

Transcript – Elizabeth Jackson [Phillips], 1945

Narrator: Elizabeth Jackson [Phillips]

Interviewer: Dorcey Baker

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Track 1

Dorcey Baker: This is Dorcey Baker. I'm class of '78, and I'm interviewing Elizabeth Jackson Phillips. And we're at Elizabeth's home on Joliette Place in Detroit, Michigan. And today is October 30, 1987. I'm going to point this towards you because my questions really don't matter; they're just to prompt you. I'd like to just start with a little biographical information and ask you to tell me a little bit about your family background; who your parents were, where you grew up.

Elizabeth Jackson Phillips: I grew up in Providence, Rhode Island, and my father was a dentist. He was one of two black dentists in the state of Rhode Island. My father was a very active community and civic leader. He brought the Urban League to Providence. He was active in establishing the NAACP. He was active [00:01:00] in the New England Dental Association, he was active in the New England Baptists. He was superintendent of the Sunday School. He was church treasurer and etc., etc., etc.

DB: My goodness.

EJP: You know, I've got a number of plaques. In fact, my father was an officer of the National Tennis Association. These were in the days of – well started in the late '20s and '30s when blacks were not allowed to compete in tennis tournaments, you know, the regular tournaments. So, black people – of course we were called “colored” then, Negroes – we had our own circuit and as a result of his interest – the whole family's interest in tennis, I got to visit most black colleges because the tournaments were held the third year of August – I mean, the third week of August. And then – [00:02:00] believe it or not – let me say that again. In the '30s, we had a little [Rhody?] tennis club – we had a private tennis club, a private country club, in Riverside, Rhode

Island. We had bought the property and improved the grounds. Later that was lost, but it was a joint effort. I didn't – not until years later when I was out of place did I find that it was unusual for black people to have country clubs.

DB: But for you it was a part of life. That's great. What about your mother?

EJP: My mother was about 12 years younger than my father and she was a housewife. She had high school and training – education, and then she had special training as a dental hygienist. She didn't work. After all, she was Dr. Jackson's wife you know.

DB: Yes, that's right.

EJP: In that generation. [00:03:00] And she was not the community activist that my father was. Somebody had to stay home. She was a very pretty woman; very attractive, very vivacious. They balanced each other.

DB: Did you have brothers and sisters?

EJP: I had one brother who was 14 months younger than I, and he too became a dentist. In fact, the two black dentists, each of their sons became dentists. Dr. Carter, and then there's a Dr. Carter, Jr. who is still practicing in Rhode Island. And my brother – my brother died in 1976 with a massive heart attack. Very suddenly. He was only – he'd just turned 50.

DB: Oh my goodness. That's terrible.

EJP: Then my mother decided to come here [00:04:00] and live with me.

DB: Yet another tale, right? Was it assumed when you were growing up that you would attend college?

EJP: Of course. My father attended college. My aunts and uncles attended college. I had one uncle who was a doctor, one uncle who – no, two uncles who were doctors, one who was a pharmacist, two aunts who were teachers, another one who was a nurse. My father graduated from Howard University Dental School in the class of 1910.

DB: So, sounds like education has been important in your family for a long time.

EJP: Mm-hm.

DB: So, it sounds like it didn't matter in your family that you were female; you were also expected to go to college?

EJP: Mm-hm. Well actually, in terms of my family roots, members of my family came [00:05:00] to Rhode Island in 1851 before the Civil War, and that's been documented in the history of Rhode Island, in the settlement of blacks. It's not something I made up. (laughter)

DB: No, of course not. Were there any specific expectations from your family about what you would do with your education that you remember?

EJP: My father was very clear. He felt I should go to college, get a bachelor's, get a master's and a PhD, and then when I got my PhD then I could think about getting married. Really. That's what he thought. Not only think about getting married, begin to socialize; he didn't even want me to date until I got a PhD. My mother told him that was unrealistic, but that's how he felt about it.

DB: That's great. So then you obviously ended up attending Pembroke. Was [00:06:00] that one of a number of schools that you were considering or was that the main school that you were considering, and how did you end up making that choice?

EJP: I didn't make the choice. My father made the choice. I did not want to go to Brown University. We lived on Prospect and Halsey Street, down the hill from the college. And I did

not want to run up the hill to Brown. And my father said, you can go to any college or university you like, but I'm only paying tuition at Brown.

DB: Do you know why he felt that way?

EJP: Yes. He very much wanted me to be a graduate of an Ivy League school. He wanted me to be a graduate of a school that had a fine academic record and he knew I would I get a quality education. He knew that it was important that my undergraduate background be strong because I was going to go on to graduate work. And I would not be socializing at Brown because who would there be to socialize with? [00:07:00] (laughter)

DB: So you started attending in 1941 – in the fall of 1941?

EJP: Mm-hm.

DB: What can you remember about your freshman year?

EJP: Yes, I can remember it very vividly as the only black coed in the college. I was always sitting on some platform with the dean – Dean Morriss – all the professors knew my name. They didn't know the rest of them but they knew my name. And they had a custom at Brown at that time; on Sunday afternoon, various and sundry professors would give tea. They would give teas and they would invite you to their home for tea and discussion and intellectual stimulation. And there were some of my peers were there two years and didn't get [00:08:00] invited to one tea and I was invited all the time. You know, I really was a token in the sense that, well if you're the only one in school you have such a high degree of visibility. That becomes a rather awesome burden for a teenager. But well, we lived – I lived all my life in a white neighborhood. We were the only black family. This was my life experience until I left Providence. In fact, when I got to graduate school, I had a National Urban League fellowship and they decided I wasn't black enough in terms of my experience, and they made me take an extra placement in Halstead, Pennsylvania – which is a steel mill town – in the black community so I could become acculturated.

DB: Oh my goodness.

EJP: And they said they would withhold the scholarship if I didn't do it.

DB: That's incredible. [00:09:00] That sounds like a great story for further on in the discussion, too. You mentioned to me on the phone when we were setting up our appointment, you were originally going to live on campus – I think this was your freshman year – but ended up –

EJP: It was the sophomore year.

DB: Oh, sophomore year. OK.

EJP: Well not for the whole year. My parents thought it would be nice if I spent a semester on campus, so we made the arrangements. What are those two halls? Andrews and Metcalf?

DB: Yes.

EJP: Was in one of them. I did – as you stop down the hill, the one nearest to Brown Street. I packed my little bag and off I went. I have no sisters. I ain't never shared a bedroom. Didn't like sharing a bedroom. I didn't [00:10:00] like a bathroom with 20 girls all combing their hair. What really got me when I got a hair in my toothpaste. I didn't like running around in your underwear all over the dorm. And what I hated was going to the field house and having to have a common shower with no shower curtain. I was absolutely appalled. So I would put on my clothes and go home and take my shower. They really laughed at me, but I didn't – I really did not enjoy – I never went to boarding school – I didn't really enjoy being with all those girls. And I did not enjoy people dropping in my room. And they decided, you know, I was a square so the smoking and the little drinking, as soon as I showed up they'd hide it.

And I was very – that made me very uncomfortable, and there were coeds who were – you know, classmates that were – when I say [00:11:00] classmates, they were fellow students – who were very uncomfortable being with a quote non-white person – and you can sense that.

You know, this one girl – I'll never forget her – we would be walking – we had the same major and we'd be walking a group from class to class, and if she found herself next to me she would go around the back of the group and get to the other end. She did that for four years.

DB: Oh my goodness.

EJP: And I saw her at the reunion and she was so affable and I thought, for four years you avoided me. You made it so obvious that you couldn't really stand being in my company, and I looked at her and she chatted on and on and on, and all that memory came back. And they were, you know, there were many girls that came to Brown that came from communities where the only blacks they knew were domestics. They just [00:12:00] were not – some of them didn't have any experience.

Let me tell you what I did the freshman week. You know, all of the activities and they have the freshman dance. And my parents didn't want me to attend, and I said you paid for it, and I have a brand-new bright red corduroy dress and new shoes and I said, I'm going. I love to dance. Well when I showed up they pushed this little blonde fellow with blue eyes and pink cheeks at me, and he looked horrified. I thought, oh my God, what am I going to do with him? And we had a few stiff words and the senior fellows, you know, they were very sensitive of the situation. But see, I didn't know they were seniors. I was on the floor dancing away and one would finish and the next would come. I had the best time. I came home and I told my parents, "Now you were wrong. I just – me feet were danced off. I just had the best time and the fellows [00:13:00] were such fun," and then later I found out that those were – that was the senior committee and I didn't dance with one freshman. (laughter) But they said that if I had courage enough to come and guts enough to come, then they weren't going to let me sit by the wall. I thought that was so sweet. But I didn't know it. How did I know they were seniors?

DB: That's right.

EJP: My parents paid for it and I was going to take in everything.

DB: Sure. That's right. Were there any black boys, men, in the class that entered with you?

EJP: No.

DB: No.

EJP: There was one fellow, Charlie Bentley, who was a big football star. I had known him all my life, we were in the same social circles. He was a freshman. And there was Earl Fisher, who was a senior. So Earl graduated by the end of my freshman year, and Charlie was drafted into service. Then they had the [00:14:00] V-12s and meteorologists. You know, they had a few in the military. Training, but you labor on such strict schedules. Lock-step. Then when I was a senior, there – the [Riley?] girl. I've forgotten what her first name is. She was a freshman and I was her senior sister. She was from Providence. I knew her. Her mother and my mother were friends. Her grandmother and my grandmother were friends; that kind of thing. The population in the – the black population in Rhode Island is a pretty old population and people were friends for several generations, a lot of intermarriage, too. She didn't do well scholastically so she dropped out. I mean, she was dropped at the end of her freshman year, but I had graduated.

Then the other experience was a mulatto [00:15:00] girl, Ella Bagley. She was older and she had – she would work awhile and save her money and then come back and go a year, and then she'd dropped out, so that she was – she graduated with me but she was several classes – I mean, she was several years older. She was a mulatto. She lived in a small town in Connecticut, and her father had married a German woman during World War I. She was visibly non-white. She had keen features. She had very, very crinkly hair. We were both sociology/psychology majors. I had classes with her, but she never spoke to me the whole time she was there. Never spoke. I greeted her, I tried to be friends. [00:16:00] In fact, the deans called me in and said she was unhappy and isolated, and could I reach out to her. I tried but I was completely rebuffed.

DB: Sounds like perhaps she didn't socialize with anyone at all.

EJP: She didn't really, but not with anybody who was non-white. The one Pembroke – she graduated; Hope Smith – but she was friendly to her, it looked as if she were white. You would have to be told that she was not white. That was the only person she was friendly with.

DB: Interesting.

EJP: I thought, you know, that was her loss.

DB: You bet. So then for most of your three and a half years at college – because you graduated in February of 1945 – you lived at home there with your family, is that right?

EJP: Mm-hm. [00:17:00] That wasn't very exciting.

DB: If I remember some of my background about the college correctly, there were actually a fair number of students who were from Providence and lived at home during those years.

EJP: The city girls, they called us, and we had our own little group, and we had our own little lounge. But you were always made to feel that it was a second-class citizenship. At least I felt that way about it. I expressed that to my parents and they said well, you can stay in the dorm for a while. Some of the city girls did do that. Maybe they didn't stay the whole time, but my poor parents lost their money. I came home to bathe, I came home to eat, I came home to get away from all that chatter and noise. I think if I had ever gone to boarding school - I had gone to camp, but you know, camp is a short [00:18:00] term thing - if I had had sisters I might have had more tolerance, but I didn't really attempt to adjust. I have to be honest. I can't say that people were unkind or anything like that.

DB: Good to hear. There are a couple of other things I'd like to ask about, about your years at Pembroke, mainly about courses you took and professors you might remember, and maybe any influence that certain professors might have had on you, and also about the dean. So, whichever you'd like to do first.

EJP: Well Dean Morriss – my father tangled with her in the first semester freshman year. I had signed up to do babysitting for faculty members. I had never done any babysitting before. And I went on my first assignment. Well, they turned the heat down and I caught a cold. They did not



come home on time. They were an hour and a half late. My father had to send me to the doctor and he called [00:19:00] Dean Morriss and said, “You strike her name off the register. She is never going to babysit for anyone else at Brown.” Then he proceeded to say, “The two or three dollars she earned, I had to pay a doctor, I had to buy medication, and she was sick for a week. And people were irresponsible, they didn’t come home when they said they weren’t going to come home, and we had to sit up and worry.” (laughs)

DB: So Dean Morriss knew not to mess with your dad, I’m sure.

EJP: Well when I applied for graduate school, I was Phi Beta Kappa, magna cum laude. I didn’t have any academic problems. But I really was kind of immature – socially immature. And she told my father she would not send a letter of recommendation to any graduate school for me unless he allowed me to live away from home a year and be on my [00:20:00] own. She said, “She can handle any program academically, but I just feel that you have overprotected her.” And that is the only way I got away from home.

So I sent to Philadelphia and worked for the American Friends Service Committee for nine months, and then she wrote the letter of recommendation.

DB: So it sounds like she knew you fairly well.

EJP: Oh, yes.

DB: What kinds of interactions did you have with her?

EJP: Well, I was a member of the Question Club. I don’t think they have that anymore.

DB: No. What was it?

EJP: It was the presidents of all the major organizations. You had a little pin. A little gold question mark with seed pearls, and I was president of the YWCA. Now at that time, when you

paid your tuition you had to pay a membership fee for the Y. I [00:21:00] don't think they have that anymore.

DB: No.

EJP: But as a result of the compulsory payment, we had lots of money because you know, you got an automatic dues payment. And I was responsible – we were responsible - for setting up the volunteer program for community service, and that was fun. And it's right down my line; social work. Then we were also responsible for seeing that every coed was introduced into a religious community if she desired. So I went to reformed synagogues and conservative and off the docks and the high temples. You name it, I've been there. And that was really – you know, you couldn't just give them a name and an address; you had to take them, go in person, escort them and sit through the service.

DB: That's very interesting [00:22:00].

EJP: And if they didn't feel comfortable after a first time, you had to go a second time.

DB: Until they felt enough of a connection with that –

EJP: That group. Mm-hm.

DB: – that congregation? That is very interesting indeed. Did the Question Club have projects or discussions of its own?

EJP: Oh yes. We had a cabinet and we talked about the activities and expanding the horizons and of course there was the war effort. You know, there was a lot going on, but you know, I was a big woman on campus. But I started out just a member, then I became secretary and vice president, and then I was elected president.

DB: What were some of the special things in terms of war related efforts that were going on during those years?

EJP: Well there was the Red Cross. The bandage rolling. There was the knitting and there was the blood bank. There [00:23:00] was the USO and that was fun. But you know, at that time the USO was segregated. We had a black USO and we had a white USO. And as a PR effort, we were – we, the black, we were the John Hope Junior Leaguers, and we were invited to the white USO, all beautifully dressed, and we sat against the wall the whole evening. And the *Providence Journal* took pictures. We were there and we refused to go back.

DB: Oh my goodness. So was the USO a social event? You have to help me because I don't really know anything –

EJP: That's not your generation.

DB: No.

EJP: What it was, it was a facility where servicemen could come – the Quonset Naval Air Station, was the second largest air station in the country. There were thousands of servicemen. [00:24:00] Then there was the Newport Naval College. There was Seabee bases. We had thousands – I mean, you didn't even have to be attractive. I mean, if you were walking and ambulatory you would find a boyfriend. And the John Hope Center was an organization that the Friends Service Committee started when I was about 12 years old. I was sent to the weekend work camp at 12, whitewashing a church basement to start a community center on the east side for colored folks. And out of that grew the John Hope Community Center. And then the director of the community center at the time when the World War II came along, she organized a group of us into [00:25:00] the John Hope Junior League, and we were quote “the prominent families,” relatively speaking. And we sponsored the programs for the servicemen. First it was just weekends and later on it was full time. You know we had ping-pong and cards and checkers and reading rooms and pool tables, and then of course dancing and sometimes group singing.

And you had duty days. You had to come on your assigned date. You had to come one day during the week and at least one day on the weekend. You couldn't just show up on the weekend for the party and the dances. You had to come on a Monday or Tuesday, Wednesday to be there. Some servicemen just wanted to talk or play cards. We programmed that.

DB: So that sounds like that was a John [00:26:00] Hope thing, not necessarily connected –

EJP: There is a John Hope Community Center.

DB: Oh yes. I worked for the United Way and we gave them tons of money.

EJP: Well [Paris Turret?], who had been in the service, he was the first full time director.

DB: Yes, that's right. I remember that name.

EJP: He ran the program for the USO.

DB: I guess what I was leading to, was there a connection between the John Hope Junior League and Pembroke, or was it a community kind of action?

EJP: How could there be a connection to Pembroke? I was the only one that went to Pembroke.

DB: That's right. OK.

EJP: There wasn't anybody else who went there.

DB: So this was an outside activity of your own that you pursued during that time?

EJP: But you see, in terms of the USO, but in terms of the programs for children, there were Pembroke's who were volunteers that worked with children's groups and youth groups and that

kind of thing. But the USO wasn't a Pembroke activity. I was responsible for getting volunteers [00:27:00] to work with the arts and crafts group and that kind of stuff. And for other centers.

DB: What about professors?

EJP: Well one professor that I'll remember as long as I live was Professor [Buckley?], and he was a – he headed the sociology department in those years. And when it was time to declare for a major, he called my parents and he interviewed the parents, and he said – he asked my parents, “Are you planning to send her to graduate school? Because if you're not I will not approve the major. There's nothing you can do with a bachelor's in sociology.”

DB: That's very interesting.

EJP: And my father says, “Why of course. I know you can do nothing with a baccalaureate.”

DB: That's very interesting.

EJP: I don't know if he did that with everybody, but he did that with my parents and [00:28:00] with me. There was a psychology professor I detested. A little hunchbacked man, and he taught experimental psychology classes and labs. And you know, you have to be a minority person and be kind of paranoid if you're able to sense when people are repulsed by your race or ethnic background. And I knew that he was uncomfortable with me and I was extremely uncomfortable with him. I didn't like working with those damned white mice, either.

DB: That's true.

EJP: Can't think of his name. I'd have to look at my yearbook. I [00:29:00] had a very charming German instructor who held cocktail parties for us. You know, it's been so long. I can't remember all the names, but I would say that I felt I had very fine instructors. The economic instructor, or political science, that I felt that these were people who had command of their field who knew how to teach. I felt I got a first class – I know I got a first-class education. I have

never, never complained about the quality of the education. I really can't complain about the social life because with all the servicemen, my goodness I was so busy. But my family, because I was in college, they did limit – I could not date every night. One night of the weekend, and my duty [00:30:00] night, and that was it.

DB: That's right. Let's see. Did you feel encouragement from your professors for pursuing graduate study? Of course you've mentioned that –

EJP: Well I was in the honors program and I did independent study and I got a lot of support and help and that was very exciting. Very, very exciting. I wish I could remember better – I've been to too many schools. I gave you the names of where I got degrees; well I went to the University of Pennsylvania, I went to a course to the University of Chicago, you name it I've taken courses. I've had so many instructors over the years, but Dr. Buckley I will never forget.

DB: Maybe that takes care of your Pembroke years. You've already mentioned [00:31:00] that, at Dean Morriss's urging, your next year was spent in Philadelphia.

EJP: With the American Friends Service Committee. My father probably would have never let me leave home before I entered graduate school.

DB: Did you appreciate her intervention there? [00:31:47]

Track 2

EJP: We of course – you didn't just go alone and unsponsored. My father had classmates in Philadelphia and we had letters of introduction to the proper people, and my father took me to Philadelphia and my mother accompanied him. And where I stayed, with [Mrs. Mudgett?], who was a doctor's widow. They inspected her home and checked out her references, and they left me with her. Then my father's classmates and friends they had in Philadelphia, they periodically got in touch with me and had me to dinner to check out how I was doing and so on.

DB: So he let you go but he made sure he knew what was up?

EJP: Then, when I went to the University of Pittsburgh. [00:01:00] I got – at that time there were two National Urban League fellowships; one to Columbia and one to the University of Pittsburgh. So, I had applied at Columbia and I had been accepted there. The girl from Pittsburgh had been accepted to the University of Pittsburgh and had been accepted there. Neither one of us had applied to the other place. The National Urban League gave me the Pittsburgh scholarship and gave her the Columbia scholarship.

DB: Did you ever figure out why?

EJP: I don't know whether it was an error or what, but it was the best thing that could have happened to me because I have loads of relatives on both sides of the family who were going to monitor my two years of graduate school to see that I studied, that I met the appropriate people, that I didn't fall into evil ways. It would have just been a continuation of my experience living at home with my family with only more people being involved. [00:02:00] See they didn't have all these connections in Pittsburgh; you know, uncivilized, steel town Pittsburgh. But we proceeded to Pittsburgh. I was the only student in graduate school whose mother brought her to graduate school. Yes, she did. She stayed for a week. She monitored everything; where I lived – and of course, where I lived again was through letters of introduction, proper references. There was a minister of a Baptist church who had done his student pastoring in Providence. She put me in the hands of Reverend [Fogey?] and commended me to his care. She marched up to the university and inspected that.

DB: Did you feel conspicuous? (laughs)

EJP: Oh my God, they never [00:03:00] got through talking about me. And we roomed with this woman. There was another student, she was an art student, but she didn't allow us to cook or eat there. So my mother inspected all the neighboring restaurants. And I thought to myself, if she doesn't go home I'll scream. Then she went back and made a report to my father. I don't think, if you have not had an experience with a middle class black girl and seen the over protection,

almost smothering. I remember there was a darling little blonde girl that came to (inaudible) with her mother. And she was blushing, and I interviewed her. I said, “Sweetheart, don’t feel badly. My mother did the same thing to me.” (laughter) I said, “You are not alone.” She says [00:04:00] nobody else’s mother is here. I said, “I know.”

DB: That’s exactly what it was like.

EJP: That’s exactly what it was like. Oh God. You know, people don’t do that; letters of introduction and all of that.

DB: That was what he wanted.

EJP: That’s the way things were conducted. You had your calling cards and your visiting days and your at home days. (groan)

DB: So what did graduate school turn out to be like after you mother went home?

EJP: I ran wild. (laughter) This was my first – see, Philadelphia was no test because there was too much oversight to it, but with the field placement you had late hours working at the community center and if you knew what that school did. They had a split [00:05:00] placement the first year; half casework and half group work. And I was the big district office of Allegheny County. I trotted up there every – two times a week with my little suit and my little white gloves and my little hat, and my little black notebook. And I thought, this is the strangest neighborhood. People have such odd colored shades. And I had a family who lived on the third floor of a large house and I went to see them every Monday morning at nine o’clock. The police were always there. They asked for my identification. They saw my little notebook and they let me get up to the third floor. Finally after a while I said to the one of the regular staff, I really can’t understand those people. The police are there every Monday. You’d think they could get along better. And do you know at nine o’clock those women weren’t dressed? They were in their nightgowns and their bathrobes. They fell out. Rolled on the [00:06:00] floor. It was a whorehouse and I didn’t even know it.



DB: Oh my goodness.

EJP: The family lived on the third floor of a whorehouse.

DB: Oh my goodness.

EJP: And my clients – my caseload was in a red-light district.

DB: No wonder they all had funny colored shades.

EJP: That was a sexual specialty. I've never been in a red-light district. When I found out, I didn't laugh. I was indignant. I said, how dare they put a nice girl like me in a red-light district? But I did have sense enough not to call my father because he would have been on the next plane. I would have been yanked out of that school so fast.

DB: That's incredible.

EJP: The red-light district. Been into a whorehouse and never even knew it.

DB: That's incredible.

EJP: But the regular staff, they thought I was so funny. I couldn't believe [00:07:00] – but what experience did I have?

DB: That's right, and your father had made sure of that, that you would have no idea.

EJP: Well we never attended a public dance. That wasn't proper. When the big name bands would come? I never got to see them. My father wouldn't permit that. That was low class. (laughs) I mean, he said those kinds of things. If you spent five minutes looking at the *Ladies' Home Journal* or *Woman's Day*, *Redbook* or anything like that, that's trash. "Why? Don't you

have anything uplifting to read or anything that will give you new knowledge? Why are you reading that trash?”

DB: Sounds like a demanding –

EJP: I was going to symphony concerts when I was five years old. He believed in culture with a capital C. Music, piano lessons, symphony [00:08:00] concerts. I could go to the ballet but he didn't believe in dancing lessons. He was a Baptist. No dancing.

DB: So you went wild in Pittsburgh?

EJP: Well, I didn't have anybody looking over my shoulder, plus there was a – I did not find the academic load demanding. It was not a rigorous curriculum like Brown. So much of what I was getting in grad school I already had studied in college. I was really bored. In fact, I often had many of the textbooks. The field curriculum was something new, because in a practice profession if you can't apply it, you know what good it'll do if you write good papers and take tests. So that was a new experience. Not [00:09:00] the field experience so much, but to be evaluated and to consciously examine what happens and analyze it in terms of what impact it had on the client.

This was all new to me and I had difficulty the first year because I had a casework supervisor who was a displaced – was a refugee from Lithuania, and I couldn't understand her, and she swore she couldn't understand my eastern accent. And we did not get along very well. The only thing about social work in terms of the functional school where you focus on the person's persona and you take the persona all apart and it's up to the person to put it back together? Well that was her approach and I didn't understand that. [00:10:00] “Miss Jackson, you think but you cannot feel! You don't feel, you don't feel!” And I'd say, “Oh, I feel! I feel.”

DB: I feel miserable right now. (laughs) Oh my goodness. So that was –

EJP: She would say, [impersonating voice] “Do your clients relate to you? You come in here so well dressed in all these expensive clothes. How do they feel when you go into their homes?”

And I'd say, "But these are the only clothes I have!" (laughs) "And your hair is too formally fixed. Do something!"

DB: Mess it up. That must have been difficult.

EJP: Oh it was. It really was. And the group work supervisor was such a totally different person and I often – on the dates I had the split work and I'd show up the group work place in tears. Oh it was dreadful. [00:11:00] Finally when the field work supervisors had their conferences and she found out I got along so well with the group work supervisor, she called me to her desk and she says, [impersonating voice] "Why don't you like me?" I couldn't say I liked her. I couldn't tell that lie. And you see, if someone can explain something to you intellectually and you can understand it cognitively, but effectively I just was repelled by this whole – what I call nitpicking process.

I know, my cousin who is a year and a half younger was getting married and I was her maid of honor. She was getting married at Easter time and I went to her and I asked if I could be one half-hour late – one half hour late – because the train did not get in to make the eight o'clock or eight-thirty or whatever. I couldn't get there until nine [00:12:00] o'clock. Two hours later I'm still at her desk. She hasn't given me permission. I'm jealous of my cousin because she's younger than I and she's getting married. I hate my father and brother. I don't get along with my mother. I don't know how it got into all of this. And I finally said, "But all I want is permission to be a half-hour late." I should have just been a half-hour late and never mind the permission.

And I just did not understand that the – I'm glad that most schools don't use that approach now. You know, it's an invasion of privacy. To me it didn't have anything to do with your performance. In fact, she was so unhappy with me that she was about to say that I was not suited for social work, but two clients came in over the Christmas holiday and they asked to be taken off the assistance rolls, [00:13:00] and I had helped them. And they had been on assistance for years and years and years, so there I had two success cases, otherwise she would have tried to flunk me out.

DB: Oh my goodness.

EJP: That was that first year. The second year was a fascinating year, but that business with the feeling and thinking and looking and talking. Can you imagine someone telling you your clothes are too expensive?

DB: I sure – that is incredible. Well what was the second year like?

EJP: Well, I was a community organization major at the time when not many students were community organization majors, and very few if any women. Well it was challenging and stimulating. There were only five of us that majored in CO or research; the other four were men. It [00:14:00] was very stimulating and it was an interesting [00:15:00] agency and I learned a lot and the people were supportive and you could see some outcomes. So the second year was good. It was very good.

DB: Of course it was a two year program so by the end of that you were done. And then what next?

EJP: What did I do? Oh, I came home for the summer. My father was terminally ill with cancer. And so, I decided well I would look for a position in Providence. I didn't really want to but I thought I should stay there and give my mother support, and my father support. And my father in many ways he was a very wise man. He said, "Look. I am dying. There's nothing you can do staying here. If there are better opportunities elsewhere in the country I want you to take them. So I was offered a very interesting position in Chicago and both parents encouraged me to go. So I went to Chicago and I had a fascinating job and I met a young man and we got married and I had two children and we separated and divorced after 15 years and he went back to Dallas, Texas and I went back to Providence, Rhode Island and worked for the Rhode Island Council of Community Services, and the poverty program. And from there I came here.

DB: So let's see, you were in Providence?

EJP: Two and a half years.

DB: Mid-sixties?

EJP: March of '63 to September of '65. I arrived at my new job one day after I got a divorce in holiday court, and the [00:16:00] director of the Rhode Island Council on Community Service was a classmate, Dr. [Sydney Dilly?], and because he worked in my hometown we maintained – while I lived in Chicago, we maintained ties over the years and he had children around the age – he and his wife had children around the age of my children, they became friends, that kind of thing. Then when he became Dean of the School of Social Work at Wayne State University, he offered me a position. That's how I got to Detroit.

DB: You had the connection.

EJP: Mm-hm. There were two of us; Dr. [Frank Floyd?] and myself. Frank headed up the research bureau at the council, and I headed up the information referral service for the retarded, and then I went to the poverty program. That was a trip. I only stayed with the poverty program six months.

You know, in the evaluation [00:17:00] of poverty programs in different communities, in most communities the poverty program became a political football, and in Rhode Island, not only did it become a political football, but it also became a mafia – became deeply - you know this.

DB: As soon as you say “Providence” and “mafia,” everyone nods their head. I mean, it's just a given.

EJP: I had one staff member who almost lost his life and he fled Providence and came to Detroit to go to graduate school for two years. The mafia really took – they started with Federal Hill and they were acting as if the poverty money was their payroll. That was not the only community in the country where that happened. It [00:18:00] may have been more blatant there, but it was not the only community. Research has demonstrated that.

DB: That is very interesting. I definitely want to ask you about your tenure here at Wayne State, but perhaps before that if we could just go back a little bit and I could ask you, while you were raising your children were you also working or –

EJP: Oh of course. When the first child was five months old I went back to work because I was so bored. My husband worked all day and went to school every night and I was sitting in that little apartment by myself with an infant. And my neighbors were absolutely boring. I went to the coffee klatches and I was not interested in the price of potatoes or who was having a sale on what, and I just really couldn't stand it. I really couldn't stand it. There was one friend who had been a social worker too, and we would walk our babies together. Her husband got transferred so I didn't really have anybody, [00:19:00] other than talking to my friends on the telephone. But I found the neighbors boring. So I was offered a position as a program director of a settlement house, and I said I can't come, I don't have a babysitter. They found me a babysitter who worked out perfectly.

DB: Now was this in Chicago?

EJP: This is in Chicago, yes. Then the Gail – these are my two daughters, here. They're three years apart. These were high school and college. This is the one who was with UCSF – that's Constance – and that's Gail. Let me get the recent photograph.

DB: Sure. They're beautiful kids.

EJP: They are very attractive young women, and they're very accomplished generally. That's Gail and that's Connie.

DB: It looks like they had this specially taken for you.

EJP: Yes, this is a photograph [00:20:00] portrait. They did.

DB: It's beautiful.

EJP: But you can see they're sisters. Their profiles are very much alike.

DB: That's right. Yes.

EJP: I think in terms of impacting my own development, my father probably had more influence than my mother. This is my father. And this is at Yale University. The New England Tennis Tournament was there. That's Dr. Hall, Dr. Fleming, Attorney Jackson and Dr. Jackson.

DB: Is there any relationship here or just coincidence of name?

EJP: No. Just coincidence.

DB: It's a wonderful picture; horn-rimmed glasses and a cigar in his hand. White – is that a derby or a straw hat?

EJP: Panama hat.

DB: White Panama hat.

EJP: Palm Beach suit.

DB: You bet.

EJP: He never wore a store bought suit in his life. All his clothes were tailor made.

DB: That's beautiful.

EJP: I think my father was a distinguished [00:21:00] looking man.

DB: Absolutely. Very much. So let's see. So you were working in Chicago within five months after Connie was born as a program director at a settlement house. How long were you there for, at that particular agency?

EJP: Well see my first job was a coordinator of community organizations for Parkway Community House, and coordinator of the young adult and adult programs since I was a CO major. Then I married and then later had a child then went on maternity leave. Then I decided I would wait until she got to the first grade before I considered work, but didn't last that long, I was bored out of my skull.

Then [00:22:00] when I left the (inaudible) North Center where I was a program director, well I left because my husband forced me to. He felt – and it was true – the long hours and the babysitter was threatening to quit because she couldn't work all day and half the night because he was still going to school part-time. And so, he said you'll just have to find a job at an agency that has regular hours and they don't demand your time on Saturdays and Sundays and so forth.

So then I went to work for Cook County Department of Welfare and I was there for a year or so. Then I went to work for the American Chicago Red Cross. Now they call it the mid-American chapter, but it's the largest chapter in the country, and they do – their staff has to be professionally qualified. They have volunteers but not in the services [00:23:00] to military families. And I went there. Phil – my husband – came down. What he didn't like about the community center that most of my colleagues were men. He says, "I don't understand why a young, married woman is always having some man bring her home." I says, "What do you want them to do, leave me on the street corner?" He really didn't like that. So he came to visit at Red Cross and he walked in there and saw this sea of women. He says, "This is a fine place. Stay there."

DB: (laughs) That's great.

EJP: You know you have regular hours, 8:30 to 4:30.

DB: That's right.



EJP: You know, in terms of childcare plans it was more workable. And I was there nine years.

DB: In the service to military families?

EJP: Yes, and I started off as a senior caseworker and I became a supervisor. We separated of course and I came to Rhode Island Council of Community Services and I stayed there two and a half years. I found [00:24:00] Providence, Rhode Island, very limiting professionally. And I think you can corroborate this; it seems to me that I was meeting the same people coming and going at the same time. They were all on the same committees and – it was incestuous, and it was so different from my professional experience in Chicago. Even when I was involved in family service work, I still volunteered at the elementary school my daughter attended, and I directed the Lighted Schoolhouse program for the Ray School in Hyde Park, and of course that was the University of Chicago area and that was very stimulating. I really loved it there.

DB: What was the Lighted Schoolhouse Program?

EJP: Well what it is basically, it's after school hours [00:25:00] are over you develop a series of leisure time programs – and some tutorial work – but mostly leisure time programs not only for children, but evening programs for adults. So that meant that I designed programs and I recruited volunteers and I trained – this is on top of a full time job – and trained – I had about 100 volunteers and I had everybody scheduled and I had to keep up with everybody. I was constantly on the phone. But I loved it. I loved it.

DB: That's incredible.

EJP: Oh, the casework alone was not enough. I mean that was – I had the formal training but I did not really find it demanding. That really turned me off. One of my caseworkers called me from the field. She says, “Betty, I've got something tremendous to tell you. Please wait until I return.” I had to stay late. I waited. I had no idea. I was worried, I thought maybe she'd been harmed or hurt. And Florence came in and she sat down and she says, “A tremendous [00:26:00] thing happened today, Betty!” I said yes, yes? She said, “Mrs. Williams said hello.” I sat here for

a whole hour to hear that? Was a very withdrawn client, first wouldn't open the door and then she'd open the door but she wouldn't let her come up the stairs. Finally she got up the stairs and finally she opened the door. This took weeks. And she said hello and she was so thrilled. And I thought to myself, I've got to get out of here because those are such miniscule gains, I can't spend my life doing this.

DB: So going then from direct servicing to the kind of planning and administrative work that you were doing at the council was one part, and perhaps going to Wayne State was yet another kind of step.

EJP: Well see, when I was at Red Cross, because they usually (inaudible), [00:27:00] I raised questions and concerns about staff development, so they put me in charge of staff development.

DB: Of course.

EJP: So I loved that. I really loved that. That part I liked. Being told that Mrs. Williams finally said hello – but there were exciting times. There were things that had their moments, but I did not find it as stimulating as social planning or community organizing or the kinds of things I was trained to do, I mean I majored in. And I was very glad to get away from clinical work. And because I had – you know when I interviewed for the job at Wayne, because I had done staff training at Red Cross and when I was in Providence I had developed a number of workshops and training institutes because this is what I liked to do. They wouldn't know when I was interviewed, “What makes you think you can [00:28:00] handle a job teaching?” I said I'd sort of been teaching all my life. And this was the time in '65 of the Great Society, new frontiers and all of that, and there were not that many people around who had the formal field background in planning and program development and the policy development. I wanted to say look, there aren't that many of us, which is one of the reasons I was interested in coming to the school because, in trying to start programs in the [Powering?] Program, I just couldn't find staff that had the proper experience or requisite experience. It was very frustrating. So I came here to help design a two-year major; they only had a one-year and it was very, very limited. And then later

on with another colleague, we designed an administration major. I love to design new things, then when they go in smoothly I want to move on to something else.

DB: These were all master's level programs?

EJP: Yes.

DB: So let's see. You would have been [00:29:00] at Wayne State from 1965 until your retirement, right?

EJP: Twenty years.

DB: Twenty years.

EJP: And I took an early retirement because my mother's ill health and my health is not that good, but mainly because my mother's health. She'd been in and out of the hospital and I was spending a fortune paying somebody to take care of her. When I began to see that it was mounting up to thousands of dollars, it didn't really make sense for me to do it any longer.

DB: You made reference I think, before we turned the tape on, to the fact that you have tons of textbooks and files around that you keep around because part of your career at Wayne State, and still, was giving lectures and attending conferences and setting up all kinds of things.

EJP: What has happened is that, I mean in terms of feeder systems that former students who are now in administrative positions in various and sundry [00:30:00] agencies, when they want to do staff training around areas that they know I have some expertise in, they call and ask me to do it. And of course I always say, on a community service basis or on a consultation basis? Consultation means paid, community service means free, and if I know they have the money I'm not going to do it free because it does need preparation and time and so forth. And I do enough to keep stimulated, but not – I like not having to do the same thing every day whether I feel like it or not. I like the variety because I'm on boards of agencies.

Last month I was in St. Louis. I delivered the keynote address for the First National Conference of Children's Trust Fund on prevention of child abuse. You know, it's these kinds of things that are stimulating. [00:31:00] I'm working with a colleague. We're going to be delivering papers at two national conferences in the spring.

DB: Great. You mentioned in the Lighted Schoolhouse program, that was sort of over and above your job. Did you continue other community involvements when you came here to Detroit?

Track 3

EJP: They were outside of it but interrelated. So you can't really mount a viable community organization major without – field placements are practicum in viable institutions and spots, and how does one get a door – a foot in the door. And one way you get a foot in the door is getting involved in various and sundry activities. So I was on the Miller District Advisory Council and they had an elementary and secondary education grant. I was active with the 13th District Democratic Party. I was on the Health Welfare Committee of Senator Coleman Young who is now mayor, and I headed up the employment committee for his legislative program. I was on self-determination [00:01:00] committee of new Detroit. I was on the mayor's youth commission – not mayor; Governor Milliken's Youth Commission. We were responsible for dependent, delinquent and neglected youth. It goes on and on and on. I was the first woman president of the Detroit Association of Black Social work, and –

DB: And it keeps going from there.

EJP: My secretary, she's say, "I have 13 outside activities for you. When do you sleep?"

DB: That's right. That's a good question. What was it like trying to juggle all of that?

EJP: Well, I've been person – not so much now; I'm older and diabetic and hypertensive – but I mean, I would put in easily 15,16 hour days every day. I don't require a lot of sleep. Don't I seem energetic to [00:02:00] you?

DB: Yes. There's no doubt in my mind. I'm also – I'm not being able to keep track of dates in my mind. How old were your daughters when you moved here?

EJP: Twelve and 15.

DB: Twelve and 15. So they must have been fairly self-sufficient then?

EJP: Yes. Mm-hm. Well I taught them how to cook when they were very small. They could cook, they could wash, they could iron, they could clean, they could do the marketing. If I hadn't – I would have been at a loss to manage. One day, Dorsey, they said, "Mother, we want to have a conference with you," and I sat down and I said, "What is it?" "We want you to know that we're taking you to court." I said, what? "We're talking you to court and we're charging you with neglect." I said, "What?" And they took the calendar out and they said "you know, this month you have eaten dinner twice with us in one month's time." I said, "Oh, that can't be." And they checked it out. They had kept a record of where [00:03:00] I was every day at dinner time, including Saturdays and Sundays. And they said, "How would that look? Wayne State University social work professor sued by her children for child neglect?" I really had gotten so carried away with running the world. I was really taken back. I said, "Well I've really got to reset my priorities." But you know, you get so caught up.

As I said, most things were work related in that developing connections and picking up IOUs because some of the people and some of the places where you volunteered and you come back and want a student placement and a scholarship. And if you had been helpful to them and it was like, this is payback time. But you know, that's all part of the process. And I loved that kind of a thing. I wanted to run for state representative. [00:04:00] But the only thing, it's only a two-year term so you have to run every other year and it was less money than Wayne, of course no security.

Coleman Young was state senator at the time. So he took me to lunch and he said, "You know I think you'd make a good one, but you are an easterner," he says, "and that accent." It's not as broad now as it was. He says, "You live in Lafayette Park. There's a lot of community hostility about Lafayette Park." When the land – when people were relocated they were promised

first shot at the new housing. Well in terms of the construction costs, when these were built the people who were displaced couldn't afford them. So you had blue collar and poor people who were moved out of workman's bungalows couldn't afford these places. [00:05:00] So they really – and of course there's a lot of – he says, "First you come from the East and you have that accent. You live in Lafayette Park and there's a lot of hostility because people were pushed out and they were promised and these promises were not kept." And then he says, "You are on the faculty of Wayne State University," so he says, "You know, you've got three strikes." So he says, "This is what I suggest you do: you join everything you can in the community and you work hard, and you don't try to push yourself but you work hard," and that's what I did. Then the 13th District Democratic Party came to me and asked me would I run. But when did they decide to do that? They came when I had – my older daughter was in college, the other one was in senior high school. I couldn't afford the income cut.

DB: That's right.

EJP: I had tenure. I had rank. I mean, I literally couldn't afford – with two kids in college – to take like a [00:06:00] \$15,000 cut a year. And I said, "I can't afford to do it. I'd love to do it, but I just can't." Now I could but I'm really not interested at this time. So, I work on – Maryann Mahaffey – she's a social work colleague but she's on city council – and the president of the council is a former student of mine. So, I really – I try to keep my hand in. Then of course when I was appointed to the Board of Trustees at Brown, oh they wrote up in *The Wayne Report*. I was on the board from '73 to '78. But do you know why I was selected? Did you ever hear that tale?

DB: No I have not heard that tale.

EJP: In '73, the university – Brown was in its 212th year and they finally decided it was [00:07:00] time to have a black woman, and preferably a Pembroke graduate, but they didn't want anybody from New England. They didn't want a housewife. They wanted a professional woman. They wanted somebody from another part of the country and someone whose professional training involved community service and so forth and so on. And [Frannie Whedon Gibson?] said, "I've got the perfect person," and she submitted my name. And you know, they

reviewed – of course I heard about this all after the fact – reviewed me. And of course my family was so delighted and the President of Wayne State University sent me a note of congratulations and I was thrilled. And you know, I think if I'd have known about what went into the selection process I wouldn't have been quite so thrilled, but it was an honor and it was an interesting experience, particularly [00:08:00] when you're in a state university, when you're employed in a state university and you're on a policy board of a private institution in a different part of the country.

The first meeting that I attended, we went to the President's dinner and the entertainment came out; young men and women, they had long black skirts and white blouses and the fellows had on dark suits. And what did they do? They sang 15th century madrigal songs *a cappella*. And here I'm in Detroit with Motown. I sat there and I listened and I said, I can't believe this. Fifteenth century madrigal songs *a cappella* and I just came from Motown. I said, was it like this when I was an undergraduate? [00:09:00] It's been so long. (laughter) I came back and I told my colleagues and I says, here I came from Motown where we get down and they're singing [impersonation]. Then these – the way they solicited the vote; “How say ye fellows of the corporation? Say ye nay or say ye yea?” (laughter) “How say ye trustees of the corporation? Say ye nay or say ye yea?” I came back and I said you know, I went there. I grew up in New England, but I'd forgotten all these kinds of things. It was a culture shock. You know, all the years in Chicago and all the years here. Fifteenth century madrigal songs *a cappella* even.

It's really – you're a Michigander aren't you?

DB: I spent my last year of high school here.

EJP: That's not very long.

DB: No, it's not very long.

EJP: [00:10:00] Well it's a different world. Where in Michigan do you live?

DB: I lived in – my parents have moved since, so I now have only a past connection, but we lived in Farmington Hills.

EJP: That's lovely country out there.

DB: It is. We were actually sort of in the poor neighborhood in Farmington Hills, which is interesting. Perhaps it's a contradiction in terms.

EJP: Well, it must – no it's not a poor neighborhood. What you say is “less affluent.”

DB: Right. Less affluent. It was culture shock for me because I had been, just before that, in a medium sized town in South Jersey, south of Philadelphia.

EJP: Oh, my. Camden.

DB: No, Vineland.

EJP: In south Philadelphia?

DB: Mm-hm. Yes.

EJP: What, across the river?

DB: It's southeast. Maybe just due west of Atlantic City, about an hour from Atlantic City.

EJP: Where is it in relation to Camden?

DB: South.

EJP: It [00:11:00] couldn't be too far from Camden.

DB: It's an hour south of Camden. No one knows that New Jersey goes that far south. See that's what –



EJP: No, I wasn't aware of that. I thought Camden was about as far as you got.

DB: No.

EJP: I know that's across the river from Philadelphia. So that's a whole new world.

DB: It's rural, so it was culture shock for me to move to an enormous suburb of a big city because –

EJP: How long did you live in Vineland?

DB: Four or five years maybe? A couple of different houses but four or five years.

EJP: Well where were you born?

DB: Texas. We should turn this off for a minute.

(interruption)

DB: I certainly did want to ask you about your years as a trustee on the Brown corporation. those were very eventful years for Brown University.

EJP: Yes, they were.

DB: And so [00:12:00] any kind of experiences or perspectives you think would be interesting.

EJP: Well what I found was that, because I was on the faculty of a large university and Wayne State has like 33 thousand students and a state supported university, but still I was familiar with academia and the problems of governance, and the problems and aspirations of faculty, and how

students perceived education and utilized their opportunities, which I wouldn't have had if I hadn't been in academia.

DB: Sure. That's right.

EJP: And I could make inputs with those kinds of insights. And what I did find that really was amusing, was there's a certain parochial [00:13:00] smugness and a certain kind of parochialism in terms of the Ivies. You know, the Ivies genuflect, bow to the east, bow to the west and hit your head on the floor kind of thing.

And of course we'd talk about the endowments and the budget and so forth. Well when you talk about the budget at a state university you're talking about the appropriations from the state legislature and the politicking. People on the board of governors are elected; they run for office. It's a totally different process. But then I have the perspective to be able to evaluate the quality of the education and its preparation for professional life or so forth. Then I served on the committee that dealt with the status of women in Brown. Did you ever read that report?

DB: I think I have a copy of it and I'm about half way through it.

EJP: Well I was on that committee and that was a fascinating [00:14:00] assignment. And because I had lived all over the country, in terms of being able to assess or observe geographical differences and customs and perceptions and aspirations. You know, if you've only lived in one place in your life – and you've lived all over the country. Did you ever live abroad?

DB: Okinawa, but we got back when I was eight.

EJP: So that's a long time ago. But you know what I'm talking about. You don't have such a provincial perspective. Except being married to a Texan; that's a whole other world.

DB: (laughter) That's right.

EJP: That's a whole other world. Because I came from Rhode Island, his family was sure that their son had come to Chicago and had connected themselves up to – connected himself to a white girl. And when he introduced me to them over the telephone, they listened to my accent. [00:15:00] His mother fainted and she said to her husband, [impersonating] "You just have to go to Chicago and rescue James because we sent him up there to graduate school. We didn't send him up there to marry a white girl. Go get him!" (laughter) And my family's response was, a Texan? You know they're wild. Is he a cowboy? They're not even civilized in Texas.

So we met in Chicago. Both families came to the wedding to stop it. And I don't care. We were both black, but we came from such different regions of the country, we had such different life experiences and my – see, people can – during a courtship people can cover up a lot of things. I had a lot of white friends. I've always had a lot of white friends. I've always lived in integrated communities, and my whole [00:16:00] life experience has been an integrated experience. But see, coming from Texas, my former husband didn't have that. His experience was as a child being run off the land because oil had been discovered and they couldn't – they took and well they practically shot him out, and running in the middle of the night for their lives. The kinds of things that he had experienced, I just read about in books.

And he actually detested white people. See I didn't know that. He was so gracious and the southern gentleman and everything was integrated and interracial and I thought, what else is new? But little by little I found that he couldn't – he would find excuses for not accepting invitations if the other couple was white, and it ended up with my having [00:17:00] lunch with the wife or that kind of thing. And it was a deliberate attempt. But one thing I did try to work on is that, when he would make pejorative statements about whites in front of the children I would try to correct it, but you know there's a limit.

DB: Yes. How often can you contradict their father in front of him.

EJP: Well as I said, it's a – he had a totally different life experience, you know. They didn't buy middle class life. They didn't ride on public transportation because they weren't going to sit in the back. And do you know I was in Dallas, Texas Christmas of '52 downtown shopping with my sister-in-law and I looked up and I saw Neiman Marcus. I said, "Oh, I've been dying to shop at Neiman Marcus." I go dashing up to go through the front door, and they had this black

doorman with a splendid uniform. [00:18:00] She grabbed me and she said, “We don’t go where we’re not wanted.” I said, “What? I said it’s a department store.” They were dragging me up the street trying to hush me. You know, that accent was so piercing, my voice was piercing. I had various and sundry gifts from Neiman Marcus. I said, “Well how did you get the gifts?” For people locally, the menials – the porters and the maids, they were allowed to shop before the store opened or after the store closed, and they would shop for friends. Or, you could order something through the mail and they would mail it out to you, but don’t come to the store. You weren’t allowed in the store. And that was 1952. And I was so mad with Mamie Eisenhower for buying her inaugural gown there. How dare she? When we got back to Chicago I took every gift from Neiman Marcus and [00:19:00] threw it in the furnace. I was just horrified.

DB: That was the South at that time.

EJP: But you know, laws had been passed. Imagine. You’ve got to do your Christmas shopping and have some maid or porter take your order and your money.

DB: Unbelievable.

EJP: We’re not allowed in the store. Of course it’s different now. But I wouldn’t set foot in Neiman Marcus for love nor money.

DB: Well now let’s see. 1973-75, you were on the corporation then when the minority students occupied University Hall.

EJP: Oh yes, and they called me long distance.

DB: Were you kind of consulting as to what should be done with that crisis?

EJP: Well I responded to their questions, and of course, you know, when I was there – ’41 to ’45 – it was a whole [00:20:00] – you could hardly have a confrontation with one person.

DB: That's right. Was it the students who called you or the administration who called you?

EJP: Students, and then later administration. When I came from meetings – they would ask me to meet with groups, that kind of thing. And then every time I marched in the graduation procession, I'd give the Black Power signal. I always tried to wear something that had red or green or black. You know, to me that was a huge crowd of students compared to the way it was when I was there. But the black student experience at Brown still has limitations. Some of the local churches have opened up and tried to make them more comfortable, but they come from out of town and some of the coeds don't have a date the whole time they're there. [00:21:00] Very limited. So that the socialization process is very constrictive, which is one of the things that my daughters did not want to be involved in. It's a different world.

And what I saw happening at Brown in that period were things that had happened on other campuses much earlier, in the mid-'60s, early '70s. The – quote, “the ferment” at Brown was much less than say, the University of Michigan exploded with the black action movement, and things were happening all over the country, but they were happening much earlier than in Providence. And I think there was a lot of – you know, they were written up in the papers and the magazines. I thought there was a lot of [00:22:00] emulation in terms of strategy and tactics and demands and so forth. They didn't even need to open their mouth; I could have told them what they were going to say. I'd heard it so many times. I don't know how many times I marched with students to the president's office and I had my buttons and – my fur out to here and my bones for my nose. Can you imagine trying to be super-black with a New England accent? They laughed at me. (laughter) They did, Dorcey. And I said, “Now we can't use that strategy,” and they said, [mocking] “Can't, can't, can't.”

DB: Did they listen to you anyway, ultimately?

EJP: Yes, yes, because you know, I wanted to say – sometimes I did tell them. I said, “You know, you need to find out people's history.” I said, “I was a member of SNCC. I tested the public accommodation laws. I've been thrown out of restaurants and public places. Before [00:23:00] some of you were even born. You just don't know what people have done and what their involvement has been, and how credible they are, accent or no accent.

DB: Where did you connect up with SNCC?

EJP: In Philadelphia when I worked for American Friends Service Committee, and in Pittsburgh.

DB: And those were the years for testing, too. The late '50s?

EJP: No, no. This would be the '40s.

DB: The '40s. Oh, that's right.

EJP: The late '40s. Mid to late '40s. That's when SNCC began of course. Talk about marching to – from Chicago to Springfield in order to test fair housing and open housing, then almost getting fired from my job, and oh. I headed up the social action committee of the National Association of Social Work. [00:24:00] They allowed me to use the room space in the Red Cross headquarters but they couldn't put social action on the board. I'd have to put NASW Committee meeting room so-and-so.

DB: Incredible. Incredible.

EJP: In terms of development, this whole process while I was on the board, preceding it and during it, I had the evolution from moving from being colored to negro to black, and I mean, ideologically and philosophically, and I realized that my father – who would be 102 this year, no 101 this year – in his way was a black nationalist because he started black history courses in the Sunday Schools [00:25:00] of black churches in Providence because he knew that black kids got none of that kind of content in school, and many of their parents didn't know it. And he would buy – I mean, he would be the works of Paul Laurence Dunbar and the poetry of Countee Cullen and we knew historically the achievements, starting from Banneker onward, but that's only because my father introduced it and made us know it and study it. We would have never known anything about it because you don't get – you wouldn't have gotten it in public schools when I was a kid. So I knew all about Marcus Garvey. I remember driving to New York to hear Marian

Anderson and going to her concerts in Philadelphia. I think he was that kind of a person. [00:26:00] He believed in supporting black professionals and black businesses, even if they weren't up to par, because he says they never will come up to par. Even if we took a loss or something had to be supplemented. He was very strong in that. See, he never said anything about Black Nationalism, but he lived it and he acted it, and it wasn't until years later that I realized what I had been exposed to all my life.

My mother was very different. She was light brown-skinned, and my grandmother – her mother – looked as if she were white; she was blonde with blue eyes. My mother had a thing about color. She had a thing about negroid features, would often make pejorative statements and I would be right down her throat, and the [00:27:00] – I realized my parents were pulling me different – my father was pulling me one way and my mother was pulling me another way. My mother would say to me, as I was moving into my teen years, “Betty, you're not a pretty girl but I do my best to make you presentable.” I really believed I was ugly. “And you know, you're not exactly dark, but you're not light either. And it's too bad you have bad hair like your father.” Would you believe that I started having my hair straightened when I was one year old? My mother held me on her lap because she couldn't – she was ashamed to take my bonnet off because I had these little kinky beads. I am 64 years old and I have been going to the hairdresser for 63 years. [00:28:00]

DB: That's intense.

EJP: And of course don't the African figure with the high, unruly rump? My God, my mother shoved me into a girdle just as soon as she could and she'd say, “You've got a high behind like your father. Too bad it's not flat like mine.” And I would find myself backing out of rooms because I didn't want people to see my behind. My mother said it was big.

DB: Heavy burdens.

EJP: But you see, it was this whole – anything that was typically negroid. Well fortunately I didn't have a nose all over my face and a mouth all over my face, but one thing she couldn't take

away from me was that I was a good student. That was the only thing. “You’re not a pretty girl, but *I* do my best to make *you* presentable.”

DB: Oh dear.

EJP: You know, she did see that I was dressed beautifully and so forth, [00:29:00] but it was always with a negative input.

DB: Give with one hand –

EJP: – take with the other. And I swore Dorsey, if I ever married and had children I would never treat my own daughter like that, and I never have. I’ve always been positive about their appearance, about their achievements and so forth.

DB: That’s great.

EJP: Later on in maturity, I realized there was a lot of impact of the racism in the country on both their developments, and they both acted out in very different kinds of ways.

DB: But maybe created by some of the same pressures.

EJP: Mm-hm.

DB: I guess before we reach the end of this tape, I suppose I’d [00:30:00] just ask you if there are things we’ve missed that you wanted to talk about or any other concluding things that might sound important to say about the influence of Pembroke on your life in general?

EJP: I think as you talk with – in your responsibility – as people talk with prospective minority students – whether they’re black or Oriental – well, Oriental is a little bit different. Black or Chicano. That one has to help that student look at the experience from a longer range perspective. Not what’s cool the four years they’re there, but what will that four years do for you



added to two years here or four years more, and does it move you further toward your goals by coming to Brown than say, going to someplace else. And I know that was – one thing my [00:31:00] father preached was developing an academic record that would stand anyplace. Sometimes it was hard to do that.

DB: With your father's insistence on that.

EJP: Well yes it was hard for me because there were fun things, but then when I would listen to the experiences of my friends who went to Howard University or –

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EJP: Considering my career line – my father was right. He was absolutely right, because I saw with my husband going to Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, when he came to do graduate school in Chicago, many of his academic credits were questioned and he had to take some things over at the undergraduate level while trying to work on a master's, and it was very hard. See, I never had that experience. Because he had a good time at Southern. And I never viewed Brown as a place to have a good time, to party back. There are other things to experience. I did have – you see I went to college – some of the girls, some of the students, I had known all my life. Everybody [00:01:00] wasn't a stranger.

DB: So at least there was that to help sustain you.

EJP: See, my father's practice was – before we went to kindergarten, the day that his hygienist wasn't there, we came in the afternoon all dressed up and we passed out magazines and we passed ashtrays, and we told people, my daddy is a good dentist. Don't be frightened. He won't hurt you.

DB: That's great. Well thank you so much for spending this afternoon.

EJP: Well thank you for taking the time.

DB: This has been wonderful, and we'll be signing off here. [00:01:35]

- END -