifth grade, and then they were sharecroppers and farm boys. I think Reverend Coleman might have come from the city, but my father didn't.

I don't think you will ever meet a man that knows the scripture like Daddy. My father knew the scripture like it was a book he wrote. It was poetry to him. Daddy went to a funeral once. One of the members died. He went to do the eulogy. He was supposed to read scripture. Daddy read the second scripture of Timothy, which talks about how the judgment of God must

first begin at the house of God. When Daddy finished reading that scripture, the minister said, it's over. Pallbearers come. It was a done deal. My father spoke like a poet quoting a poem. He was really, really something. That doggone Reverend A.J. Now, I could take up a little time talking about his flaws. Because we're human, we're all flawed. But to know him was to love him.

The first time my father left the church he was at odds with the membership. There was a cleaners that my father took his clothes to, and one of the members paid. Everybody knew it. Daddy would take his clothes. They loved him. They loved my dad. They loved my daddy.

So it was a strong community?

Oh, God, yeah. Yeah, it was.

It didn't matter what church or anything else?

I remember Martin Luther King came to speak and Daddy took us all to the convention center. The thing that I remember Dr. King told them: "Tow them cars up out of your driveway and have pride in yourself." It was the era. We had to be together. They felt like we needed to stick together. That whole process of thinking is gone, I think, from this valley. There was never a time when somebody got hurt or killed, that a minister wasn't there. Somebody's pastor was there and it didn't matter that they wasn't a member of your church. That era is long gone.

What was your father's name?

Abner, A-B-N-E-R, James Thompson, Sr. I remember about two years before my dad died we were at Applebees. My sister came from Mexico. We were sitting up talking. A lot of people were there, former members. Daddy said…can I be blunt? Do I need to clean it up?

No, no. Be blunt.

Daddy said, "I ain't going to be shit while I'm living. When I'm dead, I'm going to be standing

next to God. Just remember I told you." Nobody knew scripture like my dad, nobody. He was called the "Walking Bible." Bible study was his way. I have a really difficult time functioning in Bible study now. When I attended Bible study, he'd look at me and say, "You've got a question on your face. Ask it." I'd ask the question. He'd ask a question. She'd ask a question. Daddy never gave an opinion. He would make the Bible answer. He would say, "Find your scripture. You find that scripture." We would start reading and it was just like a puzzle piece coming together. It never failed. We never got to what I think or I believe. He said, "God is able to answer questions for Him. He does not need me to answer. He just needs me to verbalize what He's saying." He would answer any question with scripture. That's the environment I came up in. I've been in church where a woman's sight was restored. A lady was crippled and her leg was no longer short. I've always been in services where demons were cast out because a little woman talked like a man, and through a man about your size like he was a piece of paper. I've seen that.

So tell me what that was like living in the home with a person like that.

You know what? I was a daddy's girl.

Take your time.

One of the things my dad liked about me was that I didn't hold a grudge. I would call him and say, "I need to talk to you because I didn't want to get in trouble with God. So I ain't talking to you daughter to father or parishioner to pastor." He knew that I was going to go to the deep end. After I was through I was through.

I saw it through children's eyes. When I got older, he told me about church meetings. He said, "You have a right to come. But they have the right to fuss, because to them I'm the daddy, too. They have a right to get angry about stuff." I could tell you some of the things that made

my dad get up and say, "Have you lost your damn mind?" But he was also equipped to say, "You know, you're right." When he said he was wrong, he meant it. He meant it.

Daddy taught us that God's portion in Earth is people and not things, so people deserve a measure of respect even if you smell them before you see them. He would go into the Town Tavern. My father was a drinker. He didn't care because he treated people like they were important. He didn't care what their station was. He would tell people, "If you're going to go to seminary, just get God before you go. If you don't, you're going to come out a fool. They're going to teach you one way and it's going to shut the channels of God communicating with you." My father, when he was in his latter days, was going to seminaries all the time and speaking. Daddy knew scripture and he knew how to make it relevant to your life. He just did.

Daddy would go to Mount Charleston. He used to take my brothers. But they said that Daddy would be over there and he wouldn't be eating. Daddy would fast on weekends. He said he needed the quiet so God could commune with him. He used to walk everywhere and he'd say that was his time to talk to God. They called him "The Walker", because he'd be talking and walking, talking and walking.

This is a story I've got to tell you. I got a job. I told them I need to work on Sundays because I didn't want to go to church on Sunday night. They gave me a Sunday night job in the Boulevard at Woolworth's. I was a waitress and a short-order cook. I got off at nine o'clock. My brothers were supposed to pick me up. Well, if they were watching a movie, I had to wait till the movie was over, which meant they wouldn't come get me until eleven.

I told them and my daddy "No more." I started catching the bus and I didn't get home till eleven o'clock. I saved up my money and bought a 1957 three-speed Fairlane Ford, two-tone, green and lime. Mother Williams's husband sold me the car. It was stick. I learned to drive a

stick.

When Daddy took us all to Rayville, I helped him drive. No license, but I drove through Texas. We got down to Rayville. We're going in Louisiana and Daddy said, "I've got to go this way." Daddy took us through some of the back woods. We didn't know where we were going. He knocked on this door and he said, "Somebody in here needs prayer." Daddy went in and prayed with this woman. She started spewing up some shit. But whatever it was she spewed up, she was fine when we were finished. We got back on the road and went on to Rayville.

Another time, Albert Jordan said they were going to Gina to do a revival. Daddy got down there, and he said he told God, "I can't do a revival in this weather. You're going to have to do something about this weather." The weather dropped, and the temperature was seventy-two the whole time they were there. The humidity dropped. The day he left the humidity went back up and the weather got muggy again. But that's a true story, a true story.

You were talking about Bible school before. What about high school here in Vegas or elementary school? Where did you go?

I went to Matt Kelly. There were three of us on the block: me, Sarah Jo and Mary [names changed on request of interviewee.] We were the three Musketeers. Well, I didn't know at the time, but Sarah Jo was a bully. Whatever Sarah Jo said we did it. They were in my house, and Sarah Jo dropped one of my momma's sodas and broke one of mother's crystal vases. Momma came home, and Sarah Jo let me get beat. I was sitting there getting this whipping thinking if that had been Ms. Velma, her momma, I would have said, Ms. Velma, I did that. I decided then I needed new friends. I just told her how I felt about that. She just ex-ed me out and treated me like crap. That was fine. My mind was made up. I met my friends. In fact, my girlfriend's husband died last month and I went to the funeral. Rashawn Bouschwa, and Peggy, and Sally

went to Matt Kelly.

My father wanted me to be under Mr. Hall, who was a male teacher at Kit Carson in sixth grade. He took me from my friends at Matt Kelly, and I cried. I said, "Daddy, I don't want to go there. I don't know anybody." That was the best year of my life. I made straight As. Mr. Hall called me Joyce Ann, never called me Jocelyn. Once I made a C. He whipped my ass and said, "Joyce Ann, I just like this because I know you can do better." I was a straight-A student that whole year, because he expected no less from me. He said, "You're a smart girl."

I remember it was the first time it ever snowed. They called and said, "Your daddy is in the office." I thought, oh, God, what did I do, what did I do? Daddy came and took everybody out of school to see *The Magnificent Seven* at the theater. He did stuff like that all the time. He said, "I ain't working; it's snowing. Y'all want to go see the snow?" We went to see the snow and then we went to see *The Magnificent Seven*.

When we were coming up, I met Mahalia Jackson. I don't know if she was from New Orleans, but my mother knew her. Momma fixed gumbo for her. Also we met Marian Anderson, the opera singer.

She came to Las Vegas?

Uh-huh.

Tell that story.

I just remember sitting at the table and they told me who she was. She was a thick woman, short hair. She wore it in like a flip. Spoke softly. Momma said she was a recording artist, but I didn't know what that meant. My sister did, because she still has the records of Mahalia Jackson and an opera singer named Marian Anderson. They came to dinner at our house in Cadillac Arms because they knew my momma. My mother's mom, Emma, was a hottie-tottie singer in

the church. They were society people in New Orleans, so she knew all these people. When Mahalia Jackson came here, she had dinner at the house. I didn't know what opera was. She was a brown-skin lady, very, very fine. I just remember I wanted to be just like her, even though I was such a tomboy. Mahalia Jackson because she was such a soft-spoken woman. I thought Ms. Anderson glided. Momma knew them from New Orleans.

How much about your mom's family do you know?

My mother was raised by the Hortons. Her grandma raised her, because her mom got remarried. Her and my auntie's father was Henry Williams. He worked on the railroad, but their mom left them in the care of their grandmother. She was raised with her aunts' and uncles' as brothers and sisters. I knew a couple of them: Uncle Bud, who ended up having a restaurant in L.A., and Tom, who was a minister in Louisiana. There were three other brothers that I didn't know.

My dad was from a large family in Rayville. There are three of them still living, my aunt Melinda, my Uncle Tommy, and my Uncle Freddy. Everybody else is deceased. They were all raised on a farm. Daddy went to the military. That was his education. But my father remembered some fourth grade poetry—a poem the teacher taught them. It was five pages long. Daddy was quoting that poem till the day he died.

Back on track with me. We went to Gibson Middle School and then we opened Valley High School, eighth grade. My girlfriend Joanie and I used to run that school. We had the first and only black drill team. They had a white dance team, but they wouldn't allow us to be a part of that. We wanted to form our own team. The English teacher, Ms. Marcella Browndis, was a little Italian firecracker. She said, "They will have a team." We couldn't be a dance team, so we called ourselves a precision drill team. God, we had a great time. We would bribe the security

guard at the gate with a Whopper, and he would let us in. We got to travel. I wish all my kids had the last three years of school like I did. I had a wonderful, wonderful experience.

One time, my dad came. He said, "I just had a feeling. I see that you've been missing English."

I said, "Well, Daddy—"

"Jocelyn Loretta."

"Yes, sir."

He would tell me what he wanted. I was a daddy's girl. All he'd do is tell me he was disappointed and I'd be crying. Oh, I hated disappointing my daddy.

I remember when I was sixteen. I had a driver's license and I had a car. We were going to go out. There was a new club called the Teen Beat Club. Daddy said, "Do not go." But we went. We got to the Teen Beat Club. It was out by Nellis Air Force Base. One of my girlfriends was dating a guy from the base. Of course, we were kids and these were grown men. But who cared? We got there and lost those car keys. I proceeded to ask God to just help me find those keys, and this will never happen again, ever, ever, ever. I found my keys.

I did not want to disappoint my daddy. I was a daddy's girl. My mother would say, "I'm going to tell your daddy," and I would just get to daddy before she did.

What did your mother call your father?

Reverend Thompson.

In the house?

When she was angry, which she often was. Or when he was frustrated. "Reverend Thompson, I know God told you to come here and do this. But I'm tired." But it was Reverend Thompson when she was mad enough, Reverend Thompson. Other than that it was Al.

And your mother's full name?

Christina Thompson. He called her Christine.

Momma started a feeding program at the church, at Victory. They don't have it any longer. Momma would fix food. She said, "I have to fix it like I'm fixing it for my family." We had monthly dinners all the time at Mom's. We do that now at my sister's house. In fact, we do Bible study every Sunday at my sister's house now, all the brothers and sisters do. We were taught God's portion of people. My children and my brother and I, we're all in an arena where we're dealing with people. Servitude is our niche and we know it. You look back now and we understand the rich heritage that we had and the wonderful foundation that we had. We understand that we are the epitome of our parents, so what we do reflects on our parents.

My mom and dad divorced after 32 years of marriage. I think part of that was my father was always with all the people with degrees. Daddy was not an educated man, per se. When there was an era in the church when the church was flooded with doctors and psychologists, he became known as the Bible answer man. I think somebody, I ain't going to say who, convinced him that his image needed to be changed. Now, Daddy had always liked women. Don't get me wrong. I can tell you stories about that. My father had always put family first. That changed after we had gotten older. They were older and the energy wasn't there. So it was different.

What was the new image that they wanted to see?

Young and upcoming. I honestly don't know, because I didn't have a taste for any of the people that he was associating with. I'm very verbal, so I told him so. You can't give us principles to govern our life by, and then change midstream. It doesn't work like that. Daddy used to always tell us the scientists are not wrong, but we just don't understand. He was really before his time. Oh, my God, he was before his time with his thinking and stuff. It didn't help that he had a

photographic memory. There was nobody to talk about some of the things my dad would get and understand. There was nobody to talk to. There was nobody to talk to. I understand.

So in the 1960s we begin to have the first lawyers come into the city. We begin to have doctors come into the city, more and more schoolteachers. So is that the crowd, then, that your father began to spend more time with?

The people that came to influence my father were evangelical white folks, nothing personal. My father was good friends with Harry Claiborne. In fact, Harry Claiborne would take Daddy in his office and make Daddy read the law books. Daddy would go stand before the judge. That's why people would come and find Reverend Thompson if there was an issue, because they respected Dad. Daddy didn't care who you were. He didn't care about that.

Tell me more about Claiborne.

The first encounter was when Ms. Velma shot Mr. Charlie. Daddy had to go get some defense for her. Daddy went to Judge Claiborne because that was who they were going to stand before. He just explained the situation. This was a battered woman. Mr. Charlie was a drinker. He would come home and take a skillet to her. Ms. Velma decided she wouldn't take any more beatings and Mr. Charlie did something to her. Anyway, they were going to put her in jail because they said it was premeditated—she went and got the shotgun and had time to load it. But when they finished, Ms. Velma did not go to jail. She did not go to prison. I guess they call it the battered wife syndrome, because she used to get beaten regularly.

There was another lady in that church and I won't give her name. I'm just going to tell you what I know because she used to do my hair. She was an exceptional hairdresser. She moved here from California. She really wanted her husband in church, but church wasn't his thing. He joined the church and she was elated. But he would get her up on certain evenings and

take her to casinos. If she sat where he told her to sit, do what he told her to do, they would win money. We get a phone call. She shot her husband. But when they got there, he had been choking her. I think she spent two nights in jail and Daddy talked to the judge. There was a trial, but she never went to jail or anything because of his relationship with the court system. And a lot of that was due to Judge Claiborne telling Daddy, "Read the book and let's talk about what it means." Daddy understood how the law worked. But it was really because Judge Claiborne helped him.

When my dad left my mom, my youngest brother started selling drugs. My brother treats his body like a temple. He doesn't eat pork. He has never used drugs. He says I could take a dollar and make ten; that's how he saw it. But he got caught.

At that time he was estranged from my dad, because he was very angry at Dad for leaving home. Daddy left in a horrible way, his whole demeanor. I just asked him, "Have you lost your mind?" He would shake his head. I said, "Don't start crying. That's going to piss me off." When my dad hurt my mom, it was in a hostile environment, per se. My daddy took 20 years of his life to prove that he was worthy. We'd go down to New Orleans and she was Queen Christina. He started elevating, and Momma was just Momma. My mother was just mom to everybody and anybody.

But here's an interesting fact. Daddy left Momma and my mother started baby-sitting to make ends meet. She baby-sat for Aretha Franklin's sister. I have a god sister who now lives in Minnesota. She was a call girl in New York and they told her, if you go to Vegas, call this woman. She'll keep your children, she'll feed them, and she won't charge a lot of money. Momma baby-sat for, oh, God, five dollars a day, eight hours a day. We became enforcers. "Come get these damn kids." I would call them, because they would leave them. My mother

would say, "You know, Jocelyn, they can't make money and take care of their families and I don't need all that." But it's principle. So Momma baby-sat for hundreds of people at five dollars a day.

Lola then would come to Vegas, leave the children with my mom for sometimes weeks. I remember going to my momma's house and Lola's on the bed, just beat up. Momma took care of her and told her, "Lola, there's a better way." Lola was one of the prettiest women I had ever seen.

I remember Momma called me one night. Lola was in town. She said I want you to take her over to Pentecostal Temple. Ernestine Reems, who sings *Change*, was there when Momma said, "Come take Lola." Yes, ma'am. Lola gave herself to God that night. Lola now is living in Minnesota, married to a minister. She calls my momma Mother.

I have a god brother who went to my mom's house one day and there was this man in the bed that was about as big as you. I asked, "What is he doing in AJ's bed?"

"Jocelyn, he called me from the hospital and I told your brother to go get him." A couple of weeks go by. "He needs a place. Jocelyn Loretta." He stayed with my mother for four years.

At one Sunday night service he gets up to testify. He says, "I was in a mental ward at the hospital in Lake Mead because that's where they take you when you try to kill yourself. I'm an alcoholic. I'm a gambler. I had no place else to go and nobody to call. I called Mother Thompson and said, Mother, I need help." Momma sent my brother, the youngest one, who laid in his bed. My brother told him, "Anything in the closet you need, you wear it." He stayed with my mother for about three and a half years. Now he has an excellent job for the City of North Las Vegas. He's doing great.

So you were telling a story about your brother and your father.

Oh, A.J. got caught dealing drugs and Judge Claiborne was off the bench. He had to go to my dad. Daddy went to the judge, and they put him on probation. They put him on probation. But because of that my brother now has a business dealing with lawyers and doctors, Monumental Collision. My brother has a photographic memory, like my dad. And six credit hours from graduating, he walked out of the university. He said, "I don't need this." Just crazy. He did his thesis on Malcolm X. But going through the experience with drugs, AJ now has a car repair shop.

Now, tell me about your brother's entering into the drug life and what was happening on the Westside. Did we see drugs coming into the Westside about that time that your brother got involved?

Drugs have always been on the Westside.

Okay. So tell me about that community.

At that time I was married, living with my husband and my children. My brother told me what happened because I really don't know. He was trying to find a way to make good money. He said he wasn't going to work for five dollars and make doughnuts. My brother was a basketball star at Valley and got a scholarship to Arizona State. After he decided he did not need that piece of paper to validate him, idiot, he came home and just couldn't get it together. It took me 50 years to realize he sees numbers. He's a numbers' man. He sees everything in numbers. To him if you do that I can take ten dollars and make a thousand dollars. That was his way of thinking.

But see, when he was coming up the training wasn't the same. My parents were hands on with us. He and my baby sister did not get that. It was a different parent. It was a whole different ball game when they were coming up. I tell them now, "I just wish you knew the daddy

I knew when I was coming up." I'm going to do what I say I'm going to do. All we have is our word. It's hard finding people that are that way now.

Anyway, he experienced that and my mom got cancer. Momma got cancer. When my mother got cancer, my father, who had been divorced from my mother for about 17 years, came to my job and said, "Your momma is sick."

When?

When my mother got sick.

But what year?

Momma died in 2000. So it must have been '98.

So at that time they had been divorced for 17 years?

They had been divorced for a long time, yeah. Daddy came to my job at Nevada Partners and said, "Your mother is sick. You ought to take her to the doctor."

I went around the corner, "Mom, Daddy said you're sick."

"Ain't nothing wrong with me; I feel fine."

Six months later Daddy came back, saying, "Your mother is sick until the death. Jocelyn, she'll go if you take her."

I took her. I went and said, "Ma, we're going to go to your doctor." Her doctor was down here off Lake Mead. The doctor did not speak English well and that just frustrated me. I told him he needed a translator. I was just my rude self. My mother had gotten to the point she couldn't control her bladder. There was an odor on my mother that bathing would not take away. That's what made him order tests. They said she had a tumor about the size of a golf ball. That tumor was the size of a watermelon when they opened my mother up and it burst and it was cancer. Dr. Thornton was her doctor. He was a southerner.

We were supposed to take momma to Valley Hospital. Now, we're not hospital people. We don't get sick. The doctor called us and said, "I want you to bring her to Sunrise instead of Valley." My mother's heart stopped beating on the operating table. That tumor was connected to her uterus. There just happened to be a gynecologist in surgery who stepped in that room and did what was necessary. What was supposed to be a two-hour surgery ended up being a six-hour surgery. They would never say cancer. Dr. Thornton was physically shaken when he came out.

In retrospect, we would have not done the chemo because that did more damage than good. But God was merciful. My mother lived two years longer and my mother was never in pain. She was supposed to be in this excruciating pain and she just wasn't. She never lost weight. She never lost her hair. In the last month of her sickness, Momma was feeling pain. God was really merciful.

I was so angry. I came home and I must have cussed. I just told God everything that was on my mind. My daddy always taught us God knows best. But I was angry. I just felt like Ma didn't deserve this. Then I had to stop and look at the mercies of God. If my mother went to the doctor one time, the doctor said she would have lived 20 years longer because the cancer she had was a slow-growing cancer. But they weren't hospital people. The last time my mother went to the hospital she said I was a baby in New Orleans and something was wrong and Momma and Daddy checked me out. Momma said they were killing her baby. They took me out of the hospital. Daddy signed and said that they released the hospital and never went back for anything, never went back.

So getting back to your parents and Victory Baptist, what did the divorce do to the church? What did that mean to the community? Victory Baptist must be a very, very important church, a big church by the time of the divorce.

It was one of the larger churches on the Westside. I think membership was like 500, 600 people. That was big for back in that day. My dad got divorced, the chairman of the deacon board got divorced, chairman of the trustees got divorced. There were five divorces in our church all at one time, within the year, and my dad was one of them. It affected the church.

Daddy was a pied piper in a sense. My daddy was humanly flawed. Daddy would spin a tune or spin a story and they'd eat it like starving men. The first story I heard was my mother was trying to poison him. I never knew where that came from. I just went and had a meeting with the pastor and told him what I thought and if I hear any more rumors I'm going to call a church meeting and I'm going to sit all this shit straight. You want a divorce, that's fine, but leave my mother alone. Leave her alone. He did, and it stopped. I didn't care where it came from. It divided the church in that people had to be for or against. And they loved my daddy. But they loved my mom and it was an adjustment. My dad remarried. I said, "You are a crazy man to bring a woman in this church."

Did he marry a woman already in the church or did he bring a stranger into the church?

Let the truth be known. He married a former member. Before she hooked up with my dad…you name it, she had done it. She told my sister they were doing drugs together. But you know what? I don't think her a bad woman. She came and said God told her that my dad was her husband. I said, but he has a wife. I don't know how that all worked out.

My daddy taught us something. Daddy said life is like going down corridors, halls. Some doors you shouldn't go in because you don't have the ability to come out. So be mindful of the doors you go into. If you follow your first sense, you'll always be okay.

I want to talk about the spirituality in the black community. We're known in the black community as having a special spiritual connection among each other, the community itself. I

want you to talk about that and talk about how churches like Victory Baptist enhances that, what people feel with those kinds of ties. What does it mean every day, not just Sunday?

I'm going to say that that's a difficult question to answer and I'm going to tell you why.

And I know it; that's why I'm asking you.

What I was brought up to believe spirituality was and what it is now—and let me just be my blunt self. Y'all have to edit this when you get ready to leave. I get offended when people walk up to me and I ask how they're doing, and they respond, "Oh, I'm blessed." The Bible speaks of that one time in Matthew, the angel appeared to Mary telling her that she was going to bear a burden for God. "You're going to be called a whore. They're going to want to kill you." Mary sacrificed for God. We have twisted that all around, now. It's all about entitlement for me. Christianity is the new caveat in terms of Hollywood idiots. It's a moneymaker now. It isn't about spirituality. They are rock stars. We follow the life of the man we call Jesus, but there isn't a damn J in the Hebrew language. His name was not Jesus. He was a radical. He came to disrupt what was wrong. If fact, he went to the temple and started tearing things up because they were selling. God told us go play baseball, but we're on the damn football field with football equipment. We ain't even got the right equipment on.

I don't believe God designed the church to be what it is today. I will say this to anybody. Jesus didn't have a church. It's just another club. It's another organization. It's another fraternity and sorority, in my opinion. I don't knock it because if that's what you do, great, but then don't try to tell me how to live. I was taught to know God for yourself. It's a relationship. That's not what goes on in church now. It's networking. I'm not knocking it. If that works for you, great. But don't dub that God and Spirit.

Spirituality, the best way I can explain it, is a life skill. Who takes care of the spiritual

man? I don't care where you go, you just need to know your creator. Know your source. So if that means go to church, great. But have a connection. We down the Catholics, but we aren't any better. The pastor is the priest and whatever he says is law. We don't question it. In Victory, now, you better not question because he's educated and he went to theological school. Nobody questions because they know.

Well, here is the deal. Read, fools. If you read the *Council of Needs*, you'll know that there's a whole disparity between what's in the book and what reality is. They make it sound like Peter, James and John sat down and wrote these scriptures. They did not. That's okay, because I was taught you get to know God, He'll reveal the truth to you. We need to know what our uniqueness is. We all have uniqueness about it, which is a presence of God in us.

When I was coming up at church—and I still go to church—I cannot have them give me money for something God has freely given me.

What do you mean?

Well, I go and speak on a youth Sunday and they want to give you blessing. Bless me by blessing others. I don't need them to give me anything. Now I know several ministers at this church that won't speak unless you have three thousand dollars on the table. God did not design the church as a moneymaker. I don't care how you twist it and fix it. It's to deal with humanity. I'm just blessed.

I stayed home. I left the phone company and stayed home to raise my family. My husband is from a family of 18 kids. If I want him happy, I could spend all the money in the world just making sure there's food in the house because there was never enough food and never enough room. In fact, there are 12 people living in this house. My husband went and got my daughter and my son's family. My son was losing his house and my daughter was in litigation.

He said come home, because you can fight better from home.

Anyway, I quit work to stay home and I stayed home for 12 years. Miss Molly Homemaker. Crocheted, knit, macramé. I did everything but learn to make bread and I should have learned to make bread, doggone it. I had a girlfriend of church who was a young minister, and we started doing wedding decorations. We were so stupid. We bought a pre-owned bridal shop. Lord Jesus, open up a business with your own money. My value lesson was that God will not bless you through a lie. We kept that business open for seven years. I did wedding flowers. I was a licensed florist. That was a hundred thousand dollar a year business. We were dumb as dirt, so we never got ahead of the curve. Because market was twice a year and you had to spend $67,000 to buy the bridal gowns, bridesmaids' dresses and everything that goes with it. Bridal shops are middle men; it's like a walk-in catalog. We had samples. Hopefully, they would pick what they liked and then they'd order. That was an experience, but nothing stresses me because of that. We weren't making any money, and my kids were going to college. I told her I've got to get a real job.

Nevada Partners had just opened up. I went and volunteered the summer before, right after the Rodney King riots. And I remember telling them if you ever have a youth department I'd like to work in it. I thought I'd volunteer my time. My husband told me, "You're a professional volunteer, huh?" I guess I was. They called me. I've only been two years of college and that was off and on; I was having babies and stuff. So when they called and asked if I was interested, of course I was. I didn't know they were going to pay me to do the youth program. I'm still trying to figure out why they selected me. Probably because I was the cheapest and I wasn't demanding.

I had the privilege of developing a youth program. I had never done that. The executive

director came to a program. They brought the commission here. The youth choir of the church opened for the commission. They were just so enthralled with how I handled these kids. Teenagers don't talk back to me. I don't know why. I don't like babies except my grandkids. But I do well with teenagers. Everybody was just enthralled with how well-mannered these kids were. I would tell the kids to hush and they would shut up. You could drop a pin and hear it.

They hired me to come. The first year we did workshops. We invited six to seven community people in to do workshops.

And the goal of the program?

It was to get kids summer jobs. It was a YES program. YES was an acronym for Youth Employment for the Summer. We made that name up. It was right after the Rodney King riots that they established Nevada Partners. During the Rodney King riots, people on the Westside started burning up stuff. The closer it got to downtown, the more attention it got. That's when the mayor, Jan Jones, and Bob Miller called me. They said, "What's wrong? Why are y'all burning up the Westside?" Lack of development in our community, and we didn't have jobs. They made some phone calls. They had a command base down at the old Las Vegas High School, which is now the Las Vegas Academy. They had a trailer down there. You could go down and get a job referral. Six months in, they saw most of the people that had the jobs were kids. The adults didn't know how to fill out applications. They didn't know what a resume was. They did not have interview skills. Hence, the Nevada Partners.

They named Mujajid Ramadn as an executive director. It was between him and Nedra Armstrong. That was the selection. They should have gotten Nedra. But they selected Mujahid and then they started putting the team together. Nevada Partners is one of the first entities that talked about life skills in the Las Vegas Valley on the Westside. It wasn't a popular term that

was being used at the time. They hired a couple of people from UNLV. I have a dear friend, Dor Taliva, who's Dr. Taliva now, who was stationed at Nellis with her husband. They were here on a stint. She developed the curriculum for women in transition, where we found out that through welfare reform, they could not stay on welfare for life. One of the guys at Nevada Partners had a friend that was a lobbyist in D.C. and he told them what was coming down the pipeline.

They came with the program, which was really a unique—women would hang out with me for six weeks, all day. If I could get them within the first two days, they're mine. They would not leave the program. In the first few weeks we talked about personal development. I would just tell them, "I just need you to know there are choices, so let's talk about that." In the last few weeks we worked on professional development. Jobs of Nevada had an obligation to try to find them a job. They kept their welfare benefits until their benefits from their job kicked in. But they were so used to welfare that they would jeopardize it and sabotage themselves. They didn't want to get off welfare. That was guaranteed money. They were used to it.

I worked at Nevada Partners. I ran the youth program for five years. Larry Crumps came in and told me that the youth program had gone back to regular summer jobs. I was prepared to go home. He said, "I want you to consider working with women in transition."

I said, "Huh, grown folks are full of piss and vinegar. They don't say what they mean." I pointed out a whole litany of stuff.

He just said, "Jocelyn, you're in a comfort zone." That just hit me. Of course, he was right. I'm comfortable with kids, with teenagers. I don't know why, because they work my nerves. But I'm clear and they're clear. Anyway, I told I would try it. That became the love of my life. It was wonderful.

So tell me what you mean by women in transition.

Women coming out of prison, coming out of battered homes, women that were on welfare, transitioning from one place in life to another. My responsibility was to help them see clearly and to understand that they had options. I remember the first class I did I wore a suit. That was the last time I wore a suit. A little girl said, "I just knew you were going to be a bitch. Look at the way you're dressed." I understood it.

In one of my classes I had a madam. Oh, God, I loved her. She had a place in Guam and then she got pregnant, so she came back to the States. She wanted to live a normal life because she had a beautiful little boy. She said, "This straight life is killing me because there ain't no money in it."

I've been talking to my daughter, who is the executive director for Communities In School. I'm going to do my own transition program. I have a list of women that I've been accumulating for the past six months. I was going to start doing quarterly things here, just bringing them together and talking. They're going through a lot. Parenting is different now. I have a daughter-in-law that got pregnant when she was seventeen. When she was seven she was taking care of herself. I struggle with her, as she expects my seven-year-old grandkids to get up and fix their own breakfast and do their own laundry. My husband's blood pressure shoots up. A lot of women that I deal with have been molested. They need an arena where they can release that and not feel like somebody is going to judge them.

There's a girl that does all the girls' hair. They get it braided and they put the weaves in. This girl just works like an artist. When she does my grandchild's hair, there's a pattern in the hair that's just phenomenal. She has been on her own since she was 14. She's on meds now because of the pressure from her drug-addict daddy and her drug-using mother who abandoned

her when she was three. She just shuts down.

So how would you find these women to start this kind of a—

At the welfare department. I go to the churches. I would go to the centers. I would go to places like Safe Nest. I have a list of about 25 women that I'm going to call. Some of them are not working. At Nevada Partners, we had an excellent relationship with welfare. They would come on the last Thursday of the month. We'd talk about the women, and look at what's going on with them. They'd tell me whatever changes are going on in welfare, and I'd tell them whatever changes were going on with us. It ran really smoothly until the upper echelon got it and it went to pot. They started wanting to bring in the media. A couple of times, I just put the media out. Some of these women are in hiding.

Anyway, when the higher echelon got it, they wanted to do it for the dog and pony show.

Yeah. Expose.

"The hell you say!" was my response. Oh, I was crazy. So where are we at?

A few minutes ago—a long time ago you mentioned the name Ed May. Is Ed May the golfer, plays golf?

No. That's his daddy.

Okay, good. And this goes way back, when you were a little child you used to go downtown to go to the movie theater. Where did black kids go? And tell me about the experience of going to a movie theater.

What I remember is that we had to go upstairs. But we didn't care. My daddy would drop us off. We'd go in and buy our ticket, then get our popcorn and our candy, then go upstairs. That's because Momma told us to go upstairs. I honestly don't know why that was.

I remember going the time we went down South. Daddy stopped for gas and I went in

the store to get an ice cream cone. That's the first time I ever saw a colored zone or a white zone. The shop owner called me "little nigger girl." I went ballistic. My father grabbed me and told me to hush and get in the car. In retrospect, he didn't mean harm. He did not mean harm. In fact, I preface southerners because southern speak, they say what they mean and mean what they say. I prefer that. But it was a shock for us.

There were certain places Daddy would not let us go because I'm verbal. Can you tell? You have to learn that everything's not expedient and you can't—it was a different environment, a different world for us.

But when I was a child the Westside was our world. Everything was there. The church was there. Nucleus Plaza had a Smith's Food King in it. Vegas Village had the best doughnuts in the world.

Tell me where Vegas Village was located.

Vegas Village was down on Owens and Las Vegas Boulevard. That was Vegas Village. They had a bakery, oh, Lord have mercy. Momma would take me every Thursday to get doughnuts and malts. There was a little girl at school. She was half white, half black, and nobody played with her. I told her, "Come home with me. My momma will feed you." I brought her home. She'd have a sandwich and next we'd go to Vegas Village to get a malt and a doughnut from Vegas Village.

I had a wonderful childhood and I didn't know we were poor as dirt. Everybody helped. When I raised my kids there was a sticker in my window—the kids know my house was the house to come to if there was a problem. They knew it. I stayed home. I was a PTA president for two years.

What did the sticker in the window say?

I don't remember. It was something that all the schools told the families, the kids, if you see that sticker that's a safe haven. They could run in my house.

Do you remember the name of the movie theater that you went to downtown?

No. I think it was the El Cortez, but I'm not sure.

You mentioned also earlier that you participated in parades. Were you talking about the Helldorado Parade?

Oh, we didn't participate, but we got to go see it. I think the carnival was at Cashman Center?

I think Cashman Field.

I think it was, yes. We'd go down there and watch some horses and the drill teams. There weren't a lot of blacks participating at that time. But we were allowed to go.

What about your memories of Jackson Street?

That was our downtown, Jackson Street. We had the Cove Hotel. It was nice. There were a couple of clubs and restaurants. Anyway, I detest chitlins. I remember going over to my girlfriend's house and her daddy wanted some chitlins and told us to go down to Mom's Kitchen where everybody went. We went to get Mr. Trim some chitlins. We got this box of stuff that smelled strange to me and we took them to Mr. Trim. Her brother tells me, "Chitlins is the intestines and that's shit."

I said, "And you're eating it?"

But Mom's Kitchen and there was a barbeque place down there. Oh, the food was wonderful. Then there was the Comedy Club, but that was not downtown. That was on Eighth Street.

When you say downtown—

I'm talking Jackson Street. I'm sorry. There was a couple of places down there, restaurants and

juke joints. Well, the church was a juke joint and I don't remember the name of it. On Saturdays they'd let us go to the movies and run the street.

How would you get to the movies?

Daddy would drop us off and Daddy would pick us up. Then when my sister got old enough to drive, she would drop us off. It was my two brothers and I—me, Myelus and Pee Wee. He was really tiny. His name was Ielus, but we'd call him Pee Wee. Go to the movies.

Another part I just wanted to get into a little bit was like '64, midsixties with desegregation, with the Civil Rights Act, what do you remember of that?

I was at Kit Carson, sixth grade. They sent us to Robert Gibson. It was an all-white school and I was horrified. I remember they had race riots. In fact, they race rioted every year up until the time I went to Valley and that's when they decided to put the kids in school together from elementary. It stopped one thing, but I think it started another. It did stop the riots because you're most likely not going to fight a child you've known because you got to know them. But it also took away us. We needed to see each other in the schools.

I remember my oldest son was in the fifth grade at Doris French and the teacher told me, "I don't know how to teach him." I didn't know what that meant, so I asked her.

Was that at the Westside School?

Oh, no. Doris French is across town. It's on Flamingo.

Oh, you're talking about Doris French School, not the person.

No, no, no. The school. She was not used to dealing with black students. She gave him a test. I was on the PTA board. I told the parents you cannot afford not to be involved. I saw that my son flunked that test. I said, "What's wrong here?" The teacher had asked the students to give me the vowel sound that you hear at the beginning of the word and at the end of the word. I said,

"Well, that's what you need to say, then." She told me no.

I went Mr. Terry. Oh, he was a gift from God. He was a principal. Mr. Terry must have had eight kids. He was a Mormon father. I said, "Mr. Terry, you've got so many kids." He said, "Baby, we're Mormon." I suppose that explained it all. Anyway, he made her retest my baby.

What year?

Hold on. Let me think. That was in the seventies because—I jumped to the seventies. I remember her saying she did not understand how to teach them.

So was this when they had the sixth grade centers over here on the Westside?

They started that. They built up to that because they were rioting every year in schools, two or three times a year. People were getting hurt.

You need to understand that in Las Vegas, the Mormons run our school system. In fact, I'm in the court catalyzing change now because there's such a disparity in the court system. It's full of African Americans and Hispanics. The judges wanted to know aren't there any black social workers, because they're sending them to white agencies. There are, but it's a fine-oiled wheel. Looking at this, you would think white kids never got in trouble. So they're having a session. They're trying to change the law because of the way the law is written. It isn't right. But people do they think is best. There is no sensitivity in terms of culture.

One of the issues they had is that a child got molested. By the time the court system found out about it, it had happened two or three years back. They took the child out of the home. The judge says that should never happen, because it breaks up the family. What happened was that they had went to their pastor and they originally got the problem worked out. But that was the way that culture handles it. They're saying we have to handle it the way you they it. Cultures are different. You need to respect people's culture; they don't. To make a long story

short, it's my way or the highway. Hopefully, there's a process of changing that.

So getting back to your son and the teacher.

Mr. Terry made her retest him using the terminology that I wanted. He aced that exam. He aced it because he understood what she was saying. The teacher felt like he should have understood her. I told her that her job is to make sure he understands the message and that means you might need to switch. She didn't agree with me, and that's fine, but you're going to do it this time. Then I asked Mr. Terry to take him out of that class.

When I worked at Nevada Partners, Nevada went through a thing of hiring teachers. They hired a teacher out of New England. The husband came with her because they offered her an excellent job and she said she was thrown into it. She said, "I've never dealt with black kids." They threw her in an all-black school. She was traumatized.

When they rezoned the schools, because I was at Laura Dearing first when they rezoned us, they sent us to Doris French. I was going to stay at that school because I was on the PTA board of the administration there. Those kids got off that school bus saying, "Look, motherfucker." And I decided I was not staying there, because my older son was a sponge. These kids were survivors at any cost. They did not understand what respect was. You have to earn it. I went to the Doris French for my kids.

We stayed in that house for 20 years. The neighborhood started changing. When I moved there we had a couple of attorneys living down the street. Officer Jackson was two doors down and there were three teachers over here. We moved in, and the neighbors came and brought us stuff and told us who was where. It was a wonderful place to raise my children. They started moving out and renting the homes, and the whole neighborhood culture changed.

My son helped me to understand gangs. I don't like it. But some of his friends were in

gangs. I didn't want them in my house. Then my husband said, "Jocelyn, at least if they're in here, we know what's going on." My kids have never come home to an empty house. My husband works a shift so that there's always an adult at home. He said, "Mom, what would happen if you and Dad got divorced and you had to work two jobs? Who would you expect to take care of you?" That's a no-brainer. "Momma, what would happen if me and Brandon were in the mall and somebody jumped Brandon?" You better take care of your brother. He said, "Well, Momma, that's how they think." Mom and Dad's gone, so they become a family. I don't condone it, but I understand it. I understand it.

I remember teaching at Nevada Partners and one of the little girls was going to prom. This girl came through and her boyfriend came in. He had a wad of money this thick. He paid for her dress. He paid for everything. He just told me he didn't think he'd live beyond 25, so he was going to live his life. I was trying to do the moral thing here. "Ms. Jocelyn, they won't give me a job." I said, well, you've already pitched yourself out. Get a job and build towards. But if the family structure is not right, you've got to fend for yourself. You're going to go on with whatever you think is best, and there's no foundation laid. There are certain rules to govern. You're going to reap what you sew and whatever you put in the ground, it's coming up in abundance. There are no principles to living; these kids don't have that. It's like the strongest survive. There's no moral base.

I used to really, really be a stickler. I want my kids to marry within their race. Now just marry somebody that's decent. They can be blue. I don't care. I need a moral person. I think part of the problem is when the family structure changes. Now we live based on what other folks say is important. My grandson wanted some J Beats and I pitched a damn ditty.

Wanted some what?

J Beats. They're some earphones. His mother who is a thrift queen found some dirt cheap on eBay. He was walking home from school, and three boys jumped him and took his J Beats. They were trying to get his iPad. But somebody was watching him. A car drove up and jumped out and they just all scattered like roaches. You need to understand the climate that we live in. People don't want to work for stuff, and they're not taught the value of working for stuff. My mother used to always tell me, "Who is that family and what is the value system?" I used to tell her that she was just prejudiced.

They're having children earlier. I met my daughter-in-law when she was sixteen, pregnant with him. I told her she wouldn't be walking to school anymore when it's cold. I would drive her to the bus station. I would give her all the support she needed, because she's family now. We're going to hell in a hand basket, I guess.

Which year did your family come to Las Vegas, when you left Los Angeles?

Fifty-four.

Did you ever hear your parents talk about the Moulin Rouge?

Uh-huh.

And what did they mean to a family about to start a church?

That was the devil's den. But of course, we went down there. My oldest sister went in, but we couldn't because we were too young. That's where the black stars stayed. They couldn't stay on the Strip. I don't understand why they would never let them resurrect it. They've tried.

Oh, many times.

They just won't. But it was the place to be. All the black stars would go and do their own little gig at the Moulin Rouge.

Exactly. We're going to wrap up in just a little while. You talked about houses. Did anyone

in your family work so that they were part of a labor union here, Culinary or any other union?

My dad worked at Mercury. I'm sure he got something from them. But Daddy was healthy as a horse. When my father got sick, he was dead in three weeks. They never knew what was wrong with Dad.

When did he work at the Test Site?

He worked at the Test Site in the sixties.

Below ground testing at that time that he was there?

He was a laborer.

Was he one of the people who helped to dig the tunnels where the bombs were placed?

Yes, I think my stepmother got money from that.

Did he ever tell stories about going back and forth or what the work was like? Do you remember any talk of the Test Site?

Huh-uh, no.

You were also very active in the school system at the time when Ruby Duncan's movement was going on.

Yes, ma'am.

Any memories of that movement?

Yes, ma'am. Ms. Ruby was a welfare mom who just felt like y'all need to do right by us. She took a bunch of welfare mothers and started walking down the Strip. They were frustrated with her, but they couldn't do anything. There was an old Jewish man that told her, "Do you really want to make change?" He sat her down and helped her strategize what she needs to do and helped her understand what needs to happen.

Jack Anderson?

That might have been. I don't know who it was.

Mahlon Brown?

My daddy said she got some help and they organized her and "vwala." Ms. Ruby. I really, really like—oh, what's the other lady's name? I just saw her, too. I hadn't seen her in a long, long time. She was responsible for them building the West Middle School.

Marzette Lewis?

Ms. Marzette. She used to just tickle me. We don't have activists like that anymore.

The reason I thought of Marzette right away is because when you were talking about the schools and what you were trying to help with the schools, Marzette was sort of on the same wave length.

She had a different way of doing it, but, she was effective. Her and Albert Dunn, they just felt they needed to be more radical. The lady who took Ms. Marzette's place, Beatrice Turner, figures she can cuss you out and the louder she cusses the more she'll affect. They silenced her. They gave her some money and gave her a business. They silenced her. Now she takes the children that she works with. I'm sure they're paying her for that, too. In fact, she worked with the man who's running against Ricki Barlow, which really dampened her position in the community. She was working for the campaign.

At any rate, Ms. Marzette was doing well until she slapped Ricki at a meeting at the library. He was mouthing off and she just popped him. I think they told her get out of town. She says she went down South because somebody got sick. But she was gone for a couple of years. She's back now. I like Ms. Marzette.

We're going to start by just talking about the Westside in general. What do you see as the future of that small Westside community?

There isn't community. Let's start there. There is no community. I say that because the Westside started out being a place where the blacks to live and gathered. Blacks now come anywhere but the Westside. They'll come here to go to church or get some food. But Hispanics are moving in. In another ten years it's going to be Hispanic. My sister's neighbors now are Spanish. It is coming. The problem is the parents leave the house to the kids and the kids either lose it to the taxes or they don't pay the bills, so the state gets it.

They're going to move downtown because it is a no-flood area out by my sister's house. The rain, nothing happens there. I think downtown is going to move that way, and they're going to take it. That's my projection.

And I agree with you because downtown is so close and then when you look at the Smith Center, which is right there two blocks, three blocks from the Westside.

Uh-huh. They want to build an arena somewhere in that area. I don't know if you know Sam Smith, who owns a bookstore?

Yes.

Well, Mr. Smith used to be right there on D Street. Some guy from New York bought that plaza and upped his rent, upped that whole strip. A few people realize change is coming, and they own that land. They're moving it. I think they'll move downtown that way. That's why they cut that street off—they're fighting about F Street. Fight a good fight, power to the people. It isn't going to happen, because I think they'll move downtown that way.

I think it's a spiritual problem. We're like crabs in a barrel in this community. We will not help each other.

So earlier you were talking about how the community used to pull together if someone had a problem.

You know what? I remember my Daddy having issues with people. But if they had an issue, they would get it resolved. Those days are gone. A lot of that is the mentality of people here in position. I joined Black Social Workers of America, the Las Vegas chapter, because I do social work. They had to convince me. I said, "I'm not a social worker." Yes, you are, Ms. Jocelyn. A lot of social workers will not join an organization because their boss frowns on them being in black organizations. They're fearful of their jobs. They get these jobs and they like that money. "I'm going to take care of me and mine. You take care of yours."

I was going to ask you that. You think the difference you see between the black community then and now has to do with more opportunities being available to African Americans; and therefore, it's causing them to leave that community? If you don't understand what I mean—

I understand exactly. I don't know if that's the cause because I don't live on the Westside, but I work on the Westside because I understand the need is there.

I understand that.

One of the administrators of the church was a banker. He was one of the first black vice presidents. That brother was what we call an Oreo—he might look black, but he was not a black man. If you were white, he would help you. He would never help the black kids get jobs. He was only at church for his image. I'm not going to tell you what I told him. Then there was Ed Wayne worked at Sprint. He would not help. To me, there's no excuse for that if you're in a position to help. They walked his ass out of his job, because he was so damn busy playing golf. He lost one of the litigations that he should not have lost. He was in shock mode for about a year and a half. But when you get a position like that, you are obligated, in my opinion, to help somebody.

I think spiritually there is an issue with that. I think there's an issue that we can't seem to get beyond. We have other people coming here who understand that, people who come from large cities with black communities that understand you've got to have a black community. Those that are here, it's like, oh, Lord, I don't know. But I do think we have a spiritual problem.

Last question for me. I don't know if John is—

No, no, no. Please.

Do you think it's important to have a geographical black community where black people are just living in the same geographical area, or can community also mean more mental, more spiritual, more coming together around different issues?

I don't think it's necessary that we all have to live next door to each other, because I happen to like my neighbors. There are a lot of blacks over here. My neighbors aren't black. It's important that we maintain our culture and our heritage, and that tends to happen when you're in a community that's thriving.

Vegas is an anomaly in that this is one of the few places you can come here not being educated and make a hundred thousand dollars a year. My husband is a twelfth grade educated man. Up until six years ago, he was a dealer at Caesars. He makes good money. I ain't complaining. My brother opened the Hilton at sixteen years old.

What kind of job?

He was a busboy. My brother became a manager for a couple of years. Then they sold the hotel. Then he said that he didn't want to be a manager because the things they wanted him to do to his staff. They were like family to him. He went back on the floor as a waiter. He worked in every room. My brother can make a meal. He can fix a meal to make your mouth water and make a table like dear God in heaven. He loves that kind of stuff. When the Hilton sold it and took their

name off, he retired.

So does your brother fix food when you guys have the prayer circles on Sunday?

Oh, he's a health nut. No. He quit fixing yams. "Myelus, where's the sugar at?" I want sugar in my yams. So, no. He fixes grilled stuff. He went to the doctor for his prostate and he told the doctor give me a couple of months. Countdown. He's a health nut. Oh, he eats very, very healthy. Heck, no. "Put that sugar in the yams, boy, and some brown sugar. What's wrong with you? And don't forget the butter."

Vegas isn't what it used to be. There used to be 175 churches in a five-mile radius on the Westside. Now there are churches everywhere. There's no need to come to the Westside. There used to be Hamburger Heaven, which people came from miles to go to, but now it's gone.

It's shrinking in that perspective. The things that draw us together are becoming less and less, because people want to do things in Summerlin or Green Valley, which is fine. But there needs to be something that draws us together. They do the Martin Luther King stuff, and then they have events for that. I try to do stuff because we need the gathering; we need to do that. That's where I think we're shrinking. Vegas is already a different place anyway. Fly by night, people come in. They're here today, gone tomorrow. I don't know if anybody's picking up the map for the trailblazers that were here doing it.

I remember when Steven Horsford got his position. What is the man's name?

What did he do?

He was a senator.

Joe Neal.

Mr. Neal could not be bought.

That's right.

He did not care what anybody thought, and they wanted him out. They got him. Republicans did that.

Well, he was in for 32 years. When you say trailblazers—you've mentioned Joe Neal—who are some of the other people that you see as trailblazers whose names you remember or your parents talked to you about?

Woodrow Wilson was one of my first assemblymen.

Do you remember Woodrow actually being in the community at one point?

He lived around the corner from where my momma and his wife used to sew. She could sew her tail off. She would make some stuff. He was such a refined black man. She looked like she was Creole. Soft spoken. They literally lived around the corner from my momma and dad. And my daddy knew all these people.

V.C.L. Coleman was the original pastor for Second Baptist. Reverend Gilmore was the original pastor for Bethel Baptist. Then there was Bishop Cox, who when we came here was a bishop for the state. Bishop E.N. Webb, who was my friend, succeeded him after his death. We knew all these people because of my dad. My father was one of the first in our community who was Baptist, and who talked about being baptized in the Holy Ghost. He became friends with the COGIC people.

Daddy taught us denomination is just a name, baby. I didn't have a problem going in and out of places. I still don't because we were taught it's just a name; that religion is man's search for God; that's what that is. When you get it, you don't need religion.

The last people I'm going to ask you about, David Hoggard and Mabel Hoggard.

Yeah. I remember Mr. and Mrs. Hoggard. Mrs. Hoggard I remember because I think she taught my sister. My sister was one of the first people that attended the school right there where KCEP

is now.

Westside School.

The Hoggards were educators. The Halls were as well. And Mr. Fitzgerald, he was a wonderful principal.

Are you aware of what's happening at the Westside School now; that it's being renovated; that it's being put on the National Register of Historic Places?

Which school is this?

Westside School right there on the corner of D and Washington.

No. Where KCEP is?

Yes.

Really? Good for them. My sister went to Westside and she went to the Variety School right next door. I think that's wonderful. That was before my time. We went to Matt Kelly and Kit Carson. In fourth grade, Mr. Diet had paralysis in one of his hands. He wrote with one hand and he taught me to speed read.

I had a wonderful childhood. I tried to emulate that for my kids. I wanted them to have a wonderful childhood. Our household felt it was important to have a mom and dad home, so there was never a time that one of us was not in the house.

What does it mean for your grandkids when it's so different now?

Well, as you marry and bring new people into your family, the dynamics change. We still struggle, because everybody has their own parenting style. You learn to be wise in your dispensation of what you think. It's important that they feel comfortable. My house is a gathering place for everybody. Sometimes, I want to say just take y'all asses home, but I can't do that. Sunday morning, I get up and fix breakfast. My mother did that for my children. I get up

every Sunday morning and fix breakfast, and everybody comes. I know that having a meal is a gathering place for conversation, so we do that often. Because all the adults are busy I do a comfort meal. Everybody comes, because that gathering gives them time to release or reacquaint. If I was mad at you, I am not mad any longer. Because when it's all said and done, family is all you've got. Family is all you've got.

When my dad died, my youngest brother, the heathen, said, "Well, we need to start meeting, you guys." I got married, and my dad told me when you get married nobody comes before you and your children. I was a family-oriented person when it was my family. When my mom got sick I had to get reacquainted with my brothers. I still won't ask for a ride—I haven't since I was sixteen. Because they left me stranded. I probably need to forgive him for that and let that go [laughing]. But I got reacquainted with my brothers. When we get together on Sunday, we got all these books. The Bible is one of the books. Then the *Council of Needs*. We're just looking and discovering stuff. My oldest brother, when it's all said and done, Myelus is the head. My youngest brother is the dictionary for everybody. I have one brother who's a wordsmith. He was really good at that. We remember our childhood, and things Dad and Momma taught us. We just keep playing it over. I just so enjoy it.

Now we're on a track to try to find my mother's people. We know the people that she was birthed with are dead. We have cousins that are there. We're talking about taking a trip down South to find the relatives. I know my mother had a picture of her dad. She and her mother were not on the best of terms, so there was not a lot of communication with her mom.

After the marriage?

Yes. Yes. My Aunt Wilma, who I'm a lot like—my aunt was very verbal—said that when her and Momma got old enough to work, that Ella wanted them. My grandmother came and got

them. She said that for the first six months, my mother never had a paycheck because her mother was going down to the lingerie store getting lingerie. She knew not to do that with me. Momma had to just tell her to stop. My mother was not confrontational. Momma never talked about it.

See, I don't believe in having secrets. My kids know everything. I was pregnant when I got married. He was born six months to the day I got married. I got married February 12th, he was born August 12th, and you were a nine-term baby. I don't like having—they know everything, just know everything. Let's talk about it. Now, my kids are not that way. My youngest son tells you just what you need to know. He gives just enough and he's very smooth with his words. That's not what I said. I said I'm not going to mince words. But he's that way.

I like the people there, though. Family is important to me. They can be mad as a cat if their brother or sister calls, but they're going to take care of it. That's important to me.

Now, my husband is just the opposite. His family is in Bakersfield. If I say Bake, he gets to hiding. He'll go back if somebody's sick or half dead. After two years, his father pulled him out of school to work the fields. He says that they did the best they knew how to do with what they had to work with. He has no harsh feelings, but he does not like Bakersfield.

I think you'd have to go there and you probably will understand [laughing].

I didn't want to say it.

We went to San Francisco. We drove down. I told him this year that the restaurant is closed, because my mother fixed a meal and the people would just gather. There was a neighborhood drunk, David. His family lived not far from where he died. He died of heat stroke and the sun. He went to college. He was brilliant. I don't know what happened in college, but he came back. I think he did drugs. But he came back just looped. His mind wasn't straight. But he was a brilliant man. He would come in and he knew we were going to find a spot for him. Somebody

was going to find a chair and one of us was going to fix him a plate; he knew that. He'd come in and say, "I've come to sing and dance for a plate."

I said, "I'm not my momma. You cannot just walk through my door." I told my husband the restaurant is closed this year. I can fix just Thanksgiving dinner for the boys Tuesday and we got in the car. We took a leisurely cruise to San Francisco. It was wonderful. I am fixing more dressing next weekend, though. Everybody said they left the ham out. Honey, I'll fix it again this weekend. But my mother would fix dinner and people would just gather, Mother Thompson cooking.

But that was the neighborhood.

Oh, God yeah. My mother made the best rolls. Nobody knows how to make these rolls. We got the recipe, but we just can't fix it. She made these dinner rolls, these little butter rolls that melt in your mouth. Momma would send them to all the people at church. She'd fix gumbo, sweet potato pies. She would go and fix these red beans or gumbo and she'd always fix dessert. Once, he had her teeth redone. "Dr. Inglesaw, all I have to do is cook something?" Yes, ma'am.

Thank you so very much.

Yes, thank you very much.

You're so welcome.

[End of recorded interview]