

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories

Sheila L. Walker

Interviewed by J. Chester Johnson

September 20, 2019

Fayetteville, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

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Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.
- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing; and
 - annotations for clarification and identification.

- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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J. Chester Johnson interviewed Sheila L. Walker on September 20, 2019, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Chester Johnson: Well, Sheila, here we are . . .

Sheila Walker: Yup.

CJ: . . . being interviewed. And—um—I'll have a few questions as we go through here.

SW: Okay.

CJ: Um—and—um—you know, we've known each other very well for the last six years.

SW: Mm-hmm.

CJ: Um—or going on six years. And—um—I thought what I—I would do is begin to—um—deal with the issue of racism in your life first.

SW: Okay. Okay.

CJ: And—um—I have some specific areas, if it's okay, we could cover.

SW: Mm-hmm.

CJ: And then we could then shift into Elaine pers . . .

SW: Per se. Mm-hmm.

CJ: . . . per—in particular.

SW: Mm-hmm.

CJ: And I guess where I would li—if that sounds like a good thing to do.

SW: Yeah.

[00:00:59] CJ: Um—maybe we could start with sort of that moment, which has been very dramatic to me, when—that—your conversation to me and our talking about it—was your—your mother's—um—experience attending the funeral for Emmett Till.

SW: Mm-hmm.

CJ: And—um—how she responded to the way that Till had been tortured and murdered.

SW: Mm-hmm, and murdered. Mm-hmm.

CJ: And she brought it home—I believe you were seven years old at that—at that time.

[00:01:39] SW: I was seven. Um—you n—as you know, I was born in Arkansas.

CJ: Right.

SW: And—um—uh—my mother was in Chicago, and she sent for—uh—for us in [19]54.

CJ: Right.

SW: So I started first grade in 1954. Didn't really notice anything as far as racism was concerned, even though we lived in a—a horrible building. [*Laughs*]

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: Uh—pretty poor. Um—I wasn't used to those conditions because in Hot Springs, I lived in a house, we had a functioning bathroom, a full bathroom. And in Chicago in that tenement, there was a—um—a toilet outside of the small apartment. My mother had rented a two-bedroom apartment.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: So it was just one—actually one bedroom and just the open area. That's where we slept. So I wasn't—other than the fact that I didn't really see any white people until she took us to the park, like Lincoln Park or . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . or downtown or something like that. So I really wasn't aware of racism. [00:03:00] And then when Emmett Till was killed—I had just turned seven in July, and he was killed at the end of August. So I—the end of July, I became seven. And—um—kinda listening on the fringes of adult conversation, I heard about a young man, a young—a boy—uh—getting murdered and tortured in Mississippi. And you know, murder, killed—for a seven-year-old, it's like, "What is that? What—what happened?" And—um—just hearing the conversation—and I realized it was because—possibly because of his skin color. And I—I vividly

remember looking down at my hand and said—and thinking, you know, "This could get—my skin color could get me killed?"

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: Um . . .

CJ: Wow.

[00:04:02] SW: When Mamie Till decided to have an open casket—uh—and she let people come around to view—uh—Emmett's body—uh—my mother attended that viewing. And when she came home, she just broke down. She grabbed all of us—four—all of us children, and she just wept.

CJ: Hmm.

SW: And you know, saying, "You know, I just don't ever want anything like this ever to happen to you."

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: It made me notice things. When I went back to school, I started to notice that—this is Chicago, now. Um—they hadn't started busing or even integration of schools yet . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . uh—in—uh—the South. But what I noticed is that all the teachers that I had, all the custodians, all the other help people in the office, everyone was white. And the entire school was basically Black students.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: Maybe a Latinx here or there.

CJ: Right.

SW: But it was people—all—everybody was people of color that were—were being taught at that school. It was Jenner School, I remember. And it was in the area of Cabrini–Green in Chicago, which was one of the housing projects in Chicago, although we didn't live in the housing project. I just started noticing that. [00:05:40] And sometime during the winter—and Chicago has these extreme winters.

CJ: Right.

SW: It was very cold.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: So we couldn't go out to recess. And [*clears throat*] they had something called coatrooms where the blackboards went down over where you hung your coats, and the teacher had the space in the room, large room. So she had lifted up the blackboards 'cause we couldn't go out to recess that day, just for us to play in the classroom.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: And [*CJ clears throat*] I guess we were playing tag, and somebody tagged me, and I went up on one of those coat hooks

here.

CJ: Right.

SW: This mark here.

CJ: There the—that scar.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: To—right.

SW: That scar. And not only did it go through my upper lip, but it also went through part of my gums. And there I was, bleeding. She put a Band-Aid on.

CJ: Gee—um.

SW: All afternoon I sat there in that class, bleeding. She didn't call my mother. I had—my older sister was two years older than—two grades. So she was in third grade, and my brother was in second grade. She called no one, or no one was notified to come and get me and take me home. I sat there.

CJ: The teacher was white as I recall?

SW: Yes.

CJ: Right.

SW: Yes. And I don't know whether it was intentional or what, or this is just the way they treat Black kids in school. It's not that important if they're bleeding or whatever. But you know, as I—what I recognize as I—when I got older that this—this was

racism.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

[00:07:18] SW: Um—whether she was conscious of it or not, I don't know. I can't discern that. But you know, when I talk about it later on in life, that—it was one of those traumatic things that happened to me. Uh . . .

CJ: And when you got home, as I recall, your mother then immediately took you to . . .

SW: My mother call—she was like . . .

CJ: . . . took you to the doctor, and she was really upset by it all.

SW: She was so upset. "Why didn't they call me?" And I had this Band-Aid. At that time Band-Aids weren't even remotely my skin color. They were called flesh.

CJ: Right.

SW: And so it was just red, and my mouth was hanging open and bleeding. It was cold, so there was little blood crystals . . .

CJ: Oh, right.

SW: . . . but still bleeding. And—um—my mother took me to Children's Memorial Hospital, and they stitched me up. I don't know if they gave me any anesthesia . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . but I think I felt every stitch that they did. And it was like in

my gums, and then they had to do the outer lip.

CJ: Right.

SW: And that's—that's how I have this scar here . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . on my face at seven. Other things I kinda noticed . . .

CJ: But that was probably the most traumatic experience. I mean,
the combination . . .

SW: For me.

CJ: . . . of—of your mother's description of Emmett Till's . . .

SW: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

CJ: . . . funeral, plus this event where a white teacher . . .

SW: Mm-hmm.

CJ: . . . paid so little attention to your physical ailment at that time
and that accident . . .

SW: It was . . .

CJ: . . . it was kinda a combination really began to . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: . . . sensitize you to . . .

SW: To racism.

CJ: . . . to racism, right.

[00:08:53] SW: Yeah. Um—I think the second time I realized it was
when I was in third grade. I really couldn't read. I could not

read. Uh—I could read like, "See Dick run."

CJ: Right.

SW: "See Jane"—little, small words, but I really didn't have any kind of reading comprehension. And it's not an—well, there was a conference, the teacher—parent-teachers conference, and my mother had taken all of us to school so we could sit with her and the teacher and—to talk about, you know, our progress in school. And—and the teacher said that I was in the, quote, "dumb reading group." Not slow, not—you know. And my mother says—and she says, "Well, she's kinda slow." And my mother says, "Sheila is not slow. She's not slow." I just couldn't read.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

[00:09:53] SW: It was the fourth grade—now, this was a switch in teachers. She was Polynesian and part Japanese. Her name was Mrs. Sugai.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: I wasn't in her class a month, and I was reading.

CJ: Hmm.

SW: So I wasn't in a slow reading group. And I became so interested in reading that I immediately got a library card and started going to a library, just taking books out . . .

CJ: Wow.

SW: . . . just to read. Fairy tales, anything, just to read because reading just opens the world for you.

CJ: Right, absolutely.

SW: It really does.

CJ: Right.

SW: So that—I had that. Um . . .

[00:10:36] CJ: Now when did you become—um—involved with this—this program at the University of Chicago? Did y'all move to a new . . .

SW: We moved to—from the North Side of Chicago . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . to the South Side. And actually the building we lived in was right across the street from the University of Chicago Law School. Um—and you know, you could see the Law School, and it's beautiful and everything, but the building that we lived in was kind of like the eyesore of the—the block. The community wasn't like that building. That building was another slum. And—um—we get back to the winters, and then there was a—the landlord wasn't sending up any heat, and we lived on the third floor, but it didn't matter what floor you lived on. It was freezin' in there.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: The windows were thin paned. And so my mother and another neighbor who lived in the building, Mrs. Buchanan and my mother, organized a rent strike. There were six tenants in the building, and they organized the rent strike with the—with the—the tenants. And then they went to The Woodlawn Organization to back them up. They held money in escrow until—so they picketed.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: And actually WGN, a local station in New York, under the Getty archives—I think they were talking about when Martin Luther King Jr. moved to Chicago, and they thought he was gonna move into this nice luxury home and everything, and he moved into a slum.

CJ: Right. [*Laughter*] Exactly.

[00:12:25] SW: Yeah. And they were just showing what the housing conditions were for certain people. And they—there's just a picket line of The Woodlawn Organization. My mother's in it, Mrs. Buchanan is in it.

CJ: Wow.

SW: And just—it's just a little clip from Getty, but . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . they used that as—as—to show, you know . . .

CJ: That's great.

SW: . . . what the housing conditions were in Chicago for African Americans. Um . . .

CJ: That's amazing.

[00:12:52] SW: So I'm in high school now, and I think it was the second year, a friend of mine—and through The Woodlawn Organization, the University of Chicago—two students, graduate students, started this program called the Student Woodlawn Area Project. It was Ann Cook and Herb Mack. Um—I think of them fondly because they—I learned so much from them, and they were such—they are such good people. Um—it was for—the program was—I guess the grant that they got from the federal government was to tutor underprivileged children or anyone that needed it.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: Uh—and it didn't have to be in the area that I lived in, which was Woodlawn, which bordered the Hyde Park, the only integrated area in Chicago at the time. Uh—the University of Chicago was really on—partly in Woodlawn and . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . partly in Hyde Park.

CJ: Right.

SW: Um—and the program was out of—um—Ida—uh—not Ida B. Wells. It's—Ida Noyes Hall on the Midway Plaisance. And it was such a good program because of just the tutoring . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . um—which helped me academically. I didn't—I went from regular classes into honors classes.

CJ: Right.

SW: I guess as a result of the tutoring, or that's where I should have been in the first place. Um . . .

[00:14:37] CJ: I don't wanna—uh—sort of skip over that.

SW: Mm-hmm.

CJ: Because I—I know that you felt—um—or at least based on conversations that you and I've had about that that your—you had a different—in addition to sort of what was happening in terms of the tutoring but . . .

SW: Mm-hmm.

CJ: You—you began to realize how smart you were.

SW: Ye . . .

CJ: And how in—and that the teacher at least—and—an—there—you had—you had had white teachers up to a certain point.

SW: Right.

CJ: And then—and then it was a—but that was sort of a seminal time for you . . .

SW: Yes.

CJ: . . . at least based . . .

SW: Yeah. The—the . . .

CJ: . . . on our conversation.

[00:15:15] SW: The first Black teacher I had—I was in the second half of my eighth grade before I graduated from elementary school into high school. Uh—Mr. Felder. And now I'm just Miss In-the-library person. [*Laughter*] I had heard somethin' about somebody being sentenced to death row. So I'm in eighth grade, and I take out this book—uh—on death row by Caryl Chessman and read this book. And it had an effect on me as far as what I thought about capital punishment. They give you some type of aptitude test . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . to see where you are as far as reading and reading comprehension in the eighth grade. And I scored a 7.9 aptitude in reading. Mr. Felder said, "No, no, no. She's like one of my best students in this class. I have two students that are competing all the time, and she's one of the best students." They didn't adhere to that. So when I went to high school—my

high school was integrated, but they had classes that were—that taught basic English, basic courses, and then there were essential courses where you were . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . almost at grade level, but not quite at the ninth-grade level. And I was put in those classes for the first year and a half.

CJ: Mmm.

[00:16:56] SW: Um—in my sophomore year—this is before I even joined—uh—became a part of Student Woodlawn Area Project. I had a teacher—I member these teachers. You always remember the really good teachers. **Mr. Rankin**. And the way my high school was set it up is that they had teachers that taught all levels . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . grades. So every—every teacher had a basic class, an essential class, a regular class, a honors class to teach.

CJ: Right.

SW: And he was an English teacher, and he—he taught the same—uh—way he taught . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . in his regular and honors classes. And Shakespeare, William Shakespeare.

CJ: Yeah.

SW: I remember Julius Caesar, and I grasped Julius Caesar like—that Shakespeare, like it was nobody's business.

CJ: [*Laughs*] Right.

SW: And he recognized that. He says, "You know,"—out of the students that were in this class. He said, "You really don't belong in this class." And he went and saw to it that the next level—'cause we were broken—at the time Chicago school system was broken into semester programs.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

[00:18:12] SW: So the second semester, instead of me being in the—uh—essential English class, I went into a regular English class.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: And then following that, from the regular, I went into an honors English class . . .

CJ: Mm-hmm.

SW: . . . and that's where I stayed until I graduated . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . from high school. Um—so yeah, those little things like that. That was—you know, reflecting back I notice that that was—these are things that—that I felt . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . at the time that it was racism, but I—it didn't impact me that much until I went back to reflect on those times . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . and talk about, you know . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . how I was judged or misjudged or whatever. It—it—my intellect was—was judged.

[00:19:08] CJ: Right. And the—that was, as I recall, and maybe I'm getting some of this—but you also began around that time to become interested in social activism and . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: . . . and—uh—racial issues.

SW: Mm-hmm.

CJ: And you were—as I—I remember, there were times when you were like one of the youngest persons involved in that. And one thing you—you were planning—or you were so involved at one point that you—um—were thinking about going on Freedom Rides, but you were too young . . .

SW: I was too young. [*Laughs*]

CJ: . . . to get—be placed as . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: . . . one of those in the Freedom Rides. Could you talk a little bit about . . .

SW: That was what, 1964 . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . [19]65 with the Freedom Riders? Was six—no, it was earlier than that.

CJ: Yeah, it was . . .

SW: It was—yeah. It was earlier than that.

CJ: Yeah, I think it was like [19]61, [19]60.

SW: [Nineteen] sixty-one, [19]60.

CJ: I think se . . .

SW: I was too young.

CJ: Right.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:11] SW: Another milestone as far as me noticing racism was the Little Rock—the integration of the Little Rock schools. And watching that on television—I member Walter Cronkite was reporting. And I was telling my mother, I was like, "There's no white kids that go to my school. I don't see—nobody's white in my school but the teachers and everybody that work," you know.

CJ: Right.

SW: And that was what, in [19]57?

CJ: Right. It was.

SW: So there was nothin' like that. And then all during the classes I kept noticing, you know, none of these schools—I'm livin' in the North. The North is supposed to be, quote, "better than the South," but here's all this racism all around me, you know.

CJ: Right.

SW: So yeah, that was another milestone that . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . the things that I noticed. And my mother always kept up with the news, news media, and six o'clock we were right in front of—parked in front of a TV watching . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . the nightly news of—the six o'clock news.

[00:21:17] CJ: Do you think your mother's activism rubbed off and really sort of caused you to focus more intently on those issues?

SW: I think so. I think—my mother was raised by my great-grandmother, Sallie Giles . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . who was in that Helena . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: Not the Helena, the Elaine . . .

CJ: Right. We'll get to that in a little bit. Right.

SW: We'll get to that, yeah. And my mother said that her grandmother, which is my great-grandmother, was always very proactive. She had a lot—she gave my mother a lot of wisdom or taught her a lot of things when she was being raised by her. My mother was raised by my grandmother until she was like twelve or thirteen, until my—my great-grandmother—until my grandmother, who was doing domestic work, took her from her mother and said, "Well, Sara can now help me do domestic work whenever." So but my mother—I think she got her act—that sense of activism from her grandmother.

CJ: So it was passed down, yeah, to you. Yeah.

SW: My great-grandmother. Yeah. My grandmother, my mother's mother, just didn't have that.

CJ: Right.

SW: I think she was so traumatized.

CJ: Right. Annie, right? Annie.

SW: Yeah, Annie didn't have it.

[00:22:40] CJ: Right. Well, do you think this is a—are—do you want to go further in terms of areas you wanted to discuss, or would you like to go into Elaine at this point, or do you . . .

SW: Well, you know, it's—I could go further where I've [*laughs*] . . .

CJ: I'm really just inter—you know . . .

SW: . . . I saw racism in my life.

CJ: . . . that you're just . . .

SW: Well, you know, with the—with . . .

CJ: . . . those events that really've sort of driven you in your life and where you stand now, and what caused you to move so—in such a, I would say, aggressive but also inquiring way. Because your interest in Elaine, for example, caused you to grab it in such a way that a lot of people just wouldn't have done that. And I—were there other events in your life beyond your own activism—you know, you witnessed the role bef—at such a young age you couldn't even go on the Freedom Rides, and anything later that you can identify with . . .

[00:23:58] SW: Well, even before that, I watched—my cousin went to the March on Washington.

CJ: Right.

SW: That was in [19]63. I think I was thirteen, fourteen, whatever. But anyway, and I watched Dr. King, and I was just so glued to the television hearing him speak. Hearing all the speakers, but he just stood out, you know.

CJ: Right.

SW: That "I Have a Dream" speech.

CJ: Right.

SW: And it just got me more interested in doing somethin'. And they showed, you know, what was going on as far as the civil rights movement, and then the bombing, the Birmingham bombing, and the four little girls getting killed . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . shortly after that. All these things I was just noticing from the news. And even though I was so young, I wanted to be involved. My mother spoke about these things as, you know, as not being right and everything. And it's not until she organized the rent strike in—well, she had organized a rent strike a little bit before the March on Washington, so yeah. So that combined with seeing what was going on with the civil rights movement gave me a sense of wanting to get involved, you know. My mother was involved with The Woodlawn Organization, and they had different programs and things as far as activism was concerned.

CJ: Right.

[00:25:35] SW: So she was involved in that. And once I got into the Student Woodlawn Area Project—which was a tutoring thing.

CJ: Right.

SW: But it also focused on broaden the views of the children that

were being tutored into a world that was outside of poverty, you know. And . . .

CJ: Right. Right. It extended you, right?

SW: It extended me . . .

CJ: Right, right.

SW: . . . where I could see things in a different light.

CJ: Right.

SW: That I didn't feel stuck in poverty, that everything around me was—it was just that little narrow thing. It really widened my viewpoint to the extent that we went on tours. We went on tours of Chicago, looking at the architecture in Chicago. I had full access to programs at the University of Chicago. We all had an ID card. Just different things that . . .

CJ: What a great program.

[00:26:40] SW: Yeah. That really gave me a light. And then one of the other things that really put a spotlight on how things weren't equal per se—my high school was integrated, but it was only because some of the students whose parents worked at the University of Chicago or—it was—my high school was pretty good academically that—and it had a name. People like Amelia Earhart graduated from my high school.

CJ: Wow.

SW: And Steve Allen, who was a celebrity at the time, he graduated from Hyde Park High School. So there were people that . . .

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: . . . that were famous that were—had graduated from the high school I went to. And so they arranged through the Student Woodlawn Organization for us to take a day off of school and tour another high school in the Chicago suburbs, in Winnetka. So I'm goin' around in classes, and I noticed that even though I'm in a good, pretty decent high school, the—my classes were like twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty people in the class . . .

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: . . . versus at New Trier, which is in the suburb of Winnetka. There weren't any more than twenty students in the class.

CJ: Right.

[00:28:13] SW: And when you went into the labs, like the biology lab or the chemistry labs, you actually followed a student that was taking basically the same courses that you were. So I was in—I was doing chemistry at the time, and this was my junior year. And I noticed that everybody had a microscope, everybody had, you know, a chemical set up with the Bunsen burner. I was like, "Wait a minute. [*CJ laughs*] We have to share this in my high school" . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . "versus everyone having their own workstation." So I noticed that difference.

CJ: Right.

SW: And I know—now I know, but then I didn't know that it was based on the tax base, and people were wealthy in that area.

CJ: Right.

SW: So they had more resources than Chicago public schools. But I didn't notice that.

CJ: Right. Right.

[00:29:15] SW: So that was one of the things. And through the Student Woodlawn Area Project, I learned about Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee. And they were—not only the college students were being recruited for SNCC. That's the acronym.

CJ: Right.

SW: I also joined, too. And then, you know, watched—this is when the—I guess the civil rights bill hadn't been signed yet, but you know, they were training for non-violent protests . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . that type of stuff. And participated in some local boycotts in Chicago. I remember someone came to SWAP—it was a union,

the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and they asked if some of the students, along with college students, could picket certain stores because they weren't sellin' unionized goods. And I did that. We did that. I thought that was kinda cool because you get to talk to people.

CJ: Sure.

SW: And it's, "Why are you picketing?" you know, and you tell 'em what the issues were, and this is a union—it was a union thing. Which I wasn't even a part of the union, but . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . I was interested in that . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . because it was some kind of activism.

[00:30:50] CJ: And then when you graduated from high school—tell us more about your life.

SW: Well, when I graduated from high school, I went to a community college. For some reason I just felt that my SAT scores weren't high enough. I wasn't told that they were high enough to get into a university or whatever. No one, none of my counselors told me what grants were—they gave grants then—federal grants were available for me to go to college. So I didn't know that. I didn't learn that until I got into junior college then, a

community college. And while I was there, the Black Panthers had become active in that junior college and other junior colleges in the city, and they were recruiting people, too. I just never—I had friends that were in the Panther, I went to hear Fred Hampton speak . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . but I never joined the Panthers because I just—I didn't like the way that the women were treated, and I just wasn't gonna be treated that way.

CJ: Right.

SW: I ju . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: No, not at all.

CJ: Right.

[00:32:12] SW: So I had friends that were there. And when Fred Hampton was killed in [19]68—well, let me even go back to 1968 'cause that was just such a year. Dr. King was assassinated.

CJ: Right.

SW: And oh my gosh. On the South Side of Chicago they were rioting. On the West Side of Chicago they were rioting. And Mayor Richard M. Daley, Boss Hog they called him, had put out a

order for the police to shoot to kill. That was just insane.

CJ: Right.

SW: Now here I am a young adult hearing that people rioting, goin' in and—rioting and looting, you know . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . burning down stores and everything. I mean, Chicago was totally on fire when Dr. King—the South Side and the West Side, which were predominantly Black, where Blacks lived, were vandalized, looting, buildings burning.

[00:33:2] CJ: Now when did Hampton—when was Hampton killed?

SW: Fred Hampton was killed in December, I think, of 1968.

CJ: So it was something . . .

SW: That same year.

CJ: Yeah, that—it was like three months, two months before King died.

SW: No.

CJ: Right?

SW: No. He was killed later in that year.

CJ: Who, Fred?

SW: Doctor—Fred Hampton. Dr. King was assassinated in April.

CJ: Right.

SW: Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in June. And Fred Hampton

was assassinated in December, I think, of that same year . . .

CJ: Okay.

SW: . . . of [19]68.

CJ: Right. Right. So, [19]68 was a real . . .

SW: I think it was [19]68 or [19]69. It was [19]68.

CJ: Well, King was obviously [19]68 . . .

SW: Yeah, and so was Kennedy.

CJ: . . . and so was Kennedy.

SW: Yeah. I . . .

CJ: But I knew that Hampton had been—and some would say Hampton was assassinated as well.

SW: He was assassinated.

CJ: And . . .

SW: You know, the coroner report came out with . . .

CJ: Right. Right. And he was a very charismatic leader. And was—I mean, at that time I think Chicago was the center for the Black Panthers.

SW: No, I think it was still out in San Francisco.

[00:34:36] CJ: Well, my point is Hampton was . . .

SW: Yeah, but he was—Hampton made a . . .

CJ: Yeah, I mean, he was really broad . . .

SW: . . . had really—yes.

CJ: . . . had accumulated a . . .

SW: Yes. Lot of . . .

CJ: . . . lot of power for him.

SW: A following.

CJ: Right. Exactly.

[00:34:45] SW: And it wasn't only just Blacks that . . .

CJ: Right, I know.

SW: . . . were following Fred Hampton.

CJ: Right. I know.

SW: That's the really—the big thing is that he was organizing poor people.

CJ: Right.

SW: 'Cause, you know, Dr. King had wanted to have that Poor People's Campaign. He was going into neighborhoods that were—in Chicago—you know, Chicago is such a divided and seg—was such a divided and segregated city at the time. He was goin' into neighborhoods where there were poor whites and organizing . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . them to join—not necessarily join the Panthers, but join forces against the oppression of classism.

CJ: Right.

SW: You know, seeing the—really, he was very . . .

CJ: No, I know he's a very important figure. Very important figure.

SW: So you know, he was—he had to go. And he was assassinated.

CJ: Right.

SW: There's no ifs, ands, or buts about it. If somebody breaks into your home, and . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . you in the bed sleeping, and they shoot you [*laughs*] . . .

[00:35:40] CJ: Right. Well, how did all that affect you? I mean, it—you know, those three events—well, particularly King's assassination and Hampton's assassination.

SW: Well, Robert Kennedy's.

CJ: And you're—you know, I mean, you're . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: . . . and you're still a teenager, right?

[00:35:57] SW: I'm—no, I'm—when Dr. King was assassinated I was going on twenty.

CJ: Yeah.

SW: Same with Bobby.

CJ: Right.

SW: And there was just so much hope. And in between all of that, in August, there was a democratic convention.

CJ: Right. In Chicago, right? [*Laughs*]

SW: With the—in Chicago . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . with the student democratic whatever, SDS or whatever.

CJ: Yeah.

[00:36:21] SW: All of that was going on. I was gonna go down there. My mother says, "You're not gonna go down there. They" . . .

CJ: [*Laughter*] Right.

SW: "There's gonna be some trouble down there. Don't go."

CJ: Right.

SW: And I listened to what she had to say, and sure enough, it wasn't even like two hours, three hours later, you're seein' all of this craziness happen with the police beating up people with a peaceful demonstration.

CJ: Right.

SW: Now they claimed people were throwin' either rocks or bottles or whatever, but I didn't see any of that. I saw everything different where the—they were just . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . mercilessly beating people . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . you know.

[00:37:02] CJ: And so where was Sheila after that, after that event?

How did—what did you . . .

SW: I don't . . .

CJ: How did you focus your life and . . .

SW: I don't know. I was—I kinda focused my life academically. And the issue of Vietnam came up. I knew that Dr. King was talkin' about our role in Vietnam. And so I got a little involved with Vietnam, but not a lot. When Muhammad Ali's title was taken away from him, it made me focus more. Although you seein' this all—every night on the nightly news with Vietnam.

CJ: Right.

SW: And I noticed that after I graduated from high school in [19]66, a lot of the young men that were in my class, graduating class, went to Vietnam.

CJ: Right.

SW: And you would hear about this one getting killed or that one getting killed and so on and so forth. And you're like, "Whoa, there's something not right with this war."

CJ: Right, right.

[00:38:13] SW: So I got a little bit involved with Vietnam protests, but there wasn't a lot at my junior college with that. It was

more, you know, with what was going on in poverty and the programs that the Panthers wanted to get started. They actually went to my junior college and got permission to have a free breakfast program there for the children in the area. And they served breakfast out of my community college, which was unheard of.

CJ: Right.

SW: The Chicago Board of Education wasn't serving free breakfast. They had food pantries for people in need of food. So they were a resource for the people in that area, in Englewood, where those Panthers were located, and they were also located on the West Side as well.

CJ: That's actually part of the story of the Panthers that's very seldom told.

SW: It's very seldom told. Not only that, they had health clinics.

CJ: I'm not talking 'bout just in Chicago.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: I mean, they . . .

SW: All over. Nationwide.

CJ: . . . they're dealing with poor—poverty . . .

SW: Right.

CJ: . . . and free food, and that sort of thing. That . . .

SW: Healthcare, that kinda . . .

CJ: From the Black's point of view, that was significant as opposed, you know, to the media and sort of the white perspective on that.

[00:39:41] SW: Right, the way they were portraying the Black Panthers as these gun-toting . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . militant—you know.

CJ: Right.

SW: Gun-toting militia, if you wanna say. [*Laughs*]

CJ: Right

SW: The way they portrayed them was horrible. And then when you see the things that they were doing for the community, it's like, "That's not right." [*Laughs*]

CJ: Right, right.

SW: "It's not right at all."

CJ: Yeah, there was a dissonance between . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: . . . sort of what the public—certainly from the white perspective had on the Panthers versus Black perspective and what they were tr—what the Panthers we're trying to do locally in addressing the . . .

SW: Poverty.

CJ: . . . poverty issues that were occurring in California and Chicago and those sorts of things.

SW: California, Chicago, New Y—wherever.

CJ: Right, right, right, right.

SW: Yeah. Wherever they were located.

CJ: Right.

[00:40:34] SW: So yeah, all on the fringes of that, doing work as far as on the fringes of helping out and being involved, but not being a part of . . .

CJ: Right, right.

SW: . . . the group.

[00:40:49] CJ: And then how did you—where did you go from there?

SW: Well, when I went to Loyola, there wasn't much there 'cause there was very few Blacks going there, so it wasn't much.

Loyola, at that time, was known for [*laughs*] their basketball team because . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . they had won the [*laughter*] NCAA or whatever, so that's what they were known for. So when I got to Loyola, there was a—well, the Black students more or less kinda stuck together, you know, because we were just really outnumbered.

CJ: Right.

SW: It may have been a hundred of us on the North Shore campus at the time. So that basically was—everything kinda just quelled down as far as—although, I was still livin' on the South Side, and I was still kind of being—things around me that was going on in the community, bein' aware of them. So that was going on, yeah. Kinda bein' aware.

CJ: I see.

SW: But not really involved anymore 'cause I was more focused on studying.

CJ: Right, so you really focused on a lot of the academic side of things?

[00:42:03] SW: Mm-hmm. I was focused more mainly just tryin' to get out of school. [*Laughs*]

CJ: Right.

SW: But still noticing. You know, like when Kent State happened, noticing that, you know, things are not right here.

CJ: Right. Exactly.

SW: It wasn't necessarily geared towards racism, but still, you know, if a white student can get shot down, gee, what they gonna do to me? You know. [*Laughs*]

CJ: Right. Right. I'm sure that was . . .

SW: That's—that was . . .

CJ: . . . impactful.

SW: All those things are still rolling, you know.

CJ: Right, right.

[00:42:35] SW: So, no, I didn't—there was no more after that in activism. And after I graduated I got married, moved to New York, the Bronx, and basically . . .

[00:42:52] CJ: But it wasn't too much after that you and Ivor got married that you—your first—or one of your first experiences in dealing with Annie's post-traumatic stress about—wasn't—I mean, y'all made the trip down to Hot Springs.

SW: Made—we made—that was in 1973. I got married in nineteen—December of 1970.

CJ: Right.

SW: So this was in [19]73.

CJ: Oh, okay. I thought it was closer, but I'm not—I'm sorry I . . .

[00:43:21] SW: Our son, Marcus, was two. Was he two in [19]73?
He was going on two when we went to Arkansas.

CJ: And . . .

SW: And that's when I first heard about something happened.

CJ: Right.

SW: That's what she said. "Somethin' happened to me" . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . "when I was a girl. I had a premonition." That's what she says. These are her words. "I knew somethin' was gonna happen in that church. And then there was shooting, and people were getting shot in front of me." She don't know whether they died in front of me, but that was what she took—that was what she was taking in. And she said she hurled up some children that were there . . .

CJ: Wow.

SW: . . . and they got out of—through the back of the church. Whether it was a window or a door, I'm not really certain. And then she just stops at that point, and she starts crying hysterically. The trauma is so heavy on her. And this is my grandmother that—I didn't know anything about this . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . this thing. I didn't know what she was talkin' about.

CJ: So there—they—the family was Sallie, Albert, Milligan, and . . .

SW: Annie.

CJ: . . . Annie in the Hoop Spur church . . .

SW: Yes.

CJ: . . . on September the 30th . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: . . . of 1919, right? I mean . . .

SW: Nineteen nineteen, yeah.

[00:44:50] CJ: So of the—there were about a hundred people
interested . . .

SW: And then . . .

CJ: . . . or who have families as well as the actual sharecroppers . . .

SW: Right.

CJ: . . . there, so they were . . .

SW: Right, 'cause they had to bring their children.

CJ: Right.

SW: They didn't have anybody to take care of their children.

CJ: Right.

SW: So there were children—women, children—men, women, and
children in that church.

CJ: Right.

[00:45:08] SW: And what I learned about Elaine—each time that I
asked my grandmother, the same result. The same result.
She—my mother moved her up to Chicago I think in the late
[19]80s, like [19]85, [19]86, somethin' like that 'cause she got
sick, and my mother wanted to make sure that she . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . got good services and so on. This—moved her from Hot

Springs to Chicago. And whenever I would visit my mother, I would ask my grandmother, "Can you try to tell me about what you were tryin' to tell me about when you was a girl?" And she would start from, "I had a premonition." She would have this just down pat and—the same results. She would start crying. And my mother would come in, "What are you upsetting your grandmother about?" And my grandmother is just hysterics. And then I was—after she would maybe leave the room, I asked my mother, "What is that about?" And she says, "Well, your grandmother have these fits." That's how my mother described it, you know, that, "She have these fits, and she just gets—she starts the crying and screamin', and she just have these fits." I was like, "What for, and why?" Didn't understand it.

CJ: Right. But—sorry.

[00:46:32] SW: And my grandmother died in 1991. This was some years afterwards. I don't know. I was thinkin' about my grandmother, her relationship with my mother—which was not a good relationship. My mother was an only child, but they didn't have a close relationship. And I used to always attribute it to the fact that maybe because my mother was basically raised by her grandmother, my great-grandmother.

CJ: Right.

SW: I don't know. I didn't know what the issue was. And I recall that, when I was a child on the fringes of adult conversation—I could have been two, maybe three. This is in Hot Springs. I heard my great-grandmother and grandmother talkin' about somebody, some relative of mine, going to the electric chair. Which, in years later, when I knew what the electric chair was and electrocution was—that's why I took out the Caryl Chessman book [*laughs*] . . .

CJ: Right, right.

SW: . . . when I was in eighth grade. Eighth grade I'm reading this book about death row and kinda like, "Oh my gosh, this is what happens to people," you know.

CJ: Right.

SW: So yeah, that linked in with me reading that book, still not knowing why.

CJ: Right.

[00:48:00] SW: And it was after her death, and I'm thinkin' about my mother's relationship with her mother, and my mother being an only child. And my grandmother was never close to any of—I'm not gonna say any of us. The female—my female siblings, myself included—she was more closer to my brothers than she was with my sisters and I. So I was just thinkin' about that, and

I just called my mother and asked, "You know, I've been thinkin' about"—I called my grandmother Mama. "I've been thinkin' about Mama and your relationship." I said, "But can you tell me what was she always so traumatized? Why did she always go into these fits of crying? What happened? What is she tal—what was she tryin' to tell me?" And my mother says, "Oh, she's probably trying to tell you about the Elaine riot." I says, "Elaine?" And she says, "Yeah, it's pronounced Elaine." I says, "Oh, okay. Like the name, Elaine?" And she says, "Yeah." So we—it had—we had just gotten a computer, and I don't even think Google was a search engine, but I looked—put it in. And what came up was a white newspaper, the white accounts and everything. And what came to my attention, what jumped out of—'cause I'm reading what happened—not what happened, but you know, what the whites were saying. It was a conspiracy, you know.

CJ: Right.

SW: And I was like, "Oh, Nat Turner revolt," you know . . .

CJ: Right, right.

SW: . . . and I'm thinking that. And then, going along with the days, I see this name, Giles. And I know this is my grandmother's maiden name. I know that my Uncle Jim, his mai—his name is

Giles. Was Giles then. He was deceased by that time. And I see this Milligan. I call my mother, "Do you know who Milligan Giles is?" and she says, "Oh, that's your Uncle Jim." S—"I thought his name was James. Jim for—short for James." And she says, "No, his name was Milligan." I was like, "I don't even understand how that Milligan can become Jim."

CJ: Right. Well, lemme . . .

SW: But that's a whole other thing.

[00:50:33] CJ: Let me just hold for just one second on that.

Because when that came—you knew Uncle Jim early in your life, if I recall.

SW: Mm-hmm.

CJ: And you have very favorable feelings about him . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: . . . as I recall. Would you—you know, I mean, this is—when you were—first learned about Elaine and Milligan and Albert and all the rest, it was much later. Maybe you could spend a minute on how . . .

SW: Much later. I mean, I'm in my . . .

CJ: . . . how you first—how you knew Uncle Jim and what context and Hot Springs and just describe that a little bit.

[00:51:15] SW: Okay, I was a little girl when—I was a little girl. And

Uncle Jim worked at the bathhouses, overnight at the bathhouses in Hot Springs. And he was, at the time, was staying with his sister, my grandmother. And we were staying there. And I think my mother had gone to Chicago already, had already relocated. So I could've been four or five years old. And when he would come in—I guess he would sleep durin' the day. And he was just so kind. And I remember getting—my grandmother and Uncle Jim and Albert were half Native American. Their father was a full-blooded Choctaw. And so he had this wavy, silky, straight type of hair, and I would get in the bed and see his head is on the pillow. And a little girl—I would just straddle my legs [*CJ laughs*], get a comb and just start combing his hair and just, you know, playing in his hair.

CJ: Right.

SW: And my grandmother would come in, and she was like, "Get out of the bed. You're disturbing your uncle." And he would just, with his eyes half closed, he says, "Leave that child alone, Annie. She's not doing anything to me."

CJ: [*Laughs*] That's sweet.

SW: He was just sweet.

CJ: Yeah, that's very sweet.

SW: Really sweet.

CJ: Right.

SW: So those were the memories I had about him, you know.

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: That he kinda like would stop me. 'Cause my grandmother would have a switch ready to hit me or somethin'. [CJ laughs]

That's the way she was. [Laughs] So . . .

[00:52:59] CJ: Right. But Albert wasn't around at that time, was he?

SW: No, I didn't even know Albert. Albert—what I learned—I've since learned through Brian Mitchell's graduate class that he died ten years—way—ten years before I was born. So I didn't know who he was.

CJ: I see.

SW: I knew nothing about him.

CJ: I see. So he was never in Hot Springs?

SW: Never.

CJ: Right.

SW: Never, no.

[00:53:26] CJ: How do you think the family ended up in Hot Springs after the massacre and . . .

SW: I don't know.

CJ: . . . the freedom of Albert and all the rest?

SW: I don't know. I think it had to do with my grandmother whe— she did domestic work. And my great-grandmother was from Lake Providence. She had a house in Lake Providence, and my mother said that's where she was raised, in that house. Maybe she couldn't—my grandmother, maybe she couldn't find work, and so she moved to Hot Springs 'cause there was more opportunity as domestic work for her to do there. I know she married a man who I considered my grandfather. I called him Poppy. But his last name was Alfred. And the house I was born in was the house where they lived. They owned that house. So yeah. So I don't know how she got to Hot Springs. I have no clue.

CJ: Right.

[00:54:28] SW: The way I understood, at some point in time, my mother had said that her mother had lived in Little Rock, and she also had lived in New Orleans, so I don't know how Hot Springs came into play or why she went back to Arkansas after what happened . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . with Elaine in Arkansas. I don't know. So I have no how—you know, that the progression of moving.

CJ: So we really don't know. I mean, when Albert was released—

and I guess Milligan was released probably a little earlier than Albert, I think.

[00:55:01] SW: No, he was released in 1920, I think, if I'm not recall—[19]23?

CJ: But I think that's about the time that Albert was . . .

SW: Released

CJ: . . . released as well.

SW: Yeah. But he was on probation. They had him on probation.

CJ: Who, Milligan?

SW: Milligan, yeah.

CJ: Right.

SW: And he was released—he—I think from Cummins—they called it Cummins work farm . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . at the time. I don't know if it's a prison now or what. But he was released from there in the—I don't—I guess—I don't know, to a S. A. Jones of Fordyce, Arkansas, and I guess he worked there on this man's—whether it was a farm or whatever. These . . .

CJ: S. A. Jones?

SW: S. A. Jones.

[00:55:55] CJ: Don't you think that was Scipio Africanus?

SW: No, it was after Scipio Africanus Jones. Well, it could have been.

CJ: Yeah, I thought—because I think . . .

SW: Was he from Fordyce, or what?

CJ: Well, he—Tulip wasn't—well, I—that—it was well after that, but I just don't know. I just remember S. A. Jones.

SW: Jones, yeah.

CJ: And I thought that a lot of the people had in f—I mean, a lot of those had been released to Jones, and then they left.

SW: Really?

CJ: Yeah, a lot. And so that's why I thought . . .

[00:56:31] SW: Well, you enlightened me because I always wondered, "Who is this S. A. Jones?" It was signed, S. A. Jones—those old, archival papers . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . that Brian sent to me. So tha—yeah, Scipio Africanus. And it was Fordyce, Arkansas.

CJ: I—you know, it's possible that Jones had a position for—I'm [laughs] sorry, we're probably getting off a bit.

SW: Right, but that . . .

CJ: But it's an interesting point.

SW: That does make sense. It makes me feel better . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . that he was released to . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . Scipio Africanus.

CJ: And I'm not saying he was . . .

SW: If that was . . .

CJ: But I think it's a [*laughs*] big coincidence.

SW: But that was a S. A. Jones, and there's his signature, S. A.
Jones.

CJ: Right.

SW: And I guess if we could see . . .

CJ: Right, right.

SW: . . . Scipio's signature to see whether—because it just says S. A.
Jones.

[00:57:17] CJ: Right. But a lot of the prisoners were released to
him, whether it was the Elaine Twelve or whether the group
that . . .

SW: Were at Cummins.

CJ: . . . were serving time in Cummins . . .

SW: Yes.

CJ: . . . they were frequently released to him and—you know, sort of
as an agent on behalf of the prisoners. So I just—I only raise
that as a possibility.

SW: I don't know. I don't know. I have to—next time I see Brian Mitchell, I'm gonna ask him, "Who" . . .

CJ: Right, right, right.

SW: "Is this Scipio Africanus?" It makes me feel better.

CJ: Well—right.

SW: Because I was wondering "Who is S. A. Jones?" you know.

CJ: Right. Well, it's—you know, it would be a big coincidence. They had the same initials, you know. [*Laughs*] Right.

SW: Yeah, initials as Scipio.

CJ: Right.

SW: Yeah, I didn't—I never thought that. [*Laughter*] You just enlightened me, Chester.

CJ: No, no. It's in a—it might. But . . .

SW: Yeah.

[00:58:11] CJ: Now you had a certain impression about Albert, right, that you . . .

SW: I don't know. My mother—her description that he was kind of brutal. You know, I guess all of that—being raised—his father—the reason why my grandmother—my great-grandmother went to Southeastern Arkansas was to get away from her husband who physically abused her, Albert and Annie and Milligan's father. So that could—you know. When you see that type of

abuse . . .

CJ: Sure.

SW: . . . and if you're a male child, that's the—you figure that's the way you're supposed to treat women or whatever. I don't know.

CJ: Right.

SW: It's a passed-on thing.

CJ: Right. Damaged heritage—part of—part—right.

SW: Yes, damaged heritage.

CJ: Right.

[00:59:13] SW: What I read—what Brian Mitchell's students wrote about Albert after was he had relocated to Springfield, Illinois. And had a like a speakeasy or whatever during the prohibition times, and then after that he got in bed with some bad people, and he was just doing his thing.

CJ: Right.

SW: You know, I guess, you know, all of that trauma may have damaged him . . .

CJ: Sure.

SW: . . . in a way that—he went in a different direction versus Milligan . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . who became—I don't know if he was ordained or whatever,

but he became a preacher.

CJ: That's great.

SW: And you know, tried to live a, you know, pretty straight and decent life.

CJ: Did he have a church, or was it just . . .

SW: I don't know. I don't know. These are things that I learned about him after he died. He died either in [19]68 or [19]69. I think it was probably [19]69. I'm not sure. 'Cause I went to Hot Springs in [19]69, and he had just—was it then? I'm not sure. I'm kinda getting my years mixed up 'cause I didn't see him then. I know I visited—I visited my great-grandmother—was it [19]67 or [19]69? It was [19]67 that I went to Hot Springs 'cause I was—I remember I was nineteen.

[01:01:07] CJ: But you were never—were you old enough we—did Sallie ever talk about anything?

SW: No, but when I saw Sallie last—'cause I—she died in the early part of [19]68, so when I saw her in Lake Providence at her home, she was basically bedridden.

CJ: I see.

SW: And so she never said anything. I never recalled those conversation that she and my grandmother had. I just didn't know. I was just seeing my grand—my great-grandmother, who

I remember—when I was younger, when my grandmother would be out of town or spending some—doin' some domestic—she would send me and my brothers down to—and my sister to stay with her mother.

CJ: I see.

SW: My Great-grandmother Sallie.

CJ: Right.

SW: Yeah.

[01:01:57] CJ: 'Cause you know, she saw it right up close, not just in terms of the church, but the following day, the following morning, October the first. Both Milligan and Albert were shot up, and they ended up, at a certain point, in the hospital.

SW: Yeah, the army.

CJ: Right.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: And then from the hospital, they went to the jail.

SW: Jail.

CJ: But Sallie kept going back and sort of nursing their wounds occasionally.

SW: Yeah. I don't know whether it was in the hospital or the jail. This is what I hear from my mother . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . that her grandmother was taking care of her sons. They had—they were injured, and she was taking care of 'em, bathing . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . you know, the wounds and helping dress the wounds and . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . so on and so forth. So I don't know whether that was in jail. And now when I think about it, I doubt if they let them go into the jail, but whereas the military may have allowed her . . .

CJ: That's possible.

SW: . . . to come into the hospital . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . and help, you know.

CJ: It's possible.

SW: It's possible.

[01:03:06] CJ: But you know, Sallie was actually, at least according to what some—what I've read, you know, that when the Ware Six, of which Albert was one . . .

SW: Albert was part of. Yeah.

CJ: Right. That Sallie was there to greet 'im outside of the walls.

SW: Walls, yeah.

CJ: So.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: In the penitentiary in Little Rock.

[01:03:35] SW: And possibly Annie was there as well. I don't know whether my grandmother was there. I would assume that she would have been there too . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . to see her brother released. I'm not sure. The—it was 1923 was when he was released, is that correct?

CJ: Right. Mm-hmm.

SW: My mother was born in 1924.

CJ: I see.

SW: So I don't know whether she was expecting or what.

CJ: Right.

SW: At the time. And then there's a whole mystery behind my mother and her mother's relationship as an only child. I couldn't see the way—like I said, be—prior to this that maybe it was because Sallie raised my mother and whe—by the time my grandmother took her child, their relationship wasn't that close. But I can't see that at all, because as a mother—I have two children—I would do anything. Not to say that Annie wouldn't do that for my mother, but I didn't see that closeness that you

would have as mother-child relationship. It wasn't there.

[01:04:47] It was not fair. Even when my mother took her in and took care of her and everything, that closeness wasn't there. My grandmother would treat my mother—in my presence, now. I'm an adult, my mother's an adult. I'm a grandmo—my grandmother gave me more respect than she gave her own daughter.

CJ: Wow.

SW: And I brought—I pointed that out to her, and she just went into this whole crying thing. I mean, just—she said, "Oh, you started up your grandmother again." My mother's like, "Why did you say that?" I was like, "Well, it's true. You know, you as my mother—and I'm an adult now—you treat me as an adult, you treat me with respect. Your mother don't treat you with any type of respect. She thinks she can talk to you any kind of a way. You are a full-grown woman with grandchildren."

CJ: Right.

SW: "I don't understand that."

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: And that—and I was—and I think I—I didn't say it as criticism, but I just said, "Mama, you treat Sara"—I call my mother Sara.

CJ: Right.

SW: I said, "You treat Sara like she's a child. You give me more respect than you do your own daughter. This is my mother."

CJ: Right. That took a lot of courage for you to do that.

SW: And there she just went off into one of . . .

CJ: Right. But it took a lot of courage for you to do that, you know.

[01:06:14] SW: Well, you know, it was like, "This is just not right."

CJ: Right.

SW: "It's time for me to say somethin'."

CJ: Right.

SW: You know.

CJ: Right.

SW: My mother was pretty—kinda humbled and just took it.

CJ: Right.

SW: 'Cause that was her mother, and I guess that was always their relationship. But I just felt that, you know, somebody's gotta say somethin'.

CJ: Right. Let me say—I'm getting hungry, by the way. [*Laughter*]

Sarah Moore: I am too. I think it might be about time for lunch.

CJ: Okay.

SM: You guys wanna take a break?

SW: Yeah.

CJ: Yeah. Is that okay?

SW: Yeah.

CJ: All right.

SW: What is it, twelve thirty?

CJ: It's past twelve thirty.

SW: Really?

CJ: Yeah.

SW: Wow.

[Recording stopped]

[01:06:52] CJ: Okay. Well, we had been—you'd been discussing Milligan and Albert and—maybe what would be a good idea is to really just step back a moment and you spend a little time on how you in addi—you'd also talked about Annie, and those were even—or your—you knew certain aspects of Elaine, but you'd really not done, you know, sorta the study and the reading and all that.

SW: I hadn't . . .

[01:07:25] CJ: So why don't we—how—tell me the story or tell everybody the story of how did you learn about Elaine in some sort of systematic way and . . .

SW: Okay.

CJ: . . . what you went through in terms of learning more about Elaine.

SW: Well, like I—as I said before, I looked on—looked it up, the Elaine riots.

CJ: Right.

SW: And I saw the white accounts . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . newspaper, and I'm following the days. And I know that a relative of mine has been involved, Milligan. And so there wasn't much more on it. There wasn't much more on it. And periodically, I would go back and type in Elaine and see what—if there was any progress on it. And I think it was after Grif Stockley's book came out—I don't exactly know what year it was, but I had read—I guess it was the beginning of the twenty-first century, 2000 or so. I had read that there was something that was held in Arkansas to discuss Elaine. And I saw that there was an author who was there that talked about it, and that was Grif Stockley, and it referred to *Blood in Their Eyes*. I says, "Oh, I gotta get that book just to see." So I got the book, and I read it, and I went back into the index to see if there was any mention of Giles. He spelled it *J-U-I-L-E-S* versus *G-I-L-E-S*. And I see that, and I see Albert, and I see Milligan, and I go to those pages. But I'm reading the book, but I go to those pages just to see . . .

CJ: Sure, right.

SW: . . . where their names are in the book. [*Clears throat*] And after reading, you know, his account of what happened, I just put the book down. I said, "Well, that happened. Maybe, you know, that's what Mama was really so traumatized about." And I don't think there was any mention of ages, how old, but I know my grandmother said, "When I was a girl," so she had to be a teenager at least, and I don't know whether she was older than Milligan or younger than he was.

[01:10:05] CJ: And when you say Mama, you're talking about Annie, right?

SW: My gr—Annie.

CJ: Yeah, right.

SW: My grandmother, Annie.

CJ: Right.

SW: So I didn't know whether she was older or younger. So I just put it down and said, "Wow, this happened. Whoof, terrible." [*Laughter*] And that was it. But still, I just couldn't just leave it at that. I had to—'cause now here's a different—it's given me a different perspective, and I just wanted more. But there wasn't any much more out there.

CJ: Right.

[01:10:41] SW: I was working for the Health Department then, and there was this program that got started in Arkansas to help women that had breast and cervical cancer. It was called the Witness Project. And one of the leaders—it was funded by the Susan G. Komen Foundation. But one of the Black women that was—it was an educational program to get Black women to screen. Both of the women that came up to train me in the county that I worked in to—and other people and breast cancer survivors how to give their testimony, et cetera, et cetera, to get African American women to screen more.

CJ: Right.

SW: Was from ark—both of them were from Arkansas . . .

CJ: Wow.

SW: . . . but one of them was from Elaine.

CJ: Wow.

SW: And I asked her—I think her name was Charlie. I don't remember—for the life of me I can't remember what her last name was. But I asked her did she know anything about the Elaine riots. And she says, "Oh yeah, my people were in there," and I never got back to her to discuss with her what it was about and . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . how they were involved or anything. [01:11:58] I went to another thing, a Witness thing in Little Rock at University of Arkansas. They had another conference of the same Witness Project, and it was held in Little Rock. And I was down there. And I didn't really get a chance to just talk to her about it . . .

CJ: Sure.

SW: . . . to ask her any more questions of how her family was involved, was anyone killed? I didn't have—and the time wasn't there.

CJ: Right.

[01:12:29] SW: And when I got back to New York—maybe it was about five or six months later, she was gone. She'd died.

CJ: Oh my Lord.

SW: So that was a link that I could . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: You know, looking back, I could have gotten more information.

CJ: Right.

SW: What her story was, what her family history was, and try to piece together—'cause I had very little besides the fact that my two uncles were involved. And it's not until Bob Whitaker's book came out did I get a good grasp of where my family was, how important my great-grandmother was, that she was her—where

she lived was central to the meeting to form the union.

CJ: Right, right.

[01:13:26] SW: So it's not until then. And my daughter, Apryl, had called me up, and she says, "Mom, there's this book out that I'm reading about Elaine." I was like, "What book is that?" And she gave me *On the Laps of Gods*. She says, "What was your great-grandmother's name?" I said, "Sallie. Sallie Giles." She said, "Oh my goodness, she's mentioned on the very first page. And what was your uncle's?" I said, "Well, Uncle Jim was Milligan. And Uncle Albert," which I didn't know.

CJ: Right.

SW: She said, "They're on the first page as well." So . . .

CJ: [*Laughs*] Wow.

SW: . . . I hurried up and got . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . Robert Whitaker's book *On the Laps of Gods* and read that. And it just gave me such a—Grif's book was good, but it was from an academic point of view versus—and it kinda put a slant on the in—the Scipio Africanus Jones. He didn't make it seem as though he played such a major role . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . whereas Bob dug further . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . and made it obvious that Scipio was like a hero.

CJ: Right.

[01:14:42] SW: So my thoughts really changed as far as Scipio Africanus Jones.

CJ: Right.

SW: I know the NAACP had a role in the Elaine massacre, in the defense of the twelve men that were . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . on trial. But knowing what I know—and I know that Scipio, from how Bob to talked about his life—he was self-taught, he was once enslaved . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . and how he became a lawyer, and the respect that he had in the community, his activism well before the Elaine riot with the Republican . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . Party, his activism to make sure that Blacks were represented. It made me just see him in a whole different—with a different perspective. This man was working for our people, for my people.

CJ: Right.

SW: He's working for it.

CJ: Right. No, I understand.

SW: He's working for it. So . . .

CJ: Is it . . .

[01:15:45] SW: That had a profound effect on me. But even after reading that book, I didn't know what to do with that information. I just—it was information I had. I was tellin' close friends, I told my children about it, you know. Apryl already knew. And it was just somethin' that was just laying there.

CJ: Right.

SW: And so what? What do I do? This is—and I'm looking at it. I says, "Boy, the hundred years will be here before we know it." 'Cause this is like 2010 . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . [20]11? What? What do I do with this information? And it was twenty—2013. I had just read Isabel Wilkerson's book on the Great Migration. And I had just finished reading it, and the month that I had finished readin'—my sister had died the month before, and I finished reading it in July of 2013. My sister—my youngest sister died. She had cancer, but she was addicted most of her life. I mean, drug addicted, crack and I don't know what else she used, but she was—that addiction was there. And

it had a way of running through some of my siblings' lives, you know, being involved with addiction.

CJ: Right.

[01:17:22] SW: Lost my older sister to addiction. And one of the things that Isabel Wilkerson pointed out in that book—and she had these different families that she was like following. And the family in Chicago—the young people that migrated with their parents from Mississippi had a whole different work ethic, work, the way they looked at life, striving to make it versus those that were born in Chicago. And I thought about my younger sister, who was born in Chicago, I thought about another sister, who was also born in Chicago, my favorite sister. And then I thought about my older sister who was born in Hot Springs, but she's lived in Chicago from the time she was eight years old until she died.

CJ: Right.

SW: And the effects of them getting involved in drugs—I don't know how they got involved, but it took a toll on their lives. My older sister had a home. She lost her house. She lost her job. And then she got another good job, and I don't know whether she lost that job or whatever, but she died from an aneurysm, a massive aneurysm. And she wa—had still been usin' drugs,

maybe not so much as before, but yeah.

CJ: Right.

[01:19:01] SW: So I had this information. Now I've lost my older sister, and I've lost my baby sister, which my baby sister was like—I'm fourteen years older than her. So when she was born, I would more or less take care of her.

CJ: Right.

SW: At night when she would wake up, I would tell my mother, "You could just go back to sleep. I'll give her a bottle" . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . "I'll change her and so on." Whereas when I took her out in the stroller, people thought it was my baby. [*Laughter*] It's like, "It's my sister." But you know, that . . .

CJ: That's funny.

SW: We were close until after I moved . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . out of Chicago. She was—well like I said, I'm fourteen years older than her. So I don't know what the effects—but I saw, every time I would go back to Chicago, a certain slide in how my family was going.

[01:19:56] CJ: Well, let me ask you, how did—what possessed you to get in touch with Bob?

SW: Well, as I said, this book I just finished . . .

CJ: I know, but I mean, you finished the book but . . .

SW: . . . Isabel Wilkerson's book.

CJ: . . . but I'm wondering—you know, a lot of—we read a lot of books, but we don't necessarily get in touch with the author but . . .

[01:20:12] SW: Well, here it is.

CJ: Right.

SW: I'm finishing this book. I put the book on the table, and there's *On the Laps of Gods*, which I had took it to a workshop to talk about my family's involvement with Elaine.

CJ: Right.

SW: And something was just tugging at me. And I was tryin' to get an email address for Isabel Wilkerson, but I couldn't. And I Googled Bob's name, and an email came up. And I just typed in—I just says, "Well, I'm gonna send him an email." This man don't know me from Adam. And the way I phrase it is that I am the great-granddaughter of Sallie Giles. Seein' how he mentioned her at the book.

CJ: Right. Exactly.

[01:21:01] SW: This is like after midnight. Before that day was over—it was maybe—I don't know what the time was, but I

know it was well after midnight. Around six p.m. or somethin', I got an email from Bob. Even though I checked it later—from Robert Whitaker, that, "Oh my God, I—you know, you're the first African" . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . "American or descendant that has ever gotten in touch with me. This is something I've been wanting to do for so long, and blah, blah, blah." And I saw that he lived in Cambridge, and we were about to—this was in July. We were about to go to Massachusetts to visit my son, Marcus.

CJ: Right.

SW: And so, I set it up with him, and I met him actually the day after my birthday. [*Laughter*]

CJ: Oh, wow.

[01:21:52] SW: In July of 2013. I think it was probably like the twenty-eighth of July or something like that.

CJ: Right.

SW: And we had a long conversation. And he asked me would I be interested in meeting a descendant.

CJ: Right.

SW: From the other side.

CJ: Right.

SW: And I just said, "Yeah, why not?" [*CJ laughs*] And then when I got home [*laughs*]*—*after the meeting with him and getting back to New York, I thought about it. I was like, "Wait a minute. Why [*CJ laughs*] did I just say, 'Yeah, why not?' just like that" . . .

CJ: Right, right.

SW: . . . "without even questioning what I'm saying or even, you know, taking the time to think about it?"

CJ: Right.

[01:22:35] SW: And I said, "Well, whatever will be, will be." And months went by, and months went by. Said, "Well, maybe he forgot about it." And then I got an email from Bob again. And he says, "Well, I'm'a introduce you to J. Chester Johnson." And I was like, "Okay, now how am I gonna approach this?" [*CJ laughs*] And then with the introduction*—*and what I appreciated that you did is say, "Look me up. And here's an essay that I wrote that was published, and I would like you to read that." And . . .

CJ: I remember.

SW: . . . that I did and . . .

CJ: Right. Six years ago.

SW: Six years ago.

CJ: Yeah. Right, right.

SW: Six years ago.

[01:23:29] CJ: Let me ask you one thing related to this. What do you want your daughter, Apryl, and Marcus and their children to know about the massacre that you think is very meaningful for giving direction to their lives and the knowledge that they—you know, that there's some rootedness, some past that has been, you know, brought forward through this awful event? And what do you want—what do you think that can be gleaned as a positive that can give them something—well, and it may not be positive. It may—you may want to give them sort of unfettered history sort of speak.

[01:24:27] SW: Well, what I want them to really take from all of this in learning about it and seeing what happened durin' the massacre—that's history. But also take from it, you know, that their grandmother is working towards trying to not only make it known but show that there can be a relationship with someone who's a descendant on the other side. That being you.

CJ: Right, right.

SW: And not just a relationship of willy-nilly, okay, we met, I kind of helped comfort you with your white guilt . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . and that kind of thing, but really a true, meaningful relationship as you being an ally of mine. Also a friend of mine that developed out of that. And then we're working towards something that—the reconciliation of every—all of this, but trying to work towards something meaningful . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . as far as America's reconciliation with what happened with racism.

CJ: Right.

[01:25:46] SW: I just don't think it just ends with Elaine.

CJ: No. No, I agree.

SW: There's more and more talks about racism, especially with the man in the White House [*laughs*], who . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . who's the least racist of all. [*Laughter*]

CJ: Yeah. Right, right.

SW: But I think in some ways America is ready. There are more people that don't—for me, the way I look at people, there are more people and white people who don't, how would you say, buy into the racist patterns.

CJ: Right.

SW: That—he didn't start it. He didn't make it happen 'cause it's

always been there. He just uncovered it, and he used it as a political—for his own personal . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . political gain . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . to get into the White House. But there are more people who—how would you say? Like you—what I say is that there are more people that are good. Good people. And any racism that they perpetuate, it's either unconscious—you know, it's not that blatant racism, you know.

CJ: Right.

[01:27:09] SW: That blatant Alt-Right, Charlottesville, Dylann Roof type of racism.

CJ: Right, right, right.

SW: It's just all part of the society that we live in now that—how it's been set up with white supremacy being the means of consciousness of America. And that's not only white America, but Black America and Brown America. White supremacy reigns supreme.

CJ: Right.

SW: That unconscious ways that you just take white people you t—it's just a way of life living, but as Black people, it's a way of life

living, but we have all of these macro and microaggressions coming at us . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . all the time because of it.

CJ: Right.

SW: So.

[01:28:00] CJ: Well, let me relate to what you're saying because—you know, through—well, two things. I'll just make a comment about it. As we've had conversations, you know that I believe that—when we first started on our journey, we talked about racial reconciliation and all of that. But now, I don't use terms like racial [*laughs*] reconciliation, I use friendship, and love, and that. I just—I find a term like racial reconciliation doesn't really reflect the friendship and caring . . .

SW: No.

CJ: . . . that the two of us . . .

SW: No, it doesn't.

CJ: . . . have about each other. And it took great courage and commitment on your part when you forgave my grandfather for his particular role in the massacre. And you have, you know, great hope, and you've lived a very giving and loving life. Where did that source of power that you . . .

SW: Of forgiveness?

CJ: . . . have for those sorts of—you know, for that and for your love. I mean, you are a very giving and caring person. Where does that come from?

[01:29:26] SW: It comes, I guess, from my mother. A lot—my mother always said [*laughter*—she used to have a saying is that, "If you hold something against someone, if you dig a ditch for them to fall in, you may as well dig one right beside 'em [*CJ laughs*] because you gonna fall right on in with it."

CJ: Right.

SW: To hold something like revenge and that hatefulness—it doesn't do you well. I mean, there's so many other things that can cause African American, Black people, to be—to get sick from. Why hold to that—why hold a grudge? Why hold onto something that you have no control over whatsoever? You might try to get revenge, but it's not helpful. It's doing something damaging to you. And then some of the words of Dr. King, you know—it's just powerful to forgive. Powerful in the senses that when you are seeking revenge, something is being held over you. You know, you're feeding into that that is being held. When you forgive, you release all of that.

CJ: Right.

[01:30:44] SW: It enables you to kinda just—like I'm just gonna grow. Whatever this person has against me or whatever the heck, I'm gonna grow. I'm not gonna let that stifle me and make me hateful and make me revengeful because it does me no good whatsoever. And I do believe in karma.

CJ: Right.

SW: What goes around, comes around. So [*laughs*] when it comes around, I don't say, "Well, I put that on you. It was because my revenge." I just says, "Well, you made that bed."

CJ: Right.

SW: "So that's the bed you gotta lie in because you made it."

CJ: Right.

SW: And it does come around. It may not come around the same way it went out, but it does come around.

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: And that's the way I look at it.

CJ: Right.

SW: So.

[01:31:30] CJ: Well, it's fascinating. I mean, I saw it yesterday, for example. You met my cousin for the first time, and I hadn't seen him for years and years. And you grabbed him, and you held hands with him for a long time. I mean, that's—you know,

you just—there's a certain demonstration in outreach and caring that you exude, and it's . . .

SW: Well, your cousin came to see you speak, and he knew what you were speaking of, and he knew it was about his grandfather as well.

CJ: Right.

SW: The fact that he was here, the fact that he wanted to hear you speak, the fact that he gave me his hand. And I just couldn't take his hand because he's someone—he's a part of you.

CJ: Oh, right.

SW: I love you as you are, Chester.

CJ: Thank you.

SW: And I just had to embrace him to say, "Well, you're Chester's relative. I'm gonna treat you just like" . . .

CJ: [*Laughs*] Right.

SW: . . . "you're one of my relatives."

CJ: Right. Good. Well, it's beautiful and very—thank you.

SW: That's the way I feel about people. He loves you. I love you. You know.

CJ: Well, thank you. It's great giving and caring.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: So thank you. Thank you for saying that.

SW: Well, you don't have to thank me. [Laughter] That's just the way I feel, you know.

[01:32:44] CJ: Yeah. It's wonderful. And I've been a great beneficiary of that. Thank you. But what do you plan to do with what you know about Elaine? And how do you—when you go to these conferences and subjects come up, how do you use Elaine to educate other people and give instruction to people that otherwise would not know? Because there are so many of these events that haven't surfaced, and we don't know how many. I'm not talking about in Southeast Arkansas, but you know, there's a history now. I mean, there was an event in Georgia in Forsyth County where African Americans were rig—were not only lynched in that county, but they were run out of tow—and you know, they—sort of a purific . . .

SW: . . . cation.

CJ: A quote, you know, "purification" of the county.

SW: Yeah.

[01:33:44] CJ: And then Bryan Stevenson is, you know, with this program of putting tablets and markers and memorials—and Dr. Catherine Meeks doing that in Georgia, where Bryan does that in Alabama and other places. How do y—you know, I mean, there's so much going on in terms of disclosure, and there's so

much more that needs to be done.

SW: To be—right.

[01:34:18] CJ: So how, you know, how do you bring that? How do you educate people, you know, others that maybe have the same good will that you do, but how do you bring Elaine to that—to the table?

SW: I don't know. It doesn't—well, I can educate and tell people about Elaine . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . and how my family was involved and everything, but on a larger scale, I would like to see—and see there really be a conversation. Oprah has mentioned having a conversation, but it hasn't happened with people that are really prominent and well known in America, not only Black people but white people who want to work towards racial—work towards healing, work towards a reconciliation in this country because it's destroying our democracy.

CJ: Right.

SW: It has its effects no matter whether it's outright seen or it's not seen at all, but eventually, it will be the destruction of this country as we know it.

CJ: Right, right.

SW: This democracy as we know it. It'll be that. The things that are going on now with the immigrants, with the injustices on Black and Brown people, it's gonna destroy this country.

[01:35:52] CJ: Sort of brings to mind, you know, Baldwin's comments. You know, the world was destroyed by water, the fire next time. I mean, and those are your sort of . . .

SW: *The Fire Next Time*. Yeah.

CJ: You are referring to basically his book, *The Fire Next Time*.

SW: Next time. Right.

CJ: If we don't get it right at [*laughs*] some point. And don't . . .

[01:36:14] SW: Some point, it's gonna destroy us.

CJ: Right.

SW: I don't know how it's gonna destroy us, but it will destroy our democracy. It's not enough of us to—for a revolt or anything like that, and I don't think that would be helpful at all. But it will destroy us.

CJ: Right.

SW: You know, that karma thing, what goes around comes around.

CJ: Right.

SW: That may be the way it does come around.

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: It's scary to look at. It's scary for me as a grandparent to see

that. I would hate for my grandchildren to have to deal with that with all the other things that are going on, not only in this country but in this world that will have an effect on their life, such as climate change. Those things—when you talk about racism, it all goes—you know, the way I look at it, not saying racism isn't important to kinda dissolve it, but there are bigger things that are more important and life threatening to everyone on this planet.

CJ: Right.

[01:37:32] SW: Everyone on this planet. So I look at it—it's—to give them some knowledge of history, but make the world what they want it to be, not what we've made it. My generation dropped the ball somewhere. [*Laughter*]

CJ: Right.

SW: As baby boomers we dro—we—there was all the hope. We were gonna change the world. This world was gonna be different. And for a little while, it was a little bit different. We were moving in the right direction. But now? Where we are now? Mm-mm.

[01:38:06] CJ: Yeah. I know.

SW: It's . . .

CJ: Well, what would—I—if you had—you know, you were sort of all

powerful in certain respects, how would you prescribe? What would need to be done ha—sort of as events—I've, you know, I've made the point, and you've heard me talk about it, that it's a—it's not an institute. My view about how racism—we really eliminate it to the extent we can. It's a personal thing. It's not—I mean . . .

SW: It is.

CJ: I have problems believing that institutions are going to solve the problem. I'm of, you know, I'm of a belief that it comes down to personal issues, and maybe you don't agree.

SW: Well, it . . .

CJ: I'm just giving you views.

SW: With personal issues . . .

CJ: But what—if you could do anything . . .

SW: Okay.

CJ: . . . what would you do? What would your plan would be?

SW: The way I look at it, you say institutional is not—'cause in order for an institution to be broken, you've gotta have a disagreement with a lot of people to say, "This is not right."

CJ: Right.

SW: "This is not the way it's gonna be."

CJ: Right.

[01:39:24] SW: So that's where the individual making themselves more aware of racism and how it functions in this country—that's the way it's gonna be broken, the institutional a part of it, is gonna break down, if ever. But that's the way because the masses are gonna say, "No, this is not the way" . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . "things should be."

CJ: Right.

SW: "We have other things to focus on that are—that's important."

CJ: Right.

SW: So.

[01:39:55] CJ: But for that to happen, it's gotta be person to person.

SW: It's gotta be collect—person to person . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . to person to person to . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . change what you—what was invisible visib—to make it visible.

CJ: Right.

SW: To change, you know, walking around willy-nilly, "I'm in this world, and it's not affecting me, so it's no problem," to really

look at it and work on their own consciousness and their own way of making themselves aware. And I just think it's just a matter of not only educating, but actually looking, seeking out people other than yourself, people like you. Just seeking out and having some respect for another's culture, that person's ideas, just having some respect.

CJ: How do you do that?

[01:40:53] SW: Listen. Listen to what someone have to say, even if it's something that you don't necessarily agree with, listen. Try to see where they're coming from. You know, get their point of view, try to see where they're comin' from. Then in some ways, even either show some empathy or try to make them change their minds about what they thought about you as a person or your people as a person, and seeing that there are much more that we have similarly in common versus what we disagree on. It's a matter of listening and respecting.

[01:41:47] CJ: Do you think there's a gender aspect to this? [SW *laughs*] And I—this is what I'm getting to. You know, it was a lot of white folks, a lot of white men, who decided that African Americans were three-fifths of a person in the Constitution. And my own experience is that—let's talk about white folks for a moment. That it's been my experience that white women are

more inclined to at least talk about this in wa—I mean, racism and that so—right. I'm being very general. But that the hardest nut to crack in this are folks who are white men. I find that that is, for some unforeseen—DNA [*laughs*], whatever it may be, I just—my experience has been that white men are particularly hard to get into the situation that you're referring to on a person-to-person basis, willing to talk through the issues, willing to put themselves in place of another. I just—I find that—my experience has been that it's that there is a gender sort of dissonance. I'm not letting white women get off free.

SW: Yeah, but you . . .

CJ: I'm just—I'm pointing . . .

SW: You're right. It's a gender. And it's not only with white men that—when we talk about gender. There's always been this male oppression of women from the beginning of time.

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: So [*laughs*] it's just not white men. It's just men in general, but . . .

CJ: Well, I'm talking about specifically the race issue.

SW: . . . specifically when you talk about race, white men made the laws of this country.

CJ: Right.

SW: And so they made the laws, so the laws must be right.

CJ: Right. [*Laughter*]

SW: You know, because they said so.

CJ: Right.

[01:44:14] SW: Women couldn't vote . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . until they said so.

CJ: Right.

SW: And Black women, you know, that was a whole nother thing.

Black women couldn't vote, completely vote, I mean, in this country until the Voting Rights Act was signed in 1965.

CJ: Right.

SW: So yeah, men have the power. You have women that their husbands will tell them how to vote, how they should look. There's all of these things. That's men oppressing women. What you consider as beauty—and women internalize that and think that's the standard. That's the way it is. This young generation, though, is changing things. Young women, a lot of 'em I see, are changing things, as far as, "I'm not gonna feed into this male dominance. I'm equal." And so like you said, it's white men, and how do you—white women are gonna have to change to the degree of sayin', "Instead of me walking behind

you"—and which white men don't want their women to walk behind them, but they are. "I'm walking beside you, and we're gonna—we're in this thing equally."

CJ: Right.

SW: So I think white women will have a larger role in playing to change the minds of white men.

[01:45:42] CJ: That's interesting. I mean, I use—I mean, I think we're going along the same route. I—you know, if you look at history, let's say Southern racial history, and you look at the Montgomery Bus Boycott—not that white women caused the boycott to be broken and the integration to occur, but you know, they helped.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: And they helped in terms . . .

SW: They helped.

CJ: . . . of keeping the boycott goin'.

SW: That's right.

CJ: And there were a lot of official—men in official [*SW laughs*] positions that taught—that instructed white women, "Stop" . . .

SW: Stop . . .

CJ: . . . "doing what you're doing because you're" . . .

SW: Stop giving your workers rides . . .

CJ: [*Laughs*] Right.

SW: . . . because you're messin' with the—you know, you're helpin' them with the boycott.

CJ: Right.

SW: You know, whatever you're doing, just stop it.

[01:46:39] CJ: Right. And then you look at Little Rock, and when in—you know, and you had in [19]57 and [19]58—I'm talking about the one school year, you had—you know, Central was integrated, but they had to bring in the [*laughs*] 101st Airborne Division and all that kind of stuff. And then Faubus created the environment in the fall or early in [19]58–[19]59 school year to have a vote. And the vote was, you know, for the people in Little Rock, would you prefer no schools—no school, no high school, and schools not to be integrated?

SW: Integrated. Right.

CJ: Or would you prefer integrated schools?

SW: Integrated schools. [*Laughs*]

CJ: And by a two-and-a-half-to-one margin, the voters in Little Rock decided to just close the schools down.

SW: Close the schools. Right.

CJ: And then you had a group of both white and African American women, mothers and that, who worked through that year to

resolve—so that, you know, the schools were reopened.

SW: So the schools would open, right, reopen.

CJ: And so . . .

SW: Exactly.

[01:47:56] CJ: Right. Exactly. Now why does all that happen? I mean, I don't wanna—I don't mean this in terms of just being a gender issue, but there is something there.

SW: There is something there.

CJ: Right.

SW: I think when women stand up to men [*laughter*], there's gonna be a lot of resistance first. But in this country, there are definitely more women than men.

CJ: Right.

SW: It's just a matter of standing up and saying, "You know, this is just not right."

CJ: [*Laughter*] Right.

SW: "It's just not right." And we could go Hollywood and say, "Well, the woman stops cooking meals," or . . .

CJ: Right, right.

SW: That was way back in the day. Or she stops doing things that—quote, "these wifely duties," and . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . so on and so forth to hold out until there's some type of compromise with the man in their lives.

CJ: Right.

SW: So I don't know, it—we do hold a certain amount of power that we don't use as women.

CJ: Right. Right. It's just a matter—I've—I haven't—you know, there is some—there is clearly racism that's applied in women as well, in white women. And but I've just noticed over my lifetime that the response of white women to the race issue—there's—tends to be more interest in it. And they tend to be more sensitive to the concerns of African Americans. So I'm just making that point that it is a race issue.

SW: Issue.

[01:49:40] CJ: To solve the race issue, we're gonna have to see a—figure out how that it—women, white women, relate to the race issue versus—we haven't really dealt with the issue of what is the difference between white women and white men in the way in which they deal with race? Do you understand what I'm saying?

SW: I understand what you're sayin'.

CJ: Whether that's right or not, I . . .

SW: I understand what you're saying.

CJ: And there's evidence like Montgomery or Little Rock or . . .

SW: Yeah. And . . .

CJ: . . . whatever. That's examples.

[01:50:10] SW: I don't know. I just think it has a to do with—
women have a way of being more empathetic than men do.
We're not—men are raised to be tough. And if a boy shows
some type of sensitivity, then, oh, he's being a little sissy, or you
gotta toughen up.

CJ: Right.

SW: Instead of . . .

CJ: Man up.

SW: Man up or whatever.

CJ: [*Laughs*] Right. Right.

SW: Instead of looking at here's a human being who's showing some
feelings, and his feelings don't necessarily have anything to do
with his gender.

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: You know. We'll allow little girls to cry, but little boys, you gotta
wipe those tears away and show you're tough.

CJ: Right. Right. Right.

CJ: That's a disservice . . .

CJ: No, I agree.

SW: . . . to a child who have feelings. You're cutting off those feelings. So men have been raised a cut off their feelings, whereas women—we can show our feelings without anybody ever thinking . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . that something is wrong with you.

CJ: Right.

SW: If a man visibly cries, "Oh, somethin' is wrong with him, he's soft. He's not right" . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . or whatever. You—if you've even seen someone who speaks, a male that speaks, and his voice breaks, you can see him almost try to, "I gotta get myself in check."

CJ: Right.

SW: "I can't show this."

CJ: Right.

SW: "You know, I can't show that I have feelings" . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . "and tears are gonna come to my eyes."

CJ: Right.

SW: Where a woman will easily cry. Most women will.

CJ: Right.

SW: If the feelings come up, it's gonna be shown.

CJ: Right.

SW: So that all has to do with the gender—what assigned gender roles you have or whatever. It all has to do—it all works right around . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . into the isms [*laughter*], as I call it, sexism, racism, classism, the isms. It works—it has its effect on all of us.

[01:52:11] CJ: You're exactly right. Let me ask you, what do you wanna accomplish in this area for you personally, you know, for—in the near term, long term? What would you—I mean, let's—you know, when you look back over your life, what would you want to sort of say, "Okay, I wanna—you know, my next step I want to try to accomplish this in terms of race matters?"

SW: I really don't know. I would just like the ball to continue to roll towards America having that conversation of people changing, whether it's one person at a time, or it's a whole collective group. I don't know. I don't know. Sometimes it's all overwhelming, you know, to me to look at.

CJ: Right. But you meet, you know, regularly with other people and—interested in, you know, civil rights and racial issues and that sort of so—but from your—I mean, what—are there any

specific goals that you envision? I mean, is it a matter that we've gotta do something about this current environment, which is sort of recidivism [*laughs*] in certain respects? You know, you've heard me talk about—this is your interview, but [*laughs*] you've heard me talk about . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: . . . that the civil rights—a mantra in the civil rights movement of the [19]60s and [19]70s is "How long?" And you know, it's—there's been a regression . . .

SW: Regression.

CJ: . . . and you know, and it's sort of like—and that "how long" comes from Psalm 13, "How long, how long?"

SW: How long, how long?

[01:54:08] CJ: "How long, oh Lord?" But how far do we go back in time? And is it a matter of trying to stop that regression? Are there areas of interest that you think that are new areas of exploration that people ought to pursue in terms of civil rights to help in race and civil rights?

[01:54:32] SW: Well, it's in our face right now. Not only is the Black/white thing, but it's in our face with what's happening with the immigrants on the border, what's happening to those children. You know, you gotta be a cold-hearted person to see

that and say, "Oh, it's their fault."

CJ: Right.

SW: You really do.

CJ: I know you do.

SW: You can't—if you can't show some compassion of what's going on with children and how children are being held and how children are being taken away from their families—this was what happened when we were enslaved. If you can't look at that and say, "Mm-mm, this is not who we are" . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . "as Americans. This is not who we are."

CJ: Right.

[01:55:21] SW: If you follow along and say, "Well, nobody told 'em to try to come here," and not look at what causes the problems, why they didn't stay, why they're not staying in their own countries—the blood is really on our hands when it comes down to . . .

CJ: Right. I know.

SW: . . . a lot of people from Central America tryin' to get to America because durin' those times in the late [19]70s or early—when we were all in bed with these dictators and corruption started reigning supreme, we upheld that. Noriega didn't just come

overnight. What happened in El Salvador didn't happen overnight. America had its influences there, and we just looked away. Instead of saying, "Wait a minute, now, this is not gonna be good if we look long term at what the repercussions of what we're doing here in this country"—and it wasn't looked at long term. And we're responsible, then. Because who would want to leave their own place where they've been born and they've lived and they know and they love? Who would want—unless they're being threatened in some manner that they can't live and love and be.

CJ: Right.

SW: Just be . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . in that place.

CJ: Right.

[01:56:40] SW: So if you look at that and says, "Oh, well"—and even people that have immigrated here and did it, how would you say, through the channels, the proper channels they're supposed to. How can you look at that? What were you fleeing to make you immigrate here? Why did the Italians immigrate? Why did the Poles immigrate? Why did even the first settlers come to this—to these shores of America? They were trying to get away from

some type of oppression.

CJ: Right.

SW: So if you can't empathize with that because you're so many generations away, somethin' is wrong.

CJ: Yeah, I agree. Right.

SW: Something has been taught wrong for you to think that you belong.

CJ: Right.

SW: America's a country. We all belong to this earth.

[01:57:30] CJ: That's a wonderful way of putting it. It really is. Let me—ah—in addi—does your mother have the most influence on you, you think?

SW: Yeah, I can easily say yes.

CJ: Right.

SW: [*Laughs*] My mother had influence. If my mother had money, she would be—I don't know what she would've done. As far as money, she wouldn't just sit back on her heels and say, "Well, I got it, and that's it." She would be out there. She always talked—although, after she got dementia, there were some things I didn't like to hear her say. Because she would say things about, "The Mexicans are takin' all our jobs." And I was like, "You're saying that?" I said, "They're oppressed people just

like we've been oppressed. How can you say that?"

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: And she would say—and I was like, "No, that's wrong. Where did you get—why did you—what made you come up with that? You never have said anything like that before. I'd never heard you say anything. What made you change your mind?" And then she would just shut it off. But I think that was all part of her dementia as well. You know.

CJ: The narrowing of the mind, I guess.

SW: Yeah. Yeah.

CJ: That's probably part of it.

SW: Yeah. Before . . .

[01:58:53] CJ: And what do you think you took from her?

SW: Being fair. Havin' some integrity. I don't know. I di—certain things I took from my mother—my mother never trusted white people. [*Laughter*] She just never—she said, "Don't you trust them white people. They'll turn on you at any turn." And you know, it's like . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . you're telling a teenager, "Don't trust them white people."

CJ: Right.

SW: And here I am in a group that—and with the Student Woodland

Area Project, and my mother's tellin' me, "Don't trust them white people. You always, you know, be on edge 'cause they'll turn their backs on you." And then the—*[laughs]* I get into this group, and it's contrary to what my mother is telling me. So I find that I had to seek it for myself. Not to say that I haven't been betrayed by white people, but that was my really first interaction with whites on a level of me having to put trust in them.

CJ: And what is this—who—what group you're . . .

[02:00:18] SW: This is the Student Woodlawn Area Project.

CJ: Oh yeah. Okay, good.

SW: And I say white. These were two Jewish students, but they were white to me. *[Laughter]*

CJ: Right.

SW: So it was—and the students that, you know, tutored and everything—there was some—there was a big camaraderie that came out of that. There was a whole lot of trust that came out of that. I didn't feel any type of betrayal whatsoever. Even to the point of—someone was doing a documentary on the [19]63—the year of [19]63 boycott, school boycott, and they wanted—they were asking people that were involved in [19]63 with the Chicago boycott if they could identify people in the

crowd that was there. And I identified Herb Mack and Ann Cook. And I wrote an email back, and they said, "Well, somebody has already identified them." And then I wrote back and says, "Well, do you have their contact information?" 'Cause I wanted to get in touch with them to just kind of like say what a life-changing impression that they made on my life. They didn't try to make me white. They let me be me. They recognized my intelligence. And it was just a great thing. These are people I put some . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . that showed interest in me that I was interested in.

[02:02:05] When I lived in New York City when I was in law enforcement, I think I contacted them, but I had no chance of meeting up—both of them were working—meeting up with them. Since I've been back in contact, I've—and this is over the last year or so. I've talked to Anne. They had—she and her husband had founded a school in New York. And [*laughs*] I had been reading up about the school, and I says, "Wow, that school sounds the way SWAP was."

CJ: Right.

SW: You know, they're just continuing on, you know . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . with how SWAP was. You know, and . . .

CJ: SWAP being the . . .

SW: The Student Woodlawn Area Project.

CJ: Right, right, right, right.

SW: That's the acronym.

CJ: Right.

[02:02:55] SW: And I talked to Anne, and she's still in touch with some of the people that was involved in SWAP with me and—really, 'cause she was naming names. You know, sometimes you forget names, especially if they're not really close to you or anything like that. But I'm naming names, and she goes, "Yeah, I remember. I remember." Yeah.

CJ: Right. That's . . .

SW: That kind of thing.

[02:03:19] CJ: That's great to have those kinds of memories. That's terrific. You know, going back to Elaine for a moment, one of the somewhat difficult answers that I—or questions that I get—and I have my answers, but I don't know exactly whether it's true or not because I've lived more of my life in sort of the white arena. So but maybe you have a different perspective. I'm—the—I—it's hard for me to answer. Why did it take—why was the Elaine massacre sort of invisible for as long as it was? What were the reasons for that?

SW: I don't know. I think—yeah. I have no idea. I don't know. I can't speak from the white perspective, but on the Black perspective—I don't know whether it was shame. I don't know whether it was so traumatic that it was hard to talk about. You know, stories don't—sometimes stories get passed down by people, you know, who wanna make people aware of something. And then there are stories that never get heard, like family histories. My grandmother was just—she had—if I could've—if I could go resurrect my grandmother now and ask her questions, I would do that because so much died with her.

CJ: Right.

[02:05:12] SW: So there are secrets that just die . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . with people. People won't talk about it. I would've—if I had never been a little child listening to a conversation about somebody goin'—being sentenced to electric chair, it never would've ever even sparked me being interested in capital punishment. And then even going further, when I knew that—what happened in Elaine and that a uncle was sentenced. It never would've sparked that.

CJ: Right.

SW: So it had some start of creation in my mind to spark something,

to go after the truth. I don't know how or whatever, but I think it was designed already. It was already in place. [02:05:59] We can get into religion. I believe that God has already planned out our lives, how we're born, how we live. It's already been—we're put on this earth, we have free rights as far as God is concerned, but there are certain things that are planned, and it happens that way.

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: So something had to . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . guide me on that path if you wanna say that.

CJ: Right, yeah.

SW: So I don't know.

[02:06:35] CJ: I just—you know, I mean, you can always say, "Well, one of the reasons it was disguised or nondisclosed for so long"—bearing in mind, you know, I was—I grew up one county removed from it, and I never heard anything about it—is the remote location. Another thing in terms of—I can understand why white community wouldn't necessarily talk about it, but as you suggest, maybe the Black community was either intimidated or they were afraid that to the extent this becomes well known and it becomes—it could—can it repeat itself?

SW: Can it repeat itself?

CJ: Right.

SW: You know, it's funny . . .

CJ: 'Cause there are—you go ahead. Sorry.

[02:07:31] SW: My mother used to always say that white people are afraid of Black people because they think that [*laughs*] Black people are going to do to them what was done to us.

CJ: [*Laughs*] Right.

SW: Enslave. I said, "Well, it ain't enough of us, number one. And if that was the case, then you would have a whole lot more rebellions than there ever was durin' enslavement." So I don't know. It—racism is also internalized, too. And in just that whole way of internalizing that, okay, you're three-fifths of a human. This is wrong with you that—you begin to internalize that and believe that about yourself.

CJ: Right.

SW: And if you're held down by society, educationalwise or whatever, then, you know, it's something that you begin to believe.

CJ: Right.

SW: Within our own communities, we believe that about our own people.

CJ: Right.

SW: And . . .

[02:08:34] CJ: Well, there was—there have been interviews that I've seen where older African Americans—during the civil rights movement, they would be interviewed, and they would say, you know, "Before the civil rights movement started, you know, whites had everything. They made all the rules. And I sort of thought, 'Well, that's the way God wanted it to be. Otherwise, they wouldn't have all this power.'" And of course, what ultimately happened was that put them in conflict with the can—the civil rights leaders, the African American leaders of the civil rights movement. And that, you know, that is—I was—I mean, I guess, you know, there was fear of . . .

SW: Stepping out of—get . . .

CJ: . . . explaining it.

SW: Yeah.

[02:09:39] CJ: Explaining it—I mean, of expressing to others about, "This happened in Elaine, and I'm not gonna talk about it. Because it happened, maybe it should"—I mean, you know, there's . . .

SW: Right.

CJ: . . . so many questions that if you really believe that, I—but there were a lot of—interesting enough, there were a lot of

Black—older Black fam—groups of men and women who changed their views, even though they—they would be interviewed, and then they would become active participants . . .

SW: Participants.

CJ: . . . in the civil rights movement.

[02:10:17] SW: You know, it was—I don't know. It's—with the internalizing racism. When Dr. King moved to Chicago, they thought he was gonna live in this big mansion.

CJ: Right, right.

SW: And all this—they had it all set up. And, "Why does he need to come North?" You know, "Keep yourself back down South."

CJ: Right.

SW: "They still got problems." And so on and so forth. There were a lot of Black ministers who did not want him to be there. "Leave us alone." And that was a way of internalizing the oppression that was going on in Chicago, the control that the mayor had on these Black ministers and them internalizing, "Who does he think he is coming here?" And then when he moved into a slum . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . "Who does he think he is?" You know.

CJ: Right, right.

SW: All of that was—all that is just internalized oppression. It's like

you take a—you—we're supposed to be quote "fighting for the same cause", but you're taking over now? Mm-mm.

CJ: Right. Yeah.

[02:11:36] SW: So that—I don't know. So with what happened in Elaine and people not talkin' about it—it was fear behind it, especially with Black people. And I don't know what the thought process of what—when my mother would speak out or say something about what was not right in this world or whatever to my grandmother, there was a fight because she—my mo—my grandmother used to say, "Well, you just one of these uppity—" [CJ laughs] My grandmother would tell that to her only child.

CJ: Wow.

SW: That, "You just being uppity. You know, you need to know your place."

CJ: Right.

SW: Mm-mm.

[02:12:18] CJ: Wow. I guess that sort of explains it, yeah.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: Some—so.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: So that's really amazing.

SW: We can hurt ourselves by internalizing the racism.

CJ: Right.

SW: And it's something that you have to realize and fight against all the time. [02:12:38] I can give you an example. When Apryl was applying for colleges, I wanted her to apply to all these Ivy League colleges, which she did and got accepted, and she got partial scholarships. But without tellin' me, she applied to a HBC, a Historically Black College. And when she got in and she got a full presidential scholarship, I int—this is oppression, and I didn't realize that I had internalized that she would not get a good education unless she went to a white school. That's internalized oppression.

CJ: Right. Yeah, you're right.

SW: And that if she was ever thinking about grad school, she couldn't get a scholarship or whatever like she got for this HBC because it didn't mean as much as getting a scholarship from a Ivy League college, university and so on and so forth. I was proven wrong. [02:13:42] And then when I looked at it—I was just talking to her recently, and I says, "Boy, that was internalized oppression." And I didn't even realize that. I didn't even know there was such a thing, but that's what it was.

CJ: Yeah.

SW: Just to recognize that that's what it was.

CJ: Right. Right.

SW: It was somethin'—that was my internalized work—racism saying that a Black—a HBCU, a Historically Black College—you couldn't go to that university and get a equal education as you would if you were to go to Harvard or Yale or Stanford or Cornell or anywhere else.

[02:14:20] CJ: Right. Right. Right. And it goes to institutions too. I—when—I didn't know what I was going to be doing with this information about Elaine when I wrote my article. I really hadn't branched out to talk to people about it. And so I reached out to an organization that was known, or I thought it was known, for taking action that would enhance the Black perspective. And I reached out to the organization three times by email and twice by phone, and they wanted nothing to do with it.

SW: Nothing to do with it.

CJ: Nothing to do with Elaine. I mean, they didn't tell me that, but if you don't—if you send . . .

SW: If you send 'em . . .

CJ: . . . three letters . . .

SW: Right, and you don't get any response.

CJ: . . . and [*laughs*] you send two calls, you know what the response is.

[02:15:14] SW: Exactly. I gotta—I'll mention the organization. I was tryin' to get in touch with the NAACP in Little Rock. I couldn't find a viable number.

CJ: Right.

SW: And then I got in touch with the National Headquarters, and they were like, "Press this button if it's for your defense, this for that." But I could not get a body to talk to say, "I wanna put some highlight on something that happened and the NAACP was involved in." I couldn't do it.

CJ: Wow.

SW: So me as a Black person can't do that.

CJ: Right.

SW: I was totally frustrated. [*Laughter*] I mean, totally. I was like what the hell?

CJ: So that's a little bit of internaliza—that's a little bit of internalized racism itself. Right.

[02:16:04] SW: I couldn't get in touch with 'em. And I don't know how—I still don't know. I have a—there's a national number. [*CJ laughs*] It's in—somewhere I think in Baltimore. It's in Maryland.

CJ: Right.

SW: Could not get a body to say, "This is what you need to do."

CJ: Right. Right. It's fascinating.

SW: "This is how you get in touch with our chapter in Little Rock or in Arkansas or whatever."

CJ: Right.

SW: There was something for North Little Rock, and every time I'd dial that number—I didn't even get a good number. The phone either just rang or whatever. It didn't say it was . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . the National Association for the Advancement—it didn't say anything.

[02:16:42] CJ: Well, let me ask you this. On this internalized racism that you're referring to . . .

SW: Oppression.

CJ: . . . that you participated . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: You partici . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: You say you did in terms of how Apryl . . .

SW: Yeah. It's called internalized oppression.

CJ: Right.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: Okay.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: And well, how do you—how does one get away from that? By just saying—checking, saying, "I'm not going to adopt the white perspective on schools. I'm not going—this is going to be a decision that I will make each and every time. I am going to respond as I would as a Black American."

[02:17:31] SW: It's something that I think I had to work on. Self-reflection. To be able to recognize that there are ways of oppressing internalized oppression. There's a way of feeding to what you're—an oppressor—what an oppressor will say about you and you believing that about yourself. So being conscious of that, making yourself aware of that whenever it comes up, analyzing, "Is this internalized oppression, or is this just"—you know. It's a feeling that does come up. Is—but you gotta look at a feeling. Not just say, "Oh, this is just a feeling. And that's just it." But really examine that feeling to see where it comes from and what starts that feeling. What makes you feel that way? And that's it.

CJ: So you check yourself?

SW: I check myself. And I'm in a co—what do you call it? A co-counseling relationship with people. And so I will speak on it. And then I will recognize just by speaking on it and someone

listening to—attentively listening to me like we did yesterday.

CJ: Right.

SW: It's a matter of listening to—not someone commenting on what I say, but just actually listening to what I have to say. I can figure out—'cause we're all given this God-given gift of a brain, and through me talking about what I'm feeling, figure out whether it's the right feeling, I should be feeling that way, or it's something that's working—it's a oppressive feeling. And I have to work myself out of that feeling.

CJ: And is this something that, when you go to your workshops, y'all talk about this issue?

SW: Yep. It's . . .

CJ: So it's not specific to Sheila. It's . . .

[02:19:44] SW: It's specific. It's a reevaluation of my own personal feelings, but feelings about things that are going on, the oppressions of go—that are going on in the world to make me, Sheila, a better person. If I can reevaluate feelings, feelings that were put on me when I was young, if I could go in to talk about what happened to me when I was young as far as racism, then racism doesn't hold the power over me that it may have once held. I'm aware of it. I know it's there. I know how to combat it. I know how to stand up against it, but it doesn't hold

that power over me. And not to say that it isn't something that's a constant—it is a constant work. It's a constant effort for me not to be restimulated by [*laughs*] racism.

CJ: Sure.

SW: Or just to say, "Oh, that wasn't directed. Maybe I'm—I am being oversensitive. That wasn't directed at me." But for me to talk about it, someone to actively listen, and for me to, you know, talk about how I felt at that moment, whether I got angry, hurt, or whatever, and get rid of that feeling so that I can go on and be a better person . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . and see things in a clearer manner.

[02:21:14] CJ: Okay. That's interesting. That's very interesting.

Yeah. Let me go to an issue, if I may—basically going back to us. And as you know, I ascribe your forgiving my grandfather as being really very, very important to me. And as you know, I've also discussed the fact that there are certain things that white folks need to do regarding their damaged heritage and this sort of excessive veneration of the past and traditions and that sort of thing. But that I've also suggested that if we want reconciliation, racial reconciliation, that it's important—and I'm not the only one to have said this. King's said it [*laughs*] several

times. It's important for African Americans to be willing to forgive their white counterparts for the damaged heritage that they've—that the whites have sort of incorporated into their lives. And as I've referred to it, you know, it's as habit forming as mother's milk. I mean . . .

SW: Oh yeah. [*Laughter*]

CJ: And so—but you think—you—and you've—you know, you and I've—and I've written about it, and I've talked about it. Do you think it's too much to ask African Americans to—I mean, it wasn't so—it wasn't too much for King to ask, but is it too much to ask African Americans to forgive this damaged heritage or elements of that damaged heritage that whites carry?

[02:23:12] SW: I don't know. I can only speak for myself. I don't think it's too much. And I think to a degree that African Americans are forgiving in a lot of ways. You know, the families who were—of the people that were killed in that church in Charleston by Dylann Roof . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . they forgave him.

CJ: I know.

SW: And whether it had a immediate impact or whether it would have a long-term impact on him—but the longer I think he stays in

jail, the longer he has to reflect on what he did.

CJ: Right, right.

SW: I think it will have an impact. Forgiveness is powerful. It's more powerful than any weapon that you could hold. It's powerful.

CJ: It is. It definitely is.

[02:24:12] SW: You know, and someone that's done something wrong, and you say, "I forgive you"—I don't know. It gives him pause, I think, to—it should have given him pause.

CJ: Right.

SW: But it may not 'cause he was so young. But he'll have time to think about it . . .

CJ: That's true.

SW: . . . and have that self reflection. I think about Timothy—was it Timothy McVeigh that was executed?

CJ: Yes.

SW: For the Oklahoma bombing.

CJ: Right.

[02:24:40] SW: I was totally against it. I said, "He needs to stay in jail and think about what he did."

CJ: Right.

SW: Eventually, unless he is just inherently evil, and I don't believe anybody born on this earth is born inherently evil . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . he will have a change of mind.

CJ: Right. No, I agree. And forgiveness, at least speaking personally—and you forgave Lonnie, which was very important to me. It allows a fresh air and an opportunity that otherwise wouldn't exist. And it creates a level of humanity in an area—racism is far from being human. I mean, you know, I—we aren't . . .

SW: Yeah.

CJ: . . . born being racist.

SW: No.

CJ: And so it's—in so many ways it is an inhuman aspect of . . .

SW: Of being human.

CJ: . . . a personality.

SW: Yeah.

CJ: Yeah. It is.

SW: It is inhuman.

CJ: It is. And so it is a human quality that allows for one to become more human. I'm talking about the recipient of it. And so I believe in it.

[02:26:03] SW: It's a pattern that should be broken.

CJ: Yeah.

SW: You know, we—sometimes we look at patterns, if you just doing self examination. Patterns become a part of you, and you just don't want to break that because you know if you break that pattern, you might die. [*CJ laughs*] You feel that way.

CJ: I know. I know.

[02:26:23] SW: But when you start working through breaking that pattern, you find that there's a certain amount of freedom there.

CJ: Right.

SW: That you d—that pattern was holding you down, and tryin' to get rid of that pattern allows you to be more free and open.

CJ: Right.

SW: So it's like all of us were born with the same God-given qualities to be loving, to be zestful, to be intelligent, to be wise. All of us have that capacity . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: . . . as human beings. It's all the outside stuff that fo—make us form these patterns that just becomes like wearing your own skin. Like if you take your skin off or something happens to you—it's a—it becomes a part of you where you, as I say, you feel like you just gonna perish if you have to get rid of it.

CJ: Right.

SW: "I'm gonna die [*CJ laughs*] because this is a part of me."

CJ: Right.

SW: And that doesn't necessarily happen because when you start recognizing how a pattern has control of you and you not having control of yourself, your own mind . . .

CJ: Right.

SW: But you have the capacity to break any pattern if you continue to work on it.

[02:27:42] CJ: Right. And forgiveness does create that new . . .

SW: That space.

CJ: . . . that novel way of looking at yourself.

SW: That's it.

CJ: Listen, I didn't realize it. It's past three o'clock.

SW: Oh! We gotta go.

CJ: And that, so . . .

SW: We gotta go.

SM: I was just about to break in. Is there anything else you wanna say just to kind wrap it up, or do you want to end it where—right here?

CJ: Well, I would say, you know, Sheila, you know, I love you, as you know. [*Laughs*] And we've had many conversations . . .

SW: Yes.

CJ: . . . and every one is always better than the . . .

SW: Than the other ones.

CJ: . . . previous ones.

SW: Yeah. We always do. [*Laughter*]

CJ: And so I'm just glad we were able to have this, and . . .

SW: Oh. Yeah.

CJ: . . . your insights are always valuable.

[02:28:21] SW: I was telling someone—I says, "When Chester and I get to talking, we're just not delving in philosophical. We are really going into feelings and what we feel" . . .

CJ: Right. That's very—right.

SW: . . . "how we feel, how we feel about each other, how we feel about what's going on in the world."

CJ: Right.

SW: And I really appreciate that about you.

CJ: Thank you. Same here.

SW: I do.

CJ: God bless.

[End of interview 02:28:42]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]