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## Arkansas Memories Project

Interview with:

Edith Irby Jones

Houston, Texas  
3 April 2006

Interviewer: Scott Lunsford

[00:00:00.00]

Scott Lunsford: Okay. So, now, do your friends and family call you Edith?

Edith Irby Jones: Yes.

SL: Can I call you Edith?

EJ: You can call me Edith.

SL: I think by the time we get done with this, we're gonna [going to] to know each other pretty well.

EJ: [Laughter] Is it that bad?

[00:00:13.21] SL: And your middle name is Mae.

EJ: You don't have to use it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But it is.

SL: And that's M-A-E.

EJ: M-A-E.

SL: Okay.

EJ: But I use—now, I’ve gotten polite, so I now use Irby as my middle name.

SL: Okay.

EJ: So I am Edith Irby Jones.

SL: Irby Jones.

EJ: I used to be Edith Mae Irby.

[00:00:36.16] SL: Uh-huh. Did any of your family ever call you Mae?

EJ: I had one or two who did.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But it was Edith Mae.

SL: Well, my first name is . . .

EJ: And Edie Mae.

SL: . . . my first name is actually Patrick, but everyone goes—calls me Scott . . .

EJ: Or Pat.

SL: . . . by my middle name.

EJ: Oh, really? [Laughs]

[00:00:51.26] SL: Uh-huh. I have to do a little bit of business here at the first. Oh, gosh! Before we start . . .

[Tape Stopped]

Franklin Everts: And we have speed.

[00:01:02.13] SL: Okay, so the business I have to take care of is . . .

EJ: Okay.

SL: . . . I have to let you know that we're here from the University of Arkansas, and we're from the Pryor—the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History. This tape is gonna reside in the Special Collections Department at the University of Arkansas Mullins Library.

EJ: Okay.

[00:01:26.15] SL: There are two purposes for our interview today. One is you are now becoming an oral and visual history project . . .

EJ: [Laughs]

SL: . . . at the University of Arkansas, which means there's probably more of this kind of stuff gonna happen. And the second is I have to put together a video for the Silas Hunt [Legacy] awards dinner that everyone will be looking at. So I'm going all over the country interviewing all the awardees. They're gonna be there getting their life stories, and I'm gonna try and put together about a fifteen-minute video.

EJ: How many have you done so far?

SL: You are number seven.

EJ: Oh, my goodness.

SL: Eight. Number eight.

EJ: Oh, my goodness. So you've already . . .

SL: Yes.

EJ: Was it—what? [Laughs]

[00:02:14.26] SL: Well, we've done Margaret Clark.

EJ: Was it surprising?

SL: Every—I have to say that everyone—the committee has done a great job in select-

ing the initial Silas Hunt awardees.

EJ: Yes.

SL: It—I—it is always an honor for me to be with anyone, but in this case all these folks are just over the top. They're just . . .

EJ: Wonderful.

SL: . . . every one of them are just world class.

EJ: Wonderful.

SL: I can't tell you how good it is for my spirit personally to be in the same room with you all. It's—it's really big.

EJ: [Laughs]

[00:02:50.16] SL: It's really [laughs]—and I know that you discount the things that you have done, but let me tell ya [you]—you've done a lot of stuff, and I'm—I'm really fortunate to be here.

EJ: Oh, it's been a lot of fun.

SL: It's a blessing to be with you.

EJ: Life has been a lot of fun for me, and people have supported my having fun.

[00:03:08.23] SL: Well, you know, my mother used to say, "If you're not having fun doing what you're doing, it's no one's fault but your own."

EJ: You shouldn't do it. Right. Right.

SL: There's plenty of things to do that are good and . . .

EJ: Yeah. I wake up every morning just eager to get up and get that day started. I—I wouldn't know what to do if ever a day came and I didn't have anything I needed to do right then and there—when I felt that day was not full of anticipation.

[00:03:43.16] SL: Yeah. I mean, you and I were talking last night—you and I both only get three or four hours of sleep a night.

EJ: Well, I really wouldn't take those, except I feel a little better when I do.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: I don't have time to take out those. I would like to be doing some other things, but I get the three at—at most, very seldom do I get four hours.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But, at most, four hours of sleep a night.

SL: That's pretty much the same way I operate.

EJ: In fact, I feel drugged if I sleep longer.

SL: I understand. I feel the same way.

EJ: Uh-huh.

[00:04:17.07] SL: Let's talk about—I want to—I want to—I want to start at your earliest memory, and the reason why I do this, and we talked a little bit about this last night—I think that Edith Irby Jones became who she was going to become very early in her life. I think the way that you were raised, the way the—the—the difficulties you had early in life, the way that you were treated, what you saw around you, had a lot to do with shaping who you are now. I mean this is stuff, probably even before you can remember. So I like to start as far back as we can go and try to get glimpses of that, because I think the same things—I think you are the same person that you were very young. I think you have just taken what you were given, and become—and bloomed in—into what has become your life's work. So, if we can, I like to kinda [kind of] keep it in a chronology. I like to start at the earli-

est, and we may—we may jump ahead sometimes, and I may want us to go back, because I think all this stuff is related. I don't think you can just isolate any one period of time and say, "This is where it all is," because I think it starts from the time that you're born.

[00:05:47.28] EJ: I don't know whether I made any changes or not. [Laughs] I—I can't think of any significant changes that I have made since I can remember. The earliest day that I probably can remember, vividly remember, is the day of my father's death. I can remember some incidents when I look back that were not as impressive as those days. For instance, his taking me to a pump—a well pump—to get water in a T-Model Ford, and his getting out to do something in front to wind it up.

[00:06:28.27] SL: Now, where—where was that?

EJ: This was in Mayflower, Arkansas, on a farm.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: My father was—and we called him Papa—was a—a farmer which—a sharecropper.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:06:41.15] EJ: I think that's what you call it. You—you made the crop and you got a share of what you were able to produce on the—on the land. And I can—but he had evidently done very well, as I look back, because he had a T-Model Ford, he had a buggy and a horse, and he had a wagon and a horse. And I can remember those things, and I suppose I remember the T-Model Ford because after church on Sundays, he would take us to this pump. It was a well like, and there



we would bring fresh water home. But the real day that I remember, when I really remember me as—as who I was—I just can remember the scenery then and going, but I can't remember me. I remember me in this setting, the—the—the Sunday of his death. I remember having gone to church that day. For some reason, I remember that day—in which—when—while they were taking up collection, I probably learned for me the greatest lesson I have ever learned in life from him. And at this little church with the wooden table in front—and as everyone went up to give their collection, and I was dressed in my little stiff, white organdy dress, and with my patent-leather pocketbook—I can remember it as if it was yesterday—and everybody, having gone up to put their collection on the table, and I had some pennies in my pocketbook. And he says, “Edith, you should go up and put your money on the table.” And I said, “No, no, Papa. I want to keep my money.” And he says, “No. You go up and you put it on, because when you give, you get back much more than you give. So you give that in order that you can receive more.” So this was fine. So I got down from the bench, and I hurried up and put my money on the table, and I stood there. And I stood there. And, finally, he came up to get me, and he says, “But, Edith, why don't you come back to sit down?” And I said, “But, Papa, I was waiting for them to give me my money back, and more.”

SL: [Laughs]

[00:09:00.19] EJ: And that was for me, probably the greatest lesson I have ever learned. That was the day of his death. He told me then, “Edith, you don't get it back all at that time, but when you give, you do get back in multiples, but it may

not come back at the same time nor from the same source that you give it.” And that has been my philosophy in life—never fail to give—expecting it to come back from the same source or that it might come back immediately. And it was on that day that we went home, and my mother and father went horseback riding. And it was that day that I experienced my first resuscitation. We now call it “code blue,” in which they brought my father home on a wagon—put him on the—what we called then, “front room” floor. We would call it “living room” now. It was the front room to this little shotgun house, and attempted to resuscitate him. I saw them there pumping and blowing into his nostrils, and pumping him. And he died. Nothing happened. And for that day, life, I would say, began. That was when—I was about seven years old then. That was when I grew up. I had a sister then that was twelve years old. I had a brother who was about nine years old, and that was Edith. And it was the three of us and my mother. She had an eighth-grade education, so it wasn’t much that she could do. She had been his wife, and that was all that she did was his wife.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:10:59.02] EJ: And I can remember how helpless she was, and even at seven, I felt compelled that I had to help out in the situation. But that was not totally—but that was a day that I can remember that—that I became a person—a real person—one in which I felt that I had to take some responsibility. Well, he was buried, and my mother had a father living. She went to live with her father because the— the owner of the farm in which she was living wrote her a letter saying that she had to get off. And I have a documentation of a letter that she received that she

never showed me, and I only found it after her death in the bottom of her trunk. It was that my father had borrowed \$25 to make the crop that year, and for that \$25 he was—he got a horse and he got some other things in order to make the crop. She did not have \$25. He took everything my father had—the T-Model Ford that he had bought that had nothing to do with the \$25, the buggy, the crop that was his share of the crop—everything. But I didn't know that then. I—all I knew is that my father, who I thought I was his favorite child, had died. But I grew up. I grew up because I realized that my mother needed help. And my oldest sister at that time was twelve, and somewhat mothered me when my mother was distraught. She was . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She had been strictly a husband's—would you say . . .

SL: A housewife.

EJ: A housewife. She . . .

[00:13:10.05] SL: How—how old was she then?

EJ: Approximately thirty-ish.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I could tell you exactly, but—thirty-ish.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Thirty-eight, maybe, at most—maybe not that old.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But . . .

SL: Now, did you have . . .?

FE: Excuse me.

SL: Oh, is there fifteen minutes?

FE: Yes.

SL: Oh, we're at fifteen minutes. Why don't we—why don't we . . .

[Tape Stopped]

FE: We're good, Scott.

SL: Okay, good. Thanks.

FE: Uh-huh.

SL: All this is going down in Mayflower.

EJ: This is in Mayflower.

[00:13:47.02] SL: Now, let's talk a little bit about Mayflower and your world there, a little bit. Now, didn't—was there another sister that you had?

EJ: There was another sister. There was the . . .

SL: That died from typhoid.

EJ: This is the sister. It was three of us.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It was the older sister, my brother, and I was the younger . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . of the youngest of the—of the three.

SL: Now—but did you lose a sister to typhoid?

EJ: That was the one I lost.

SL: Oh, okay.

EJ: You read more—you know more about me than I know about myself.

SL: No, that's not true.

EJ: [Laughter] Yes, that was a sister that was living at that time.

SL: I'm just going to—I'm going to be trying to do mining here.

EJ: Yeah, yeah.

SL: I'm . . .

[00:14:27.24] EJ: Yeah, that was the sister. It was Juanita, Robert, Edith, and [Louis?]. [Louis?] was born after my father died.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Uh-huh. I'm seven, and I'm about seven years older than he is—six and a half—something like that.

SL: Oh, my gosh.

EJ: Uh-huh.

[00:14:48.21] SL: So your mom may have been pregnant at the time.

EJ: She was. [Laughs] Yeah. He died in May, and she had the baby in September.

SL: And so the sister that you lost died how much later?

EJ: Months. I don't know the dates.

SL: So in the article that I read . . .

EJ: But that's not the worst part.

[00:15:12.13] SL: What's the worst part?

EJ: Her father died during that time. The father died . . .

SL: Your mother's father?

EJ: My mother's father—the one that she had gone for dependence on after her husband died. He was an old man, of course—an old man according to that time—he

was sixty-some.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And—but he died, and Juanita died, which was my sister, after he died. All of this is months apart. So she was—but she kept us. She was a strong woman, and during the same time—there was a typhoid epidemic at that time—my brother contracted typhoid fever, and he almost died. I never got sick. I didn't get sick. I was there to pass the bedpans, and they had diarrhea—significant diarrhea. I was there to—I can remember my mother putting her head on the table and weeping unreservedly, particular when my brother was so very, very sick. And that was after she had lost her father, she had lost her daughter. She had lost her husband, and now her—at that time—her only son . . .

SL: [People?]

EJ: . . . was sick and thought he was going to die because he was having bloody stools, which was a—a earmark of typhoid fever. I was the only one who didn't get sick.

[00:16:50.14] SL: Was all this still in Mayflower?

EJ: All of this is in Mayflower.

SL: [Sighs] So one extreme . . .

EJ: Well, no, let me correct this. Not all of this was in Mayflower. Part of this was in Conway, because when she was forced off of the farm . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . she went to her father. She stayed with her father for a few months, and then she moved with us to Conway.

SL: Okay.

EJ: To Conway. And she moved because there were no schools in Mayflower, and the sister's death was in Conway. The father's death was while she was in Conway.

[00:17:36.27] SL: Okay. So—well, there's a couple of things here.

EJ: And that isn't the worst part. [Laughs]

SL: And the worst part?

EJ: For her—I developed rheumatic fever . . .

SL: Oh!

EJ: . . . so I couldn't walk. I had swelling of the knees and I couldn't walk. But this was at a time when they didn't know what to do with it—still don't know really what to do with it, but could not treat it. So I couldn't go back to school. But she taught me in school. She taught me from my brother's books, and he would—he was three years older than me, so she taught me. She had an eighth-grade education. [Doorbell Rings] And so it was there that I learned to read and write. And then when all of the tragedies—and she had buried my sister, and she had buried my grandfather and we were still in school—she felt that the schools were not adequate to give us more than what she had to offer, and so she made a move to come to Hot Springs, Arkansas. And that's how we got to Hot Springs, Arkansas. She had an aunt in Hot Springs that she communicated with, and said that she wanted to come to Hot Springs so that her children—the two of us—and at that time, she had the baby—a brand new baby—to come to Hot Springs to get us started in school. And that's how I got to Hot Springs. Because I could not walk

adequately, because of my typhoid [rheumatic?] fever knees' swelling and pain, and because I had been taught at home—had not gone to school but maybe one or two months when I got sick—they put me in a class with my brother, with her teaching, and she taught me from his books. And I stayed in the class with him to fourth grade—and went to the fourth grade. And I never learned my [multiplication] tables because . . .

SL: They skipped over it.

[00:20:00.12] EJ: They skipped over it. They skipped me to the fifth grade, and—and left my brother in the fourth grade. Then when I got to the fifth grade, I didn't learn my fractions because they skipped me to the sixth grade. So I'm—I was two years skipped up. Of course, I don't advocate that for any children now. I know what it can do. You—you—you miss something.

[00:20:23.01] SL: Well, did you—? Surely you had to go back or something, or how . . .

EJ: I don't . . .

SL: . . . I mean, how did you pick—you don't do math?

EJ: I—I—not very well. [Laughter] I can count.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I can count money.

SL: Yeah. [Laughter]

EJ: But I—I do okay.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But I'm sure I don't do it as well as some people would do it, not having learned

my multiplication tables.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:20:48.19] EJ: And not really learning well my fractions and—well, in the sixth grade I did get my decimals, so I—but then it wasn't too much of a hinder because we got the slide rule then.

SL: Right.

EJ: Do you—you wouldn't remember the slide rule.

SL: No, I do remember. Yes.

EJ: You remember the slide rule?

SL: Yes.

EJ: So we had the slide rule.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:21:08.19] EJ: So you learned to use the slide rule, and you didn't need to know fractions, and you didn't need to know decimals. And I went to college, and I got through physics.

SL: I was wondering.

EJ: Yeah, I—I had a major in college in physics, chemistry, and biology.

SL: Right. Exactly. And I know there's some math involved.

EJ: And there was a lot of math, but I knew the slide rule.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I was able to do whatever I needed to do, and got pretty good grades, you know, and A's out of the courses. I think I had one B on my transcript in college.

SL: In one of the—this is really loud, isn't it?

FE: Well, at—at times.

SL: Okay.

FE: But this one's . . .

SL: But we're over it, aren't we?

FE: I think so. I mean—now we are.

EJ: I can't—I can't stop them. I think that's . . .

SL: That's across the street, probably.

EJ: Yes, I think that's across the street. I don't think they would hear us if we said,  
“You have to stop your work because you're disturbing.” [Laughter]

[00:22:07.12] SL: When I was reading about your sister's death, there was a comment in there that you had seen or that you had noticed a correlation of people surviving illnesses that had money, and those that didn't, didn't do as well.

EJ: It appeared to me at that time. Typhoid fever, as I say, at that time in Conway was an epidemic.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:22:37.23] EJ: Almost every child or every household had someone in it who had typhoid fever. The—they had very few doctors. I can remember a doctor, and I remember his name very vividly now—Dr. Cummins came to our house on one occasion to see my sister. There were no hospitals—no particular medicines that—that you could give them. But he came. But he only came once.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And she had this bloody diarrhea . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . hemorrhaging, and someone ran to his office to try to get him, and he was busy on other calls. I had seen him go to the neighbors, who had larger houses, and the children dressed better.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And some of them had cars, and he went there several times. And it was then that I vowed that my sister would not have died if she could have paid for having him to come to see her as . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . often as he had gone to see the other children. And it was then that I resolved that I was going to be a doctor.

[00:23:56.06] SL: Well, I was going to say—it sounds like to me you were just completely—oh, what can I say? You were totally engaged in healthcare in a real—where the rubber-meets-the-road way.

EJ: But I didn't realize it. [Laughs]

SL: You didn't realize it, but you were already . . .



[00:24:16.11] EJ: That's right. I can remember comforting my mother when my brother was having bloody diarrhea, and he was sitting on the potty stool, and I can remember her head being on the wooden table that she was sitting on, and she was sobbing unreservedly—just sobbing . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . because she thought she was gonna lose him, too. And for the grace of God, he didn't die. But I resolved that day—I was about seven years old—that I was gonna be a doctor. But I was gonna be a different kind of doctor. I was gonna be

doctor in which money wasn't gonna to make any difference with me—that I was gonna particular see that those who did not have money—those who were less fortunate—would get the kind of care that they needed—that I was gonna do it as much as I could do it, and I was gonna instill into others that they must do it, too. And so I have spent my lifetime trying to live out a childhood dream.

[00:25:26.07] SL: I don't think there's any question that you've been true to that dream. I mean—but let—let's—before we—before we get on to that part, I want to try and get a picture of what the society was around you. I mean, you've all—already—early—you've moved twice or you—you start in Mayflower. You go to . . .

EJ: Conway.

SJ: . . . Conway, and then you're in Hot Springs.

EJ: And then back in Conway.

SJ: Okay. Well, in Conway and then Hot Springs.

EJ: Yeah.

[00:25:54.00] SJ: So I'm trying to—I'm assuming in Mayflower it was pretty much . . .

EJ: In Mayflower we were in a little wooden hut. I can vividly see it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: We must've had about three rooms in which the children slept in one room.

There was a kitchen and what we called a "front room" combined, and that—you did everything combination there.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:26:21.03] EJ: There was an eating room, kitchen table, fireplace, and then there were two other rooms—a room for my mother and father, and a room that the three of us children slept in.

SL: In . . .

EJ: I slept with my sister, and my—my brother had a cot.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I can remember this if it was yesterday. That was—and we had an outdoor toilet. That was Mayflower.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:26:50.27] EJ: But around the house was gardens. We had all kinds of gardens, so food was not a problem. And even today, tomatoes are my favorite vegetables. And we had vegetables and plenty of food. And it was—but it was in almost in the middle of a wide area in which farming—corn and other—cotton and other things were growing in large patches . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . around us. But near the house was a vegetable garden—vegetables, and I can get a vivid picture even now of seeing that. In fact, the day that they brought my father home—Papa, as we called him—the day that they brought Papa home, my sister had just gotten me up from a sleep and had gone out to get me some tomatoes in the garden. I mean, it was just that vivid. But then my whole life has been vivid. I can almost remember almost each day—each week—for my young life what happened. And then it got a little less vivid, and I can remember by the month or by the year.

[00:28:22.12] SL: Do you—do you remember much about your mom and dad's folks—their—their father and mother—your grandparents?

EJ: Well, I remember my grandfather, and I remember his wife—my mother's mother died when she was young.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And he had remarried.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And so I remember where he remarried twice during my childhood. The first marriage was a Miss Callie, who was a step-grandmother, and she's the one who taught me to read when I was less than reading age.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She had me reading Shakespeare and Milton and the Bible and . . .

SL: Well, now, was she a teacher?

EJ: She was a teacher.

SL: Oh, okay.

EJ: And she had accumulated all kinds of books . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and she would have me to read the Bible through and through, and memorize scriptures and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So she took me as a charge.

SL: And your older sister probably got the same sort of attention.

EJ: She—she—right. In fact, my older sister they say was a genius.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That she was—she made all A's all the time.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And that she was the smart one.

[00:29:41.14] SL: Now, what did your grandfather do?

EJ: He was a farmer.

SL: He was a farmer.

EJ: He was a farmer.

SL: And he was probably a sharecropper as well?

EJ: No, he owned his . . .

SL: He owned his own?

EJ: . . . he owned his own. In fact, he had lots of property . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . in Mayflower.

SL: Now, this is your mother's side.

EJ: My mother's . . .

SL: Okay. Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . mother's father.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:29:59.18] EJ: My father came from Mayflower.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And he was an Irby.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: The Irbys owned most of Mayflower, and he was the descendent of the Irbys.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So they were farmers in Mayflower, but I'm talking about a different Mayflower.

There's a sort of—part—a sort of urban Mayflower and there's a rural, and both of them are rural, but . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . more rural. But he had moved out to the rural area.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But the Irbys in Mayflower owned much of the land in Mayflower.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:30:42.21] EJ: The story of that is—I didn't learn until some time ago—and that was that the Irbys—the slave-owners Irbys, had left, as they died, the property in Mayflower to their slaves.

SL: That's good.

EJ: And it had dwindled down . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . to their children. I didn't know the whole story until I met my slave-owner's descendent, who, in addition to being a physician, was a historian, and was significantly concerned with collecting the family history.

[00:31:31.29] SL: And what was his name?

EJ: Robert Irby Wise. He was the son of an Irby mother.

SL: And where was he? When you met up with him, where—where did you all meet?

EJ: We were in Atlanta, Georgia.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: The American College of Physicians was honoring me that year . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . with one of their most prestigious awards.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I was the first woman to have gotten it, and I was the first black to have gotten it.

[00:32:08.22] SL: And where—where did he call . . .

EJ: And he . . .

SL: . . . his home? I mean . . .

EJ: He was in Williamsburg, Virginia.

SL: Oh, wow. [Laughs]

EJ: That was home for him.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: He lived in a settlement in which you had to pay \$100,000 to make an application.

SL: Gosh.

EJ: And non-refundable. [Laughs]

SL: Well, I kind of wanted to get that on tape so I'd—not only would it help me remember, 'cause [because] I—I want to try and track down . . .

EJ: Yeah.

SL: . . . that connection.

EJ: Uh-huh. Yeah, that—yeah, that was—that was how I met him.

SL: Okay.

[00:32:44.18] EJ: And he noticed that my name was Irby.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And there's not a whole lot of Irbys.

SL: Right.

EJ: And he noticed that my story said I was from Arkansas.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And he knew that he had relatives who had migrated to Arkansas.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:33:04.23] EJ: In fact, his father's brother had gone to Arkansas when he was found to be—most of them were physicians.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But his father's brother was an educator, and he was educating his black children—slave children—with his Mulatto children . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . with his white children in the same classroom.

SL: That's big.

EJ: And that was a crime.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: And he was caught doing it.

SL: Oh!

EJ: So . . .

SL: So they sent him to Arkansas?

EJ: No, so he fled.

SL: No, he fled to Arkansas.

EJ: So he took all his slaves.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: He was the only educator. Everybody else was a physician. So he took all of his slaves and all of his whatever, and fled to Arkansas, and settled in Mayflower, Arkansas.

SL: What a great story . . .

EJ: And . . .

EJ: . . . and what a great precedent.

EJ: Yeah, and so . . . [Laughs]

SL: It is. Uh-huh.

EJ: And so that's—that's what it's—what it's all about. So he was there with—settled in Arkansas with his slaves . . .

SL: Yes.

EJ: . . . and his Mulatto and his white offsprings, and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . that's what Mayflower is about.

[00:34:23.19] SL: Well, that's so good. Okay. So when you were growing up in Mayflower, or when you lived in Mayflower, it was predominantly a black community. Is that . . .?

EJ: I was there so—no, it wasn't.

SL: It wasn't?

EJ: There were—there were some whites there.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: In fact, as I can remember now, my mother's best friend about her age was white.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But they knew nothing of this story. They were just . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . happened to be about the same age.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: My mother was very fair complexion.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:34:59.03] EJ: And they just—they were—they got to be friends, and they shared what little they had to share. They particularly shared a well.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: A well that they kept butter—you—you—in order—they didn't have refrigerators then, so when they milked the cows and made the butter, they had to keep the butter from . . .

SL: Cool.

EJ: . . . cool. So they had a well in which they would put things down in the well to keep it cold so that it would not spoil—butter and milk and fresh meats in the summertime. And they shared the—I don't remember the lady's name, but I . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:35:39.01] EJ: . . . I can remember going to her house and her letting me—showing me how to get the water—how to get the bucket down in the well, and not to spill it so that it contaminated the water so you still had drinking water.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Yeah.

[00:35:55.14] SL: Wow, that's rich. So they—so you had some friendly interaction with whites early on. I mean, they . . .

EJ: Oh . . .

SL: . . . were a part of your life early.

EJ: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: In fact, in Hot Springs—when we moved to Hot Springs and my mother moved away from her aunt—she was first in a house with her aunt.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And in two or three months she was able to get a little three-room house . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . in which we moved into.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: We moved next door to a German family.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And then next to that was another white family, and they had daughters that were the same age as I was.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And we played together. We thought nothing of it. I went to the black school. They went, though, to the Catholic school.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:36:44.02] EJ: And I thought the reason they went to the Catholic school—

because they had money. You had to pay to go to the Catholic school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That they had money and their parents could pay, and I knew my mother couldn't pay for me to go, and I was going to the public school. It never dawned on me that we were separated—segregated to . . .

SL: By color.

EJ: . . . by color. And when we got home, we was just anxious to get together to play with our dolls and do other things that girls do. They're still in Hot Springs—at least they were when I was practicing there.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:37:22.06] EJ: They were probably the first to make it to my office to say, "I'm your patient. Just do me an examination." So, yes, they—we had that relationship. We had separate black and white schools when I was in school, but there was no—no explanation was given. We didn't ask, and as I say, I thought my friends went there because they had money.

[00:37:54.05] SL: So this is late [19]30s?

EJ: You have to count back. [Laughter]

SL: I'm trying to remember.

EJ: That would have to be . . .

SL: Seem—it seems like that document I just took up was dated [19]31—1931, maybe.

EJ: The [19]30s was about when my father died.

SL: Yes.

EJ: The [19]30s, so it had to be . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . the late [19]30s.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Yes.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: The late [19]30s. I graduated from high school in [19]44, so if you—yeah, it had to be the [19]30s.

[00:38:21.26] SL: Yeah. So—now, we kind of skipped over Conway—the time that you spent in Conway, and I'm sure that was . . .

EJ: I didn't spend a lot of time in Conway.

SL: It was kind of a transitional . . .

EJ: I didn't . . .

SL: . . . thing from Mayflower to . . .

EJ: Almost.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I went to school maybe a week or two weeks out of the whole time that I was there.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:38:42.08] EJ: I have a picture. That's the only reason I know I was in class that one . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But then I got where I couldn't walk.

SL: Right, rheumatic fever.

EJ: And rheumatic fever. And it wasn't much time I spent there.

[00:38:55.19] SL: How long did—were you—how long did you have the fever?

EJ: Well, incapacitated for several months.

SL: Gosh!

EJ: Yeah. And which I can remember them building a—a chair—a kitchen chair in which they put wheels from a bed.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: You know how they have to roll in the . . .

SL: Casters. Uh-huh.

[00:39:17.28] EJ: . . . casters—put it in there, and they were able to roll me around on—on the chair. Made me a wheelchair, would you say?

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: My grandfather did that wheelchair so I could be rolled around in.

[00:39:32.17] SL: Well, I'm getting a picture that your mother must have been incredibly strong.

EJ: She was. She was.

SL: And I'm just wondering . . .

EJ: Strong and pretty.

SL: And pretty.

EJ: And pretty.

SL: And this had to be a huge test of her faith. I mean, were—were y'all—? I mean, I . . .

EJ: You know, she went to church.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And we had family prayers.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But I don't know whether she was as outwardly religious as I am.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: You know? We had morning devotions.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Particular, Sunday mornings when we had time.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:40:17.29] EJ: She took time to explain to us with the breakfast, before we went off to Sunday school, how important it was that we know that we were always right in dealing with others and that we never needed to really be concerned about anything because there was an entity that always took care of us. And, you know, I believed it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: In fact, later on I found out it was true. It just wasn't quite so simplistic, maybe—or maybe it was more simplistic than she put it. [Laughs]

SL: Right.

EJ: But I believed it and had no fear about anything.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That she told me that someone was always taking care of me. Something was always there and . . .

[00:41:05.15] SL: Well, what was it that your mother did once y'all were by yourselves? I mean . . .

EJ: She worked. She took day's work, and she took washing and ironing. When I was nine years old I could iron a shirt—a white shirt—and do better than any laundry anywhere. She took in washing and ironing, and she did that so she could be with us.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:41:29.20] EJ: She would go and pick up the wash and then bring it home.

SL: Bring it home.

EJ: Wash it and iron it at home and take it back. So it meant she was there to see us off to school, and she was there to—when we came back from school.

SL: Wow.

EJ: Yeah.

[00:41:42.25] SL: So I'm—so eventually it was just you, your mom and your younger brother—is that . . .?

EJ: My older brother.

SL: Or older brother.

EJ: He didn't die.

SL: He didn't die.

EJ: No, he didn't die. He's very much alive.

SL: Okay.

EJ: He's here in Houston.

SL: Okay.

EJ: He—he didn't die. [Laughs]

[00:41:58.22] SL: Now, wait a minute. Now, who was she pregnant with when your . . . ?

EJ: The younger brother.

SL: The younger brother.

EJ: Now, the younger brother did die.

SL: Oh, he did?

EJ: Yeah.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: But that was later on?

EJ: Oh, much later.

SL: Okay.

EJ: He was—he was forty-ish . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . plus.

[00:42:13.11] SJ: So it was you and your two brothers . . .

EJ: And two brothers.

SL: . . . in Hot Springs.

EJ: That really—yes. Uh-huh.

SL: Yes. Uh-huh.

EJ: My sister had already died.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And my younger brother was just in arms.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: He was just a baby in arms.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:42:26.08] EJ: And my other brother. And, in fact, my younger brother—when did he start to school? He—I don't—yeah, it was—it was much, much—it was six years. He was just a baby when we moved . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . when we moved to Hot Springs, so he wasn't even school-age then.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I was school-age, but he wasn't.

[00:42:50.15] SL: Well, tell me about Hot Springs at that time. I mean . . .

EJ: Hot Springs?

SL: . . . I mean, that was—that was after—well, now, let me think about it. When were all the gangsters in Hot Springs?

EJ: I didn't know they were there then, but they were probably there. I didn't know they were there until I got in high school. [Laughs]

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Because we were—well, I wouldn't have any reason to know.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But as we got in high school—the eleventh and twelfth grade—we'd hear about all of the gangsters being there, and the [Oaklawn horse] racetrack, and how the high school boys would go out and put bets on the races, and how they worked in

the hotels, and what they saw, and so forth. My brother was not allowed to work. He—he didn't work in the hotels.

[00:43:42.12] SL: You had some brief contact on the street with the mayor though, didn't you?

EJ: Oh, yeah. In fact, almost every mayor—I was Hot Springs' pride and joy from even as soon as I—well, they advanced me, as I say.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:44:07.26] EJ: So everybody took an interest in trying to get me to learn more—be easy—and they knew my mother was a widow.

SL: Yes.

EJ: So they also knew that—that she could not dress me to participate in some of the activities, so clubs bought dresses and had me to make speeches, and people gave monies to see that I had the proper dress. And they took me to conventions that were outside of Hot Springs. And this was when I was eight, nine, ten years old.

[00:44:39.27] SL: So you were the darling child of the community.

EJ: I would say now as I look back, yes.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I—well, I thought they were doing it then, and they were . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . because I was poor. You—you know, and if I was on program, I wouldn't



have anything to wear. I can remember one Easter, for instance—I had the leading part in the Easter speech, and didn't have anything.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:45:09.25] EJ: My mother had one nice dress. She sat up all night long—took that dress apart—made me a dress—and I was beautiful the next day. But guess what? She couldn't go to hear me speak.

SL: 'Cause she worked?

EJ: No.

SL: No?

EJ: She didn't have anything to wear.

SL: Oh, that's right! She took the one dress . . .

EJ: She took the one dress she had and made a dress for me. But I understood, and she was happy. And when I came back, she wanted to know, "How did it go?"

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:45:51.01] EJ: And this was this kind of sacrifice she made. She made those kind of sacrifices to see that I would be able to do. And she would take the last penny, and she says, "This is all we have. Spend it if you need to, but otherwise bring it home."

[00:46:09.11] SL: Now, the kind of support y'all got, though—was it mainly centered from the black community?

EJ: No.

SL: No?

EJ: No, because . . .

SL: So you're already . . .

EJ: Because my—the—the two neighbors that I had were not black.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: The—the one neighbor that lived next to us was of . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . German descent. And she would—I would say “accidentally” always cook too much.

SL: [Laughs]

[00:46:39.00] EJ: She would cook too many— too much soup . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . too much vegetables . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and she would pass it over the fence to my mother. And that was when she had the—the two boys and me—to be sure that we never went without food.

[00:46:56.20] SL: So what about the black and white relations in Hot Springs as a community?

EJ: Well . . .

SL: I mean, you had a . . .

EJ: Later, as I . . .

SL: Was your situation kind of unique?

[00:47:09.15] EJ: Well, then later I grew up. You know, you just don’t stay a little girl and play in the neighborhood.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So knowing that we were poor and so forth, I helped my mother. I went to her day jobs with her, and I helped her do whatever she needed to do. If she was making beds, I got on the other side of the bed.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:47:31.08] EJ: If—if she was cleaning the floor, I helped her clean the floor—I did—and I always got more money. Not only did they pay her, but they paid me, too.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And so by taking me, they always made the sacrifice. And, now, money was difficult then for everybody.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:47:49.02] EJ: But they always found enough to give her extra to have me go. But then as relations went, we didn't have—we didn't have the divisions in relations. There were separate schools and, as I say, I lived next door to whites. I'm not the only one who—and so the neighborhoods were not entirely separate. They were separated more by money—economics.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:48:19.20] EJ: The kind of house you could live in. And, yet, where we lived was not really, really poor, poor, poor . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . the—the—where we were neighbors. They were what I consider without money left over . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: But they were people who were able to eke out enough to have something to eat in the house . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . to have some utilities, and live with some—with most of the needs of life.

[00:48:51.01] SL: So at Hot Springs you finished—you went through public school . . .

EJ: I went through public schools.

SL: . . . all the way through high school there.

[00:48:58.10] EJ: But the other contact I had that I guess really made me to dream—I took typing and shorthand.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And somehow or other I got the job. I was the fastest typist in Arkansas by contesting that there was at that time. I typed 125 words per minute . . .

SL: Oh!

EJ: . . . on a manual typewriter.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: And I took shorthand. [Laughter] But at that time, they didn't have secretarial pools.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I was a secretarial pool.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: I went in the hotels and I took letters from various people who had come down for the bass.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:49:50.28] EJ: And I got their letters ready for them to send. I could take the shorthand, I could—and my mother bought me a typewriter that she paid fifty

cents a week on until she paid out. So I had my own portable typewriter, and so I was a roving secretary from maybe my tenth grade to twelfth grade. I went into the hotels and took it from all of the businesspeople. And I would say that was where I really learned to interact with people.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:50:22.00] EJ: And then there was a John Webb, who was black, who was—what you call him—a—a—a fraternal man. He was head of fraternal. He was Mississippi grand lodge . . .

SL: A Mason?

EJ: He wasn't a Mason, it was one of the others.

SL: Oh.

EJ: He was a Mason, but . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . that wasn't what he was the grand lodge of. It was another fraternity.

SL: Okay.

EJ: And he let me come in the—after school and work with his secretary. Oh, he was so polished. Oh, he was so—you know, he was so everything that I would like to be.

SL: Yes.

EJ: And so I emulated him, you know? I came out, and when I made speeches, I made them the way he would make 'em [them]. And I emphasized the same way, and—and then . . .

[00:51:24.01] SL: So you had a business role model with him.

EJ: Oh, yeah, yeah. He didn't know I was role-modeling after him. He thought I was working for him, but I was role-modeling after him. And I worked after school for him, I would say, from the tenth grade through the twelfth grade. By that time, we were making lots of money. We—I bet you we had all of five or ten dollars a week that . . .

SL: To spare.

EJ: No, to spend.

SL: Oh, to spend. [Laughter]

EJ: But it was—it was over and above what my mother was making, so . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . this meant that we had money to buy the necessities and so forth.

[00:52:06.08] SL: [Sighs] What a great period in history to be doing that. Was that—now, when did the [Great] Depression hit in—? Was—was Hot . . .?

EJ: The Depression was before then.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Yeah, and we were coming out of the Depression then.

SL: Coming out of Conway, I guess, was . . .

EJ: Was—was the—yeah.

SL: So we were post-Depression.

EJ: But we were still in the Depression, but not—not—not really to the point . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . where everybody was reaping the benefits.

[00:52:34.21] SL: And Hot Springs—I wonder if Hot Springs kind of . . .

EJ: And Hot Springs was different . . .

SL: It was different.

EJ: . . . because people came with money and they spent their money.

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

EJ: That's why they came.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They came to spend their money. And so in Hot Springs, we felt less of the poverty-stricken situation . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . than in most places.

[00:52:55.23] SL: Sounds like to me that—well, number one, I—it's just so hard for me to fathom all the strength and courage that it took your mom to raise y'all like she did.

EJ: It was—now when I know what it—what it took, it had to be difficult. And, as I say, she was young.

SL: And she was beautiful.

EJ: And she was beautiful.

[00:53:19.15] SL: And so what about her life—her social life? Did she have . . .?

EJ: She gave it up.

SL: She gave it up?

EJ: She was strictly for us.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I can remember she had one would-be boy—boyfriend.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And he was requiring too much of her—for her to—for us, and she gave that up.

SL: Her priorities were straight and solid.

EJ: Well, her priorities were us.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Yeah. And she let us know that was her priorities.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And she enjoyed it. She—she got to—and particularly after we grew up and we were able to respond, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[00:53:57.28] EJ: And I would say—my—my older brother went off to service, and he was able to send money home.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: He bought the house that we had been renting.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:54:17.22] EJ: When I went to college, I—I remodeled the house because I took extra work to be able to have money.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So during her lifetime she was able to live comfortably.

[00:54:35.12] SL: So—so y'all didn't—I mean, after your grandfather died, you didn't really have a male role model in the family.

EJ: Yes, we did.

SL: Oh, you did.

EJ: She had two brothers.

SL: Okay, let's talk about them.

EJ: Her oldest brother, I say, was about maybe five years older than she was . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and he would send us clothes, and every Christmas he would send a box full of clothes and toys and fruits and candies, and I thought he was really the Santa Claus.

[00:55:10.23] SL: Now, where did your mother grow up?

EJ: In Mayflower.

SL: In Mayflower?

EJ: In Mayflower.

SL: And so both your mother and your father were from Mayflower.

EJ: Yes.

SL: And so was it . . .

EJ: Except they were from a different part of . . .

SL: . . . part urban and rural?

EJ: . . . of Mayflower. Yeah.

[00:55:24.13] SL: And so were—were her brothers in Mayflower as well?

EJ: Not at that time.

SL: Oh.

EJ: They had already grown up and out and working.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: One brother—well, they both worked for railroad companies.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They paid more money.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:55:36.15] EJ: One was Des Moines, Iowa, and that was the older brother . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . who had no children, and he sent all of the clothes and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . fruits and candies and books to be read, and so forth.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:55:49.17] EJ: And then the younger brother had moved to Chicago [Illinois], and  
he would sometimes send money . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . sometimes clothes, and would do other things to help . . .

SL: Well . . .

EJ: . . . her survive.

[00:56:02.17] SL: . . . did you ever see much of those brothers?

EJ: Yes. The older brother would come at least twice a year.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: At least twice a year . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and would spend a week—he and his wife.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And they would make pictures and they would bring down goodies and—so that

was contact.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:56:18.10] EJ: The younger brother would come, I would say, at different times,  
but would come.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And his wife would come sometimes.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And they would bring things to support. Yes, she had excellent brothers' support.

[00:56:31.03] SL: Well, gosh, that's good news. I mean, I just . . .

EJ: Yeah.

FE: Excuse me. We're at fifty-eight. Is this a good place?

SL: Yeah, let's—let's change tapes.

[Tape Stopped]

SL: . . . okay?

FE: Yeah.

SL: 'Cause I noticed that I've kind of shifted her over here by . . .

EJ: Oh. Oh.

FE: No. Yeah, I mean . . .

SL: We're okay?

FE: Well, you know, I guess if you could . . .

EJ: [Laughs]

[00:56:46.00] SL: All the artwork, by the way—what are you gonna do with all this  
artwork?

EJ: You know, I have no idea. And people come and [ ].

SL: I mean, you could open up a museum of just the artwork.

EJ: Well, if I had at home—if I brought all I had at home here, I could. Yeah. I—I have lots and lots of it at home. People that go places—they bring it to me. I don't know. I go places and I pick it up.

SL: We gotta [got to] figure something out on this.

EJ: [Laughs]

SL: It would be such a loss to just have this stuff just go away and no one every appreciate it. I mean . . .

EJ: But I'm here forever.

SL: These stories that you're telling . . .

EJ: Hey, look, but I'm here forever.

SL: . . . give strength to all this stuff.

EJ: Do what?

[00:57:26.01] SL: The stories that you're telling right now give strength to all these accomplishments . . .

EJ: Well . . .

SL: . . . that are all over these walls. Look at all this stuff.

EJ: Oh, people have been so kind to me.

SL: Well, I think you've been . . .

EJ: I mean, from really almost . . .

SL: I think it's that same thing . . .

EJ: Almost from birth.

SL: . . . your daddy told you. I think it's the same thing your daddy told you.

EJ: Oh, I give.

SL: I think once you give, it's going to come back.

[00:57:43.24] EJ: Oh, it comes back. Oh, believe me.

SL: So . . .

EJ: And it does not necessarily have to come back from the same source.

SL: And hardly—rarely ever does, I bet.

EJ: But, really, it works.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: You actually can reach down to the bottom of what you have and give it away. If you're not careful, when you look back it's full again. I don't understand the principle. I just know it works.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: I don't understand it . . .

SL: Well . . .

EJ: . . . but it works.

SL: I—I—it's—we gotta figure out to do with this stuff or you've got to make some kind of decision. You can't just let this stuff go away.

[00:58:16.11] EJ: But I'm still a young lady. I'm not even eighty yet.

SL: I know, but . . .

EJ: [Laughs]

SL: You know what I'm saying. This stuff is valuable.

EJ: And, as I say, actually, if—if all of my children took everything they want, they'd

have too much space—they would have too much junk.

SL: Well, that's what I'm saying.

EJ: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

[00:58:34.14] SL: Yeah. And—well, we'll talk about that later. So, okay, we—  
we've been talking about your mom.

EJ: What a woman.

SL: What an amazing woman.

EJ: She was strong. She was strong. I know now she was strong. By the way, what  
did you do with my—did you keep that? I gave you a—I intended to give you . . .

SL: I took it upstairs to scan the little . . .

EJ: Oh, the—the . . .

SL: . . . the thing where she's relinquishing . . .

EJ: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . all those items . . .

EJ: Yeah.

SL: . . . for the \$25 debt.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: That just drives me crazy. [Sighs]

EJ: But—but . . .

SL: But you know what?

[00:59:09.18] EJ: It's just—it's just one of those things that reminds us of what the  
times were like at that time. If you had no one to really protect you—looked out  
for you—that it couldn't happen—well, I don't know it could happen today. It's

less likely to happen today.

[00:59:28.13] SL: Well, and one of the themes that I hear in the other interviews with the awardees that I've been doing is a lot of times things were just the way they were, and people just accepted that.

EJ: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

[00:59:40.07] SL: I mean, there really wasn't much thought about it being any other way, you know? It just—particularly, in the segregation stuff . . .

EJ: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . you know?

EJ: Oh, yeah. They felt helpless, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: If I do something—if I even speak up . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:59:55.17] EJ: . . . I guess that was the one thing, though, that she did not curtail my—my speaking. I was always out there vocal.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Every cause that I felt strong about, I—I promoted my side of the story.

[01:00:10.20] SL: So were you activist-oriented? I know that you were—your activism predates Martin Luther [King, Jr.] and—and all the . . .

EJ: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: You know, the stuff that got the big press.

EJ: We were—uh-huh.

SL: But you were—you were kind of—you were being active civil rights-wise before

. . .

EJ: Oh . . .

SL: . . . it was fashionable . . .

EJ: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . or before it ever got any press.

EJ: Before they even talked about civil rights, you know?

[01:00:33.08] SL: Uh-huh. I mean, just your decision to become a doctor early on is, I think—sets a precedent—an attitude that you have that you carry with you all the way through.

[01:00:45.23] EJ: But I also forgot to tell you, I had the opportunity when in Hot Springs to work for a doctor.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: My mother worked for the doctor as a maid.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And had an accident in which she was unable to walk. She broke a vein in her leg.

SL: Oh.

[01:01:03.18] EJ: And the couple was a young couple . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and had a little boy about eighteen months. But my mother was actually their maid. And—but when she had the accident and could not work—I was about nine then, no more than ten . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and they allowed me to come in to keep the baby, who was eighteen months old.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:01:28.01] EJ: So that the wife would have some time to do the things that she—that my mother was doing, plus keep up her life.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:01:35.22] EJ: So I had that contact with a physician when I was about—I could not have been more than nine or ten then.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And they particular—and his mother, who was an alcoholic . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . divorced—lived approximately two blocks away from where they lived . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . was often a place where I went to walk the baby to . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . because she talked to me.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:02:05.13] EJ: And that meant the—and, of course, the—the doctor and his wife were happy that I did go there because it meant I was both talking to the mother and . . .

SL: The baby.

EJ: . . . the mother was there to oversee my taking care of the baby as a nine-year-old.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: You know, that she would be sure the baby was okay. And I suppose she—she did more to push me. It was a Dr. Ellis. She was divorced from her husband. It was the . . .

[01:02:34.06] SL: This was the doctor's mother?

EJ: . . . doctor's mother. Doctor's mother.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She was divorced from her husband and had evidently had a bitter situation, and had resorted to alcohol.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:02:47.15] EJ: But she pounded into me every day: "Stay in school. Be whatever you want to be. You can do it. Be in school." And they were having me to come over to keep the baby even—of course, things weren't like they are now. You couldn't have a nine- or ten-year-old go over and keep a baby . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and no one else is there and you go out for the night. But I—they would come and pick me up. I would be there with the baby in the house, and they gave me as if I was an older daughter—run of the house—books to read. So by the time I had read practically every book you could put your hand on . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . by the time I graduated from high school. The required readings—the readings I was doing because I was babysitting, and the baby was asleep. And—and the doctor's mother—his mother lectured to me: "You can be anything you want to be." And every time she—she saw me, she was telling me what I needed to do.

“You need to stay in school. When you graduate, now, you’ve got to be in school. And if you don’t have money, somebody will give you money. You just—you act like you got money.”

SL: [Laughs]

[01:04:10.13] EJ: And I did. You know, she brainwashed me enough to make me do that.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And, of course, I was very active in my church.

SL: The Baptist church?

EJ: We went to Sunday school—Baptist church . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . Union Baptist Church.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:04:25.08] EJ: And right now I’m real concerned that they continue to be. I sponsored a scholarship program. I sacrificially be sure that the boys and girls who attend that church—if they want to go to college, I sponsor them. That’s one of my giving, and somehow or other, I always get enough money to give.

SL: Well . . .

EJ: And get some more. [Laughs]

SL: Yeah.

[01:04:50.06] EJ: But they have been my surrogate parents, even with my mother living. They would take me to conventions, and if I didn’t have adequate clothes, somebody bought me the necessary clothes.

SL: So they would take you—this is . . . ?

EJ: To Sunday school conventions in different . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . different cities, like Arkadelphia . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . like Little Rock . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:05:17.17] EJ: . . . Pine Bluff. So I got the exposure of traveling out of Hot Springs with the church . . .

SL: So, now . . .

EJ: . . . as a child.

SL: As a child—the church was doing this?

EJ: The church was doing that.

SL: Okay. Okay.

EJ: The women in the church . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . was doing that.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: There was a Mrs. [Seats?], who they say I looked just like.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She had no children.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So she took me as her daughter. And so I had all the little fancy dresses and all

the other things that the children who had more money than my mother had. So she would see that I got them.

[01:05:56.15] SL: You had a rich life.

EJ: Oh, I had a rich life. And guess what? I still have a rich life.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: I still have a rich life. If I just look like I want it, somebody puts it in my hand.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: I don't have to say I want it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I can just—you know? It's been that way all my life, and I just praise God, and I thank people, and I pass it on. It—but it's been that way. I can't think of anything which I've gone after diligently and didn't get. I can't think of being told “no” about anything. I can't think of anything—lack of money—I—for instance. I didn't have any money to go to college. Money has never been a thing for me. I don't have it now. I don't need it. What do you do with it? It's just—just—it's for exchange . . .

SL: Uh-huh.



[01:07:02.21] EJ: . . . and I want what money will do, I don't need the money. I

didn't have any money to go to college. I went to work in Chicago, and I was

able to save \$60 and transportation—and bought some clothes so I thought I

would look pretty in college—went to Knoxville College, and I had \$60. Tuition

was \$300. Can you imagine tuition being \$300? I didn't have \$300. I had \$60.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:07:33.02] EJ: But that was all I had. And I can remember standing in the registration line, and the lady at the desk said, "Those who have everything they need, get in this line. Let's see if we can't move it a little faster. And those who know they need something else, stand in the other line." Well, I knew I didn't have everything I need, so I stood in the other line. And when I got up there, she says, "Young lady, what is it that you need?" I said, "Tuition is \$300, but I don't have but \$60." She says, "Well, I can't help you." I says, "Oh?" I said, "Who can?" She says, "No one can help you here but the president." I said, "Where is he?" And she said, "His office is over there, but he doesn't have any money to help you. But he's the only one who can make any provisions without money." So I says, "May I see him?" She [ ], and they introduced me to a Dr. [William Lloyd] Imes. So I went in, and I says, "Dr. Imes, I'm Edith Irby. I want to enroll as a freshman, and I don't have all of the tuition." He says, "How much do you have?" I said, "I have \$60." He says, "Tuition is \$300." I says, "Yes, sir, I know. But I don't have \$300. I don't have any place I can get \$300, and I want to go to school at Knoxville College." He says, "Can you work?" I says, "Sure, I can work." He says, "What can you do?" Oh, boy, that was like throwing the rabbit in the briar patch.

SL: [Laughs]

[01:09:17.28] EJ: I say, "I can type. I can take shorthand. I can do most other things if I need to, but I need to go to college." He says, "Can you take shorthand, too?" I says, "Yes, sir." So he says, "Well, my secretary is sick today. Could you take a letter for me?" I took his letter. That was, like, oh! And I typed his letter and I

handed him his letter. He says, “Young lady, you’re hired. You can be my secretary’s assistant secretary, and we will see that you get your tuition and your other bills paid.” So I got a job as—as assistant secretary to the president, and I worked my way through school for tuition, and I worked in the canteen and in the drug-store for extra money.

[01:10:16.19] SL: Okay, now, wait a minute. We’re getting ahead of ourselves here a little bit.

EJ: I’m in college. [Laughs]

SL: Yeah. I’m still in Hot Springs.

EJ: Oh, still in Hot Springs.

[01:10:24.26] SL: So, okay, now, we haven’t really talked much about your high school life.

EJ: Oh, high school life?

SL: Yeah. Now, I know that you were active in high school, too.

EJ: Oh, yeah.

SL: So tell me some of the activities.

EJ: I was a cheerleader.

SL: Tell me about being a cheerleader.

EJ: I enjoyed it.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: The stadium was right back of my house.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Football stadium.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So it meant that I could climb the fence and go to the stadium or I could walk around the block and go to the stadium.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:10:53.25] EJ: And I wore the little short dresses, and I thought I was pretty.

[Laughs]

SL: Well, I think that you probably were pretty, and I'll bet you took after your mom.

[Laughs]

EJ: Well, I thought I was. And I was a cheerleader.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I was out there, and I was showing off . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and I was yelling. I enjoyed it. It was wonderful, you know? And we had all of the other things—the—the school dances, the [sock] hops that you pay a nickel to go and . . .

SL: Uh-huh. Now, this school—this school was?

EJ: This was Langston High School.

SL: And it was all—it was black?

EJ: It was black—all black.

SL: Uh-huh. Were they—was the school competitive athletic-wise?

EJ: Oh, yes! Oh, yes!

SL: I mean . . .

EJ: We were the best team—in—in—in—in Arkansas.

[01:11:41.05] SL: Well, I was gonna say—I—I remember when I was in Fayetteville High School.

EJ: Uh-huh.

SL: I was captain of the football team.

EJ: Oh!

SL: And we'd go down and play Hot Springs. We'd . . .

EJ: Oh, yes.

SL: Those guys were always tough on us.

EJ: Now . . .

[01:11:50.29] SL: But by then it was not desegregated.

EJ: It was segregated, but by then . . .

SL: But the quality of athletes . . .

EJ: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . in that neck of the woods was . . .

[01:11:58.01] EJ: And there was not that much—at that time, we had moved from where we were, so there wasn't that interplay, except when we went over to their house.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It wasn't like my seeing my friends . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . who were white every day. I saw them maybe once a month or something like that . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . because we had grown up together, and then they would tell me what happened to them, and I'd tell them. But we were living almost separate lives then.

SL: Right.

[01:12:25.03] EJ: Whereas, in the sixth, seventh grade and so forth . . .

SL: It was an everyday thing.

EJ: It was an everyday then.

SL: Probably, boys got in the way as much as anything.

EJ: Well, boys were part of my—I liked the boys.

SL: [Laughter] Yeah.

EJ: I liked the boys.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:12:42.22] EJ: But it—it was—it was a good time.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I never worried about the fact that maybe I had less than others. It didn't—didn't matter . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . 'cause I was having much more fun, I thought . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . than the others. And when anything was voted, I usually won. I was aggressive. I went after what . . .

[01:13:12.15] SL: So what else did you do besides cheerleading?

EJ: Oh, I was head of the class—almost every class—in fact, in every class I was in, I was an officer. I was the queen for the Prom. I—I participated almost in every-

thing.

[01:13:32.12] SL: So you were probably quite the heartbreaker, too, huh?

EJ: I enjoyed it. [Laughter] Oh, I—oh, I loved the boys. In fact, I just made contact with my long—a boyfriend that—it was a boyfriend in high school for—boy—boy and girlfriend for at least three or four years.

SL: Uh-oh!

EJ: Oh, we had a serious thing going there.

SL: Hmm.

[01:13:58.15] EJ: He went off to the service and I went off to college, and then we had no more contact. And, in fact, I didn't see him until last year, and I went to Cleveland [Ohio] to do a speech.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Probably the most highlight I've ever had. This was the greatest thing. They—they—it was a—they call it the Renaissance speech. They're having President [Bill] Clinton to do it this year.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:14:25.24] EJ: And it was the first time I had seen him since high school, and he was there . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . to—to do the speech. And it was one of my good nights, and I swayed the audience . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and he was very proud. He was very proud.

SL: Well, of course.

EJ: And he had lost his wife.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And, of course, I lost my husband.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:14:48.26] EJ: And I remember the very fond days that we had together, and it was just good to see him.

SL: So is he moving here?

EJ: No. [Laughter]

SL: What's wrong with him? He ought to be right here. [Laughs]

EJ: Hey, that's been a long time ago. [Laughs]

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Things have changed. [Laughs]

SL: Yeah, yeah.

EJ: Things have changed. Yeah. He does have his family.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: And I have my family.

SL: Yeah, of course.

[01:15:11.21] EJ: But it was just good to see him after thirty . . .

SL: Well, it sounds like a . . .

EJ: . . . years—after thirty years. Yeah.

SL: . . . fun, fun thing. Yeah

EJ: Yeah.

[01:15:17.24] SL: Okay, now, wait a minute. When you told me your boyfriend went to service—I forgot to ask about your brother’s service time. Was he . . . ?

EJ: They both went to service.

SL: Now, the older brother . . .

EJ: The older brother . . .

SL: . . . that was sending . . .

EJ: . . . was in the class . . .

SL: . . . money back . . .

EJ: . . . with me . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . went to service.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Stayed four years.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So he lost his place with me.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:15:37.06] EJ: Well, he lost his place a long time with me, but then he lost four years in addition to that because he was in four years.

SL: Yes. Now, was he in the war at that time?

EJ: He did not actually do combat duty.

SL: Oh. Uh-huh.

EJ: But he was in the war.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But not—he did not do combat duty.

SL: That's good. Good.

EJ: Yes, it was good.

SL: I mean, I . . .

[01:15:57.19] EJ: He was in World War II . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . but had no active combat.

SL: Uh-huh. Was he stateside or did he . . . ?

EJ: He did not go overseas.

SL: Good.

EJ: He never went overseas.

SL: That's a blessing.

EJ: Uh-huh, and he's okay.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: He didn't get any of the earmarks of war at all.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:16:15.20] EJ: Yeah. The younger brother didn't have it quite as . . .

SL: Easy.

EJ: . . . easy. He never understood why he had to go to fight.

SL: Oh, he got drafted.

EJ: It was something—he didn't know what he—what was going on.

[01:16:31.19] SL: Was that Vietnam? No.

EJ: No, no, that was . . .

SL: That would be much . . .

EJ: . . . World War—World War II.

SL: Oh, so the younger brother . . .

EJ: Uh-huh.

SL: . . . was also . . .?

EJ: Uh-huh. World War II.

[01:16:40.12] SL: And where did he end up being stationed? Do you know—  
remember?

EJ: I don't know, but I got the . . .

SL: Was it European or . . .?

EJ: Oh, no, he never went overseas.

SL: Oh, he didn't either.

EJ: But I—I—I still have the papers.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I have all the papers from both of them.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:16:54.24] EJ: Uh-huh. Because my mother died, and when she died I kept all the  
papers . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and so forth.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Neither one of them were married at that time . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . so she had all the papers.

[01:17:05.24] SL: And so he—when—when did he die—the younger brother?

EJ: The younger brother?

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It's been at least fifteen years ago.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I don't remember the exact date. [Laughs]

SL: Okay.

EJ: He was thirty-eight when he died.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And he was seven years younger than me, so . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . you figure out the year.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Life has gone by since then. [Laughs]

SL: Yeah, yeah.

[01:17:33.02] EJ: Yeah, he was thirty-eight, so that meant I must have been about

forty-five—something like that.

SL: Uh-huh.

[Door opens; someone enters the room]

EJ: Someone will help you.

[01:17:49.14] SL: Well, did you have a—a good relationship with both brothers?

EJ: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah—still—still with the older brother.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: The older brother has come to Houston . . .

SL: Houston.

EJ: . . . because I'm here, and he's my right hand. He—he assures that all the property is taken care of.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And he assures that I am taken care of, and . . .

[01:18:11.00] SL: So he'd probably be a good source for me to get the real story about you.

EJ: He—he probably would get the real story. [Laughter] No, I'm his little angel.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: I—I have always been. Yeah.

SL: Yes.

EJ: Uh-huh.

SL: [Laughs] Well . . .

EJ: They outgrew me, so they were my protectors.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Both of them at least six—were six feet, and I never quite got to just five feet, so—yeah.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They—I was always their little sister.

[01:18:39.04] SL: It's great to have him with you, I bet, isn't it?

EJ: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: And particular with my husband being deceased. It . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It means all the things that I don't want to do . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . I call on him to do.

[01:18:52.16] SL: Now, does he have family—his family here with him?

EJ: They're grown up.

SL: They're grown up

EJ: They're grown up.

SL: An empty nester, then.

EJ: He's a—right. Uh-huh.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: And he's remarried. Both of them remarried . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . because their families and both spouses are dead.

SL: Hmm.

EJ: Yeah.

[01:19:07.29] SL: Well, there's nothing like family.

EJ: Yes.

[Telephone Rings]

[Tape Stopped]

[01:19:12.25] SL: Okay, so high school—you were active, you had some kind of—

you were an officer in some organizations all through high school.

EJ: Yeah, and I was the queen of the Prom.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I think with my junior—well, it was my junior year I was queen of the Prom.  
I was very active.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I participated.

[01:19:34.27] SL: All right, so you graduate from high school—what—? I mean, did you put in your applications your senior year like most kids do to different colleges or—or how did that work?

EJ: Yes, we did.

SL: I'm—I'm wondering how you ended up in Knoxville, Tennessee?

[01:19:52.24] EJ: How I ended up in Knoxville, Tennessee?

SL: Yeah.

EJ: You'll be surprised, and I have a lady now who could tell you. She is almost 100 years old. She was my senior sponsor, and I am her sponsor at this time. She knew I didn't have any money.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And knew I wanted to go to college.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She had gone to Knoxville College.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She was my—as I say, my senior sponsor. And that Knoxville—and at that time,

somehow or other we felt it was not prestigious to go to a—a public-supported school.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:20:33.27] EJ: The Arkansas AM&N [Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College], which was a black state school there . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . had offered me a scholarship.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But it was, as I say, it was not prestigious.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:20:48.20] EJ: It was prestigious to go to a private school.

SL: Okay.

EJ: And particular to what they call them—black private school. And I wanted to go to a private school. There was [Fisk?] and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . Clark and Talladega and Knoxville and I could name—there are forty of them.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And she had gone to Knoxville.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:21:14.07] EJ: And she says, “I want you to go to Knoxville.” She says, “It’s just what you will need to develop you. It’s a small school, and you’ll get a chance to be active, and it will mature and grow you and—” and Knoxville accepted me after I made application. That was the only school to which I made application . . .

SL: Hmm.

EJ: . . . because that's where I wanted to go.

SL: So you just sent out that one application.

[01:21:40.20] EJ: And sent out that one application. But I went to Chicago to live with an aunt and uncle.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: My mother's brother . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and his wife . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . to work, and . . .

SL: That was the summer?

EJ: That was the summer.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:21:55.06] EJ: And I worked in what they call Chicago Aldens. It's a mail-order house. And because I could type, I got paid a good salary.

SL: Sure.

EJ: And so I made enough money to sustain myself, to buy some clothes, to get my transportation to Knoxville, and have \$60 left over.

[01:22:16.04] SL: Now, refresh my memory. I know you told me. Who was it that taught you to type?

EJ: In high school we had a . . .

SL: Oh, it was just typing class.

EJ: . . . typing—a Mrs. Woods—a typing class . . .

SL: Okay.

EJ: . . . in high school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I started taking typing in the eighth grade.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Yeah.

[01:22:31.23] SL: And, like everything else, you just attacked it full on and . . .

EJ: Well, I liked it. [Laughter] And it did for me what I needed it to do . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and I attacked it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: Uh-huh. What a difference that made in your life.

EJ: It made a big difference.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:22:46.03] EJ: And even after I started practice, it still made a difference.

SL: Sure.

EJ: Before I could afford a secretary, I could type my own letters.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Even now, if I get caught and I need to do a letter, I do my own letter.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:23:00.13] EJ: Now, I haven't learned the computer yet . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . because everybody does it for me.

SL: Right.

EJ: I'm gonna have to because now the hospitals are taking away no—it's almost paperless in the—in the hospitals.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It's computer.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But then they still have people right there at your shoulder to—to do it for you, so I have not really learned to be adept at using a computer.

[Tape Stopped]

[01:23:24.13] SL: Okay. So you leave Hot Springs and you go to Chicago.

EJ: And work for a summer.

SL: Work for the summer, and there you learn . . .

EJ: In Chicago Aldens.

SL: . . . that you get accepted to Knoxville, and you go to . . .?

EJ: Well, I was in—yes, I get accepted to Knoxville.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:23:39.28] EJ: And I go to Knoxville.

SL: But you—you knew that before you went to Chicago.

EJ: Oh, no.

SL: No, you didn't?

EJ: No, no.

SL: Okay.

EJ: But I knew I was going . . .

SL: Yeah.

EJ: . . . but I hadn't been accepted. [Laughter]

SL: Confident, were we?

EJ: [Laughter] Yeah. I knew that I was going to Knoxville; I just hadn't been accepted. Yeah. [Laughter]

SL: One way or another, you were gonna . . .

EJ: Yeah.

SL: . . . be at Knoxville.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:23:58.25] EJ: 'Cause, I mean, that's why I went to Chicago, to work to make some money to go to Knoxville.

SL: Right. And so you make it to Knoxville with \$60 in your pocket.

EJ: With \$60, but lots of pretty clothes and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . I bought some clothes.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I had my fare, and I had \$60.

[01:24:13.25] SL: Yeah. What was—? Now, there's got to be a huge difference between Hot Springs and Chicago.

EJ: I was with—it is. But it wasn't for me because I was living with my aunt—my

mother's brother and his wife, but he worked on the railroad.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So he wasn't there . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . most of the time. She was the one who was the caretaker . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . for us.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:24:45.20] EJ: And she had a niece there who was about my age that she had reared—they had reared.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And we were the same age. So for me, getting over to Chicago was with her and there wasn't that much difference.

[01:24:59.03] SL: Well, now, what about—I mean, where in Chicago were you? Were you . . .

EJ: I was in the . . .

SL: . . . downtown or . . .

EJ: I was in the middle . . .

SL: . . . outside?

EJ: No, no, no, I was right downtown.

SL: So . . .

[01:25:07.28] EJ: I was in the south of south Chicago, in the middle of what they called then the—what did they call it? South—south Chicago, where multiple,

multiple blacks lived—the high-rises, and the—there was no—well, they had some parks, but there was absolutely no yards, you know, like we had in Hot Springs . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . and so forth. Everything was brick—brick and mortar.

SL: Right. So that is a big difference.

[01:25:40.23] EJ: Brick and mortar and ‘L’s [elevated mass transportation] and subways . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and buses, which had never seen in Hot Springs.

SL: Right, and it was also . . .

[01:25:52.03] EJ: I think I had never ridden a bus in Hot Springs. I had—we had buses in Hot Springs, but I’m pretty sure I had never ridden a bus in Hot Springs—haven’t to this day. I’ve never been on a bus in Hot Springs for transportation.

[01:26:03.08] SL: Right. So when you get to Chicago, you’re now in pretty much an all-black neighborhood. Is that right?

EJ: Hmm . . .

SL: No?

EJ: No, no.

SL: Okay, so there was some . . .

EJ: It was maybe predominantly black, but . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . but not all black.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Uh-huh. In Chicago—not—not at that time.

[01:26:26.12] SL: Well, were there any—were there any race challenges going on in Chicago when you were there that summer?

EJ: No, no, not at that time. No.

SL: So you didn't . . .

EJ: Plus, the fact I was . . .

SL: You still had skirted most of any racial tensions or . . .

[01:26:40.29] EJ: Yeah, plus there were—I was working in Chicago Aldens, and there were only about three or four of us blacks in the whole workforce there . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . at that time. So it—it was just one of those things. I was a typist and practically everybody typing along with me were white. And—but it didn't faze me because I knew it was Chicago, and that's the way it was. We had lunch together and we talked together and . . .

SL: What . . . ?

EJ: . . . there was no—no mention of race there whatsoever.

[01:27:19.18] SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I—I guess what I'm hearing is that once you were in Hot Springs, you were—even though you went to a black high school, you were still pretty integrated with the white community in some way. I mean, it sounds like you had—you were doing . . .

EJ: With my friends.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Just—just with those friends.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But then when I moved to the other house, I only saw them every now and then.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:27:46.27] EJ: But there was no—no conflicts and there was no—there was no . . .

SL: Animosity.

EJ: . . . animosity.

SL: There was no tension.

EJ: No tensions.

[01:27:58.27] SL: Uh-huh. And you—pretty much the same thing in Chicago for you?

EJ: In Chicago it was—yeah. We were—we were working together.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: We saw each other on the streets together. We rode the streetcars and the ‘L’s and so forth together. But that was about the only real contact.

[01:28:19.12] SL: So was there any of this business about having to be in the back of the ‘L’ . . .

EJ: Not . . .

SL: . . . or the back of the . . .?

EJ: Well, see, I didn’t have that in Hot Springs ’cause we didn’t ride the buses.

SL: Right. I know that.

EJ: And in Chicago, there was no such . . .

SL: No such thing.

EJ: You tried to get your seat wherever you could.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: If you could hang onto a—a—some kind of a post, you did that.

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

EJ: So there was no—no concern about where you sit.

[01:28:42.21] SL: So all—so by this point in your life—and you're young lady now .

..

EJ: Yeah.

SL: . . . you've really not experienced any—in this—there just wasn't—everybody was getting along fine, I mean . . .

EJ: Everybody was getting along fine.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: There was no animosities.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And then when I went to college . . .

SL: You were . . .

EJ: . . . three-fourths of my teachers were white.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Because they were the ones who were missionaries and either had money and they could afford to come and work for less money, and—but I didn't think anything about that.

[01:29:24.00] SL: You—I—I guess what I'm trying to say—you were comfortable.

EJ: I was comfortable. And actually, the man who saw that I most would pursue going to medicine was vice-president of Knoxville, who wrote probably the strongest recommendations—probably was the reason why I got in med school . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . was white.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: He was vice-president at that time, and I worked in his office as a senior, and he just thought that I ought to pursue medicine.

[01:30:01.11] SL: Uh-huh. Now, how long were you in Knoxville?

EJ: Four years.

SL: Four years. And you came out of that with a degree in—that—it sounded like there were three . . .

EJ: Three: chemistry, biology, and physics.

SL: And physics. I don't see how you got through physics. I . . .

EJ: Well, I was young.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: But you can understand—I worked eight to ten hours a day.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:30:25.23] EJ: But the thing that I have done that most people do—I don't sleep as long as most people.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So I would even stay up with the girls playing bridge on my bed.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I played bridge with them and still stay up and did my lessons.

[01:30:45.02] SL: [Laughs] Okay. So your social life at college—were there—I mean, did this school have athletics and . . .

EJ: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . all that?

EJ: We had football and basketball and . . .

[01:30:59.20] SL: Uh-huh. Did you ever do any kind of athletic stuff?

EJ: I tried. Can you feature me on the basketball team? [Laughs]

SL: Well, maybe—run-and-gun.

EJ: [Laughs] But I was . . .

SL: I could see you being the point guard . . .

EJ: Uh-huh. Yeah.

SL: . . . running the team.

EJ: Yeah, they let—they let me play, but I was mainly the cheerleader.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:31:14.26] EJ: I was a cheerleader in Knoxville.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I was one of the cheerleaders.

[01:31:20.09] SL: Uh-huh. What about student government or any of that? Did you get . . .?

EJ: Oh, I was—I was very active in those.

SL: Now, see? You just pass over all this stuff . . .

EJ: Well, that was . . .

SL: . . . like it doesn't mean anything.

EJ: [Laughter] That's—[laughs].

SL: [Laughs] But I—I—I'm looking at the . . .

[01:31:32.26] EJ: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I was a part of the student government. I was a part of the debate team, so they sent me all over to all the other schools.

[01:31:43.24] SL: Now, were you involved in speech and debate in high school as well?

EJ: Yes. Yes. And in fact . . .

SL: And I bet you were great.

EJ: Well, we always won.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: We always won. [Laughs]

SL: So where—where did you lose? Was there anything that you've lost in what you've set your sights on—ever?

EJ: I try real hard.

[01:32:02.27] EJ: You can't imagine . . .

SL: Yeah.

SL: . . . how hard I try with most things. If I start it, I give it all I got.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I give it all I got. If—I can't think of many things I've lost. But I can't think of anything which I have taken lightly. If I'm a part of it, I give it all I got.

[01:32:27.28] SL: Okay, so speech and debate—you're on the debate team. Cheer—

were you a cheerleader or were you just kind of the cheerleader . . .

EJ: No, no, no.

SL: . . . on the team?

EJ: Oh, no, no. [Laughs]

SL: You were actually the cheerleader—a cheerleader.

EJ: [Laughs] Oh, I was a cheerleader. [Laughs]

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

[01:32:47.00] SL: But you played some basketball.

EJ: I—you wouldn't exactly say I was on the varsity team.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I went out.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And they let me play. But if they got in a tight game, they put the tall girls in.

SL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

EJ: Yeah. But I had the fun of playing.

[01:33:03.29] SL: Uh-huh. What about any political . . . ?

EJ: And we played tennis. Oh, political? I was very political. I was officer in practically every organization.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: The student council.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Did I hear something fall? The student council. I was active in the Greek organi-

zations. I was Delta Sigma Theta, which is a major sorority.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:33:38.06] EJ: I took part in practically everything that they had. I—I was culturally enriched there.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They taught me how to do most things.

[01:33:51.08] SL: Now, what—these—this has got to be mid-1940s.

EJ: I graduated from college in 1948.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I went to college in 1944.

[01:34:03.08] SL: Uh-huh. What was going on with the rest of the country as far as race relations at that time? I mean, it was all . . . ?

EJ: Nothing in particular.

SL: Right.

EJ: No—no outcries.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: If so, we didn't know about it—probably some concerns about blacks not being able to vote in certain places, but nothing that was spectacular at that time.

SL: There wasn't a popular cause yet.

EJ: Not openly.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Not openly.

[01:34:36.03] SL: Well, now, what about you and where you were? Were you—

were—did you start to express concerns or did you . . .

EJ: There were no . . .

SL: . . . start to sense . . .?

EJ: No, there was no sense or concerns.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: The University of Tennessee is just across the hill from us.

SL: Yes.

EJ: And we had a relationship with them . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:34:57.08] EJ: . . . which they sent students over to us and we sent students over to them. But there was no real concern. They were not accepting black students at that time.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They did, I think, even before I finished college—started—and at that time, if we did not offer a course at Knoxville, the student from Knoxville could take a course at the University of Tennessee.

SL: Even though they weren't really enrolled there?

[01:35:25.23] EJ: Yeah, even though they were not enrolled at the University of Tennessee. Tennessee gave them the course, and they got the credit from Knoxville. Yeah. But I was not involved in that. I got everything I got at Knoxville.

SL: That speaks well of Tennessee.

EJ: Tennessee is a good place.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Knoxville, for me, is like—it's as much home for me . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . as Houston.

SJ: Uh-huh.

[01:35:53.19] EJ: I was chairman of the board of trustees for Knoxville College for about twelve years.

SJ: Wow.

EJ: So I got to know most of the businesspeople in Knoxville.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: In fact, a lot of people thought I lived in Knoxville. During the time that I was president of NMA [National Medical Association], Knoxville was having some financial difficulties at that time.

SL: Yes.

[01:36:17.01] EJ: And between being out for NMA and being out for Knoxville, I was almost passing through my office, and the doctors in Houston kept my practice going as if I was here.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And there was not a single week when I spent more than three or four days in the office.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They were always in the air for the sake of either the National Medical or for Knoxville College because I was dual—I was chairman of the board—Knoxville College was having problems about possibly losing its accreditation, and the

NMA was moving upward. And I needed to be—and I had learned how to sleep in the—without—work without sleep. And now I sleep on the—I—I purposely plan my trips to sleep at night on the plane.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So I sleep at night in the plane so I don't lose any time.

[Tape Stopped]

SL: There you go. Are you hearing that?

FE: Yeah.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Has he done that?

FE: [ ]

EJ: What's he say?

SL: [Laughs] Stamina. Oh, I'm just . . .

FE: See, I don't have your stamina.

SL: Well, we have to schedule our schedules together, and we didn't even consider flying at night so we could . . .

EJ: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . sleep on the plane and—and do our work during the . . .

EJ: Yes, and so you're refreshed the next day to do your work.

SL: I think that's smart. Uh-huh.

EJ: Yeah. I do that . . .

SL: That's smart.

EJ: I even do that now. I'm going to a meeting this week, and I'm gonna sleep on the

plane so I can be there for 8:00 the next day and not lose any time—losing—no time in the office lost . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and no time for the meeting lost.

[01:38:02.00] SL: Boy. Well, okay, let me think. Now, where are we? We're . . .

EJ: We're—where are we?

SL: We're at Knoxville.

EJ: We're at Knoxville.

SL: And just out of curiosity, how's that college doing now?

EJ: We're still there. We're still struggling.

SL: Oh.

EJ: In fact, we have had some low ebbs, but we are back up. It's—it's struggling.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I'm struggling with it.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Yeah. It will be there. There are enough of us that owe a significant indebtedness for shaping our lives . . .

SL: Yeah.

EJ: . . . that we cannot afford not to have it to stay there.

[01:38:40.04] SL: Is it—did it become affiliated with the Tennessee university system in any way?

EJ: No, no, no.

SL: It's still a private college?

EJ: No, it's a private college.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And it should stay that way. It's a private college that meets the student at the need that the student has.

[01:38:54.21] SL: Uh-huh. Is it still—is it predominantly black still or is it . . . ?

EJ: It's predominantly black, but there are more whites.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: There are—there are a number of white students.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And a number of foreign students who come.

[01:39:06.05] SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And you mentioned that the teachers there when you were there . . .

EJ: Were predominantly white. We still had . . .

SL: . . . and missionaries and . . . ?

EJ: And they were there. They get paid now. That's the difference.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But we still have a large number of white teachers.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:39:19.23] EJ: Uh-huh. But those that were there during my day were working—they were probably rich—otherwise had some other income.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They were working for the love of seeing little black boys and girls progress . . .

SL: Getting their education. Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and get an education.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: They were believers.

EJ: They were believers.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And many of them were with money . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . had no need for money. Their needs were met. They had a place to sleep and their food was given, and that's—they—they didn't require much. And they gave all they had.

[01:39:56.02] SL: What was your graduation day like in Knoxville?

EJ: Oh, we celebrated. [Laughs]

SL: Let's—tell me the story.

EJ: The graduation day? You don't want to hear that story. [Laughter]

SL: I might! [Laughter]

EJ: Well, the . . .

[01:40:10.13] SL: Did you—did family come in for you and . . .?

EJ: My brother did.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: My—uh-huh. My mother could not come.

SL: Right.

EJ: We didn't have enough money for Mother to come.

SL: Right.

EJ: But my brother came.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:40:19.27] EJ: But, yes, we celebrated. We usually marched—about a block is our march, and we—from the administration building down to the chapel.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And as we were, we were celebrating. [Laughter]

SL: Well, good.

EJ: In more ways than one, we were celebrating.

SL: Okay, that's good.

EJ: Yeah. But it—and it was very sober, though. We—we—nobody did not forget why they were there and what . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . we were supposed to do.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Knoxville College instilled in each of its students, “You’re special.”

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And that “because you have been special, you’ve taken the advantage of the things that we’ve offered. Now you have to go out and make everybody else special.”

SL: Being responsible. Yes.

EJ: Yes, you must be—yes, must be responsible.

[01:41:09.17] SL: Okay, so you—is there anything else about Knoxville that I should

be asking about that you're not . . . ?

EJ: I am still very much in tune with Knoxville.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That is one of my real causes. I'm on the board at this time. I . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They have the rule that you have to rotate off . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and rotate on, and I'm back on.

SL: Okay.

[01:41:33.19] EJ: To be sure that boys and girls who go there now would get the same kind of opportunities that they afforded me—that not only do they learn reading, writing, arithmetic, but that they learn the way of life, that they not forget who they are, and that the privileges that they have may not have gotten to everybody.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And it's their responsibility to see that the world is made better because they did get some things that other folk did not get.

[01:42:07.25] SL: You know, your time at registration there at Knoxville and you landing the job with the president and all that—I mean, I—I—I sense that as a very pivotal moment . . .

EJ: Oh, I was going to Knoxville. It was just a matter of—I mean, I was going to school there.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It was how I was going.

SL: Right. Uh-huh.

EJ: You know, so—and he could have said, “You know, we don’t have anything here to offer you, young lady.” It would’ve meant the same thing to me. I was still going.

SL: Right.

EJ: I was . . .

SL: You would’ve figured something out.

EJ: I mean, it was just a matter—it was just—yeah, something else would have had to happen, because I went to go to school there.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:42:46.12] EJ: And that is the way it is with life.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: If you’re persistent—if you continue to drop water on a stone, the stone will give way.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: If you’re persistent—if you intend for it to happen, it will happen. I have no doubt that the things that we fail in are the things that we are not persistent about enough to achieve.

SL: That’s a great quote.

EJ: [Laughs]

SL: It is.

EJ: Well [laughs], I hadn’t heard it before, but . . .

SL: I hadn't either. I mean, I'm saying I'm going to be quoting you, so . . .

EJ: Uh-huh.

[01:43:21.00] SL: The—was there any particular class or instructor at Knoxville that really lit you up as far as your career goes or was there—? I mean, I know I . . .

EJ: There were those who were—I—I could hardly say one did. I had so much push from everybody.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:43:45.13] EJ: It—every class I had I was stimulated in to—to do your best.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And guess what? I had one B on my transcript. I worked two jobs.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And—but, now, that was with all the effort that I could give it. I gave it all that I had. But, no, I was—every faculty member—and we were a small school. That was the other thing—only 300 students.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So the faculty got to know the students and . . .

SL: The students got to know the students.

EJ: . . . and got to—the faculty, and the students got to know the students.

SL: And the community . . .

EJ: And . . .

SL: . . . probably got to know the students.

[01:44:23.06] EJ: And the community. And, of course, they got to know me even more so because I worked in the president's office.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I worked in the canteen so I could have some money. See, the president's office gave me tuition, room and board.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And the canteen gave me spending money . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and some money to send home to my mother.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: There was extra money.

SL: Yeah.

[01:44:45.15] EJ: So I got to know all of the students, and as a result of that, my life was particular enriched because I could call everybody by their first name.

SL: And the Knoxville community—how did . . .

EJ: The Knoxville community . . .

[01:44:58.09] SL: . . . yeah, now, did you live on campus?

EJ: I lived on campus.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Uh-huh. But now, when I go to Knoxville, I can walk into any bank and everybody knows this is Edith Irby Jones.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Because of my relationship with the college and the college relationship with the banks . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and with the businesspeople in Knoxville. Knoxville College is a very integral part of Knoxville, Tennessee.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It's—and there are some people who never knew I didn't live there.

SL: Right.

EJ: Because I would show up so often.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: Well, that's great loyalty.

EJ: Well, I have—they were loyal to me.

SL: Yeah.

[01:45:37.25] EJ: As I said, they kept me when I didn't have anything, and they attempted to make me—as I said, the debate teams—to take the leadership roles, to attempt to teach me how to do things. I owe it to them. I owe it to them.

[01:45:57.14] SL: Okay. You graduate from Knoxville. What do you do? Where do you go?

EJ: I went back to Chicago . . .

SL: Okay.

EJ: . . . to work . . .

SL: And . . .

EJ: . . . to get some money.

SL: Are you back in the same place or—?

EJ: I'm going to medical school. I went back and I got a job at Aldens, except they

gave me a big job. And I was now manager of personnel.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Big job.

SL: Yeah.

[01:46:20.18] EJ: And I enrolled at Northwestern University, which was about a ten-minute ride on the rail from . . .

SL: And . . .

EJ: . . . from the work to Northwestern University. I enrolled in their evening course—clinical psychology.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:46:38.20] EJ: I was trying to make myself more competitive for getting into medical school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I was going to medical school, so I had to get—and I had applied to twelve medical schools. You had to pay either \$5 or \$10 application fee, and that was all the money I had—another \$60, and I spent it—seems to be my magic money—and I spent it making applications. But this was a time when World War II veterans were coming back, and they were given preference, and we knew that.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:47:11.26] EJ: And I needed to be competitive—very competitive.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So I went to Northwestern in clinical psychology to make myself more competitive.

SL: And you did well there.

EJ: I made two A's.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I did two courses, and I made two A's. That was about as well as I could do for that one.

[01:47:31.09] SL: So the story goes that you got a call from Time magazine?

EJ: From Time magazine. I went home and they said, "Telephone is for you, Edith." I answered, and they said, "This is from *Time* magazine. I called to find out if you are going to accept your place at the University of Arkansas." And I said, "I have not been accepted yet." And he says, "Yes, you have been." And I said, "Well, maybe the letter went home. I'm here in Chicago, and I haven't heard from them." And he says, "But we want to know if you're going to—if you're going." I said, "Yes, I'm going."

SL: [Laughs] Well, now, what about the other eleven schools? I mean, you applied to . . .?

EJ: Oh, I had been accepted at Chicago U, Northwestern, and when I got the announcement—when the publicity spread . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . about my being—the university—oh, I got all kind of acceptance then.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:48:37.20] EJ: In fact, I got—Northwestern said, "If you go down, and if you don't stay any longer than six weeks, we—if you come back, we will tutor you up, and we'll put you in the freshman class." I got other invitations saying, "If

you do not want to go to the University of Arkansas,” that “we will accept you.” Those are schools in which I had not received any acceptance from. Chicago—University of Chicago had also said, “If you go down and you find things unbearable, if you will come back before you get too far ahead—or too far behind, that we will put you in the freshman class and give you a special tutor to bring you up.” So I had a cushion.

SL: Yeah.

[01:49:23.29] EJ: But it was only after the announcement that I had been accepted at the University of Arkansas. But I never received an acceptance letter from the University of Arkansas.

SL: You still don't have one?

EJ: I still don't have one.

SL: Now, I—it seems like—now, I read somewhere that Governor [Sidney Sanders] McMath . . .

EJ: Didn't like it, they said.

SL: Well, now, I . . .

EJ: It wasn't McMath. He wasn't the one. It wasn't Governor McMath at that time.

SL: It wasn't?

EJ: No, it wasn't Governor McMath. It was the one before him. He refused to give the convocation speech because I was there, but it wasn't—wasn't McMath. Was it [Frank] Cherry? Who was it?

SL: Well, Cherry got beat by [Orval] Faubus.

EJ: No. Well, who was it that was before McMath? It wasn't McMath.

SL: Hmm. Okay.

[01:50:21.12] EJ: But they tell me that he did not give the convocation speech that he usually gives, and that Dr. [H. Clay] Chenault said, “That’s the way it is. We’ll go ahead. We—we’ll do without him.”

SL: Hmm. I—I must be—I might be confused, but I thought that McMath kind of worked behind the scenes.

EJ: It wasn’t McMath. McMath worked behind the scenes to have it happen.

SL: Yeah, okay.

EJ: To have it happen.

SL: That’s what I’m talking about.

EJ: Uh-huh. Yeah, he worked behind the scenes to have it—but he was not the governor at that time.

SL: Ah, okay.

[01:50:52.27] EJ: Uh-huh. He was not the governor. It was the one before him.

Now, who was it?

SL: Oh, that’s—you’re being mean to me now.

EJ: Was that Cherry?

SL: It may have been Cherry, but I . . .

EJ: Was there a Cherry?

SL: I think that . . .

EJ: Whoever this governor was refused to come to the convocation service.

SL: Hmm.

EJ: I’m going to just go to the restroom. Would you excuse me?

SL: Uh-huh.

[Tape Stopped]

FE: Let me take your mic.

[Tape Stopped]

FE: Okay, and we've got speed.

[01:51:14.17] SL: Okay, great. We're in Chicago.

EJ: Okay.

SL: That's where we left.

EJ: Okay.

SL: You get a call . . .

SL: I'm in Chicago.

SL: You get a call from *Time* magazine.

EJ: After I graduate—graduated from . . .

SL: Knoxville.

EJ: . . . Knoxville College, and I'm working now . . .

SL: You're a manager.

EJ: . . . getting ready to go to—yeah, manager of a personnel office at . . .

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Chicago Aldens. But on my way to medical school.

SL: Yeah.

[01:51:36.29] EJ: But not having been accepted, but having placed twelve applications.

SL: Spending all your money to do that.

EJ: I was spending all my money to do it, and I was working to make myself more competitive . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . by going to Northwestern and by also working to have some money so I could go to medical school. Now, mind you, I didn't have any money to go to medical school. Tuition at that for medical school was—oh, no, it was \$10,000 and \$15,000 at least to—to the schools that I thought that I wanted to go to.

SL: Yes.

EJ: The—I think the most expensive, maybe, was \$15,000—University of Chicago. Northwestern was \$10,000. And they varied in just that.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Harvard [University] was—was probably \$10,000. They were less expensive than the other schools, but I applied to all of those.

[01:52:39.12] SL: Uh-huh. You get a call from *Time* magazine.

EJ: Oh—got a call from *Time* magazine, and I had just gotten in from work at Chicago Aldens, and, “This is *Time* magazine I'm representing. I called to find out if you were going to take your place—are you going to accept the place in [University of] Arkansas Medical School?” And I said, “I don't know about it.” And says, “Yes, today they put out the message . . .”

SL: Press release. Uh-huh.

EJ: “. . . the story that you have been accepted, and I wanted to know if you are going.” I said, “Sure, I'm going.”

SL: [Laughs]

[01:53:26.28] EJ: And this—and he went ahead to interview me to find out where I had gone to school and when I was going. And I told him as soon as I could make arrangements to leave my job and get transportation, I'd be going to Arkansas to make arrangements. But that's not the end of the story. The story is I didn't have any more money to go to the University of Arkansas than I had to go to Knoxville. In fact, I didn't have as much. By the time I paid fare back to Hot Springs, Arkansas, I had very little money. I sure didn't have \$500—\$500 was tuition in Arkansas. So—but I told him, “Yes, I was going.” And I made all arrangements. I resigned from Chicago Aldens, and I managed to get a ticket on the train to get back to Arkansas. And I took off for Arkansas, and I may have had \$100 . . .

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: . . . saved for that purpose. I had completed my course at the university . . .

SL: Northwestern.

EJ: . . . at Northwestern.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I got back to Arkansas—Hot Springs. And I was a celebrity when I walked into Hot Springs.

[01:54:48.19] SL: Let's talk about that just for a second, because all of a sudden you are thrown into the civil rights politics.

EJ: Not really.

SL: Not really?

EJ: Not really.

SL: Well, didn't . . .?

EJ: It had nothing to do with civil rights.

SL: Well . . .

EJ: I had nothing to do with civil rights. Absolutely, absolutely none. None whatsoever.

[01:55:14.04] SL: But didn't all the other schools—? Or some of the other schools that you had applied to—all of a sudden, they're coming at you with . . .

EJ: Oh . . .

SL: . . . “You've been accepted here.”

EJ: But—but I thought it was academic.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I was—I was naive, and I hope I was right.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I thought they had reevaluated me . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:55:32.29] EJ: . . . and had somewhere passed over me, and had not looked at all my credentials. I was the twenty-eighth in the nation in the medical aptitude test.

SL: So . . .

EJ: That's not bad.

[01:55:50.09] SL: I mean, but, Edith, don't you think that returning war veterans . . .?

EJ: There were no one—I was twenty-eighth. That means there were only twenty-seven people who made better grades on their medical aptitude test than I did.

SL: Across the whole country?

EJ: Across the whole country.

SL: So—but don't you think . . . ?

EJ: But I didn't know that then.

SL: Oh, I see.

EJ: I didn't know that then. I only knew . . .

SL: Well, looking back now . . .

EJ: Looking back now . . .

[01:56:19.07] SL: . . . don't—don't you see yourself as—you're—all of a sudden,  
you are some kind of political football that's happening?

EJ: No, no, no.

SL: You don't see that now?

EJ: No, all I wanted to do was go to medical school.

SL: I know.

EJ: I mean, I had spent my whole life getting ready to go to medical school, and now  
I had a chance to go to medical school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I had been accepted.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And nothing else made any difference.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:56:41.06] EJ: Segregation didn't make any difference. Money didn't make any  
difference. Absolutely nothing made any difference. I had reached the point in  
life that I intended to get: accepted in medical school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Do you understand what I'm saying?

SL: Yeah, I—absolutely.

[01:57:02.11] EJ: I had spent—how old was I then—twenty-four?

SL: Twenty—no . . .

EJ: No, no, no, twenty-one. Twenty-one. Twenty-one.

SL: I think—yeah. Uh-huh.

EJ: I had spent twenty-one years—minus seven when I wasn't doing—fourteen years to get into medical school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And that was—that was my focus.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:57:26.28] EJ: And I couldn't see anything else. No one else—I didn't even know there was—I wasn't concerned. I knew there was NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. We had a chapter on our campus. But that wasn't what—I had had no communication with anybody in NAACP. I had no communication with any blacks. I had no communication. It was the white professors at—at Knoxville who actually wrote the recommendations for me and told me, "Girl, you can do anything you want to do." And I believed them. But it—it wasn't a black/white issue; it was that it was a soul issue.

[Laughter] It was . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: You know?

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:58:10.07] EJ: They believed in me, and they encouraged me. And, as I said, nothing else made any difference. It didn't make any difference that I didn't have \$500.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I didn't have \$500 to go to—I didn't have \$5 over my fare from Chicago to Arkansas to go to medical school—even though the tuition was only \$500. Do you want to know how I got my \$500?

[01:58:35.13] SL: I do know, but I want you to tell me anyway. [Laughter]



EJ: The people in Hot Springs . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . passed the hat. They took up collections after church. The mayor gave his money. It was a bill. I don't know whether it was a \$1, \$5, or \$10, but he gave a bill in the hat to show his approval, you know? They shook cans on the corner of Central Avenue and put "Fund for Edith Irby." It was—it was—it was what? It was—it was—it was—I don't even know the word that I could say.

SL: Oh, it's hometown support.

[01:59:33.20] EJ: It was hometown support, but the feeling I had for it . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . was, "I have everybody behind me. I don't have any choice but to succeed."

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: You know, it's like, "They've put me here. I've got to succeed." And it wasn't a white/black issue. It was—the whites were putting in. They were putting in as much as the blacks were. They were putting their dollar bills in an envelope and

sending it to me or pasting their coins on a cardboard so they wouldn't rattle in the envelope and—and sending it to me so I would have it. And some of them had return addresses and some of them had no return addresses. But I had my \$500, and one of the nightclub owners had a white Cadillac, and everybody thought I should be taken to school in class.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:00:33.27] EJ: So he and his wife drove me over to the school, and the picture that you see that they've circulated—that Life magazine took that—I had just walked in. No, no, I had just walked in the hall. No reaction from anybody. I doubt—I doubt if anybody knew I was there. And he snapped the picture. But that's not the end of the story. I got in. Everybody was casual. "Hello, how are you?" And—and we got in and registered. I had \$500 in nickels, dimes, quarters, some dollars, and I put it out on the table and paid my registration fee. And then I found out I needed \$50 more . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . to pay for incidentals. Lab and incidentals. I didn't have \$50. I might've had a dollar left, at most. And then I remembered that one of the fellows who went to one of the colleges in the area in which Knoxville was—not Knoxville College—Morehouse College . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . worked for the [Arkansas] State Press, and in our rides on the segregated train going to and from—going to school, vacation time, Christmastime—we had gotten to know each other, and he had found out that I had been accepted at Knox-



ville—at University of Arkansas. And he said to me, “Edith, if you ever need anything, I work for the *State Press* in the summertime, and Daisy and L. C. Bates run the *State Press*. And you go down and tell them that Thad Williams told you that you needed help, you knew me, and to ask them for help.” Lo and behold, I had my \$500, and I found out I needed \$50, which I didn’t have. I didn’t have a dollar over that. And I needed it to pay it before I could complete my registration. And I took a bus—ten cents—got on the bus, went down to *State Press*, walked in and says, “Is Mr. or Mrs. Bates here?” And she says, “I’m Daisy Bates. Can I help you?” I said, “Mrs. Bates, I need \$50. I’m trying to register to—” she said, “What? You need \$50? Why do you need \$50?” I said, “I’m trying to register in medical school. I’m Edith Mae Irby, and I need \$50 more than the money I have to register.” She didn’t ask me anything else. She went up and looked behind a shelf behind some books, took out a jar, took out \$50, and gave it to me. It wasn’t until later I learned that was her last \$50. I went back—put my \$50 down, registered, and that was the end of the story. Every Saturday thereafter, Daisy Bates brought me \$25 to \$30 each Saturday for me to buy stockings and food and transportation and so forth. And so I could always count on Daisy Bates coming, and she had collected this money from the black professionals who all congregated right there together on Ninth Street, everybody had—so all she had to do was walk from one office—said, “Give me \$5. Give me \$10. This is for Edith Irby.” And she would bring that to me. [02:04:05.09] Well, I—I managed to do okay, and by this time I had gotten well accrimated [acclimated] to being in Little Rock and being a part of what was happening there and being a part of the Bates’ life,

for they were aggressive in having the things of segregation changed. And to be sure that I did not spend any lonely time on weekends, they played poker. Well, I'm not a poker player, but I enjoyed the atmosphere.

SL: The banter. [Laughter]

EJ: Yeah, I enjoyed it. So the weekends in which I didn't have to study and so forth, I went out to their home, and I was there for the poker game, and I got a chance to meet all of the other elite black folk of the city.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:04:59.29] EJ: Well, I finally got to be known as a socialite there in—in Little Rock. I was invited to all the parties and so forth. But then I also got some speaking engagements, and I had been invited to come to New Orleans [Louisiana] to do a NAACP speech, and Thurgood Marshall was gonna be on the same program, and George Byrd [ ] NAACP workers—Thurgood Marshall at that time was legal counsel . . .

SL: Counsel for the NAACP.

EJ: . . . for the NAACP.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Right. So he was part of the program.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:05:40.18] EJ: But in the process of it—blacks didn't ride airplanes then because—well, we just didn't—I don't know whether it was that expensive. I had never been on an airplane. But, anyway, he came down in his black Cadillac that is long as my building now, I thought.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: And he drove me down from Little Rock to New Orleans.

SL: You and Thurgood Marshall?

EJ: And Thurgood Marshall. So . . .

SL: Wow.

EJ: . . . we got to do a lot of talking.

SL: Yeah.

[02:06:08.25] EJ: And he wanted to know how was I doing. “Doing fine.” “How are your grades?” “They’re fine.” “How’s your relationship?” “Doing fine.” “What do you do for money? Where is your money?” I never thought about it. “I get enough.” “Well, how do you get it?” “People send it to me. They put dollars in envelopes, and Mrs. Bates brings me some, and some people put—put money on a—a card, you know, and paste it on the card so it doesn’t juggle around it. They send me that. Maybe fifty cents at a time.” So I was getting \$20, \$30, \$40, you know, from all over the country. People would send me money. So I was doing okay, I thought. I had enough—enough for me. And so he said, “That—that’s no way to live.” So he went back to New York, and he and Dr. Montague Cobb, who was their professor at Howard University, got together, and they got with one of the rich women in New York. For right now, her name slips me, but they gave me an all-expense scholarship.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:07:22.28] EJ: “You write down whatever you think you’re gonna need, and we’re gonna see that you get it.” Well, I wrote it down, and my expenses came

out to be \$3,000. I couldn't imagine—\$3,000 for a year? That was my tuition and room and board and food and transportation and clothes—\$3,000. She sent me the \$3,000 in one big—I'd never heard of \$3,000 in one lump sum.

SL: [Laughter]

[02:07:51.02] EJ: But then my mother had my younger brother, who was at that time fifteen.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And she was struggling and wanted him to have the best—sent him to boarding school—and she died.

SL: Oh!

EJ: So it meant he now didn't have a source for payment in boarding school, nor did he have the support that she was giving him as—all her attention then.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:08:20.27] EJ: Thurgood Marshall heard that my mother had died and that my brother was in board school, and I was his only person to take him. So they sent me whatever his expenses would be, and over and above, just in case there were incidentals. So I was able to keep him in boarding school and to keep myself in school, and living like a queen. And so that—that was the way I lived until I completed school, and until he completed school.

[02:08:56.20] SL: Okay, now, I understand how nonpolitical and how—really, it was friends and your—all the support that you got that got you to med school and got you in med school—how all that was not political.

EJ: None of that was political.

SL: I understand all that, but once—once you're there—I—I—I just can't help but believe that . . .

EJ: Nothing political happened once I was there.

SL: I know, but even though—but I guess what I'm trying to say—just the fact that you got a call from *Time* magazine means that there is a political slant on it.

EJ: But I was too—I was too naive.

[02:09:45.04] SL: You were naive, but what I'm saying is—it is history. There's history being made here, and you weren't thinking of it in those terms.

EJ: I just wanted to go to medical school.

SL: You just wanted to go to medical school, but everyone around you is seeing the history.

EJ: But I just wanted to go to medical school.

SL: I know.

EJ: That's all I wanted.

SL: I know.

EJ: And nothing else made any difference.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Absolutely nothing else.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I was where I wanted to be at that time.

[02:10:12.01] SL: Uh-huh. Now, you get in medical school.

EJ: Yes.

SL: And you can't eat in the cafeteria.



EJ: Yeah, but there was—there was laws on the book, and Dr. Chenault called me in and says, “They say if I let you eat in the med—in the dining room with the whites, that they’re gonna raise a stink. And I’m not going to let you eat with the help, so I’m going to give you separate quarters. You’re gonna eat in the library in a special room that’s gonna be set up for you, for you to have lunch.” And he says, “I hope you understand.” That’s how it was put to me. He says, “I hope you understand.” He says, “I’ve got to stay here, and I want you to stay here.”

SL: Okay.

EJ: And so I accepted it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I didn’t accept it, I just—I didn’t have to accept it. That’s the way it was.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:11:21.14] EJ: And every day they set up this special room. It was a study room in the library. They put a white tablecloth on. The help came in every day and changed flowers—live flowers. I had live flowers every day. And a little note saying, “We love you. We love you.” Well, you know, who couldn’t function under that? And then about the third or fourth day, I couldn’t get in because the students go into [laughter] . . .

[02:11:58.28] SL: So there wasn’t a law against them having lunch with you.

EJ: And—and it wasn’t in public.

SL: Right.

EJ: It wasn’t a public place. You could have lunch if it was private, but you couldn’t go to a public place because the law said, “Blacks and whites cannot eat together

in public.” And that was my private dining room, so there was no laws against that. So they came and they brought their lunch, and we ate and we studied, and it was a private study place. So we studied and told jokes and so forth, and then they—because the—the bathrooms—the toilets were segregated—you know, black here, white there—I couldn’t use the women’s toilets. And he says, “If they find out, they’re gonna use everything they can to impede our progress. So I’m gonna give you a special toilet.” He said, “We’re not going to mark it, but it’s yours.” He said, “The help knows not to use it, and if others use it, it’s up to you who else uses it. But the help knows not to use it.” So the girls saw me going in there—the technicians—so they used it, too. And Mary, who was my friend, and is still my friend—I love her as much as she was my sister.

[02:13:15.01] SL: This is the lady that stood on the bus with you?

EJ: Oh, yeah. I love her as much as—I couldn’t love a sister any more than I love her. And let me please say, Betty, too. It’s just that Betty and I were not thrown as close together as Mary and I. But Mary is so unpretentious—still is. So is Betty. She—they put three of us together who they didn’t know they were putting together, that we were just sort of naturals, you know? [Laugh] I guess it’s because we all wanted the same things, and we—we were just naturals. But I couldn’t feel any closer to Mary than if we had had the same parents. And it was nothing particular; it was just that we needed each other. But it was nothing like her that could—could be confused with black. And she was blonde and blue eyes, so there was no way that she could be confused with being half black or that maybe they made a mistake or . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and so when we would get on the bus, we knew that if we would sit down together that we would probably miss class that day. That would be the worst thing we could do.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Could happen to us.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:14:41.14] EJ: So we didn't sit down because there was a sign that said, "Blacks sit from here back, and whites here up." So we didn't sit down, but we stood up. And even though the bus might've been empty, except for two or three people, we just stood and held to the thing. We talked and we laughed and we giggled, you know, like . . .

SL: Like . . .

EJ: . . . girls would do.

SL: Yeah.

[02:15:01.17] EJ: And we stood there and we got off. Nobody ever said anything to us. But her father was a veterinarian for the state, and somebody must've told him that "You're daughter's riding with that black girl, and somebody's going to hurt 'em." So he bought her a car.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: So now we had a car. And not only did she take me, but also the fellows who didn't have a car. So now we had a—a gang [laughter] of us who rode in Mary's car and it made it easier for us. And even though we may not have been in the

same study groups, she would still pick me up from the other groups if the fellows didn't have cars. But the worst thing was that when the fellows—after I got my own apartment and the fellows wanted to study with me, and we wanted to study together, and they would come to my apartment to study—we would study until 1:00 [a.m.] or 2:00 at night, and if they didn't have a car, we were afraid to call the cab to come and pick 'em up in front of my house. Not so much the danger, but what folk would say I was running . . .

SL: Right.

[02:16:16.26] EJ: . . . from my—[laughs] from my house. So what they would do was after we studied—1:00 or 2:00—and they got ready to go home, to give them for about five minutes to walk down to the corner, and I would call the cab to pick them up from the corner. All that—that was crazy, but we did that because we didn't want any repercussions . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . of what could happen to them, and so forth, or what maybe some black man might think of them coming out of my apartment, and being stupid or . . .

SL: So it was mixed.

EJ: 1:00 in the morning.

SL: Well, yeah.

EJ: Because we had to make it.

SL: That's what med students do.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: We had to make it. And, believe it or not, we were some of the higher grades in the class 'cause we studied together.

[02:17:07.29] SL: Uh-huh. What was Mary's last name?

EJ: Arthur.

SL: Arthur.

EJ: Uh-huh, A-R-T-H-U-R. She's in Hot Springs. She has retired.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But she came here after her divorce and worked for Dr. [Michael E.] DeBakey as his—she was an anesthesiologist.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: As an anesthesiologist, and he hired her because of me. He thinks I can't do any wrong.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: And I try not to let him find out the wrong I do. [Laughter] I try—I try hard not to let him find out.

[02:17:47.21] SL: Well, so, now, it sounds like to me that your classmates . . .

EJ: Oh, they supported me.

SL: They . . .

EJ: I was just reading a letter last night . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . that I got from the wife of one of my classmates that died recently, and she says, "Oh, [Busey?] loved you so."

SL: Hmm.

EJ: And he did. About one-third or more of my classmates are already dead.

SL: Hmm. It's hard, isn't it?

EJ: Well, they were a little older than the girls. The girls were—didn't go to the service.

SL: Uh-huh. That's right.

EJ: And we came straight out of college, and most of them spent four or five years in the service.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:18:32.02] EJ: Some of them had had other jobs and decided they wanted to go into medicine. And so we had one who was a banker—had lots of money, but didn't feel satisfied, so he was getting a—he was the oldest one in our class.

[02:18:45.21] SL: Uh-huh. Well, so, I mean, were there—was there any tension at all in—inside the school—in the classes?

EJ: If so, I didn't know it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Tension was to memorize where those veins and nerves . . .

SL: Surviving the curriculum, Yeah.

[02:19:00.18] EJ: [Laughter] Yeah, but no, no, there was no tension from the teachers, no tension—I'll tell ya how crazy it was—Saturday we had classes and you were—classes were unexcused that you were come to class.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And half day, and sometimes there were only one-third of the class present. But what they—calling the role was mandatory, and when they called the role, he

never looked up. “Andrews. Allen. Jones.” And somebody would answer, “Present.” And, look up—only fifteen or twenty people out of ninety people.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:19:44.16] EJ: But he never said anything. So I decided, you know, I didn’t want to go either. I was in love and I was courting my husband and . . .

SL: Okay, we’ve got to hear about that here in a minute, but . . .

EJ: Yeah, and so I decided I wanted to miss some Saturdays, too. And I had the fellows to answer for me. When they called “Jones,” they’d say, “Present.” The next time I went back to school, he said, “Now, look, Edith.”

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: Said, “I don’t mind your not coming to my class.” Said, But I do resent you making a fool of me.” [Laughs] He says, “I’m gonna know that you’re not there, and somebody will answer in a bass voice, ‘Present.’” He said, “I just want to you to know, I know.” [Laughs] That was Dr. Wells.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: He was one of the great publishers. And I went to class after that because there was no way for him to explain that I answered, “Present,” and I wasn’t there.

[02:20:42.18] SL: Okay, so you had a little—you had some—you had a love life on your mind while you were in med—medical school.

EJ: Oh, yeah. Oh, I fell in love. Yeah.

[02:20:52.23] SL: Okay, so, now, tell me how you and your husband hooked up. I want to know. When was the first time you saw him?

EJ: I needed—oh, do you really want me to tell you the first time I saw him?

SL: Yes.

EJ: I didn't like him.

SL: Well, I want to hear that in detail. [Laughter]

[02:21:05.28] EJ: The—I—because I—I needed money and we didn't have class in medical school during the summer, I sought work, and I was able to get a job at University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That's what it's called now.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But at that . . .

SL: AM&N

EJ: . . . time it was called AM&N. And my husband—that was his first job after he had gotten his PhD at Washington U. He was the first black to have gone to Washington U—University in Seattle and to have gotten a PhD, and that was his first job. And I was working during the summer, and I was working in the registrar's office, and he would come in. And he looked so important, he thought—I thought—that I thought I would get to know him better. And we got to know each other better. We started going to the parties that the faculty and so forth would give, and so forth, and then during the—after school started for me, he would come over and spend some time on weekends when I wasn't studying. And we got to be real chummy. And about—my mother died in March, and we had been, say, from September 'til March we had gotten to be friendly—very, very friendly.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:22:33.06] EJ: And this meant I had the younger brother, I had the house, and responsibilities, and he said, "Let's get married." Well, we married two weeks later.

SL: Wow.

EJ: So we got married. [Laughs] And we took the younger brother and we got married, and then we had our own children. I had my first child the week after I finished my first year of residency.

SL: Wow.

EJ: And I did my first year of residency at Arkansas.

[02:23:08.18] SL: Now—okay, now, but when you saw him for the first time you didn't like him?

EJ: I didn't like him, no.

SL: What was the deal with that?

EJ: Well, I thought he thought he was so important.

SL: Well, he probably was [laughter] whether you knew it or not.

[02:23:22.15] EJ: I told him so. [Laughter] But that was—I thought he thought he was important.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: That—that was really the truth, but I've told him that since.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Yeah, I told him that. [Laughter] But I—I didn't like the way he came in and took charge, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: “After all, you’re in my office. I’m in the registrar’s office and your job is elsewhere.” He was, I think, guidance and something counselor—something like that. [Laughter] But we—we got to know each other, and my mother died, and after she died, I was left with my younger brother and I was left with the house and decisions, so he says, “Why don’t we get married and let me take care of some of these things for you?”

[02:24:10.00] SL: Okay, so—but he’s working in Pine Bluff?

EJ: Yeah.

SL: You’re—and you’re spending your summers in Pine Bluff—your summer in Pine Bluff working.

EJ: Summer. Uh-huh. Yeah.

SL: But then you have the house over in Hot Springs that we’re talking about?

EJ: After she died.

SL: After she died. While I’m thinking about it . . .

EJ: Well, I had the house with her there in it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She was—she was living in Hot Springs.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Yeah.

[02:24:31.06] SL: And when you were at UAMS, where—where did you live? Did you live on campus your first . . .?

EJ: No, we had no campus [housing].

SL: Had no campus.

EJ: Everybody lived in . . .

SL: Their own apartments or little houses.

EJ: Own apartments. They did have one or two fraternity houses . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But very few.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Most people lived in apartments.

SL: Okay.

[02:24:52.02] EJ: Earlier, I initially lived with an aunt marriage—by marriage . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . in North Little Rock, but that wasn't desirable. Number one, I was too far from the school.

SL: Right.

EJ: Number two, she needed someone to talk to in the evenings and I needed . . .

SL: You didn't have time.

EJ: And I didn't have time.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: So Mrs. Bates again . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . found me a place with the Reverend and Mrs. [William?] Townsend, who was an older couple, and they gave me a—a place to live.

[02:25:27.03] SL: Okay, before we get back to your husband, you're—I'm hearing

Daisy Bates, L. C. Bates. I'm hearing Thurgood Marshall.

EJ: George Byrd.

SL: Yeah, I'm hearing all these guys that are active.

[02:25:45.21] EJ: And you should hear of Harold Flowers.

SL: Yes.

EJ: Harold Flowers.

SL: Yes, I'm hearing all these activists around you, and I know you're in law—you're in medical school. It's your lifelong dream, and you just want to be in medical school, but you're hearing—you've got to be hearing all this stuff from all these different directions.

EJ: Oh, I'm hearing it. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah—and encouraging them and being a part of everything that goes on, and . . .

SL: Yeah.

[02:26:10.07] EJ: . . . oh, yeah. Oh, I'm a part of it. I'm—I'm not—it's not going by without my knowing what's going on.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I know what's going on. I'm promoting it. I'm encouraging it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I'm—at one time when I was younger, I was a leader by nature—by “Let's get out and do it.”

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

[02:26:29.16] EJ: Oh, yes, I've been much a part of it. But my main impetus then was medical school. I was going out every night while I was in med school. Af-

ter we had finished studying—they would come to my apartment to study, and we would—school was out at 4:00, and we studied, say, from 4:00 to around 7:00. At 7:00 I put on my dress-up clothes and I went out to the little churches and to the schools for rallies and to tell people that they didn't have to accept—it was separate but equal then.

SL: Yes.

EJ: They didn't have the . . .

[02:27:04.05] SL: Oh, yes, *Brown v. Board [of Education]* is years away.

EJ: Right, they didn't have it. There wasn't—it was separate but equal. So I was telling they didn't have to accept the potbelly stoves that didn't heat enough to heat that . . .

SL: Classroom.

[02:27:17.29] EJ: . . . classroom—whatever it was; that they didn't have to take the rain, they didn't have to accept those secondhand books. It was separate but equal. And where pages were torn out or the children had written over it so with crayons and so forth that they couldn't learn. And I was actually out on the road almost every night after we finished studying.

[02:27:40.21] SL: Now, this was part of the Freedom Four?

EJ: Freedom Four. We would take to the road.

SL: And the Freedom Four are?

EJ: Harold Flowers, Bob Booker, and Davis—I can't think of Davis's first name right now [Editor's Note: Floyd Davis].

SL: Okay.

[02:27:52.28] EJ: But those were the other three, and I was the fourth one. And we would go to all these backwoods and we would eloquently tell them what their rights were and what they should do about it, and how—not—not to start a riot, but to actually get involved in being sure that changes were made. And because I was in school and because I might lose my place in the class, they would take me over to the Kennedys, who had a—a—a funeral home in—hmm, what place was that? Anyway, I have to think . . .

SL: Around Little Rock?

EJ: No, it was—well, it was not very far from Little Rock. McGehee, I think it was.

SL: McGehee. Okay.

EJ: Uh-huh. A funeral home, and they would take me over there so that I could go ride back to school in a hearse so they wouldn't know that I was involved with them. So they would take me and drop me off at—to my apartment in the hearse, and I'd get up and go in. Either they dropped me off in the hearse or another car and the other car picked me up and took me in.

[02:28:59.00] SL: So you just—you all blanketed an area that was within a few hours . . .

EJ: No, not always.

SL: No?

EJ: On weekends we went way out.

SL: You did?

EJ: Yeah, because I didn't have to be back to school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So we—we went all over Arkansas—all over Arkansas.

[02:29:16.14] SL: How—how did the folks take it when y'all showed up?

EJ: Oh, they would rally. They rallied. They rallied. “Edith Irby is coming.”

[Someone enters the room?]

EJ: I guess that's them—maybe they're telling me Glen is here.

SL: Oh, okay.

FE: Do you want me to take your mic?

SL: We leave in thirty minutes, right?

EJ: In thirty minutes. Right. Okay.

SL: So we'll—we'll just cut it off in thirty minutes.

EJ: Okay.

SL: We just lost power.

EJ: What did you do?

FE: Oh, you know what? That plug fell out of the wall.

[Tape Stopped]

FE: And I'm just checking the drive.

SL: I'd probably be a problem patient.

FE: Okay, we're rolling.

EJ: Probably so. [Laughter]

FE: We're rolling.

[02:29:49.07] SL: Okay, we were talking about your evening and weekend jaunts  
around the state of Arkansas with the Freedom Four.

EJ: Okay.

SL: So—and you were basically just informing local communities of their rights and what they should not be willing to accept under the equal—separate-but-equal doctrine that the country was running under at that time.

EJ: That is correct.

[02:30:23.28] SL: And we also said that—or you—you were talking about how there was concern that if the school knew of these activities, it could cause you some problems, so there was some alternate transportation arrangements made . . .

EJ: [Laughs]

SL: . . . to get you back on the campus without people really knowing . . .

EJ: That I was a part. Yeah.

SL: . . . you were with and what you were a part of. In—in—in these forays out into Arkansas, out into these communities, was there any—ever any time you felt in any kind of danger? Did you run—did anyone, like, catch you guys out there or . . .?

[02:31:06.08] EJ: Oh, I was young . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and brave and fearless and felt that I had a cause for which to be concerned, and never really feared. There were times in which there could have been some confrontation which would have been difficult. They had a rule then that if you was caught exciting a riot and you cross in one county and you cross the county line, you couldn't be arrested in the other county. It didn't make much sense. A lot of things didn't make much sense then. But we would always hasten to get on the other county line once we had gotten out of the meeting. And so, consequent-

ly, I was never involved in which there was an arrest. We had been followed at a high speed, but that was just excitement from me. I was never felt that there was any danger in it.

SL: You know, I had that same immortal feeling back when I was young, too.

EJ: [Laughs]

SL: We all do, I think—that nothing bad is going to happen.

EJ: [Laughs] Not to me.

SL: 'Cause we're good people.

EJ: Yeah, yeah.

SL: And—and there's no reason for some of that.

EJ: [Laughs]

SL: I understand that attitude.

EJ: I don't know whether I would feel that way now or not.

SL: I don't think any of us would.

EJ: I don't think so. [Laughs]

[02:32:33.24] SL: Well, the—this had to be a—there had to be something very fulfilling about that, I mean, it was another form of you giving to the community. I mean, not only now were you making your dream come true, being in medical school, but you had increased your awareness of the world around you. Having traveled—I mean, in all of your upbringing, all this segregation stuff really wasn't a big issue, it didn't seem like. I mean, you seemed to always to get along fine with whites. You never had any problems with 'em.

EJ: But I heard the cries of other people, and I was able to feel their pain, and actual-

ly, in getting into their physical setting, I could see how deprived they were. And, consequently, I certainly could sympathize and would have them to do everything reasonable possible to alleviate those conditions, that no one should be forced to live deprived of some of the basic needs of life. And I was there to tell them that just because the color of their skin was different, that they did not have to accept that. And there were people who would support them and have them not to have to accept that.

[02:34:10.17] SL: Now, about what year—this has got to be, what, about [19]50?

Nineteen . . . ?

EJ: No . . .

SL: [19]49?

EJ: About 1949 to [19]50.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: On into [19]51.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: [19]52, things were not quite as difficult. Either I was more involved and enough other people—but I stayed involved the entire time.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Maybe not on that level all the time, but I was constantly making speeches and other places as far out as I could reasonably go and be back the next day—the weekend and be back the next Monday in time for class. I would take my books with me. I would study in the car.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I would study maybe sometimes even in the setting of where the speech was. I would study my books, so I managed to do my class work in spite of the fact that I was active with the community.

[02:35:23.05] SL: So by now, you have to be aware that you had reached some—you had to have an inkling of your celebrity status. People knew who you were whenever you showed up, I mean, they had heard your name. And at this point in time, you had to have a sense that you were affecting change—that you were a part of it.

[02:35:49.22] EJ: You know, I think that—I would hope that I could think that I have always affected change. When I have seen things, I have tried to right them.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They were not necessarily on the racial basis.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That it was with any kind of situation. When I saw the poor, I tried to help them have more.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: When I saw the hunger, I tried to see that the hungry were satisfied. It's not just a racial situation, it's people.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:36:22.23] EJ: And you will see from the patients who come to see me—they come to see me to have their needs met. I don't think they care whether I'm black or white or . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . any other kinds of situation. They come because they know I'm gonna do everything reasonably possible to meet their needs. And that's been the story of my life, that my needs have always been met. Early, my needs were meager, but they were met.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:37:02.26] EJ: I didn't go hungry. I did not sleep cold. I would not want to have to live that way again, but the needs were met. And I think every person deserves the right to have their needs met. And if they're not being met by some other situation, then I attempt to be the catalyst to have their need met.

[02:37:29.13] SL: Do you think that the same sort of things that the Freedom Four were doing—do you think that was happening across the country at that time?

EJ: You know, I . . .

SL: Or do you think—was your situation unique?

EJ: I don't know. As I say, I haven't—I was not a part of a movement.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:37:50.02] EJ: I guess that I became a part of a movement much—after I came to Houston.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: That I recognized that I was doing what everybody else was doing as a movement, and I was doing it as an individual with just a few people, to have things different.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It was . . .

SL: I think you're right.

[02:38:17.04] EJ: . . . after I came to Houston that I became significantly involved in affairs. My husband was—at the time that we had the riot in Houston—was dean of students, and I was on the face-to-face involvement. I saw the boys as they were locked up and taken to jail, and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . I comfort them by giving them hot meals and hiding them out at my house and accepting the money from the people across town there. They're the rich people who got acquainted with me at that time—could not speak out and stand out and physically protect, but as fast as they put the TSU [Texas Southern University] fellows in jail, they would bring the money by the house in cash money . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . for us to go by to get them out.

SL: To get them out.

[02:39:24.16] EJ: And they let me know that they would support me in any situation, and to support my husband to have them to have the wrongs righted. Even though they were not in a position, they would pay to have those who were willing to do it, to do so.

[02:39:44.20] SL: We kinda left you with—we had a really brief sketch of how you and your husband got together. And we—you ended up marrying him just a few—three or four months after your mom died? Is that right?

EJ: Right. Well, maybe even less than that. My mom died in March and I married him in April. That's not three or four months, is it?

SL: No.

EJ: [Laughs] That's three or four weeks.

SL: Weeks.

EJ: We were engaged, though, when she died.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And because I was left with the responsibility of a younger brother . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . a house and a houseful of furniture, and I had never taken on the domestic kind of things, like cooking and managing a house, because my mother had always done that.

SL: Right.

EJ: He felt that he could help me.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:40:45.00] EJ: And he did. He took over many of the responsibilities of being sure that the things were taken care of, and left me free . . .

SL: Yes.

EJ: . . . to do the things that I could do better.

SL: Now, he was—he was . . .

EJ: He was a college professor.

SL: He was in Pine Bluff.

EJ: He was in . . .

SL: You were in school in Little Rock.

EJ: Yes.

SL: And the house was in Hot Springs?

EJ: In Hot Springs.

[02:41:09.03] SL: So how did that all that resolve itself?

EJ: It was—well, until I finished medical school, the house stayed there and we went over to weekends when . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . we had an opportunity to be sure all was well.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:41:27.15] EJ: My younger brother was already in boarding school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And . . .

SL: Now, where was he at, what boarding school?

EJ: He was near Magnolia.

SL: Oh, okay.

EJ: And I've forgotten the little town they called, but it was out from Magnolia. I don't think they still have the school there anymore.

SL: Monticello? Camden?

EJ: It was near Camden. It wasn't Camden . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . but it was in that—in that area.

SL: Yeah.

[02:41:55.26] EJ: Uh-huh. But I—I think they had—it was the only private boys' school in—in that area, and which—well, it wasn't all boys, but the boys were the

residents.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I think the girls had to live in the city.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But the boys could go in as residents.

[02:42:14.25] SL: So did you—you obviously had to—you had to stay in Little Rock to go to school and your husband had to stay in Pine Bluff to teach.

EJ: Oh, so we just locked the house up and . . .

SL: Commuted? You just commuted back and forth on weekends?

EJ: We locked the house up, and whenever we had an opportunity, we went over to—to see about it, and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . once we married, we built a house . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and moved the furniture over and rented the other house. In fact, I still have the house.

SL: Is that right?

[02:42:48.10] EJ: And—and from that same house, I've had two young ladies who have graduated and have gone to the same college that I went to. And I still have the house that I use as rental property. I would say—maybe I still have the house that I keep for love's sake.

SL: Well, sure.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: Emotional attachment.

EJ: But I keep it as up kept . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . as—more so now, because I can afford to do so . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . than at the time when we had it a long time ago. Yeah, I still have it. In fact, I still have the house that my husband and I first built in Arkansas. I have lost none of my attachments in Arkansas. We built another house in Arkansas, and the city just gave me a plot of land in Arkansas, which I'm going to develop, in Hot Springs, and I have another one in Hot Springs that I'm going to develop. I'm still a very active participant in my church activities. I have this scholarship fund . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . which I finance. I go back as often as I can to attend the church services. So I'm—Hot Springs is still . . .

SL: You're still very tied.

EJ: It's—it's—Hot Springs is my solid ground.

[02:44:08.29] SL: Okay. Let's go back to UAMS. By all accounts, all of your classmates were supportive, or you had a good core of classmates that were supportive.

EJ: Well, as far as I know, they all were.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: If I had someone who was not supportive, I don't know who it was.

SL: [Laughs] Well . . .

[02:44:33.21] EJ: You know, when they got the tests and they got the key to the tests, they slipped into my apartment to bring it to me. When they found out that emphasis was going to be put on a certain criteria, they shared it with me. They treated me like—not like another man, but they treated me like a female, and protective in most of the cases, but they were—they were all very protective of me. They were—I was not just another boy, because they still lifted the—for the cadavers, they lifted the top off, and they waited 'til I took my seat. They did all of those things which men ordinarily do for females. But then, when it came down to the classes, I was just another student. But they shared with me, and when they found out that emphasis, as I say, was gonna be on a certain thing, that I was the first one to know that, “Hey, we better get this together, and this is what we better do. This is what he did last year, so let’s—let’s study this.”

SL: Yeah.

EJ: Yeah.

[02:45:51.26] SL: Did—I know at the time you may not have been aware of—of the things involved in getting you—your acceptance to UAMS.

EJ: Didn’t know anything about it.

SL: But now you’ve heard some things that happened or how . . .?

EJ: Haven’t heard much.

SL: Uh-huh. How . . .?

EJ: Would you believe, almost nothing.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:46:17.14] EJ: The first day or soon thereafter, Dr. Chenault . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . called me into his office . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . to tell me I was there as just another student.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That if anything occurred that was any way derogatory, he was the first one to know. That was all that was said. I did complete my course there—did one year of pediatrics. I stayed one year of internship in pediatrics . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:46:51.29] EJ: . . . went over to Hot Springs and was practicing there—stayed there . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . for one year. And it was—well, it was more—I had intended to stay more than one year. I stayed—I think it was six years—a long time there.

SL: Yes.

[02:47:08.22] EJ: Dr. Chenault had retired by that time and was a part of a multiple-discipline clinic—urology and OB/GYN [obstetrics and gynecology], and I had taken a straight pediatric internship.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That clinic taught me how to do gall bladders . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . appendicitis. It caught me how to do breech deliveries, and all the things I

had not learned during my residency, the clinic sort of taught me, even though I had an office away from there—I would say about five minutes from where they were.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:47:51.21] EJ: They were my constant consultants. I could always know if I got into any difficulty with their multiple-discipline clinic, I always had somebody who I could rely on. I really thought I was overworked when—the reason I came into the residency—I thought I wouldn't have to work that hard if wasn't doing general medicine.

SL: Right.

EJ: But I found out that's different. I'm working twice as hard, and not doing general medicine.

SL: Right.

EJ: But it was a beautiful life for me in Hot Springs. I was working with the—well, practically all of the women in Hot Springs, practically all of the blacks, and I felt that this twelve and fourteen hours I was putting in was too much. I put in twelve or fourteen hours now and I think, “Oh, my God, what a short day!” [Laughter] Yeah, but Hot Springs was a good experience for me. It grew me up. It made me self-confident. It let me know I could survive in the big world.

[02:48:58.06] SL: Uh-huh. So, you felt like that you got a great education at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

EJ: Oh, I know I did. And when I compare myself with the others that come from various other schools and—I got a great education.

SL: Are we . . .

FE: Yeah.

SL: . . . one minute away from thirty minutes?

FE: Well, we're one minute away from changing tapes.

SL: Oh, from changing tapes. Well, why don't we go ahead and . . .

FE: Which is about the same.

SL: Are we that close to thirty minutes?

FE: Yes.

SL: We probably are.

EJ: I guess I do need to stop.

SL: Okay, let's stop.

FE: You're at a point . . .

SL: Now . . .

EJ: Yeah.

[Tape Stopped]

SL: Last night—here, we . . . it's not rolling.

FE: No, it's—it's rolling.

SL: Okay, good.

FE: We're great. We're synced.

SL: All right.

FE: All right, Scott. We're rolling.

[02:49:47.12] SL: Okay. We've this—here's—headphones underneath this. Well,  
looking at the interview last night, I couldn't help but notice your necklace.

EJ: Oh, my goodness. [Laughs]

SL: What is the story about your necklace?

EJ: And—and you'll probably . . .

SL: I mean, I see it in a lot of photographs and—so I know it's dear to you.

EJ: It is dear to me. It is a gift that was given to my husband—by my husband—at least forty years ago.

SL: Yes.

EJ: And I think I've worn it every day since then. I know exactly where it is when I got to bed at night. I know where it is all day long. It—it is precious to me.

[02:50:29.27] SL: You know, we haven't really talked much about your husband. I mean, we've talked y'all meeting and—and getting married, you know . . .

EJ: Yes.

SL: . . . shortly after your mom's death, but—and we've talked a little bit about him kind of looking after your real estate interests and—and all of that, but tell me a little bit more about—about him.

[02:50:54.02] EJ: Well, for me, he was strong—extremely strong. He was—I married him approximately three weeks after my mother died, and he just came in and he took control of all the things that I needed done. He was my support. He was—he was strictly my partner. I wouldn't call him my silent partner because he was more than silent. [Laughs]

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But he also was very accomplished in himself. He was a college professor. At the time that he died, he was retired from Texas Southern University. He had

been the dean of the college of education. But he was the one who was the smart one in the family. He was the one who wrote my speeches when I didn't know what I was talking about, and handed it to me going out the door. He selected most of the clothes that I wore. And the necklace is a gift from Italy. He was traveling in Italy on an educational trip and brought that back to remind me that he thought about me while he was over there.

SL: Yeah.

[02:52:15.18] EJ: He was an excellent father. He actually took the parenting side of—for the children, for the most part. In fact, he allowed me to be all of the things that most wives and mothers and so forth had to do—he relieved me either by supervising them for someone else to do or—or he did them himself. He was a very strong man. He was a leader. He was a leader, a public speaker. He was a very strong person. His doctorate degree was in education, and he was the educated one in the family, and we depended on him to make the major decisions about most of the things. I was the dependent one. He allowed me to practice my medicine and to be a part of the social world, and he supported me in doing so.

[02:53:29.19] SL: Now, where did he get his undergraduate degree? Or where—where was he born and raised?

EJ: He was born in Louisiana.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Homer, Louisiana . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . near Shreveport, Louisiana. He received his bachelor degree from Southern

University in Baton Rouge.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:53:50.07] EJ: He was the first black to have gone to the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington, with a—a—a doctorate degree. So his—he understood quite well what my path was, and he was—he gave me support. He was always there to support me, not to sympathize with me—never sympathize—but to give me support to do that which I needed to do. For instance, if I had a speech to write that was not about my technically medical and so forth, usually I didn't have to bother about writing it. He would have it written, my clothes on the bed for me to put on, and a chauffeur to drive me wherever I needed to go in order to do it. It was an adjustment for me to learn to do the things I had to do for myself, because he had done them for almost forty years, and I was spoiled.

[02:54:52.01] SL: Uh-huh. He anticipated all your needs.

EJ: He anticipated all my needs and—and took care of them.

SL: What a guy.

EJ: Yeah.

[02:55:01.01] SL: So after you graduated from medical school, you practiced in Hot Springs.

EJ: In Hot Springs.

SL: And—but was he still in Pine Bluff at that time?

EJ: That was—he was still working in Pine Bluff.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But at that time Pine Bluff was about sixty miles from Hot Springs.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And we wouldn't consider sixty miles very much now, particularly with our freeways and so forth. But . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . sixty miles then got to be quite an ordeal. So he was only at home on weekends and on Wednesdays. And then we had two children then, and it got to be a little complicated, me with three children . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . two children and his driving the seventy miles, about, on roads that are not quite like our freeways now.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:55:54.19] EJ: So we decided that we needed to change. I needed to—I wanted to go back into the residency, and that we needed to be together to rear the children.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So he found employment at Texas Southern University, and Baylor [University] accepted me as a residency in internal medicine.

SL: So that's how you got to Houston.

EJ: And that's how we got to Houston.

[02:56:16.27] SL: I see. Now, okay, let's talk a little bit about your children.

What—what happened—when—first of all, how far—I mean, when did you give—first give birth to your first child?

[02:56:31.09] EJ: Our first child was born about three weeks after my internship . . .

SL: In—in Little Rock.

EJ: . . . at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And that's a story. [Laughs]

SL: Well, let's hear it.

[02:56:46.01] EJ: That's a story. [Laughs]

SL: I'm here to listen. [Laughs]

EJ: I was supposed to have been delivered at the hospital in which I had done my year of residency.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And somehow or other, the physician and his staff at the hospital got a little bit confused as to what preparation they should have been making. Instead, I was sitting out in the park area of the hospital. And when he came over and he was a bit agitated. So he insisted that I go to a private hospital they had, and it was for all whites. He was—and so I went to—at his request—to the hospital, and, lo and behold, I did not have a natural delivery. I had a few complications, and he had to do a C-section [Caesarean section], and at that time blacks and whites didn't go to the same hospitals—at least if they did, there were different sections in the hospital.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And this was one of the elite hospitals, where there were no different sections—they just didn't accept blacks. But there I was, and I'd had my baby by C-section.

[02:58:06.08] SL: So did you—did they give you any trouble in the admission room?

EJ: No, they just said I needed to leave.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But I didn't know all of this. They told my husband that he would have to take me home. And when the doctor came the next morning after the section, I did not make the progress in labor that they thought I should make. And, 'course, I—everybody in Little Rock in the profession was watching to see what I was going to do with this first baby. And they couldn't afford for me to lose the baby, so they sectioned the baby. But you can't send—you don't usually send a woman home less than twelve hours after the section.

SL: Right.

EJ: But they did. They got an ambulance and they sent me home, and—and we went—well, he did the circumcision on the kitchen table. I was a physician, and it was easy. He brought a sterile pack from the hospital, and we did the circumcision, and all went well.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:59:13.10] EJ: But the next week there was no hospital. They closed the hospital. He was on the staff, and he said that it could not be. He could not bring his patients, no matter what they looked like. They wouldn't have a hospital. So we closed the hospital.

SL: Wow. That's a good story.

EJ: That's very little known. [Laughs]

SL: Yeah.

EJ: That's—that's—that's only known by those who—who were along with me in those days. It's . . .

[02:59:38.12] SL: So what was your child's name?

EJ: Gary.

SL: Gary.

EJ: Uh-huh. And Gary is here in Houston.

SL: Oh, that's good.

EJ: Uh-huh.

[02:59:47.28] SL: So you have a brother and one of your children here with you?

EJ: I have a brother and *all* my children here with me. [Laughs]

SL: Is that right?

EJ: Yeah. The—my daughter just came about a year ago.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She's mostly here.

SL: [ ]

EJ: Right. She's mostly here.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:00:06.28] EJ: She actually has been living in Martha's Vineyard [Massachusetts] for the last twenty-two years.

SL: That's a beautiful place.

EJ: Oh, it is beautiful. Oh, it's gorgeous. And their people are just wonderful. She practiced law there and retired from practice of law after twenty years. And I can't retire from medicine after almost a hundred years. [Laughter]

SL: You know, I want to look—is her lipstick okay right in the middle—up on top? I'm just worried that it might be a little bit . . .

FE: I didn't [notice?]

SL: . . . smeared. Is it okay? I think it's okay. Yes, that's—I think that's good.

EJ: Get me a mirror and I can tell ya.

SL: Okay. I think it's okay. It looked like it was just . . .

EJ: I can't see it.

SL: . . . a little bit smeared on top.

EJ: It may be.

SL: I—I—when I—when I first started doing these interviews, I interviewed someone for all day long . . .

EJ: Uh-huh, uh-huh, and you ended up . . .

SL: It was Debbie Walker. It was Debbie Walker, and she had a little bit of smeared lipstick.

EJ: And she didn't like that.

SL: Oh, she didn't like that. [Laughter] Oh, she didn't like that.

EJ: Is that a little better?

SL: In fact, she still gives me grief about it.

FE: Yes, I think I got it.

SL: Yes, it's good.

FE: Does it look good?

SL: Yes, it's good.

EJ: Okay.

[03:01:14.17] SL: Okay, so Gary makes history.

EJ: Well, yes . . .

SL: It's almost like continuing the lineage.

EJ: Well [laughs], I think—well, not intending to do so.

SL: Right.

EJ: But, indeed, it was. But all turned out well.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: All turned out well.

[03:01:35.18] SL: Okay, so you're just—you had just finished your residency . . .

EJ: Yes, it was . . .

SL: And you were . . .

EJ: . . .three weeks after my residency.

SL: . . . and you were establishing a—you were gonna open up shop in Hot Springs?

EJ: Not really. I went to Hot Springs. I had not really decided. I was going back to the University of Arkansas and do another year . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . of residency there.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:02:01.00] EJ: But I had an aunt who became ill in Hot Springs, and I went over to help to care for her during the time that I was waiting to have him get a little older and to go back to Arkansas—go back to Little Rock . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . to do my second year of residency.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And when I got to Hot Springs, everybody gave me such offers that I couldn't re-

fuse, that I stayed in Hot Springs.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:02:34.22] EJ: There was a clinic in Hot Springs that was a multiple-discipline clinic. There was one other black physician in Hot Springs, but was a very old man . . .

SL: Yes.

EJ: . . . so he had done very little practice and was attempting to do even less.

[03:02:52.26] SL: And what was his name? Do you remember?

EJ: I do, but I can't think of it now. [Laughs]

SL: Okay, you'll think of it later, I'll bet.

EJ: Okay. [Laughs]

SL: Okay.

[03:03:00.11] EJ: But the—and now I've forgotten the name of the clinic, but Dr. Chenault, who had been dean of the medical school . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . when I entered and was responsible for making the decision that I would be admitted and that I would be treated as any other medical student, had retired.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And he was a part of the clinic. And, as a result of it, he also said, "Why don't you just stay off for several years and we'll do a residency here with you. We'll teach you everything."

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And, indeed, the clinic did. I had my separate office, but they taught me how to

do everything. They had a multiple—a specialty clinic.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:03:54.04] EJ: And so I learned all the things that I had not learned in medical school and what I had not learned as an internship. I stayed in Hot Springs for six years.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And thought I was overworked. I was [laughs] working, at most, twelve hours a day.

SL: Yes.

EJ: And I thought that was . . .

SL: Too much.

EJ: . . . too much. And, of course, the children were young. By that time, I had the second child.

[03:04:20.18] SL: Uh-huh. And was that Myra?

EJ: Yes, that was Myra.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And so we decided that we needed to be together to—to rear the children, and so he started looking for a place that he would be happy as a college professor because that was his calling, and a place that I wanted to go back into the residency.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And we found Houston, and that's the beginning of the long story, that we have been here and I couldn't love any place any more. I don't see how that I could have become more comfortable in any place. The people of Houston have been

just very, very kind—very, very accepting. And my residency went very, very well, and my practice—I'm satisfied. [Laughs] It goes very, very well. I have excellent support. I enjoy seeing the patients, even though sometimes I think I have more than my share. But I enjoy doing it.

[03:05:30.28] SL: Well, Houston is pretty well known for its medical community, too, isn't it?

EJ: Yes.

SL: I mean, worldwide.

EJ: Worldwide.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I have been blessed to be with the renowned physicians in Houston in—in terms of having gotten an education from them . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:05:53.27] EJ: . . . and also in having—even now, getting the support that I need.

SL: Now, DeBakey was from here, right?

EJ: Dr. DeBakey—he's not from here—he is here. [Laughs]

SL: Oh, well . . .

EJ: Dr. DeBakey is ninety-seven years old.

SL: Wow.

EJ: Dr. DeBakey is still practicing medicine. He recently had surgery.

SJ: Uh-huh.

[03:06:17.07] EJ: He had a thoracic aneurism and, believe it or not, he had the same surgery that he had invented for others to have years ago. And he is doing quite

well. He—he is one of the physicians who has encouraged—has given me work to do—has been there to support me in situations, for instance, when I was inaugurated as president of the National Medical Association. He was in Europe with one of his devices that he had recently invented, and he was having surgical procedures there. He came back to Las Vegas [Nevada] for the inauguration, stayed the night, and then went back to Europe to continue his tour in Europe with his innovation of his newly found device.

[03:07:19.09] SL: Well, was he in any way instrumental with your international clinics that you have scattered around?

EJ: You know, he wasn't, except the encouragement that he gives me, but not physically so.

SL: Was the—was the first one in Vera Cruz?

EJ: The first one was in Vera Cruz, yes.

SL: Uh-huh. Now, I want to know how all that happens.

EJ: How do I get to . . . ?

SL: How did that happen?

EJ: How did I get to Vera Cruz? Oh, I was invited . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . to come to Vera Cruz. It was a world session.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: A worldwide convention on infectious diseases.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:07:57.02] EJ: And I was invited as a speaker. I did not know when they invited

me that they intended to have this clinic named after me. It was the first clinic that Vera Cruz had had . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . as an emergency clinic, and that they allowed me to initiate the clinic in Vera Cruz.

[03:08:22.02] SL: Okay, now, wait a minute. Are you telling me you didn't have anything to do with setting up that clinic?

EJ: No, no.

SL: They just built this clinic?

EJ: They built a clinic and named it . . .

SL: Invited you to come talk and then named it after . . .

[03:08:30.20] EJ: And named the clinic after me. And this is how I became involved with the clinic in Vera Cruz.

SL: Well, who built the thing? I mean, who—who—who were the players?

EJ: The city.

SL: The city did?

EJ: The city of Vera Cruz.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:08:46.01] EJ: They had no emergency facilities . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . except at one or two of the hospitals—that was inadequate. But this was strictly emergency, and at that time they were having severe wrecks for some reason. It was almost an accepted thing that they would have two and three severe

wrecks a day.

SL: Hmm.

EJ: And yet they did not have enough facilities in the hospital to handle it. So this was a freestanding—did nothing else but emergencies. And it's still there.

[03:09:24.07] SL: So you must have had garnered some renown for someplace in Mexico to build a clinic and then name it after you. I mean, was it your work here in Houston in the Third Ward or . . . ?

EJ: I don't know why they did. Well, it was a world conference.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But why they named the clinic after me? You know, I never asked because [laughter] if I had asked they might have been wondering themselves why. [Laughter] So I just accepted the fact that the clinic was [laughs] named after me.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I thought maybe it was a short, catchy name, you know? [Laughter] And that's why. You know, you don't have much trouble remembering Edith Jones.

SL: No.

EJ: So I didn't ask why.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I was afraid to because they might have started looking white and changed their mind. [Laughs]

[03:10:14.20] SL: Well, do you ever go back and visit them?

EJ: Yes. I have not been for three years now.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But for a while I went two and three times a year.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And they came here. Things got a little tense between the United States and Mexico, and we still—the families still come and visit me who I met in Mexico, and they use me as an excuse for coming. And the last time I've been was about three years ago.

[03:10:46.00] SL: Uh-huh. And it's still thriving and doing well?

EJ: Oh, it's still thriving, they tell me, and they—they keep me informed that all is going well. But since that time, they've built at least three more.

SL: Is that right?

EJ: Uh-huh. Freestanding emergency clinics.

SL: So they just modeled after the . . . ?

EJ: After that one.

SL: The one that they [     ].

EJ: Yes.

[03:11:05.17] SL: That's great. That's good news. Okay, so then the next one was Haiti.

EJ: You know, I had—I told you that, but I had already been to Haiti.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Yes, I had already been to Haiti. And we had built the clinic in Haiti—had started the clinic in Haiti, but not on the scale that it is now or that—at that time we had one building in Haiti and—and only one location, and now we have a massive location with massive buildings with about six countries cooperating and sending

their physicians' equipment, and we have three satellite clinics. So the Haiti clinic has just grown and grown and grown.

[03:11:57.08] SL: It seems like I read that between all those clinics and Haiti, it's about 1,500 people a day.

EJ: That's one clinic.

SL: That's one?

EJ: That's the major clinic.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: About 1,500 clinics [patients]. But then we had the clinics up in the mountains.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:12:11.27] EJ: Where people have to climb to go to the people, but—and the—those are satellite clinics. But in the clinic in the—that's just out from Port Aux Prince—we—they have 1,500. And when we first went out there, we didn't even have transportation there. You had to almost get out of a Jeep and walk because the rocks were so difficult to get over. Now we have [tap-tap?] going, and [tap-tap?] is the transportation system as the trail is here—the train.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And it goes on regular trips to take people to and from the clinic. We have about twelve buildings on that particular clinic spot, and, of course, we have four countries that send in their physicians to rotate. We have a hospital—not—not like the Marriott or the Hilton, but we have a hospital in which we can accommodate twenty-four people and serve meals that—physicians who want to volunteer, and the physicians who rotate because their countries require them to do a year of

charity work before they can come back and be a physician in their own country.

We have four coming from Cuba every year, four from Germany, four from Switzerland. And I've forgotten who now the other come from.

[03:14:02.17] SL: Well, tell me how this happens? How—how did you end up getting involved in Haiti?

EJ: How did I end up in Haiti—of all places?

SL: And how did you get this ball rolling?

EJ: Somehow or other, there was a—a—a representative here named Mickey Leland. Mickey Leland was black, and he had the same mindset as I have—that you come in the world to do things. And he used his position as having been elected as representative not only to help the people of Houston, but to help poor people everywhere. And so he was on missions to help people, and somehow or other he'd got me appointed by the [US] State Department to tour with the group—Haiti. And I saw such poverty there—such poverty that you would never believe. And on their general hospital grounds, because they didn't have space, medicine—the other facilities to care—you had people there who were just camping out on the grounds of the hospital, many of them covered with all kinds of lesions and sores and—I saw women who had given birth to babies, and because they didn't have enough room to put them, that you have two in a bed—in a regular hospital bed—where they—one would sleep with their head with the other with their feet in opposite directions. And I—it was just something that I just—it stayed with me, and I could not bear to think that something could not be done. [03:15:49.26] And there was a young man who had just finished Harvard who was from Haiti, whose

father had been in politics there, who was with the group—twelve of us—and wanted to come down to visit me here in Houston. And I allowed him to come visit me in Houston. He saw what I was doing. So he said to me, “You know, I sure hope you will help me. I want go—I want to go back to Boston [Massachusetts], and I want to do for the poor people of Boston what you’re doing for the poor people of Houston. And I said to him, “You need to go home. There are more poor people in Cuba than there are in Boston, and some—and poorer—and somebody’s gonna take care of the people in Boston.” So he said, “But, you know, I don’t have any money.” “You don’t need any money, just get out and tell people what you are trying to do, and if you have to practice from the street corner, you practice from a street corner. And you give the people what they need.” I says, “If it’s no more than you tell ’em to wash before you eat. You give them whatever you have. If you don’t have medicine, you give them the rules and regulations of staying well.” And he went back to Cuba, and he did just that. He found someone who gave us the land. I found someone who gave us some money, and we dug some wells because we found the children were bathing and toiletting in the same water that they were drinking. And, of course, they were having infections after infections. So we found that we could get a well dug for \$500, and I went out and I begged my friends who said they had money, and I begged them for money, and we’d build some wells. And we finally got around to getting some buildings. We had an old building there, but the Army had been over there, and they moved out from some of these little Army shacks, and we were able to move some of those shacks in on that property. And then, somehow or other, the

countries came in—Switzerland and France and Germany and Cuba were the countries, and then the United States. Because he had gone to Harvard, Harvard participated. And we built a dental clinic, and the women came to have their babies, and they had a worship center there, and finally, it just grew so large. And we started building satellite clinics and going out to the satellite clinics and—and rendering service there, and going up on the mountains where the people couldn't come down and . . .

SL: You took it to them.

[03:18:52.21] EJ: And we took it to them. And, of course, they're still going very, very strong, and they keep me posted. My daughter went, and would you believe she computerized them. She went to stay two weeks, and she stayed two months plus. [Laughter] It's—you—it's something where you catch it and nothing makes a difference. I guess the greatest experience for me, though—I was getting ready to go to Cuba, and—for the clinic—and I asked them what was it that I could bring. I usually carried all of the old clothes and medicines and samples and whatever I could get to carry. So they said, "We need some barbed wire." "Barbed wire? I know what barbed wire is. You know, even though I'm not really a farm girl." And I said, "How much barbed wire do you need?" They said, "We need six strings to go around eighty acres of land." And I said, "God, that's impossible, you know? Number one, just how do I get it and I how do I get it over there?" But I was lamenting the fact that, you know, I'm not gonna be able to satisfy them. I just don't know even where to get started.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:20:13.12] EJ: One of the grocery deliverers for one of the hospitals stopped me and we were talking in the hall about his family and that they had to have some illness. And I said, “Well, you know, I’m going to go to Cuba next week, and if you need to, you need to bring ’em in now.” I said, “You know what they had the nerve to ask me for? They asked me for some barbed wire.” And he says, “Oh, some barbed wire.” He says, “You don’t know what barbed wire—?” I said, “Sure, I know what barbed wire is.” I said, “But he want me to get eighty acres of six strings of barbed wire to bring to Cuba.” I says, “It’s impossible.” He says, “Leave it to me.”

SL: [Laughs]

[03:21:01.06] EJ: So he was able to get the barbed wire donated—got someone to take it down to the port—put it on the boat—carried it to Cuba. What they needed was—by this time, we had grown, and the government had come in to teach the farmers how to rotate their crops.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And how to farm and what to have. But the animals were coming from the mountains at night and was eating up the crops on their display—their crops. So they were trying to get something to keep the animals out at night so that they could still have their demonstration crops. And the—the end of the story is they got the barbed wire there. They got it there before my daughter left, and she went down to get the barbed wire to have it delivered to the setting. And, of course, they wouldn’t let her have it. In Cuba, they—if they don’t speak the language and you don’t speak the language—didn’t understand you—you’re not quite sure what

happened. So she became infuriated. And she said, “We’ve got the barbed wire here. We’re ready to pay for it.” They didn’t—she didn’t get the barbed wire. She came back to tell the—the owner or the—the one who ran the clinic that she couldn’t get the barbed wire. He says, “It’s all right. I’ll go down and get the barbed wire.” So we went down, and he says, “You know, we just appreciate so much you keeping the barbed wire for us. Do you have a truck you get it out there for us?” He is so . . .

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: . . . [laughs] in touch . . .

SL: Yes.

EJ: . . . with what is necessary.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:22:50.11] EJ: Not only did he get the barbed wire without paying the necessary levy that they charge—they were gonna charge her \$1,000, you know . . .

SL: Yes.

EJ: . . . to—to take the barbed wire off—but got the barbed wire free, took it out, and indeed had the farmers to put it around the land, and the boats—the goats no longer got into their demonstration crop.

[03:23:15.11] SL: What a great story.

EJ: Oh, yeah

SL: Tell me, when did you first—what year was it when you first went to Haiti and did that tour? Do you remember?

EJ: I don’t know, but I have some literature on it. We have . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I would have to get that for you, but it's been at least twenty-five years ago now.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Maybe thirty. Time passed so rapidly.

[03:23:41.05] SL: I've seen a photograph of you with Fidel Castro. Did—did you meet with him or . . . ?

EJ: Yes, several times.

SL: Several times. Well, how did you . . .

EJ: In fact . . .

SL: . . . find him? What—what was it like being with him?

EJ: He's a great guy.

SL: Yeah, I've always heard that.

EJ: He—he—he wants so much for Cuba, and he's willing to do whatever's necessary. He's a very hard worker. He's extremely intelligent. He reads. He's very self-sacrificing. He expects all of the Cubans to be—and there's nothing that he would not do for Cuba. He raises his own and makes his own wine. So for a few years thereafter, I could always depend on wine.

SL: [Laughs]

[03:24:35.25] EJ: Because he would send it for anybody who was coming over.

SL: Uh-huh.



EJ: We were able to get an exchange program going in which students or physicians from Cuba would come to [University of Texas] MD Anderson [Cancer Center] and learn the techniques of cancer cure . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:24:54.06] EJ: . . . and bring to MD Anderson their herbs and all the other kind of things that they do that they get results from.

SL: Yeah, the natural remedies.

EJ: The natural remedies.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: So for a while, we don't have as much now as we did have. The United States became a little bit more oppressive.

SL: [ ]

EJ: Yeah, and we cannot travel to and from—cannot bring as much without being surveyed and concerned about.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:25:29.09] EJ: But, yes, the meetings with Castro were excellent, except for a fishing trip that he thought he was taking me on—a deep fishing trip—and he was taking the group fishing.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And with this boat going in and out, it was the sickest I have ever been in my life.

[Laughter]

SL: You got seasick.

EJ: I got very seasick.

SL: Oh.

EJ: So deep-sea fishing is not for me. [Laughter]

SL: Well, that's good. Let's . . .

EJ: And I was the only woman on the trip.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So that wasn't good. [Laughs] And the men just thought I was gonna die, and I thought I was going to die for a while. [Laughs]

[03:26:12.11] SL: Yes. Well, what was the most interesting conversation you had with Fidel Castro? Was it—I mean, did you . . . ?

EJ: His ability to do what he needed to do. He—he was an extremely self-motivated person who not only was capable of physical work, but capable of making whatever necessary situations in behalf of Cuba that he needed. I really think that he is so—or was at that time—so involved with Cuba's freedom—Cuba's ability for the people to live a good life—that he was willing to give up his own.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: As I say, he was a very hard worker. He—he was extremely well educated, though some of it may have been self-education. He read, read, read.

SL: Ferocious reader.

EJ: Yeah. There was almost nothing you could bring up that he had not read something about.

[03:27:26.00] SL: Well, he probably felt a great affinity toward you and your work.

EJ: We—we—we got along quite well. We—it was almost like a natural, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That we were able to—and his English, of course, is quite well.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: To discuss things and ambitions that he had—not for himself, but for others—that

we were able to get along quite well.

[03:27:58.09] SL: It's too bad. You know, sometimes you just wish that governments would . . .

EJ: Oh, yes, yes.

SL: Sometimes they get in the way, don't they?

EJ: But it's—it's—it's difficult. We get people in, I think, who misinterpret—who sometime maybe become overambitious—selfishly so . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . who do not have the interest of even the country at hand. And—and sometimes it may be language barrier that they do not understand—they're—they're talking to each other . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . but they're not talking with each other . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:28:41.02] EJ: . . . and do not understand what we really want. Otherwise, the world would be one. If we really understood what each of us is saying to the other, there would be no differences. Because, really, we cannot be unless we enhance each other. There is no—no me unless I have some you to make me.

SL: I hear ya.

EJ: And . . .

SL: I get that.

[03:29:17.07] EJ: . . . when we learn that, we will know that the least of those supports the most of those. And it takes all of us to have what is necessary for all of

us. And there's enough. There's enough to go around. It's not gonna run out when each of us give whatever we have to give. It won't run out. We just need to have it so it's more divided. It needs to—some people don't need as much. It gets to be a burden for them to have to care for it.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And then some people don't have enough, and so they have a—a burden trying to accumulate, and sometimes in a way which is not wholesome—that which other people have.

[03:30:14.16] SL: So now you're working on something in Uganda?

EJ: Yes.

SL: What's happening there?

EJ: Well, I'm supporting them right now with medications.

SL: Yes.

EJ: They had asked me if I could send to them particular the new heart medications that . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But they need samples. They need medicines. And whereas I do not go, I pay—I have others to go, and I also have others to use all of their samples, and particular the drug companies, to send to Uganda and to any of the other countries who might ask me—such as Mexico. As they said, “We can't get medicines of certain kind.” We'd get some samples and we send it to them.

[03:31:17.06] SL: Okay. I was just—I just got a flash—we kind of left off with your children. Now, do you just have two children?

EJ: I have three children.

SL: Okay, now, what's the third one?

EJ: You forgot one. [Laughs]

SL: Where's the third one?

EJ: The third one is here in Houston.

SL: And when did—and this is a . . . ?

EJ: And he was born in Houston.

SL: Uh-huh. Okay.

EJ: He is—I guess he's—let's see if I can count now. He must be about forty-one now. [Laughs] Yeah. So . . .

SL: What are—what are his interests?

EJ: Right now—well, what are his interests? He's in real estate . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . for a livelihood.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:31:53.26] EJ: But for livelihood only because he's actually a volunteer. He volunteers with the Boys' Clubs and he uses his energy to act as assistant coaches over—he has a son, and he's a single parent.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So he has gotten involved with his son, who is graduating this year from high school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And he assumes without pay the coaching of the high school basketball—football

games—teams—and he has in the neighborhoods taken on the boys' clubs and so forth to seek to enhance their life. That's what he's about.

[03:32:42.07] SL: I wonder if anybody influenced his line of thought on all that.

EJ: You know, probably his father did. [Laughter] His father did a lot of volunteering.

SL: Really?

EJ: Oh, yes. Uh-huh. He used much of his time helping other people.

[03:32:59.11] SL: So you have all three children and your brother here.

EJ: And I have my brother here.

SL: And a sister.

EJ: No.

SL: No. No, no. No sister.

EJ: I have no sister.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Uh-huh.

SL: Well . . .

EJ: I'm the only girl. I was all they could stand.

SL: Yeah, that's right. [Laughter] Well, I'm trying to think—what else should we be talking about? What have I dropped the ball on here that I'm going to get in trouble on for not bringing up?

EJ: I haven't thought about it.

[03:33:25.00] SL: Let's—let's talk about the University of Arkansas Medical School just for a second.

EJ: Okay.

SL: I—I remember asking you if you felt like you were adequately—adequately prepared for the medical community when you—I didn't put it this way, but do you feel like you got the education that you needed?

EJ: I'm certain that I did.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:33:54.06] EJ: When I came out from the University of Arkansas—number one, while I was out there as a student, we—we were educated. We had no doubt that we were getting a good education. We had professors who would take nothing less, and I had no privileges. If I did not perform, if I did not live up to what my expectations were, I would not have come out of medical school. But they supported. They gave us all the support, but the expectations were that “You will not come out as a second-rate student.” And then, of course, once I finished the—the medical school, I elected and they accepted me to stay as a residency for one year. And, of course, that meant that I was very comfortable there, and by that time they were very comfortable with me. And I don't believe then—I don't know when the *Brown versus* . . .

SL: [19]54.

EJ: [19]54. And I graduated in . . .

SL: Well, that would have been . . .

EJ: [19]52.

SL: . . . [19]52.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:35:20.03] EJ: So at that time segregation was still the law of the land in Arkansas.

SL: That's right. Uh-huh.

EJ: But there was no—I didn't feel it there. There was—and when I was—in fact, I didn't have any signs of it. By the time I had gotten to be a—a residency, the school—a resident—the school had forgotten about there was a law of separate-but-equal in eating. And just—and when I went down to—and somehow or other, we forgot, and we shared the dining room together, and there was no difficulty whatsoever. No one bothered us, and there was no difficulty. I don't think that even my classmates ever thought about one time that, “You know, you're black. Maybe we better take care of you.”

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: They would say, “Now, you—you got to do what you got to do,” and we would get together and we would study. And I felt that I had an education that was equal to any that I could've gotten in any school in the country—in the world.

[03:36:38.27] SL: How—what was the term—how long did the Freedom Four do their activities?

EJ: Oh, that was almost all the time that I was in medical school.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Yeah.

SL: And . . .

EJ: It started—just about the entire time. I . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I did not go as frequent in my junior and senior year because I had night duties.

SL: Right.

[03:37:08.18] EJ: But even after I went back to Hot Springs . . .

SL: I was gonna ask . . .

EJ: . . . I had contact, and I still went out and I did speeches and encouraged the people and that, particular, then for their medical services . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . to improve their medical services, improve their hygiene, and the diet—to take the money that they were making and use it wisely, rather than some of the foods that they were spending and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . so I was still active with the community.

[03:37:49.08] SL: So you were in Hot Springs when the whole [Little Rock] Central High [desegregation crisis] in [19]57, thing went down.

EJ: I was—I was in Hot Springs. I had been there and practicing.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: In fact, I kept Mrs. Daisy Bates when they were after her.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She came and stayed at my house . . .

SL: At Hot Springs?

EJ: . . . so that—uh-huh . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . that she would be protected.

[03:38:10.22] SL: Well, did you ever feel like you were in danger at all?

EJ: No, no.

SL: No, there wasn't . . .

EJ: No danger.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: I—I—I never felt that—in fact, there was never any explosive situations around me.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: No. I knew about the situation in Little Rock . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . but in Hot Springs we just kept doing what we were doing . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and that was seeing patients and relating to each other and not really mentioning it—going into the hospitals and—and not really being particular—well, we were concerned, but not—not—not—not being affected by it.

[03:39:03.14] SL: And Daisy Bates was just as steady as she could be through all that?

EJ: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, but there came a time when she was threatened, and she came to Houston to spend the weekend to be away from the threats. And, of course, she lived with me . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:39:23.26] EJ: . . . because it was—Daisy Bates had played a major part in my

survival, as—as I told you.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She had—had actually been the supporter for me financially. And when I didn't think that I needed money, she went to all the business—black businesspeople, who were, at that time, hovered on—in—on Ninth Street.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And she would collect \$5 or \$10 from each one.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And at the end of the week, she would bring me \$25-\$30 that she had collected so that I—she thought that I needed money—that I would have money. And for a period of time, this was all the money I had, except that the people would put into envelopes and dollar and sometimes a quarter and half-dollars, and “I hope this will help you.”

[03:40:22.22] SL: Uh-huh. So she came to stay with you in Houston. That's kinda late, isn't it? When—when . . . ?

EJ: Well, now, that was much, much later . . .

SL: Yeah.

EJ: . . . in Houston.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:40:36.28] EJ: But in Hot Springs, during the . . .

SL: [19]57 stuff.

EJ: . . . the—during the difficulty, she would—she only sought refuge with me.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It was not to stay with me any period of time.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: She—that—I was in Houston. I was—I mean, I was in Hot Springs . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . at the time when the . . .

SL: Central High crisis.

[03:40:57.28] EJ: . . . Central High crisis. And because of the conflict there and because some felt her life was in danger, she came over to spend the time with me because she felt safe in Hot Springs.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Because nothing was happening in Hot Springs.

[03:41:15.06] SL: So what precipitated her coming to see you in Houston? What was going on?

EJ: Just to be sure I was doing well. [Laughter] Just—just—just to be sure I was doing well.

SL: She wasn't—I mean . . .

EJ: In fact, because my mother had died and they didn't know my husband, they didn't know what situation I was.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: So they would do that. I—the people from my church would just come and said, “We came to see Edith.”

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It was just to be sure I was okay.

[03:41:46.15] SL: And, now, was that down here in Houston?

EJ: Down here in Houston. Yeah. They had come just to be sure I was okay—spend the weekend and then they would go back.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Uh-huh.

[03:41:56.05] SL: Uh-huh. Well, what about—did you ever have much contact with Dr. Martin Luther King [Jr.]? I know there's one photograph of you watching him talk.

EJ: Well, we—we—we encouraged each other.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Yeah, we were about the same age, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And we were doing the same things.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:42:15.11] EJ: I can't remember—during the riot—we had a riot here in Houston, you know, at Texas Southern, and my husband at that time was dean of students.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:42:26.04] EJ: And the students rioted, and one policeman got killed and . . .

SL: And what—what year would that have been? About . . .?

EJ: About—about [19]65, I would think . . .

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . that—that the—that it occurred.

SL: Okay.

[03:42:44.29] EJ: They had the sit-ins and—at the drugstores that otherwise did not allow blacks to use their [lunch] counters and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . college students then were beginning to feel that “We’re not gonna take this,” and, of course, he was dean of students and was—I wouldn’t say he encouraged it, but he didn’t attempt to stop it.

SL: Right.

EJ: And . . .

[03:43:12.00] SL: Well, he identified with the cause, of course.

EJ: He identified with it, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[03:43:15.24] EJ: But it was during this time that we—we found out there are a lot of good people in the world. There was—that we have here—we know the rich people—the people who actually have almost endowed every benevolent organization that we have. They were putting the fellows in jail as fast as they would sit on the counters. And the rich family was bringing the money down to get them out . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . as fast as they would put them in, and no one ever knew. It was the same family that helped me to open the hospital—the charity hospital out in the real poverty-stricken area of Houston—the Mercy Hospital we were showing you . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:44:13.14] EJ: . . . that we stayed there, oh, for at least twelve years until we were

no longer needed.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But the citizens of Houston did not approve of segregation, but had—they needed someone to speak out and say—and the college students were the ones who actually took the lead.

[03:44:39.06] SL: Uh-huh. So you just had—you—you say you kept in touch with Martin Luther King. Did you all talk very often or—? I mean, I would think that between your two schedules that . . .

EJ: Well . . .

SL: . . . it would be hard for y'all to keep up with each other.

EJ: Well, we didn't get on the phone and chat [laughs] that often.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: We knew each other. We knew what each other was doing.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:45:03.11] EJ: And when some occasion was coming, say, for some speaking and so forth, and he needed support, he would say, "Can you come down and speak?"

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: "Would you be available?" I did not go on any marches.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: I—I was not the marching kind.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I'm—I'm not physical. I think if somebody came up and struck me, I—I might would strike them back. [Laughter] So—but I—I gave all of my support. I gave

my support in encouraging him and actually soliciting money—giving my own money to the occasion . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:45:47.16] EJ: And as much support as I felt I could give, we gave it. I did not go on any marches as such.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But I was in the congregation who sent them on marches.

[03:46:05.11] SL: Uh-huh. Did you know . . . ?

FE: [ ]. I'm sorry.

SL: Okay.

FE: Let me just pull on the—lean up for just a second. I just want to check your cable back here.

EJ: Okay.

FE: There you go.

EJ: Oh, like that?

FE: Yes.

EJ: Yes.

FE: [ ] connection. Okay, good.

EJ: Okay.

FE: All right, Scott.

[03:46:24.06] SL: What about—did you ever know or meet [Clinton Administration presidential diarist] Janis Kearney?

EJ: No.

SL: 'Cause she ended up—Daisy ended up selling the paper to her a little later on.

[03:46:35.14] EJ: Oh, yes, I did. I did know her by name.

SL: Yes.

EJ: I met her, but I did not know her.

SL: Okay.

EJ: After she had sold the paper . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . I got to meet her and found out that she had bought the paper.

[03:46:49.07] SL: Uh-huh. And do you know any of the other awardees that are gonna be at this Silas Hunt thing? Did you know—ever run across . . .?

EJ: Green, just—just by . . .

SL: Who they are?

EJ: . . . maybe by seeing 'em one or two times at some occasion . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . but did not know them.

[03:47:05.21] SL: Okay. Okay. Well, I'm trying to think of what else we need to talk about. I mean, there's so much—all your volunteerism, all these organizations, all these plaques and certificates everywhere. I mean, it just goes on room after room after room. And I know that your . . .

EJ: And home. [Laughs]

SL: . . . house is probably worse. [Laughs]

EJ: Yeah, I have—I have the expensive things there that—patients take 'em as souvenirs sometimes.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And they don't realize that I would prefer to keep 'em.

SL: Right.

EJ: So I have to take—keep the—the more attractive things . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . at home.

[03:47:44.12] SL: Well, I have to tell you; the artwork that I see here is, I think, excellent.

EJ: Thank you. Some of the art—and, of course, I had to take some of the artwork home. Some of the most expensive artwork.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Because people don't sometimes realize how much I actually enjoy it and care for it.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:48:04.28] EJ: No one has taken anything of any real value from here.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But I think they might would, who did not understand how much I did want to keep it. Biggars—John Biggars . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . was a renowned artist.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And before he died about three years ago . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . before he died, realizing that I could not afford to pay the prices that he was charging for his art, he gave me some of the most—let me say—attractive pieces.

Behind you there, you see that is one of his pieces.

SL: This one right here?

EJ: Yes.

SL: Yes.

[03:48:49.02] EJ: That has traveled all over the world, and I put it there intentionally so that I would know where it was.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: That it would not move. I am the—he did a portrait of me, and I had it in the hall back there, and it had been there for more than ten years.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And after his death, everybody would come in and say, “Oh, this is John Biggars’ painting.” And I was afraid that someone who did not care . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . might take it off.

SL: Would take advantage.

EJ: Would take advantage.

SL: Well, you’ve got enough artwork that I see . . .

EJ: Did you go on the other side? Have you been on the other side?

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

FE: Change tapes?

[Tape Stopped]

[03:49:29.24] EJ: . . . was an artist. He was a lab tech [laboratory technician] when I was doing my residency at Veterans Hospital. He later left the medical world . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and did nothing but art.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And now he's probably one of the most renowned artists and continues to do art.

[03:49:53.01] SL: Well, I'm assuming that people that—number one, you must love art, because so many people have given it to you.

EJ: They do. They do.

SL: I think you have enough to where you could just have an art museum.

EJ: Well, someone had suggested—if I took that which I had at home . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . I could rival almost any museum. If I took what I had at home . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and combined it with what I have here, I could have a museum.

[03:50:21.19] SL: I think—I think you have one here now.

EJ: [Laughs] Well, some people think so. Some people think so.

SL: I think so. I mean, I've never—I've never been to a clinic anywhere . . .

EJ: Where the—well, and—and some people come just to show off to their friends their art.

SL: Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

EJ: Let me—when we finish here, let me take you across the other way because that's our spillover office.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: At one time we had a drugstore there.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:50:51.23] EJ: And when the drugstore man retired after thirty years—most of my help has worked with me thirty and forty years.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And they either die—a few of them live long enough to retire.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But he was an artist.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I met him at Veterans Hospital, and he was an artist then, but he was head of the lab there.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: He resigned there, and now he does nothing else but art. And I have his first piece hanging in the hall there that he got his first major award for.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:51:33.02] EJ: And every night—and at home, of course, I have art over everything—and that's where my expensive art is, primarily, is at home, because I don't want someone to take a piece . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . without . . .

SL: Right.

EJ: . . . asking me.

[03:51:52.17] SL: Well, so we may have to come back down here and do more with you, and maybe you could give us a tour of your home next time.

EJ: Okay, okay.

SL: I—I would love that.

EJ: In fact, it—it probably would've been a better setup if we could've done it at home, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: The interview at home.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But—well, of course, we haven't had that many interruptions here.

SL: No, we've been—this has actually been very nice. It's very great, and it's good to see you in your element and how—I mean, I wish that—there are some legal things about us videotaping you with patients, but . . .

[03:52:30.28] EJ: Well, no. They—I have a lot of—of people who video—they do video. You get the patient's permission, and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . I have patients who volunteer. I—you—I probably don't have any of the—Glen [last name?] should have . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . significant videos . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . with me with patients.

[03:52:56.01] SL: I can't help but believe that Glen and I are going to continue to

cross paths. I hope so.

EJ: He has—for the last—as I say, it must've been ten, twelve years ago that Park Plaza Hospital hired him to do blacks in medicine.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And I was his figure for doing that. And since that time he has continued to follow almost every major situation that I have had to do video . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . of. The Association of Black Cardiologists gave a world celebration for me in Hawaii.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And he taped all of that, and when—now, I didn't know him when I was inaugurated, but that was taped . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and I probably can get that from the National Medical Association.

SL: Okay.

[03:53:57.10] EJ: But there's almost been taping of almost everything I've done.

SL: That's really very valuable—I mean, you know, as far as research goes.

EJ: Uh-huh.

SL: I know that Glen has hopes of making a documentary.

[03:54:11.14] EJ: You know, they have this women's museum in Washington [DC].

. . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . and they told me that they had a significant number of tapes and pictures and

so forth on me.

SL: Okay.

EJ: Uh-huh.

[03:54:30.11] SL: Well, I like getting all these resources mentioned on the video because I won't remember all of them.

EJ: Uh-huh. [Laughs]

SL: And, you know, when it comes time for us putting a project together for you, why, all these resources will be invaluable, I mean—and we're hoping to get it set up where we can collaborate . . .

EJ: Okay.

SL: . . . with—with folks that have these kinds of archives and have done the work and—you know, maybe we can make stuff flow back and forth.

EJ: Uh-huh.

[03:54:59.25] SL: That's—that's the whole cooperative bent that I intend to have with the Center. So anyway, what time is it?

FE: It's about a quarter to ten.

SL: Do you want to shoulder the camera and—and just follow her around . . .

FE: Sure.

SL: . . . and let her talk about her clinic? Do you want to do that?

EJ: Okay.

SL: We can do that.

EJ: Now, what . . .?

SL: Or is there anything else we can do here?

EJ: Right. We're going to have to—oh, you mean here?

SL: Yeah.

EJ: I don't know of anything else. What do you want to do?

SL: Well . . .

EJ: We didn't have patients . . .

SL: Okay . . .

EJ: Uh-huh.

[03:55:35.06] SL: I have been asking this of all the folks that we've been interviewing. And I want you to—you know when you get your award at this dinner, they're gonna give the podium for you to speak, and I think they're going to give you about two minutes . . .

EJ: Uh-huh.

SL: . . . to say something.

EJ: What do you want me to say?

SL: Well, I just . . .

EJ: [Laughs]

SL: I want you to say whatever you want to say, then and now.

EJ: [Laughs]

[03:55:58.25] SL: But if you—if you can just imagine, I—I believe that the—the building will hold—the facility will hold about 400 people . . .

EJ: Uh-huh.

SL: . . . at this dinner. So try to imagine yourself—I mean, if you had something to say to these folks, knowing, you know, all their connections to the University of

Arkansas and being aware of all the good that they've contributed, what—what would you say to the audience and your fellow awardees? I mean, what—? And you can take your time. I know I'm kind of putting you on the spot, but, you know, I'm looking for some kind of philosophy or inspiration or encouragement or just . . .

[03:56:51.24] EJ: If I was actually saying to an audience, some of them who really understand what it's like to have been in Arkansas at a time when I went to the medical school—at the disparities of education in every way—and having the University [of Arkansas for Medical Science] medical school to accept me and to say, “We want you to get an education. We want you to be a doctor. You want to be a doctor. We are here to give whatever we can give to have you be so. We expect you to cooperate and take what we have, and to go out and help others.” That's—that's literally what happened. I would say that because of this, not only do I have a personal debt for what the University of Arkansas medical school did for me—I have a debt for what the University of Arkansas medical school did, I would say, for the world. For if it had not been—and even though I may have been the catalyst to which they rallied to have their purpose achieved—I certainly have seen it multiplied in the manner in which they have over the years continued to try to have not only at that time white males having education and to be physicians and to serve, but they have also had—regardless of what the—a person was as to female or male—as to black or white—as to poor or rich—but to have all of the citizens to have the opportunity to be and to deliver care, such that we could make a better world. A better world in Arkansas? Yes. But many of us have

been out of Arkansas, still making a better world. And I would say that that's how the world is gonna be changed. It's not gonna be changed from wars—by killing each other. The world is going to be changed, and all of us are gonna be made better when we can understand the needs that each of us have—all of us have. And that when we satisfy the needs that we have for ourselves, we satisfy the needs also that others have. And that we will one day—we will one day have a utopia. We will one day stop warring and killing people, and we will sit down and we will be able to discuss with everybody that which we want, that which we need. And when we do, we'll find out that whoever the divine maker was, He made enough of everything for everybody, and all we need to do is to learn how to share it, learn how to get along, and know that everybody else deserves the same rights that we want for ourselves.

[04:01:11.23] SL: That's great. That's good.

EJ: That's . . .

SL: I can use every inch of that.

[04:01:18.29] EJ: That's actually what I'm about. I'm about to build up every individual, no matter how downtrodden they may be, no matter how poor they are, every person that I come in contact is special. And even though they may be performing at a low level, so to speak, they may need to get off drugs, and so we have the drug abuse clinic. They may need to have jobs. They may need to be trained, and so we have the school board to vote to have different trades and teaching for those who are past school age, and yet offer them an opportunity that they can learn something that they can do, and they don't need to rob and steal

and kill, and that they can earn a living. They don't have to even stand on the street and beg. Until we can—all of those who have, see that those who do not have, have an opportunity to have, we will always have struggle. But, more and more, we have more people who recognize, "I have more than I need."

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: All of us have more than we need. Most of us have clogged closets.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Most of us have food that we throw away. Most of us—many of us have more cars that we don't drive. And—and I don't mean that we should go and give this to these people, otherwise you demoralize them.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:03:23.19] EJ: But we should make an opportunity, that all can have an opportunity to getting for themselves that which they want for themselves. And I think each of us—each of us is responsible for doing so, and the world will be better. We'll be better when we learn that we don't have to fight a nation to be able to have a nation agree with us. We don't have to kill off their young men and have their—their country kill our young men and our young women. We can sit down and we can conference. We can come to agreements, and we all can live a better life. The world will be better when we get people in who are not selfish, who recognize that you can only wear one dress at a time. You can only wear one shirt at a time. You can only really drive one car at a time. And when you recognize this, that you will know that you don't have to do those measures to protect that you have when other folk have the opportunity to get what you have without tak-

ing it from you. And we're fast working that way. Young people are changing their minds. Young people are not what they used to be. We don't have the hippie group anymore.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: We have young people now who are willing to get out there and make the community better. We have young people who are willing to say that "I'm gonna be the best that I can be, and I'm gonna expect you to be the best that you can be." Things are changing.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:05:25.08] EJ: And things will continue to change. And I think it was—for me, it was building onto the principles that I had learned at home and—and later got in school, and then having gone to a Presbyterian-related religious college—saw the sacrifice that people were making who did not need to make them, but just so that we could be—and then having gone to the University of Arkansas, where I guess the world expected me to have difficulty, and there was no difficulty. I was welcome with open arms. I was expected to achieve, just like every other student was expected to achieve.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:06:17.21] EJ: And—and now I'm expected to take care of my patients. I'm expected to stay abreast of what the new medical treatments and the interventions are. I'm expected to perform. And, yet, it's a good world. It's a good world because we have to live with each other, and we must understand each other's weaknesses, and we must be able to support also each other's desires, wants, and

strengths.

[Tape Stopped]

SL: They're all pretty—I'm going to step back here.

FE: Okay, you're good.

SL: Yeah, good.

EJ: No, you can turn it off.

SL: No, that's all right.

[04:07:02.07] EJ: I'll wait for him. When you—when you really recognize that all you have is what you have right now, and the only person you are is what you are right now to me. And when you recognize that, and with every person you come in contact, you recognize “all that I am, I am now.” You may not even have a chance to be somebody else for somebody else, and so you be your best at all times no matter who you're with. For me, it—I—I'm happy. I would say I—most of the time I feel—most of the time—all of the time—I may get disappointed I didn't get that—but I forgot in less than ten minutes that I didn't achieve that.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I didn't do that, because I move on to something else. And if I can't jump the highest, then I find something I can do. I run. Maybe do something else . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . that I can achieve in, and let someone else who is more endowed to do something else. I—I couldn't be a good surgeon. I—I wouldn't be able to stand there all day long and follow nerves, and so I wouldn't want to be.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:08:37.25] EJ: I prefer to stand there and hold their hand and tell them, “It’s gonna be all right, and I’m gonna send you some medicine,” and know that I have eased their pain. And if I didn’t ease their physical pain, I eased the way that they looked at their physical pain to let them know that somebody cares.

[04:08:57.28] SL: You know, I’ve said this to everybody that we’ve been interviewing, and I believe this—I—you know, that the university was a little ahead of the curve on the desegregating and encouraging Afro-Americans to come in and get an education. But, you know, I think the real net result for the university is that it made the university much stronger—that having you in Little Rock made that school a better school, and it’s true—I mean . . .

[04:09:42.08] EJ: But, you know, but they must have some time, even before they thought about—the descendent from my slave ancestors’ owners knew many of the professors that taught me at school. He was along their age.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And somehow or other, they had already gathered about them, without segregation being any of the concern—they had gathered people in the institution who were not only fair thinkers, but they were aggressive thinkers . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . which had nothing to do with race.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:10:31.11] EJ: Which had to do with human beings. It—it was—and when it came to race, it was just another situation. These were high achievers who had

made sacrifices to be where they were and wanted the world to be better, and it just so happened—I think it just so happened that I was black.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: I—I—I think many of the situations in which I have been in, it's incidental that I am black, that with my same bent in my thinking—with the same expectations—that I would have done these things anyway.

SL: Yep, I think you're right.

EJ: And . . .

[04:11:31.04] SL: I think—I think that those outside of your realm look at situations and make them what they will . . .

EJ: Yeah.

SL: . . . of the situation. But I think personally, in—in your immediate environment—I think you're right.

EJ: Yeah. I—I—I think we—we make our world.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:11:56.06] EJ: And, actually, whatever we decide we're going to do, we either make our situation to defeat ourselves or we achieve what we go after. And there are still basic laws, and I guess those laws are the same that Moses wrote down years and years ago.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And nothing has changed. And if we followed those [Ten] Commandments—if we followed the trend of thinking, all would be well with all of us, and there would not be any need. I don't know when we're gonna get a utopia. We certain-

ly won't get a utopia as long as we go over and we are fighting a country. War won't bring a utopia. We can kill everybody over in the east, and all we're gonna have is dead bodies. And somewhere we'll get an uprising someplace else.

SL: Yep, violence begets violence.

[04:13:13.09] EJ: Violence begets violence. And after a while, what we send into the lives of others come back into our own.

SL: That's correct.

EJ: But I don't know how we can actually affect change except to have people continue to meet on a basis of when there's not something important going on—to meet when you're not trying necessarily to change systems, but necessarily to enjoy each other. When we—when we really get to realize that there's no difference in any of us—that—that there's no difference, and you—you don't get that when there's conflict. You don't get that when “this is mine and this is yours, and I'm afraid you're gonna come over here and take mine.” But when you recognize “if I don't let you keep mine—keep yours, then if I ever get without mine, I don't have any place to go. And so I need you to have yours, and I need to keep mine, and I need to be able to share mine with you so that we always have between us.”

[04:14:31.28] SL: There is a major, major difference between giving and taking.

EJ: That's right.

SL: And there is—there should be recognition of—of what we can give.



[04:14:42.08] EJ: As I say, the—the greatest lesson I've ever learned, I learned from my father—is that, indeed, what you give comes back in multiples, and it does not relate necessarily to money. What you give—whatever you give—whatever you

give—comes back in multiples. It can be kindness. It can be the fact that you make someone else just comfortable—the fact that you give it, somehow or other multiplies the fact that you get repercussions of whatever you get. My mother used to say, “You cast bread upon water, and it comes back a sandwich.” [Laughter] And it—as I say, it does not necessarily relate to material things.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: It relates to all things. You have friends because you show yourself friendly. You have enemies because you make your enemies.

SL: You become threatening. Yeah.

[04:15:56.11] EJ: Yeah. It’s been a good world for me. It’s—it’s—it’s been a good world. If I had to relive it, I can’t think of many things that I would do different, even if I recognized the results would have come out just like they’ve come. It’s been a good world.

SL: Still is.

EJ: Oh, it still is.

SL: You’ve got so much happening, it’s just unbelievable.

EJ: Oh, oh.

SL: You’re still going.

[04:16:25.06] EJ: Oh, it’s—as I say, I hate to go to sleep because I’m afraid that I may miss something.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: Or if—if I sleep too long, it—it means that I don’t get something done that I wanted to get done. It’s—it’s exciting. But I’m—I’m willing to give up. I—I—I

have no fear of death. I have no fear. There are speculations—I don't want to hurt. I don't like pain.

SL: Yeah.

[04:16:58.16] EJ: But I have no fear—that death also brings something good.

SL: You know, it's—I just got a flash—I've read that at the moment of death, there's a loss in weight. Have you ever read that?

EJ: No. [Laughs] You mean, the spirit is so weighty, it goes away?

SL: There—there's—it's supposed to be, like, twenty-one grams—that you lose that much weight.

[04:17:32.08] EJ: Well, you can almost reason. You—you actually stop breathing, so you don't have that much air in—in—and air is heavy.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: So it's reasonable that you lose weight.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: That's a scientific explanation . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: . . . that you're no longer taking in the air.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: But if you actually weigh air, air is weighty.

SL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And if you no longer have air in the lungs, you lose that weight. But you also lose it some other ways. You lose the weight of having to make decisions, having to be concerned. It's all over.

SL: Yeah.

[04:18:15.25] EJ: And—and I firmly feel you have another chance. Now, how that chance is, I don't know. I never—and it doesn't really concern me—just to take advantage of this that we have now—living to the fullest.

SL: This is our time.

EJ: And this is our time.

SL: Yes.

EJ: Don't—don't waste one bit of it.

SL: [Laughs]

EJ: Yeah. Have no regrets if you can avoid that.

SL: Yeah.

EJ: And if there are things which you would have regrets about, push 'em back and keep moving. You can't go back and—and change it.

SL: Do the best you can . . .

EJ: Do the best you can and keep moving.

SL: . . . at the very moment that you have.

EJ: Yes, yes.

SL: Yep.

EJ: But, certainly, don't spend any time pondering or wondering, "If I had—maybe if I had done this." It's—it's—it's done, so you keep moving. Next time I won't do it that way, maybe.

SL: [Laughter] That's right.

EJ: Yes.

SL: Well, okay, I think we're done.

[End of Interview] [04:19:25.17]

[Transcribed and edited by Cheri Pearce Riggs]