

**Interview with Ms. Rosetta Johnson**  
**Ms. Priscilla Jessie**  
**Conducted by Marian J Krzyzowski, Monique Claiborne, and Ashley Bell**  
**For**  
**The Chene Street History Project**  
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MK: Why don't we begin first, I'd like to ask a little bit about your parents. Their names, and where they were from, when they were born, and where.

RJ: My mother and father were born in North Carolina, Charlotte, North Carolina. My father was born 1886. My mother was born 1890.

MK: And what were their names?

RJ: My father's name was William Jessie. My mother's name was Kadora, K-a-d-o-r-a. She was a Green-- she was a Coker.

MK: How's that spelled?

RJ: C-O-K-E-R.

MK: Okay. Did they meet, in, North Carolina? Or did they meet up here?

RJ: They met in Arkansas, Blackwell, Arkansas.

MK: Okay, how did they get from North Carolina to Arkansas? What was the reason?

RJ: Their parents, as far as we know, just moved there. 'Cause we weren't born there. Their parents left North Carolina, for some reason, and came to Blackwell, Arkansas. And that's where we were born.

MK: And so they were married in Blackwell, Arkansas?

RJ: They were married in Blackwell, Arkansas.

MK: What was their religious affiliation?

RJ: We were Baptist. Our religious denomination was Baptist.

MK: So they were married in a Baptist church?

RJ: Yes.

MK: Do you know what church?

RJ: St. Paul--St. Matthew. St. Matthew.

MK: And what did your dad do for a living?

PJ: ....?

MK: And did your mom work outside of the home?

RJ: She took care of the home and the children.

MK: Okay. So, children. How many were there and who and when?

PJ: ....?

RJ: 1 cat

PJ: ...?

MK: And when were you born?

PJ: ....?

MK: okay.

PJ: ...?

PJ: ...?

PJ: ...?

PJ....?

PJ: ...??

RJ: I was born April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1926.

PJ: ....?

PJ: ...?

MK: How did your family pick Wardell, Missouri. Who did they know up there?

PJ: In 1929, in 1930 when we moved there, my father had this farm we were renting. And he made, of course it wasn't his and the land was divided, but after that the boll weevil took over and ate up all the cotton. And we couldn't work. That's the only way we got work. So we had to sell the mules back and give them back to the man that owned 'em. and then he, they called it hoboos then, but hopped on a train and went to Missouri just to make our living.

PJ: ...?

PJ: ...

PJ: ?

MK: So you were still back in Arkansas?

RJ: He sent and got us.

MK: When did you actually move up to Wardell?

RJ: In 1933.

MK: So he moved there

RJ: A year before

MK: The year before okay.

RJ: To prepare things for us.

MK: Did you go to school in Wardell?

RJ: Yes

MK: What kind of school was that?

RJ: It was a school in the middle of the farm. And it was school by day and church on Sunday. And it was a one room school room. And they taught from 1<sup>st</sup> through the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

MK: And on Sunday you had a pastor there?

RJ: He came on Sunday, yes. But the teacher was the pastor too.

MK: Okay. What do you remember from that time? Besides going to school, what are your memories of that?

PJ: ...?

MK: Back in Wardell.

RJ: We remember how hot it was. Because you had the roads, they had fields, they had their, roads, you had cotton and corn and everything growing in a row. My dad had 80 acres and his brother-in-law had 80 acres. And they shared that. And we had 53 of that. And my brother and myself actually worked out there because my other 3 brothers were too little. And so we had to do all that work. We had to go to the fields in the morning, at 6 o'clock. Whenever the sun was beating. We'd go and that's when we planted the crops, that's when we crop the crops and till the land until the cotton was ready for us to pick in the winter time. And then we'd have to come home at night, read the news, pa would fall asleep. I remember we had a real hard time doing all of that.

MK: So when did you go to school?

RJ: We went to school, school started in September. And they allowed the children who lived on plantations to go in October. So we went October till May.

MK: How long did you stay in Wardell?

PJ: ...?

MK: And you came to Detroit?

PJ: ....?

MK: Why did you come to Detroit?

PJ: ....?

PJ: We went together in kindergarten. I was 25 ... when I came here. I live here 3 ...

MK: Where did she live in Detroit?

PJ: Adams ... 5557 Adams ... downtown.

MK: Which side? West side or east side?

PJ: ... On the east side....

MK: And how long did you live on Adams Street?

PJ: ...? When I first got here ...

MK: Which uncle? Which side of the family?

PJ: ...? It was her uncle

MK: Oh her uncle.

PJ: Yeah it wasn't our uncle. He was, he had a gun ... I can't hear ... so if he wanted to go with me ... if I didn't go with him, I didn't know what he would do to me. If he would shoot me ... and I refused to do that so we had a fight. I run down to the wood shack ... if I got in there and I stayed in there all night and I come back the next morning ... come find me ... ..

MK: how long did you stay in the wood shack?

PJ: I stayed in the wood shack .....

PJ: I stayed over there

PJ: ...?

PJ: Oh I stayed over there, I don't know the exact address.

PJ: ...?

PJ: I stayed over there like a year.

MK: And what did you do? Did you find a job?

PJ: I found a job working ... ..

MK: So how did you get from the West side to Grosse Point?

PJ: I ... I ride the street car... Go back and forth.

MK: What streetcar was it? Do you remember?

PJ: It goes from West side to, I can't remember the entire way .... Sometimes it would pick me up.... I stayed on the freight. I'd go out to Grosse Point and stay out there until ... it would get you on Thursday ... so I didn't have to go daily ...

MK: Where in Grosse Point, where did you live?

PJ: It's on University and, I can't remember

MK: How long did you work for Mrs. Simmons?

PJ: I worked there for about....

MK: And then what happened?

PJ: .... Then my mother got sick. And I ... and had to live with her ....

MK: And where did you get a job?

PJ: I looked around for a long time ...

MK: Were you living on Hastings at the time?

PJ: Yeah. ...

MK: So um, then after that, what happened? Did your family start coming up? Did your sisters come up?

PJ: No, my sisters ... the next year ... Mr. Simmons ... I told him ... he said he'd find me ... stayed at his house ... I stayed in his house and he got me ... and I got you a job ...

MK: What kind of work were you doing?

PJ: .... Cleaning houses.

MK: On the west side?

PJ: No, this is the ....

MK: And where was the apartment at? What street was that on?

PJ: ....

MK: The one, is that the one on Hutchins?

PJ: ...

PJ: ...

PJ: ... Yeah ... I knew ... I lived here on the east side ...

MK: So what, you guys were talking, is this before the war begun, or not? Before the war?

RJ: No this is before the war.

RJ: This during the '30s and 40's.

RJ: Because people, black ... I came over there ... that's when I came ... I stayed until after high school.

MK: What year was that?

RJ: Mother said I had to go finish high school.

MK: So you finished high school.

RJ: I finished high school in 1938.

MK: And which high school was it?

RJ: Ovanen High. In Newmagic, Missouri

MK: Ovanen?

RJ: I had to stay down south until I finished high school. Ovanen High. They spelled it like... nawnadi is my high school.

MK: So you came up in '38?

RJ: Yes. After I, after she, got it started at this lady's house. She kept after their little girl. She can tell you, the lady across the street wanted a girl that would take care of her child. Like she sits there every Thursday ... she said she didn't know but one girl who would do that ... had to wait until I finished school. When I finished high school then they sent for me, the lady sent for me to come.

MK: And what was her name?

RJ: Her name was Marian Elder.

MK: Elder?

RJ: Yeah. And it was right 'cross the street from her. Mine was 1637 Green Court and her's was 1604 Green Court.

MK: So you came up in '38, and what time of year was it?

RJ: After school was done, sometime in May.

MK: Okay. And you started working for Ms. Elder?

RJ: Yes.

MK: and you lived in?

RJ: I Lived in with her. I took care of her daughter. And named my daughter, right there, after her, her daughter. Carol.

MK: And how long did you live there and work with Ms. Elder?

RJ: I lived there until, I lived there about 3 or 4 years.

MK: And then what did you do?

RJ: And then she and her husband started getting along bad. Her doctor was, doctor, was in the Fisher building. And they, naturally, their doctor had to be my doctor so they know how my health was. That was the way they did it. After I got there, and they were getting along bad, the 4 doctors. One was Dr. Hilerd, Dr. Mcliggen and his wife Dr. Corvet, and Dr. Lynn, 4 of them from the Mayo Clinic. They asked me would I come there, to help as a file clerk for them. And I worked for them from 1943 till 1948, in the Fisher building I was the first black girl to ever work there.

MK: And where did you live then?

RJ: I lived with Marian a long time. She still let me stay there until I found something else.

MK: What was it like working in the Fisher building?

PJ: ...?

RJ: If you can imagine in 1943, it was, the whole city was just like the south, except they were cognizant enough to know how to act. And they treated me, I don't know if you were here at the time but, there was a bank downstairs called Wau Beach and they didn't even have any black patients, patrons there. So I had to go downstairs and take the doctor's money and put so much in and take so much back. And they would call up every time and say well, you know, we're not responsible for the money after it lives the bank. And the doctors had to clear it's okay. And so, there was 13 girls who worked in the office. And

they all, all the heavy work I had to do. Stand up behind each patient and put everything in the drawer that had to be had for the doctors to work with. And then I had to take specimens to the lab, no matter what I was doing, eating or whatever. And I had to take care of the laundry but I was supposed to be a file clerk. And then the secretary and I had it because she wanted me to, she wanted me to be like a maid, she wanted me to mop up. But they had groups that cleaned up the building, and they still do. And I refused to wear a black uniform because they all wore white. And I told, she said, white shows dirt, I said, black and blue and all the other colors show dirt too if you wear them too long. So the doctors saw that I got white uniforms. I had one 'cause I had gone to beauty school. I was going to beauty school while I was working.

MK: Where'd you go to beauty school?

PJ: Pearl.

MK: And where was Pearl at?

RJ: ... and Grettcher. Next to the .... Over there.

MK: So this was while you were working at the Fisher building?

RJ: I went to school at night, yes. That's how I became a beautician.

MK: How'd you get over there? Because you were still living on the west side, right?

RJ: No, I left there. I started moving, I moved on Harmon, Harmon and John L. After Marian and her husband finally left each other. I had to move and I stayed on Harmon and John L.

MK: So you'd take the streetcar over?

RJ: Yes, I'd take the John R. bus all the way down until the Grand Boulevard and I'd walk over.

MK: And when did you finish school?

RJ: In 1948, I finished beauty school. In 1940 I went to Excelo Plant and I didn't like that. Then I opened a beauty shop, the first black beauty shop over on Dexter. 11723 Dexter.

MK: What was the number? I'm sorry.

RJ: 11723 Dexter. It was called High Fashion by Winslo. Cause I had a gentleman that was the stylist there. And I was the manager.

MK: And how'd the business go?

RJ: It went really well until I start, I had 1 daughter. And then I had another son. And that's when we start arguing because he didn't want to divide the money 50/50. So that's when I left. I stayed there from 1955-1960. And then I started teaching. I went back to school and learned how to be an instructor. And I was an instructor at a beauty school on Northwestern and, between Dexter and Grand River, for 10 year. And then I stayed there until 1972. And I taught 1 year at Virginia Feral because at Virginia Feral



they didn't except black students. We couldn't mix in the school. There were 14 black schools. Virginia Farel wanted a black instructor because they didn't know how to do black hair. so that's how they hired me. I worked there a year.

MK: And then what?

RJ: From 1972, I worked there the whole year of 1972. Until my daughter got out of school. And then I come home to my father. Because my father was sick at that time

MK: was he still in Missouri? Or where was he?

RJ: No we moved my father and my mother here, I forgot to tell you that. In the '50. And they stay here until, '51. My mother died in 1970. We lived on that side, on, we couldn't live on this side because it was segregated. So we lived on that side on Lincoln.

MK: What was the address?

RJ: 13918 Lincoln. Back on that side of Hamilton. We stayed there from 1958 until 1970.

MK: So you have 2 children?

RJ: I have 3.

RJ: I have Clarence, Ivan, and Carol.

MK: And they live in the area?

RJ: Yes. My two sons are here now. My son's laid off but he's not here. And I have another son, Ivan, he's a down syndrome child but lives here too. And carol lives in Southfield. She's the principal now at Oak Park. She's been there 9 years. She got her doctorate in 1992. She was principal in Ann Arbor for 4 years. School here in, Westland. She lives in Canton. And that school in Westland. She works in the second school group. ... in fact, in Saginaw for 2 years.

MK: Do you know what school in Ann Arbor she was principal at?

PJ: I think ...

MK: Elementary school?

RJ: It was elementary. She's an elementary principal. She likes to work with children. I'll get it.

MK: Where is she now?

RJ: She's in Oak Park. At Temper School. I will get that information for you. Because I know all of it.

MK: Let's go back to 1943. There was a major race riot in the city in '43. What do you remember of the race riot. What do you remember, did you grant anything ,did you see anything? What was going on?

RJ: In 1943, to me, that was a real race riot. Because my sister lived on Hancock and Hastings. I know you remember Hastings Street. I know you remember hearing about how bad that was. And she lived over there. At that time I was still at Ms. Elder's, on Green Court. So therefore I couldn't go to see her except for at curfew hours, you know. How you could go over, you couldn't cross Woodward Avenue. Woodward divides the city. And that's the west side. So I steady with her. And naturally I couldn't come over here, until, there were a couple hours an evening they would allow you to come on over here. And then you had to go back. And I remember how they turned over streetcars. How they robbed stores. How they killed, most, they were trying to kill the racists. If they caught you on this side, on the west side, of black people on that side, they would kill you. And if they caught white people on the east side they would kill them. If they could. And that's the year I sent for my 1<sup>st</sup> cousin to come up here. And she was just caught at the bus stop. And I had to let her come here, to Green Court, and stay there until we could find her a place to go. But she had to ride in a checkered cab cause of

PJ: ...?

RJ: Checker cab wouldn't ride black people at that time. At that particular time at the bus stop, they had to take her cause she couldn't get away any other way.

MK: And you Ms. Jessie, what do you remember? You were on Hancock and Hastings. What was going on there?

PJ: Well I was riding the car line. I don't know too much--but I did see a streetcar stopped right outside my window. And the streetcar stopped and they started beating everybody up in the streetcar. Every light person, white or light

RJ: If you were real fair

PJ: If you were real fair they'd beat you up too. So I saw them stop and do that to him in the streetcar. I saw them when they was coming in and out of some of the stores. Some of the boys going in and out of the shops, just young kids, and he got shot in the back--they weren't--

MK: You lived upstairs?

PJ: I lived upstairs yes.

MK: On Hastings or

PJ: On Hastings and on the corner.

RJ: Right on the corner, the very corner.

PJ: And I could see down Hancock, I could see down at the streetcar right out my window.

MK: What corner were you on? The northeast the northwest?

PJ: the streetcar was going back and I was upstairs looking down. So I guess that was, the only window was on the west side looking down.

MK: You were on the west corner?

PJ: If this is Hastings,

RJ: Going downtown.

PJ: Going down this side. The streetcar going this way. I was on this side of the street. I'm upstairs in the window looking down at the car and everything passing by. I could see everything.

MK: The streetcar is going down towards, towards downtown?

RJ: Yes.

PJ: Yes. That's the Harper bus. The Harper streetcar I think it was.

MK: You were up above. You would, so then you must have been on the west side of the street.

PJ: Yes. I was on the west side looking down.

MK: Was it the north side of Hancock or the south side of Hancock?

PJ: Hancock runs this way. Hancock run this way. I was upstairs and I could look down on

MK: So you were on the north west corner

PJ: Yeah.

MK: And how long do you remember, did it last several days, the?

PJ: Yes, yes--

MK: So what about, now, let's go back, let's talk about the east side now. What was your connection, how did you end up going to Black Bottom, or that area?

RJ: You know, when I was going to beauty school. I was 28, I was 2 years out, I was in my 20s and I was working at--I had friends who went to school, over there, and they lived over there. There were times I spent days and weeks with them because I worked in the area. Luckily my husband is in the army. But I was, I could go to Coleman's Young's BBQ. Because that BBQ used to let. Everybody went over there. That was the best BBQ in town. It was called Park's.

MK: What was it called?

PJ: It was called Coleman's

RJ: It was called Young's. Park was his manager. He broke away from him at Open Fire. But it was first called Coleman Young's. Just Young's, it wasn't called Coleman's.

MK: Where was it at?

PJ: ...?

RJ: I think it was on Mt. Elliot. I really think it was.

PJ: ...?

RJ: Because it was near Joe Louis's home. And he lived on MacDougal. And so, you know at that time, the park, Belle Isle Park, was open so we went out there a lot. So you got a chance to visit. And see and everything. All those streets were real discriminated. All of us over there were black. All down in there. Even the bars and everything were black. Black run drug stores. We had our black hospitals. We had black doctors. Everything was black. In that part.

MK: You mentioned MacDougal and Joe Louis. Did you know the family? Did you go over there?

RJ: we didn't. this is the home. But his sister, one of his sisters was an inspector. And I knew her. Because at that time they had inspectors that did the beauty shops if they weren't up to what they were supposed to be then they would close them until you got it in condition.

MK: When you were living on Hancock and Hastings there, what was that neighborhood like before the riots, what did it look like? What was it like?

PJ: ...?

MK: Well I mean, was it a business neighborhood? Was there a lot of activity in the streets? What kind of businesses were there?

PJ: it was nice. Hastings was our main street. Hastings where all the stores were. But the neighborhood was nice.

MK: What kinds of stores were up there in that area where you were living?

PJ: well they had a Chinese store. A ... school. I don't know none of the names. And they had .... A street market .

RJ: And they had everything you wanted over there.

MK: And was it all black?

RJ: Yes.

PJ: Mostly yes.

RJ: Except the Chinese. The Chinese was there.

MK: What about Jewish? Were there any Jewish people?

PJ: I can't remember.

RJ: No, I don't remember the Jewish until I moved ... On the east side of Detroit at that time was all black. And we very rarely, um, ... had groups of people on the street because that was the main street at that time. Hastings. Everybody in all the streets know Hastings was here.

MK: Did you go down to Hastings?

RJ: Oh yeah, I used to hang out down Hastings.

MK: What did you do down Hastings?

RJ: Went to the bars.

MK: What bars did you go to?

RJ: I went to Champion Bar. Went to Clown's. I went to Sensation Bar. Went to Royal Blue. I married down there, in '62. I married this guy up there that picked up his jacket. His name was Candy Johnson. He was a musician.

MK: What kind of musician?

RJ: He blew the saxophone.

MK: And he played down there?

RJ: He played all over. He traveled. He made records. He played with Count Basie. He played with the Camp that Got Away. At the place on Woodward. The place on Woodward called. What was that place called? All the musicians used to come there. He played with all the, Charlie Parker. All the major musicians. In fact, I have a write up about him. And he was in Jet 2 or 3 times. He was one of the best sax players, including Charlie Parker was the same time.

MK: He played tenor or alto?

RJ: Both of 'em.

MK: And how did you meet him?

RJ: In the bar.

MK: Which bar?

RJ: Chesterfield. On John R.

MK: And uh

RJ: And I never knew that man's Basie. I always called him Mister ... now he was ... but he was very nice.

MK: And so, when did you get married?

RJ: 1962.

MK: And where did you get married in church? Or Justice of the Peace?

RJ: Just got married. Now the man the first time, when I was down south, I went to justice of the Peace and my dad didn't like that 'cause that was down south. And my second husband, believe it or not I had 3 husbands, I married another, I married him at the Justice of the Law. I married at his mother's house and I married in white because he hadn't been married before. And he was a saxophone player too. I like saxophones.

MK: I guess so.

RJ: I like music. Cause my father taught music in church. And I still sing in the choir. But I like saxophones, and I still like saxophones.

MK: So the Chesterfield didn't have music there did they?

RJ: Yeah, they had a little band there.

MK: A little band there?

RJ: And uh, in the **flames** he played the **flames**. Charlie was a traveling musician. Johnny didn't travel. He traveled one time with .... B.B. King and he was his mother's baby and he was scared down there and called his mother. He made one record with B.B. King. And he left and went to Georgia and he got scared and told his mother to send down. So that's how he--He was scared to travel.

MK: You're third husband, his name's Candy? Where did he go to school? Where did he learn to play?

RJ: He went to **Willard** School. And he was a **born and native**--Go over and get married at that time. Went to the movie theater and go over there and get married. ...

PJ: ...

MK: So after you married, where'd you live, with Jamie Johnson?

RJ: We lived over there, we lived on Dexter, then you could move where you wanted to move. Before the riot, you couldn't do that. You had to have money. Ford, 'cause Ford, had an **expense** for black people from down south. That's how they got accepted--a little bit. Then after the riot, when they got **accepted** to jobs, and during the war, so that made it able to move on the west side. And people on the west side thought they were better than people on the east side. Even blacks, black people.

PJ: ....?

RJ: OH, that's Ms. Collins. That's the lady.

(Doorbell rings)

RJ: We don't have to stop talking.

MK: Is he still alive? Your husband?

RJ: He died in '81. He played, he didn't know how to **rent**. He played in New York that night and got up and travelled, he was coming through Massachusetts. He had moved to, we had separated, he had moved to Ohio. That's why I can't remember the name of that place. Anyway, he died playing **....** on **...** court. 'Cause he didn't stop **...** He was just like that.

MK: Is he on any recordings? Does he have any albums that he recorded on? With any of the

RJ: Yeah we have a couple of them. I don't know where they are because my son used to keep them. But we have a couple.

MK: So you said he played with Basie?

RJ: He played with Basie, he played with Mercer, Ellington, Duke Ellington. He played with all the big names. I didn't like the traveling, that's why we couldn't get along. 'Cause I had a beauty shop and after I start having children, I couldn't travel and have a beauty shop and raise children. And he was an only child, he couldn't understand that.

MK: Right. So, Chesterfield was one club on Hastings. What's another one you?

RJ: Chesterfield was on John R.

MK: I mean John R.

RJ: And, uh, oh we had the Flames, and we had uh

MK: What about the Gotham Hotel? Did you ever

RJ: The Gotham Hotel. I had a shop next door to the Gotham Hotel, I'll tell you the address of. I did all the **Juicy Tuesdays**. The musicians, the people would travel from all these things, the musicians would **....** I have a picture over there with a man they call the Tune, I had **...** it's on the table over there.

MK: Did, so when did you have the shop next to the Gotham? What years were you there?

RJ: Well when I first got out of beauty school, '48, '49. But I was only, a **scaffold** girl. A basic girl, you know that's what they called it, you did basic work. And you couldn't make too much money so I didn't stay there too long. But I did stay there. I met Joe Louis. I met all the bigs. **.....** Because he would take me back stage. That's why I can't remember that place, on, in front of the orchestra place. In fact that's what it's called.

MK: Orchestra Hall.

RJ: Orchestra Hall. We were down there at that place. And you know how we had the Supremes. I used to do her hair. In fact, Diana Ross, and then uh. In fact, I tell everyone, you owe me \$25 to cut your hair. The kit that, you know how you'd get your kit and you'd start off cutting hair with your basic tools. Well, she didn't never pay her deposit. So she'd owe me \$25. But we used to go over and, people come down

to the shop when I was in the shop, the beauty shop. And she was kind of private then. She wouldn't give you her autograph.

MK: Where was the shop then?

RJ: I was at beauty school at Northwestern. She came down, and then the Supremes, that's when you could see 'em for a dollar. And my daughter was a fan. She used to love to stand, they stood in line. That's when you used to see Frank Sinatra all them. You know, line up for a dollar. Those were the interesting days. And that's how we got a chance to go. Because when you're young you can ride, in those days you could drive and take people for a ride. You could go all over. Of course I had a girlfriend that I wanted to see, and I'd go over and stay 2, 3 weeks at a time, you know. But we could just go and spend the night at people's, it wasn't like it is now. We weren't afraid. I saw a lot of that. My friend was always crazy, because it was always ... And we had the Live Grill. And the Three 6's.

MK: Where was that?

RJ: All down Adams. We had the Lyric Sign, all the way down. And ....

MK: Did he play with, did he play with Joey Exton?

RJ: Yeah, he played with everyone. I can't lie. We were all, all those bars were down there. Even, when Jackie Robinson played, you couldn't stay in the heart of Detroit. You had to stay, there was a little hotel down there called the ... You had to stay in that one. I remember him.

MK: What about other tenor players? Did you meet other tenor players? Any of the ones that came to town?

RJ: No. I met them, but I never.

MK: Victor Gordon, George Adams.

RJ: I knew all them. I knew all them. I knew him. Steve Cole. 'Cause they played with Joe. He made the last record with, he made it for himself. And it was called Look Black. Dean played with him before. And then when Dean left, Dogan. Neal Dogan. And that was the last time he played. And I met most of them at The Flame. You know they gave concerts.

MK: And The Flame is where?

RJ: The Flame, The Flame was on John R., I think it was across .... I can't see between the two of 'em. But that was the nicest bar. That's where Diana Ross and .... That was a big spot.

MK: What'd it look like? What'd The Flame look like?

RJ: IT was fabulous. You know, you had your bathrooms with the ladies in there to give you towels and give you cologne and everything you needed. And you tipped her a quarter. That was a big tip at that time. You tipped them a quarter. And they, they had knockers, you know, big round knockers on the doors. And that's how you applauded. And you'd have to take the handle and do like that.



MK: And what side of John R. was it on? Was it on the west side or the east side?

RJ: The Flame?

MK: Yeah.

RJ: Going downtown, it was on the east side.

MK: Okay.

RJ: The Flame. The Chesterfield was on this side.

MK: What did The Flame look like from the outside? Was there a neon.

RJ: Yeah there was a flame on it. It was a nice size building. Like two of these houses. And we had a lot of good times.

MK: And what about the Chesterfield?

RJ: The Chesterfield wasn't that large. It would be like this building and a half. But it wasn't giant or nothing. And the band was always small. Now that's where Johnny played. And I think the **Sisters** came to Detroit at the **Blue Room**.

MK: Where was that?

RJ: It was on the east side of Hastings, on Monroe Street down there. You know where The Sensation is? It was on the other side of Hastings. Those was right there. .... But they were down there. But they all were nice. The Clown, all that. You could go in and they had white table clothes.

MK: You **stayed**?

RJ: Ladies could go alone. Go with a bunch of girls and go on out. I could to drive in, I started driving in '82, .... You could take your girlfriends and go out. ...

MK: you guys have any questions?

PJ: You mean us?

MK: I'm asking Ashley and Monique? Pardon? Okay, go ahead.

A/M: Where did you--

RJ: Um, you want to be a cosmetologist?

A/M: Well, I do hair now. Just some braids--

RJ: You want to get the whole thing? Or just the braids?

A/M: I know I'm busy and--Have to have licenses, so--

RJ: Right here on Glendale, where the college used to be, you know where

A/M: ....

RJ: Right on the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup>, you know where it is.

PJ: ....

A/M: Highland Park, is that what you're talking about?

RJ: Uh huh, that's Highland Park. You know where Highland Park College used to be? That's called Career Work now. And that's where you can go.

A/M: ....

RJ: They ... 'Cause that's where they have that. They teachers there. And that's where you .... You know where that is? You know where the college was at? Well that's ... They call it Career Work.

A/M: What church did you go to ...

RJ: Well for the last 42 years I've gone to the, First Amenthist Baptist on

A/M: I'm sorry, can you spell that?

RJ: We would .... Besides it's on Clint and Corn Garden, between Clint and 6 Mile. Right off Dayton.

A/M: Tell me about Blackwell?

RJ: Blackwell Drug Stores?

A/M: Do you wanna, was it private, or?

RJ: It was just like, Blackwell Drug Stores were just like Cunningham's. They was the same size, they had the same procedures. The same, it was just, it was nice. But it was just owned by black people.

MK: What was, what did it look like? What kind of sign, you know Cunningham's had that green and white always. What did Blackwell's

RJ: They had Blackwell's. The same way they had Cunningham's they had Blackwell. And the reason I emphasize that is because that was the only one that was big enough to do that. The rest of the little drug stores were just drug stores. But Blackwell was a real drug store like Cunningham's. And had everything. And the first, we had several. But that was during that time and I heard people tell the story of how, now Sonny Wilson had a night club. And he was one of the, right down of the street from where she stayed on Hancock not far from Hastings. And he had a, wow, he had the longest bar in Michigan. Have you heard that?

A/M: Yeah.

MK: What's the name of it?

RJ: Sonny Wilson's. He was a short little guy, I guess that's why they called him Sonny. And he just wrote a book. Now he wrote the book about the place. And it's at Wayne State. 'Cause that's where Carol ... . He got his doctorate. He got his at Wayne State. Blackwell was, to me, just the same. You could go in there sit down and eat ice cream. Were as the other stores didn't serve you until after, after the war. And that's where we had to go, to all black hospitals, and we had all black cabs. I had, my girlfriend, she could pass for white. And I worked for a while, I told you, at that shop downtown? Over by the Gotham? And she used to work downtown in one of the stores as a flag girl. And she'd come up and work with us, with the black girls. So we all went to lunch one day at Hutchins. I told you again, that's how we got way on the east side. We'd get her to get a cab, hail a cab. But then we'd run out there and get in it. We thought it was funny then. We didn't know it, how bad it was. But it was funny how she used to do that. But we'd talk about it, how we had to .... when she wasn't there. We did all that.

A/M: Do you remember any other black all, businesses?

RJ: Yes. I remember, in fact, I was writing 'em down last night. We had 14 black beauty schools. And we had, all those bars you heard me talking to the gentleman about. I'm sorry, I forgot your name.

MK: Krzyzowski.

RJ: Krzyzowski. We had all the good bars. Most times it was bars/restaurants. And we one, and church.

MK: Funeral homes.

RJ: Funeral homes, we had our own funeral homes. We still have our own funeral homes. We have a few, I don't know any bars that I'd like to go to right now. 'Cause we're in a rough neighborhood. And they don't ever, young people don't think like we did in those days. Now they think they so smart, that they don't need to know anything. The average one just out here not trying to inform himself. Not trying to ..... I'm talking about the young men and women you see walking the street yelling, and ... and drinking pop on the street. You can't tell them nothing. They don't want to know. But in those days, young people wanted a business. I came up here 18 and I didn't have, I never I had any trouble either. If I wanted to do something .... And that's why the same doctors that I went to and worked for all those years, I still go to the one she recommended to me, the last doctor that we need to stick together, I went to him 53 years because I got sick and he's the one who see it. He even paid it. Because the problem is, she couldn't do that then. She was on the board of health. And she took me in there. And gave me surgery. Try to find out what I had. Had to ... just to find out what it is. And he doctored on me 53 years. He came right here in this living room right here. I worked from a part time and think that was the shop. And he moved out to Southfield. I went to him right there, and I still go there. But he died about 3 years ago. He was at my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party. He was one of the best doctors I think I ever saw.

A/M: There was like hospitals down on the east side, or?

RJ: Yes. One was on about as far as Dayton. I can't remember that. But yeah, one. But most of them were downtown on Rush, John R, Vernor Highway, Vernor Hospital. And one on Elliot. That name, E.K. Thomas. I think that was it. But it was about 6 of them, we had black hospitals. Couldn't go to many

hospitals, unless you were rich. Now I think we had 13. I ain't talking about the ball players of St. Bernard but ....

PJ: ....

MK: What about Dr. Sweet? Where did he, uh

RJ: Dr. Sweet was a good doctor.

MK: Where did he, uh

RJ: I don't think Dr. Sweet had a hospital. They worked out of

MK: He had a private practice?

RJ: I think they worked out of, I think that's his--But he's a very good doctor. I've heard his name a lot. Dr. Sweet was

PJ: Dr. Sweet was our Landlord when we stayed on Hayes. That was a beautiful apartment.

MK: He had an office on Chene Street

RJ: I thought he did. Because he still did. He stayed up there, he stayed up there. But I just knew of him. But I know he was a good doctor.

A/M: Vernor Hospital? Was the name

RJ: Vernor was called, Vernor was called Vernor.

1.10 stopped at 1:02

RJ: ..... But we had, we didn't, we couldn't, as I said, we couldn't go to other hospitals because we couldn't afford it. And you know because there hadn't always been Medicaid, that was the first insurance out for black people to start going to the hospitals. 'Cause when I worked in the Fischer Building, there was one black couple, Hayden, the whole time I was there.

MK: patient?

RJ: Um hm. Just one couple. They used to ask me how I feel, how'd I get this job and I told them, I told them, and I asked them if they wanted to know what I would do with the money? I said was going to buy some of--I was young then, real sassy. But they were, sometimes they would look at me and they just couldn't understand how someone could, but I didn't mind. Because I never wanted to--Because I was the top of my class when I went to high school. And I worked for my principle and his name was Elston Howard, no his name was T.B. Howard. And at the New York Yankees, you may know, Elston that was his son.

MK: That was his son? Wow.

RJ: Um hm. That was my principle's son.

MK: That Ann Krynowski Yankees.

RJ: Huh?

MK: Ann Krynowski was a Yankee.

RJ: Yes, very good. Uh huh. And he bought his daddy a place down there next to the school. I was from there. Called Housefield.

MK: Is Elston Howard still alive?

RJ: I think he died. He would play Jackie Robinson ... sometimes.

MK: Did you play an instrument?

RJ: Did I play an instrument? No I just sang.

MK: Tenor?

RJ: I sang. And my family sings. My dad sang accapela. He liked music was his thing. So our family can sing acapela. We know the notes, do re me fa so. We know how to sing. And my daughter plays flute. And her name's carol and she plays the flute. And my son Clarence plays drums. But see, we were too poor to, even when I went to high school, it took 25 cents to take piano. I always wanted to play piano but I just didn't have that. My dad had to walk up there, because as you heard me say, I wanted to learn magic. Which means I had to leave Wardell and go stay with somebody and ride a bus and go to school. That's how bad I wanted to learn. And my mother wanted to me to go and that was that. My dad bought my, it cost 11 dollars to buy my class ring. So you know how long ago that was. 11. He walked the soles off his shoes till he had 11 dollars.

PJ: ...?

RJ: Even more than that, it was another town. It was as far almost as from here to Flint. Between Pontiac.

MK: You in a choir at church?

RJ: Yes, my daughter and I. She just retired as couple years ago. And my son Clarence. We all sing in the choir. We sing the first Sunday and the fourth Sunday. We sing the senior choir on the first choir, and we sing mixed choir that meets every Friday, that's all voices.

MK: When you were going to hear music at the clubs, who are the vocalists you remember? Who did you see?

RJ: I remember Ella Fitzgerald, Diana Washington, Nina Simone, um, I can't remember her name but she tried to get me to follow her. That's when I was in beauty school and she wanted me to go with her.

MK: Etta Jones?

RJ: I remember Etta Jones. But she played the piano, and she was heavy.

MK: Esther Phillips?

RJ: I was going, what is her name again? I really did, I tried. ...

MK: Did you ever see Billie Holiday sing?

RJ: Yep. I saw her a lot, at The Flame. She had that little dog. And had a fur jacket just like that. Every time came that fur jacket came that little dog. That itty bitty dog was about this big. I don't know what you call it. She had that little dog. I saw Diana once. I saw her, I saw them all! I saw Mahalia Jackson. That's all I used to do. Every Friday night, every Saturday night. Nat King Cole. I got a lot of people.

MK: Do you remember how much it was to get into the clubs?

RJ: 50 cents. I told you I paid a dollar to see Diana Ross. So, but you see, money was scarce and we were working in private families.

PJ: ....?

RJ: We worked for 8 dollars a week. We were off every other Sunday and every other Thursday. So that's how much money we got.

PJ: ..... Because ....

RJ: And that was

PJ: ....

RJ: And we rode the bus and that was 10 cents. But the buses didn't run in the black neighborhoods then. They run out... They didn't run over there. We rode streetcars. When I first got here, you see how angry I was, I didn't know about the streets, my sister told me to come out to Green Court so you could imagine, for a couple weeks I had to stay at a home, I called a friendship home because I didn't, when I first come to Ms. Elder the girl I think had another week or two. So I had to go stay over there and that was a bit of a walk so my sister told me how to come out here and see her on Green Court. And every time I'd get to the bus stop, streetcar stop, it said no standing and I thought it meant no standing. That was before cars, that was what the card said. I didn't notice it, and I just stand back. And you know the line, the streetcar line is in the middle of the street. Have you seen the pictures?

MK: Yep.

RJ: So you got to walk out to that yellow line. And I didn't know so at that time, it keep going and I go, why doesn't it ever see me? I'm standing right here. And it said no standing. So one time a lady walked up to me and she's waiting for the streetcar. And she said next time, you walk out to that yellow line, right up by that yellow line and that was it. That I could walk out there 'cause cars wouldn't hit you. You

can't imagine that today walking out in the street and nobody hitting you. That is what happened. I always tell that to people. 'Cause that's just it.

A/M: Do you remember anything with the Nation of Islam when you were down in that area when it started? Or do you just remember Christianity?

RJ: At that time, I don't remember being Islam then. At that time, I remember a lot about my cousin when he came up, that's when weaves became popular, for black people. They became popular. They would take your weave off your head 'cause they didn't want you to look like you were trying to be white. And all that. And that's when that started. They came and took the weaves off your head. But I didn't get involved with a lot of that. Because they were kind of deadly at that time. The reason I heard. I respect them though. I respect the fact that they dress nice. And they talk nice too. Except that, what you hear. But I respect them a lot.

MK: So who were role models for you when you came up here? Did you have role models? Did you think of dark people that you wanted to, you know, be like?

RJ: At that time, when I first came up here, all I knew about, the most I knew about was church. And Mahalia Jackson was one I really, really worshiped a lot. Because she said as long as she lived, she'd always be singing. She'd be singing until she died. After that, when I start going to the clubs and stuff, and learning, you'd be surprised at the things you learn after you leave. It's just like leaving here and going overseas. You wouldn't know a thing about over there. And I didn't know a thing about the city. So when I got here and I saw that you could still be a lady and be an entertainer, then, that's when I saw Diana Washington, Nina Simone. You know when she made that song, when she was young, ... in Black. Don't you remember that? Do you remember?

MK: Um hm.

RJ: And she was all of that. She was real black. Really had a beautiful voice. And Ella Fitzgerald. 'Cause I used to do their hair.

A/M: Do you have any pictures of them?

RJ: No. No I don't know. I don't have any picture of them 'cause they didn't give out pictures there a lot. And you know, as I say, we didn't have any to buy. I had a, we bought albums and they had pictures on them. But we didn't. After I had children they tore 'em up and all that. Destroyed. I liked Diana Washington. I liked Mahalia Jackson. I liked most of the good singers. Just liked Fitzgerald would sing I Will Always Love You, with that beautiful voice, I liked that. I don't like those sopranos though. There were a few.

PJ: ....

RJ: Nat King Cole, yeah I liked him. Do you know the story about Nat King Cole?

MK: No, which one?

RJ: The one that he was in Alabama and he was playing the piano. And the man told him he wanted him to sing. And he said he couldn't play and sing at the piano. And he got down there and he started singing Straight Never Fly Right. That's how he made that record. I like him. I really like him.

MK: Did you ever see him perform?

RJ: Yes.

MK: Where did you see him perform?

RJ: At the Orchestra Hall. They all used to come there. You could sit there and bring your sandwiches and just **be chill** at that time. Children aren't as bad as they are today. We'd sit there and be quiet. And everybody left and we'd just hang. We **chilled** a lot of the time.

PJ: .....

RJ: You had to take it off. And if you talked to loud then they kicked you out. They weren't about that.

PJ: ....

MK: I interviewed a guy who grew up near Chene Street, he was a white guy. A Czech guy. He was a bass player. And about the same time that some pretty big name acts came out of ....., Wardell Gray, people like that. But this guy played bass and he played, he played behind Dizzy Gillespie.

RJ: I love Dizzy.

MK: And he played Stan Kenton. And he told me about, when Kenton would come in Nat Cole would be double billed usually. Nat Cole Trio and Stan Kenton. And then he'd take 'em down to the restaurants on Chene Street. And of Course Nat Cole is black so, and Nat Cole said you know, you can't invite me. He wanted to have the owner of the restaurant and bar invite him personally otherwise he wouldn't go down there.

RJ: A lot of us felt like that. I remember when Billy Eckstine, I used to like him too, he closed the Bars, you know the Bars?

MK: Oh yeah.

RJ: And he said, if they wouldn't let his people come in, he wouldn't play. So at that particular time when he had that place, that night, he felt, they thought he was going to perform, he wouldn't perform.

MK: It was on Joseph **Cochrell**.

RJ: Was it? I never went because they wouldn't let us in there. But I did go to Bakers. You know Bakers?

MK: Oh yeah.



RJ: And they had a player called **Flowers**. He was black, but the black people couldn't sit in the audience. So Candy played there one night, I think he played one week. They stared him. You know Candy Johnson? I had to sit back there where they played ping pong. I couldn't sit out in the audience.

MK: No kidding.

RJ: Yes. That's how you did it at the white bars. That's when they started making them Black and Tan. That's the first thing they called 'em, Black and tan. And they had one right here on Davidson and 14<sup>th</sup>. You know where the Chesterfield Market is. They had a bar there and it was so pretty, you could sit there and press those buttons and order whatever you wanted. The lights come on. Well Candy opened there, Candy Johnson, opened there. And he stayed there a long time. It was a real nice bar. But a gentleman there dated a friend of mine, a girlfriend of mine. That's when Caucasian men were dating women, black women. But they would get 'em a house and you couldn't have any friends there. But I was the only friend he'd allow to come over. He told me the reason he made that bar, the Black and Tan was because he found out black people drink more liquor than Caucasian people because, Caucasian people didn't want beer. And he said that's why the prices were high because he knew they were still going to **drink** booze. And he would me all that you know. I know why they made that **living**, and I know now why they make, we used to go into the store, Hutchins downtown, and you know at that time, you know in those days everybody liking **hats**, when I went to **Corrals**, they had their own oil. And it was heavy. And then you know, oil used to be heavy. Oil used to be heavy and not light weight. Well that's when it first came out. And that's why it was always called a special name because they had their own set of cosmetics. And it was heavy. It was too heavy. We used to have real .... So, you couldn't sell your dresses, you couldn't sell them a hat. If you sold a hat you had to buy.

PJ: ....

RJ: You had to buy. They would come ring 2 or 3 dresses up and if you didn't like them they'd put 'em back.

PJ: .... We was too dark to go in there, for a job

RJ: And that's why we had to take jobs with private families. Because we were dark.

PJ: The light girls you know, they ...

RJ: If you wanted light.

PJ: ....

RJ: We was too dark.

PJ: ... dark....

RJ: And you had to be a certain size.

PJ: ...

RJ: And when they got in, even the light girls, they had a lot of customers who as light, they couldn't wear nothing but brown, black and dark. You couldn't wear light colors. They wanted people to look at the products and not you.

A/M: Did you, ....

PJ: ...

RJ: Stayed there a lot. I got a lot of pictures on here.

PJ: ...near where I first come here....

RJ: That's not the hotel she's talking about. They had a lot of those small hotels. But they wanted big, like the Gotham and all of them. But she stayed, took pictures this time. That was the biggest club down there. That's where I saw Billy Eckstine.

MK: What did it look like?

RJ: IT was fabulous. It was big. Just like they did the Gotham. The Gotham was nice. That was nice. The people that open these big places, they were nice.

A/M: The clubs on Hastings ... were they black owned?

RJ: Yeah. The ones on Hastings? They had to be because everyone down there was black.

A/M: What about Club Three Sixes?

RJ: Hm?

PJ: ... Everybody owned. The black owned was not....

RJ: What's that?

MK: Three Sixes.

RJ: Three Sixes was owned by blacks because we was the only ones down there. Everything, all of Black Bottom was black. If it was owned by Caucasian people they wasn't in front.

A/M: Then it was operated still by blacks.

RJ: If it did, it was because they had told us we couldn't go. We couldn't go in certain places. Certain stores we couldn't go in.

PJ: What .... A man named Joe Turpin. ...

MK: Right.

RJ: Black cop. It would be full of black people.

MK: You remember him?

RJ: Um hm.

MK: Do you remember Mr. Turpin?

RJ: Um hm. I remember it was real dark.

PJ: ....

RJ: I didn't know he was a cop. Nobody told us.

MK: Where did you see him?

RJ: Down John R. they was towing his car. And he'd ride around in that car with those black boots on. ...

MK: Was there much, were there drugs visible, was there, you know?

RJ: No, no. Only thing they drink was beer and wine. They didn't have enough money to get too drunk. Now the musicians could drink and do what they wanted to do because they could get a lot on credit. But uh, that's one thing Candy didn't do. .... No, they had drugs later. When the picture God Father came out, that's what was said in there. They were going to break it down and stick it in the black neighborhood. And that's when they broke it down to 4 and 5 hours. But you know now the bigger musicians, you know that, you know they used drugs. That's what a lot of them died from. They don't tell that a lot. But you know a lot about them. The two Dorsey Brothers. And even Charlie Parker. He overdosed. So I know all that 'cause I know

MK: Did you ever see Wardell Gray play?

RJ: Yep, um hm. I don't think I missed too many. 'Cause they all came to the Orchestra Club. They would come sometimes with a small band, actually we called them double. And then sometimes they would come by themselves. Most times if you a small band you got with a big band and you got a chance to see them. Mom Madely and all of them.

A/M: ... being a musician, that some of the famous musicians come over for dinner or come over to your house?

RJ: Nope, I never invited them. I don't like a lot of musicians. I can't stand a lot of musicians. I don't like their attitudes. I didn't like Candy very much. .... He was a very selfish man. He was very good, and very good to me, but he had a personality on the stage just like .... And Michael Jordan, they have a personality for the public and they have one for you. And I didn't like that. So I never invited them. Naturally his, his family drummer, now he didn't work with him, I knew them. But he ruled with his drummer so I had to see him. But otherwise I don't, they think they better, a lot of them think they're better than men. Most at least.

MK: Who did your husband kind of look to as a model because of playing sax? Who was

RJ: ..., Count Basie. He liked those two best. And the one he worked with. The one I told you he made the record with. The last one he played with.

MK: Phil Dogget?

RJ: Yeah. Those three. Those are the ones he talked to most. He made a record with .... But he was an only child and he was very selfish. But you couldn't tell him unless you really knew him.

MK: Thank you very much, that's great.