

Interviewee: Joseph L. Watson
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Interviewer: April Wood, Historic Charleston Foundation
Videographer: Leigh Moring, Historic Charleston Foundation
Transcriber: Paul M. Garten, Inc.
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BEGIN INTERVIEW

APRIL WOOD: Will you please say and spell your full name?

JOSEPH WATSON: My name is Joseph Lee Watson. That's J-o-s-e-p, W-a-t-s-o-n. The Lee is supposed to have been Lelijah. But being that I was born, and it was just me and my mother there, when she went about giving that to the doctor, he was so upset because he missed being there to do what his job was, and it was just me and her on December the 24th. Did I do that right because I can give you so much on actually what went on?

AW: When and where were you born?

JW: I was born at 27 ½ Amherst Street, which is less than 100 yards from where we sit. There was a small court behind what was Woody's Grocery Store over here, what [00:00:52 Luxury Simplified] has now. And the first building in that court is where I was born.

AW: What were your parents' names?

JW: My parent name, my father was Benjamin Watson, which they called him Shorty, and my mother was Mary [00:01:09 Prioleau] Watson.

AW: How long have you lived in this area?

JW: I lived in this area all my life, 67 years now, 68 come December the 24th.

AW: When did your family settle here before you were born?

JW: My mother, her mother had passed away in 1932, and being my grandfather had eight kids out there in Parker's Ferry, his sister who lived in town asked, could she raise the baby child? And so she brought him in at two years old in town and raised him, and they stayed right at 72 America Street at that time. And from that she and her husband raised my mama real good until he passed away. When he passed away, that's when she decided she needed to get a skill, and she moved down in the [00:02:07 barrio] which was the project downtown. And from there she opened up her beauty shop after she got the trade for that on what we call Harlem Street off of Elizabeth Street.

And then from that, she used the money from that and bought the house at 43 Radcliffe Street and had her beauty shop on the back of that. And what she had in there that really was so – show you how industrious she was, not just the beauty shop, but she did tablewares, made homemade wines to sell during Christmastime, and also she rented out two cottages in the back and the upper floors within that building. So, that allowed her to have and make a living even after her husband passed. But off of that, my mother picked up on businesses and stuff like that, and that's when she had the idea that she would open up a business here.

AW: What was the name of the business?

JW: The business here was called Watson's Grill. And when she opened that, it was really a change in my life because where we lived at, it was more – my mother always told us, I raised you in the house, not in the street. So, we stayed in the house most of the time. We came here and she opened the business. We saw so many different people with different attitude, different ways and stuff like that, noticed how she would handle herself, even though she was doing so much work and cooking the food, serving the tables and stuff like that, but she's listening to what's going on within the restaurant. And when she see someone or you'll hear someone arguing, she'd tell them, take that outside, take that outside. And they always would leave, and you'll have a peaceful place. That's what she wanted because that's how she always carried herself peacefully.

AW: Did people eat in this –

JW: Yes.

AW: Was it the whole building or –

JW: What you see here, these windows were larger than this. They were large just like the window across there. She blocked them up after my father and his womanizing and partying and stuff. People came and broke the windows, and so that's when she decided to [00:04:21 unintelligible]. But the restaurant actually dining area went back another 20 feet beyond this wall, and then the kitchen was over here on the side. And so when we move in, it was only two rooms downstairs and three rooms upstairs. But she added onto the house as we were here for the family and stuff like that.

AW: So, did you live upstairs?

JW: Yeah, we lived upstairs. We moved up there right there in 1963. She rented out but helped the people that she was renting out and cooking. Then she went about and got two other jobs. My mother sat upstairs. I was just 11 years old, and she said, Lord, who fool me to think I can buy a house? And I watch her cry. And after she stopped crying, like she normally do, she would pray. She got up the next morning, came down, worked here in the restaurant, but then gone out and got two more jobs and worked that. And she came home, and she told us that y'all got to take care of the house because I'm going to be working. And so for the next four years, she was busy working with jobs. And, I mean, she didn't come home until 9:30 something or 10:00 at night, but leave – came downstairs ever since 6:30 in the morning.

That evening job, that last job she had was cleaning the courthouse on the corner of Broad and Meeting Street. And she met lady friends in there that really, I think, comfort her on what she was trying to do because the families then seemed to really bond with the kids and stuff like that. So, really the ladies then worked that way. But she didn't realize through all of what she was going through, it was teaching me what I know I have to do, always to persevere. Don't give up on what you have to do. Work hard at whatever job you have.

So, right there in 1968, that's when she decided to make it into just a sweet shop, something she can handle herself. And my brother built that wall there. And she opened it up, and everything was fine. With the school being that Sadie Brown was open up, that mean in the morning time you had over 400 kids coming down. It was like a wave coming through the community in the morning time. So, I would have to be down here and help her and stuff like that. And so I got there, and I asked my brother and sister to help. And they helped for a while, but then they went away. But I said to myself, she's not going to make it if I leave her on this corner by herself. So, that's when I said, even when I finish my job, no, I come in here to help her, make sure that she has some rest and she's doing well. Yeah.

AW: So, what order are you in the family?

JW: I'm the middle child. That's where the peace come from because when you got hell on one side and fire on the other, you know to be calm. Okay. And you can get out of this before the two of them beat you up. No, no. But always I was the middle child, and always paying attention to what she says because my mother always talked to us from little kids. She wanted a conversation or wanted to know what you were doing in life like that. And as busy as this neighborhood was, the people just like they were – it was like a ant colony, steady moving, people steady doing things.

You go back into the '50s, which is coming off of World War II. You still had people who did jobs that I see just came back here in the last ten years where they're taking scrap up and using that as income to make it. You had rag man and tin man with wooden carts coming down the street selling. You also had people selling vegetables out there. You have in the middle of this block down here, the Bell family had three businesses in their building, which the family still own one house today down there. They had a shoeshine parlor, a barbershop, and they sold wood within the community. And in the evening time, the father after he knock off his regular job, that's when he would load his wood wagon and go around through the neighborhood selling wood.

So, they were finding some way to be industrious. They wasn't just saying, eight hours a day that's all I'm going to do. And a lot of the people that were doing that were people who worked at the cigar factory. The great thing moving here, which got me reading newspapers, came from the people next door, the Lucases, because Daisy Lucas took to me like I was her child and stuff. So, also the gallery shows down the street midway of the block, whenever they – bills were needed to pay, now they had one child they were going to send downtown, and I'd get a dime for going down there and paying bills at different places. But they took to me and talked to me about life and what they were doing and what they were trying to do. Daisy Lucas took to

me very good. Her mama and daddy did, too. And now their grandson stays in the house next door, George Pettigrew.

But the old man actually had chickens. He raised chickens there, and off of raising that he made a deal with my mama and the restaurant that she would give him all the soup bones, and he would break the soup bones up and mix that with the chicken feed, so he got more chicken feed that he would give her – anytime he killed chickens, he would give her a couple of chickens. And that yard was full of chickens. But that's what you had in this neighborhood that you had more like people actually had horses and other animals through here.

Pigeons was something. It was unbelievable in here because people used that actually to say as food, too, back then. Right across from the Catholic Church on Radcliffe, St. Philip, I think that was the biggest place for pigeons right there at their house. I mean, there had to be over 50 that they were feeding all the time. The thing was that they could get the eggs off of them. They could actually use that just like you use the chicken. And pigeons were all over town at that time.

AW: Did you eat that, the pigeons?

JW: Oh, yes. Did I? Yes, we did. My mother came from Parker's Ferry, so a lot of what they ate and cook is what she cook. And a lot of time my uncles then would bring food, deer meat, corn, wild meat. They would bring it to us, and we would have it here in the restaurant. And people would be looking for that. You always could find that on the menu that she have that here. So, that connection to her family out there actually benefit us here. Summertime we would spend out there as little kids. Before we got here, we spent that time out there in Parker's Ferry. And our language was the struggle when we spent a month out there and come back and school open and the way we talk, and the teachers didn't like that. They wanted you to speak English only. But here you is when you around family, you hearing the Gullah so much. That way was so good.

And the thing is, they were so industrious out there on the farm that they were doing nine different things out there. My uncles then actually grind up sugar cane for everyone in that area, and their daddy and granddaddy would be on the back hill watching them. And if they see that mule stop from going in a circle, he come up there and cut their behind. And they say it was like around the clock because you would be curing that syrup and have to keep the fire going all night under that pot and stuff.

My granddaddy came to live with us when mama started redoing the rooms upstairs because she couldn't be there and working at the same time. And so he slept with us, and talking to him about the family history, that's when I found out that the family came from Eutawville. Two of them came in the 1860s and work on the White Plantation down on the other side of Parker's Ferry. And from that, that's where they got together and bought – the two brothers bought 72 acres in Parker's Ferry off of Penny Creek Road. And so from that, they worked that.

But those brothers when they became – their kids, when those boys became 17, 18 years old, they were put out. And I was talking to my grandfather in the bed, and he told me about

putting out as boys. I said, why you do that? He said, they have to go and be a man. So, he put them out. And I wanted then to find out from them how you felt when your daddy put you out. So, I went about when they came to town. I asked them about it. And they agreed with him that, no, he did the best thing to them by putting them out. And I used that same toughness with my son when he was in college because he didn't like going to Savannah State, and he was here and all comfortable.

But that change really bothered him, and he was in the car with me 2:00 at night and telling me what he didn't like. And I just stopped the car on 95, and I said to him, get out and go be a man. And he got out of the car, walked around for a hour-and-a-half, and I'm nervous about it. But I called my niece. Did he call you? No, he ain't called, but he's still out there walking around in the dark. He came back, got in that car, didn't speak to me the whole weekend, took him back to school, but he applied himself. But he didn't know where that come from. It came from my grandfather, what he said. No, you got to push him. You got to make sure to be a man out there, and not to let him be like the boys you see around here.

And that's one of the most happy thing that I have because I remember in the hospital looking at him when you're first born, and something in me said, you don't matter no more. That child matter. And that's what I've always looked at that I wanted to help and do for him, or just like the same thing with my mother when things was bad here. I can remember she saying to us upstairs – and this was before she cried and stuff like that I told you about. She actually fix the food for us and told us, y'all go ahead and eat and put the rest in the refrigerator. And we asked her, Mama – my sister said, Mama, you going to eat? She said, no. She got a glass of water and went to bed. But here she was doing it for us, and you don't realize how much you learning from that or what you supposed to do in bad situations and struggling situation.

AW: Can you tell us about like this neighborhood? What were the boundaries of the east side then? Have they changed?

JW: The boundary has changed because at the east side, it was covering way more than that. Our councilman, which was appointed then back in the '60s and '70s through the city council, that area covered from Calhoun Street all the way up here to Lee Street. And when they really did start growing the city and stuff like that, that's when we had a councilman to this area. The East Side Community Council, which is across the street, now boundaries are just from Mary Street up to Cooper Street. That's our boundary, and that's where we try and do as much as we can within this area and help and learn the community try and learn what we can say at the BAR, the meetings, so that we really do have an effect and not let the community be changed in such a way that it loses its character.

And losing the character loses also that integrity, and that integrity you see and just walking through here and seeing how a person fix a house up, how that courtyard or the entrance greet you. And before you meet them, you know so much of what that person really try to project as a individual, that character level or respect level that he has, and that's what you want to be able to do. I mean, one of the beautiful thing I do now when I do walk, there's people that greets me and they say, hello, how you doing, and those things like that or just a smile. You get a smile because you said good morning to them. That really – it allows them not to feel afraid or

intimidated because someone is coming walking past and fast. You don't know what's going to happen. But it calms them down, and now they know that you're a friendly person. And that's what you've had here in the South for so long, and that's what we need to keep going in this area.

AW: When you were a kid, was this neighborhood always called the east side, or was it really something that city council [00:18:37 made up]?

JW: No, it was called – this area was called Mexico because the Mexico Barbershop was across the street. That building had three businesses downstairs, and Mexico Barbershop was one of the calming factors in this area because Reverend Gold and Reb, the other pastor, really counseled and talked to people, and they had four chairs in that barbershop. You could stand over here and listen to the fellas there playing checkers inside. When they make a move, and they're slamming it on there, you know when he winning the game. And so, no, they were really a calming factor [00:19:21 in this] area.

Reb would always say – they'll send you to the store to get something for them while they're cutting hair. And the one in the first chair, Reb, he belonged to the Seven Day Adventist Church up there on King Street. And he send you for something, and you didn't get it right. You come back. He say, now you're cooking with gas. Where that come from? Because gas was a new thing then. It was something that was not always that people had. But, no, you're doing what's right now. So, you remember them from that. The other pastor in there, Pastor [00:19:59 Dom], the church down here on Alexander Street right across from the project, Reverend Gold and his son later on pastored that church.

Like I said, they talked to so many people and calmed so many thing going on out in the community. And also they taught other fellas how to cut hairs and stuff like that. And there's one fella who stops. I see him at Sam's. He's from up there, Elloree or someplace. He's up there. But he told me, I remember y'all because y'all are across from the barbershop when I got my training in there and stuff like that. But that goes back that he open up a shop, and he was successful in his life and still remember doing good things.

AW: So, you got your place, Mexico's Barbershop. What are some other landmarks that used to be here that are the same or that are different from when you were a kid?

JW: Well, the difference is that building being gone there and the one with the park. The one that was there, Jones Dry Cleaners which was on – that was Market Street back then. He had a branch here. And the employee he has in the bank now – in the branch then, we often meet at the bank in the morning time. She'll still be there. But she was someone that really did a lot of talking and stuff in the community. I wish I had brought the pictures out to show y'all of how that was, that building. In the building over there, they had a liquor store, and there was Parker's Grocery Store. And always when I walk in Mr. Parker say, how you doing, Sport? What do you want? You going to try some cheese again today? And it was that Gouda cheese. He let me taste and stuff like that, and those things you remember from him.

Down from that was Al's Cleaners, which the branch of that now is across town on Rutledge Avenue, the only branch there. And up above that building, there was [00:22:10 eight]

two-rooms apartment that families stay in. So, you see that this corner had a lot of people living on it, not just a single family there, here, and across the street, but that really had a lot to do with how busy it was here. Over here across the street was Henry Grocery Store. He was a Jew. And Mr. Henry would always tell me that he remember when my mama would come in the store after I was born and set me on the counter. And his wife would make sure I stay there while my mama picked things up and put it on the counter. But he always would talk about how your family with them, how you're part of them, and that was so important.

Woody's Grocery Store, which is over here, Mr. Woody started off right up here with this one-story white house. He started his business there. Then he moved in here and raised his family upstairs. His son still often visit me here. He was just here last week and just sitting around talking about how we were when we grew up on this neighborhood. But his store was the store my father went in to call the doctor. And having a party line, he couldn't get off, get them off the line. So, Mr. Woody got on there, and he said some words to them to get them off to call the doctor.

But, hey, the doctor didn't make it there in time. And I learned that from my father. He told me about that, what he went through, and then Mr. Woody told me. And I said, well, okay. Y'all know. He said, this same phone right here. Yeah, and I know it. But that makes it part of you, the family, that they can look and tell you something you cannot remember, but it's part of your life. It's like they telling you, no, you belongs to us. God gave you to us at this time, stuff like that.

AW: So, the neighborhood, this street, this intersection had a lot of businesses. Why were there so many grocery stores next to each other?

JW: Because it was that dense a population in this area. You go down on the next corner. You had an Italian down on that corner. Greek was down on the other corner. And all of that was a flavor to this area that you really was drawn to. On Reid Street, midways of Reid Street was a bakery, but you didn't have to go there to know what they were cooking. You could smell it. You go on Mary Street. Soon as you turn on Mary Street, that same building facing down Elizabeth, it was a bakery there. And you could smell what they were cooking, and so it'd fill you up. People would come for that so much. Cooking or what you needed was done right here within the area. And that to me really gave you a flavor of what this neighborhood was.

During the Christmastime, that's when you see the kids out. And, I mean, they don't exercise like we did back then. Everybody wanted Union Number Five skates, and we were going to skate all over town. The city had to put skating zones up to try and keep us from being in the street. At the end of this block, right across when you turn there, used to be Swift Meat Company. And all that meat would come in on boxcars and stuff. And within that building they would actually do all the butchering and stuff for that meat.

But we right there in March would go to Edwards or the Five-and-Ten Store just before you get there, and we'd buy kites. And when we buy the kites, we would plan, because the wind is going to get so strong, to go down here, cross East Bay, and you could go about 100 yards further over on the railroad track and see who could get their kite to hang over the top of the

bridge. And there was one bridge at that time. So, here's the wind blowing. It's still cold, and we're out there trying to get our kite that far. So, you buy 500 feet of cord, and you got to get the best cord and knot it right, so it don't break loose. And you're out there half of the day doing that. So, those are things that really give us that activity of knowing and enjoying this neighborhood, playing football and stuff up and down here on this street.

You go back – I can remember at one time, there had to have been, let's see, 40 of us out here in the street, and that was coming out of Tobin Alley and [00:27:04 Lambs] Court was little – which Orange Court just a little further down. All of us were out there playing ball in the street like that. Cars would really slow down just because they know they playing their ball. Let them just go ahead and play or go around. The street at that time was a one-way street. It's not like it is right now. This one block here is two-way. And so the confusion that happens here when people get to this corner is, I mean people from out of town, it's too confusing really to take away what has been a normal flow to do something special. I think that's what we're going to have when they change Spring and Cannon Street to two-way, and really it should not. The street is too narrow for that.

AW: So, why were there so many – it sounds like it was really exciting here. So, it was very diverse, lots of people coming home from school, going shopping, playing in the streets. Was it all related to the cigar factory, or was it the Navy Yard?

JW: The Navy Yard was the stabilizing force because one out of four, one out of every four people worked there. So, definitely, like I said, the gallery show was down here midways of the block. That's where he worked at. So, that was putting him on a national pay scale, not on the pay scale here. The docks were the same thing because they could stay so busy. And what they're working out there, that drove what was going on here. King Street had more department stores, and you could see. They might have had two restaurants, four drugstores on King Street, but not what you see now with all these club and nightlife and stuff. You might have had two, and all of that was shut down come Sunday because blue laws was in effect in town. And so that was one of the things that really controlled that area. You could go downtown.

And when we sold newspaper, and I didn't tell you about that, we went sold newspaper starting when I was nine. And when I went by the News and Courier, right where they're building the apartment building, right there on that corner is where you could buy the 10 or 15 papers. And my cousin and my brother, being that they were older, knew the routine, but I felt out of place. They took us to the corner where the saddle shop was right on the corner of Line and King Street, and we sold newspaper there. But something happened on that corner after a couple of weeks, and we change our routine. And we talked about it, didn't come back and say anything to our mother.

But what had happened was that a man pulled up there. At that time that street was the main artery to get you over to where you could go and get on the bridge. He pulled up there with the kids in the car, and he bought three papers. So, the next day when he come, and we saw the car, we came to the car like he was buying a paper. But he got out, and they threw eggs and blocks at us. And right then and there we're thinking, they ain't friendly to us. They just set us up. The next day we decided that what we were going to do is walk King Street down to Market

Street, then Market and sell papers there and sell it in every stores. So, we went from just 10 to 15 paper, better than 25 and 30. I'm going down there with papers like that. So, what happened bad actually turned out good.

You go in the department store, and you know the people behind the counter that was really wanting the newspaper and stuff like that. Soon as you walk in, you know which one is, and all your papers are gone by the time you get down to the Market. We would buy some fruits or something from the places right down there. And then we'd go on the backside of the customer and sit there, rest a while, then come on home.

AW: You rode bikes around? How'd you get around?

JW: We walked.

AW: You walked.

JW: We walked. We walked this town. When my mama had the business here, the restaurant, we – actually she had three banks downtown she had an account with. And so she made sure either you walk or you catch the bus. And the beltline at that time took you around town, and you'd get anyplace in town within 20 minutes and walk 3 or 4 blocks, and you did. But it went right down Broad Street. But me wanting to see different areas and stuff like that, no, I would never go just to the bank. The money's in this pocket, this pocket, and the back pocket for you to put in the bank. But, no, I want to go further down or look around this street and stuff like that.

All that changed, though, when she sent me down King Street to pay some bills. And being that King Street was busy, crowded from Wednesday to Saturday, as a kid I didn't want to walk through all that and the people talking and you trying in and out. I'd take the railroad track down, play on the track, balancing and all this and that. But I did that, and I lost \$70 out of my pocket.

AW: Just fell out?

JW: Just fell out. I looked for it for four hours. I came home, and I told her in the kitchen about it, and I was thinking I was getting my behind cut. No, she took just a pen and put it in my pocket and sent me back downtown and say, stay off the track. Don't you go back on that track no more. And so that, it stop with the tracks. But the tracks was something real nice because if you looked at how they did, they would really – when you come down right there to John Street, it would be making its last curve behind warehouses that was there, so they could offload into the warehouses.

But before there, they actually could – they would turn and go on Chapel Street. And Chapel Street would allow them now to come over here back and connect to the Union Pier down here. So, it was not just that they'd come just straight down East Bay and go there, but they had a way coming through the middle area to do that. So, it was all something you looked to see how and why it's designed this way and why were these buildings here for like that. And it was just something that curiosity had me going wanting to look. That's the thing. That area really fed

the inner city and all the stores that was there. But here it is now. It could be a greater harm to each one in the community by the buildings that they allow to build there. Because none of the streets are wide enough to handle the cars coming out there. And we got to look at it, you want to maintain livability the main thing.

AW: Where did you go to school? Did you walk there, too?

JW: Oh, yeah. When we stayed on Blake Street, I started out at Sanders-Clyde. And then once they finished, and we moved here, went there third grade right there. That was Fraser at that time. Well, it's Fraser now. It was Columbus Street School then. And graduated from there, went to C.A. Brown. But because I wasn't a person that mixed with a lot of the fellas, I got in a lot of fights. And so the vice-principal told me, Mr. Mack, which is David Mack's father, son, you ain't going here. You're going to go to Burke from here.

But that was one of the best things that happened because Burke was situated different. They had the trades there, and right there at ninth grade, they start counseling you on what you wanted to be and do in life. Teachers actually when the classes – when you changes classes in the annex building, there they're in the hallway talking to you about things you pass. You might not come to their class yet, but they're speaking to you. They kept on teaching you. It wasn't that you could avoid what they were talking about. There were several teachers talking about philosophy and stuff like that, but it grabs you.

They had the trades building on the side, and being the trades building was there, all the mechanic, brick masonry, plastering and all that, here it is in tenth grade. You got a idea what you're going to do in your life. And so right after high school, you got a plan of what you're going to go into. So, what I did after taking woodworking, blueprint reading and all, I went to Trident Tech. And Trident Tech wasn't downtown. I had to catch the bus up the road early in the morning. 6:30 in the morning I'm out there catching the bus. And after being there for five, six months, I got offered a job at General Electric. And being at General Electric as a welder, I looked at the blueprint, and I said, I can read this thing. I put in right there in my first year for blueprint reading and became a fabricator.

And so as a fabricator, I actually built steam turbine generators and was happy with that because it was something that kept you so focused on what you were doing that 8 hours, 12 hours wasn't nothing to you. And so the power station they have up there in Winyah Bay, Williams Station here, over 400 of them, I can say, no, you turn a switch on. That's a power plant that we created, and those plants will last 60 or 70 years, and those are steam turbine generators. So, if you maintain them right, they'll last a long time. But that was a job I thought I would have for 40 years, and fellas used to say that. Joe, you stay so busy, 40 years, man, for you, but, no.

AW: Who ran this shop when you were up there?

JW: My mama.

AW: Your mom was still –

JW: Yeah, still here. And that time I was working evenings. I went to work at 3:00. And so I would help and do work in the morning time with her, let her rest. Then right there at 2:00, she would come downstairs and handle the rest of the day, yeah. But, yeah.

AW: When you were at Burke, was it segregated?

JW: No. My segregation ended right there at Trident Tech. That was the first time that I really had a white teacher, totally different from what I was used to going through. Matter of fact, it brought me to tears sometimes because I did not understand what he was talking about, how he was moving along on it. And actually when they tested me, several times I cried, break down and cry. But I knew what I had to do. I had to apply myself and push myself because I saw what my mama did. So, that's what I done, and I got through there.

When he offered me the job the first time to go to GE, that was December. And I told him no because I was already working. I worked in Perdita's Restaurant down on Exchange Street, and I worked there for five years as a busboy, also as the bar boy and wine boy opening wines for the table like that. That was one of the five restaurants that was in town. But that was to help her pay for the house here. And after I looked at one of the checks from GE, I said, next time he [00:39:12 got backs], I'm going to this. And so that's why I done. I went on then and got that job. That was that March of that year, still hadn't finished Trident Tech, but I had the job there. And I never went back to the job down there.

But that job down there taught me a lot, too, because it was the idea that you're serving people. You're making \$17 a night as a busboy. Very few boys were doing that. I'd come home and give my sister \$2.00 every night because mama wasn't going to let her work. And from that and working in there knowing how to handle myself around people and the conversation with them, also the conversation with the five races that was here in this area, always feeling comfortable around any and everybody.

AW: What were the five races that were here?

JW: Like I said, you had the Jews. You had the Italians, the Greeks, and then you had the blacks. Those all were here in different businesses and stuff that you saw, and you were among.

AW: Were there very many white people in this [00:40:19 unintelligible]?

JW: Yeah, but definitely I didn't say that part, but that's part of it. To me, it was something that was so important because you knew, and my sister said it when we were down in Florida. You stand up, and you talk to anybody standing around here because I just feel that comfortable. And in the restaurant there were people that came in there that was real, I mean, well known. But we talked to them, and so you felt comfortable and serving them and stuff like that. And always around town, you found that that was the same thing.

AW: Do you feel like it's more segregated now than it used to be when you were a kid?

JW: It is more segregated because [00:41:03 it came] that time right there in the '70s where you had – what the government did is allowed cities to really start doing suburbs and stuff like

that. So, Mr. Henry offered my mama across there to buy his building for \$6,000, but he was going to move out of the area, and that's what you saw that they actually were heading to the suburbs. But what you see coming back now is just what gentrification has always been, an ever-flowing thing within the community. It ain't something that you can control. It's how you adjust yourself to what's going on, and that adjustment mean that you had a totally black community. Mayor Riley went about making sure that he saw what was going on, that he brought in place a three percent mortgage within this area, which allowed them to stabilize the area, that whatever job you had that interest rate was low enough on the house now that you could afford to get into it.

AW: The people that moved to West Ashley moved because it was better opportunity or because they couldn't afford to be here or just [00:42:18 bigger lots or] –

JW: No. It was something that they saw was a better life. And to me it was not something that was hurtful. Gentrification, if I look at it right, you look at it when you go back to what they call Porgy and Bess and how the mixture was down in that area. At that time when I was working at Perdita's, you had blacks living there all the way down on Queen Street and stuff in that area. And so, no, it was a mixture throughout the city. Only now that we've started back through this area, where you see it's improving, there was a time when this area was really down right there in the '80s and the '90s because you had so much violence going on. And it was the community. We heard on this bench here and people who came in here and in the street about how much violence was happening that should not be happening that did not happen before.

So, we tried to apply ourself to changing that. You found that my mother was talking to the kids. I can remember she was standing at the counter saying, something wrong, something wrong, because she sees so much of the violence and what's wrong going on out there. And it was the neighborhood that had to really bring it under control, and it did a pretty good job back then, I think, but it's one we need to do now big time.

AW: So, can you tell us where we are right now?

JW: You're on the corner of America and Amherst Street, which was – Hampton Square was owned by one individual. And when we moved on this corner, this block right here down to the corner actually had red bricks. It was distinguished totally from the rest of the block because that's how he planned it. When you go out there at the sidewalk, you look across at each one of the sidewalk, and you'll see it's narrower there going further down. But this is the corner of America and Amherst Street, where we've been now for 59 years as of April the 1st. We've been on this corner, yeah.

AW: Do you think this is kind of the core of this neighborhood, this intersection?

JW: It was back then. It was. Really the businesses really was there where people were passing by.

AW: When is back then?

JW: Back then was back in the '40s, '50s, and '60s.

AW: And where was the GE office?

JW: General Electric was in Ladson, South Carolina, which actually the company had 600 acres and was supposed to build 7 buildings, but they only ended up building 3. I worked in the second building which was the fab shop. The machine shop was in the front. The diaphragm shop was in the back, yeah.

AW: What years were you there?

JW: I was there from 1971 to [00:45:20 1989].

AW: And how did you get there? Did you drive there?

JW: I drove there. I bought my first car, or she bought it because she had to co-sign for me. It didn't have air condition. It didn't have a FM radio. A '68 Dodge Dart my mama bought, so I could drive there. And when we turned on the corner – I bought it up there where the Housing Authority is now. That was a car shop. And when we turned on the corner right here at Amherst and Meeting, she said – no, Wolf and Meeting – she said, you're going to wreck this car. And so I didn't say nothing back. I was happy I finally got a car. But three weeks later, yeah, I wrecked it.

AW: Was it a new car?

JW: No, it wasn't. It was a used car. And I wanted a new car, but she didn't want me to have that because I'm the first person in the family want that. And I really – I had a way of really lobbying my mama about things that I never got, but I got this car. Bicycles for Christmas, I left the book open. That magazine and stuff, I left it open figuring she'll see that. Well, we'll get the bike. Never got a bike. When we did get a bike, it was a girl bike because my sister and I are riding it. But, yeah, I wrecked the car and put it in the shop right then and there up on Dorchester Road. And when I got it back out, I started being more safe. But I already had a plan then. My plan was to pay for that car so fast and get me the car I want. And so the note was only \$57 a month. I paid it every week until I got it done. And I went and bought a '72 LeMans.

AW: In 1972?

JW: In 1972. Pulled up here in front of the door, and my mama look at me, and she just look. And normally when I come and I work the store, she go upstairs, and she fix a plate of food to bring to me. I didn't get a plate of food, not at all. I got up that morning and came downstairs and was going to show Daisy next door the car. And when we stood out there by the car, that was the worst behind cutting I ever got. And all she said was, I'm disappointed in you. What have I been telling you and showing you how to save and do things with your money? And I dropped my head, and I just listened, just listened because that was the best friend I had. And she just kept laying it on and talking about the different things she told me. I hung my head and finally came

back in here, got in my car, but I made a promise to myself that December I was going to show her that I had took my tax money, money I saved, and got a saving certificate down at the bank.

AW: Where did you go to the bank?

JW: First Federal Savings and Loan.

AW: Where was that?

JW: That was on Broad Street.

AW: Did you go there for like – how did you get paid? You get paid with checks?

JW: I got paid with checks. Every Thursday they would pay us with checks. And one of the reasons I was able to buy the car, General Electric was in a situation where they were working 12-hour days 6 days a week. So, it wasn't my normal paycheck. I had all this extra, so I could really double down and do all the things I wanted. There were things I had planned I wanted to see if I could do. I wanted to know if I could buy a house, raise a family, do better than what I was done, my father did with me. And that was one of the things I wanted to prove.

And so, no, because of Daisy and how she talked to me, that's when I started investing my money. And that money turned around and helped me right there in 2008, because when the economy went down, if I had not done those things, and she been gone a long time, but [00:49:39 had not], I would not have known it. And those are the things that the community had that the children didn't learn just from their parents, but learned from people in that community are wanting to do something with their life, try that you know the child that you can really say something to them, and it touch their heart. It stimulate their thought, that you do that. You continue that with that child.

That's when, like I've been telling you earlier, the walk up here, and she might be out there sitting on the step. But just for her to look me in the eye, smile with me, no, everything's all right. No, we sharing this life and my accomplishment together. Someone else might be talking to her but, no, we're there together, and that's how people have been in the community. That's what you want to happen to help that child. That child belongs to me or like with the gallery shows. I was in fourth grade, and coming out of school and walking around the corner, she's there standing up in the door. And the kid is telling me, my mama – your mama ain't this. Your daddy ain't that. And I'm just hanging my head.

But when I came to go and do an errand for her, that's when she talked to me about who I belongs to. You belongs to me. We care for you. That child don't know your mama and daddy. But you can laugh with them, and I bet you he'll get upset. And so I did that. And when he got there and started figuring he could tell me again about my parents, I said, let me write this down. I want to write everything down. And I got my notebook out and started writing. Tell me some more about my parents. And the other kids started laughing about it, and he couldn't laugh because he figuring those words will be hurting, and he went off.

But what she taught me actually [00:51:37 unintelligible]. But, again, here she giving to my life as a child to help me through that. When she was older and I still got these things, and her husband had done passed, she was going to the Senior Center downtown. And she kept making pottery items, and I got them on my dresser now. But she shared that much with life with me that you want. That's what we had. The kids all belongs to you, and you got a right to talk to them. Even when we were staying in Tobin Alley, and we'd been in there only a year-and-a-half before we moved on Blake Street when she started working there. Of course I should tell you the rent. When my mama moved from Wall Street, 17 Wall Street, it was \$10 a month.

AW: What was that?

JW: It was a one-room apartment that she had when she got married to my father. Then she move over here 27 ½. It was \$6.00 a month for two rooms. Moved in Tobin Alley, which is midways this block, which I keep telling the city that we can build [00:52:50 inner court houses there]. I want to see this come back. And there, that was only \$10 a month for three rooms.

AW: What was in those rooms? Were there bathrooms?

JW: No. The bathrooms were all outside. Everything that we had to do, we all did and took two of those. One unit's outside. Matter of fact, that's why they tore down Tobin Alley because the people that owned it was [00:53:16 Artman] Furniture on the corner of Cannon and King. And since the city was requiring them to have indoor plumbing, that's when they decided to tear all that down.

AW: When was that?

JW: That was right then. That was the early '70s that that all came about. Yeah.

AW: So, in the early '70s, everyone got indoor plumbing?

JW: They started doing it. When we'd been on Blake Street right there in the '60s, he'd already put, and the bathroom was between the two apartments that we had then.

AW: So, you shared a bathroom?

JW: Shared that bathroom there. But here in the early '70s, that's when the city wanted them to have that in there, which he had just a row on one side of the houses of toilets that you could come out there.

AW: Where was your kitchen? Where'd you cook?

JW: Your kitchen was actually like part of your living room with inside there because there was no running water. When we moved here, there was no running water in here. My mama had to put hot water heater and stuff, yes, so she could have that.

AW: How did that work? Where did the water –

JW: Water?

AW: Yeah.

JW: You had a central location. Inside Tobin Alley there was a drain with that water, and you had the pipe coming up about that high, and it came off at a angle, and you could turn the water on, fill it up and take it into the house.

AW: So, she took it like in buckets?

JW: In buckets, yes. Buckets, yeah.

AW: She must've been strong.

JW: Well, they were stronger than that because remember now what you see in Africa, they still did by toting that water on your head. My mother told me about when she went out in the country at nine years old, and her sisters then were doing that but wouldn't teach her how to do it, and look at how the water wasted on her because there's a way you glide yourself on the stops so it stays steady, so you could get there.

AW: Where did you buy your clothes?

JW: Oh, being I made \$17 a night in that restaurant, there was Brock's Menswear, Father & Son, Bluestein, bunch of places. Matter of fact, at that time I had pants for every day of the week, a [00:55:33 unintelligible], a shirt, different colors. All the way through high school, always had those things, clothes and stuff like that.

AW: Was it the same? You go to a store, you try on a few things, see what looks good?

JW: Yeah. Uh-huh. But what I learned early in life was that mens had a fashion and style, and the pleats on the pants meant different seasons and time when they made that. Your inverted pleats or the three pleats and which way they go on there actually added to the style of the clothes and what he had on. So, that's what people still see today in me because I'm not going to wear some of the stuff you see today.

I mean, if I was married, I would not have a wife wearing all this tight stuff you see in the street. Ain't no way, huh-uh. You ain't going to be showing all that. Because a woman back then and a few now really know how to show that inner beauty by how they dress in the morning. Over at our charter school, we had a young lady from – her daughter was going to the school. And just looking at her fashion, I asked her after a few meetings, governor's board meetings we had, I asked her, how long do you stand to the closet in the morning to choose what you put on? She said, how do you know that? I said, I look at how you're dressed every time I see you. And that's what women did so much.

I can remember as a young boy with the mens that used to sit out here retired and stuff. They would look for the womens. And, oh, so-and-so coming out there. I hear them talking. Yeah, look how she's dressed today, yeah. But they're looking at how beautiful she make herself and present herself in public, and that beauty actually draw a peacefulness, a beauty like a rose to people to you. Without saying anything, they know that that's the pleasantness you offering out here in public. So, that's why I told the young lady in our meeting, but I just noticed that she carried herself like that because she wanted that beauty to show all the time, and not this thing with all these things they're putting in their nose, their ears and stuff or even all the tattoo, is how you really can project your beauty from your heart, which is your strength, to people.

AW: So, when you were not working when you're young, what did you do for fun? And then did you go on dates?

JW: Oh, I went on dates. When I was in the restaurant business, there wasn't that much time and school going on. I only went to one football game and two basketball games all the way through high school because the job I had at Perdita's was six days a week, six evenings out of the week. And I know I needed to help my mama here, so it wasn't like I would get away from that. Yeah, I went on dates and stuff like that. I went where young mens – boys 16 and 17 couldn't go, the Glass Door, the Latin House, the Brown Derby, the clubs that the restaurant waiters took us to.

Because in the evening time when we get there, and we done set up the whole dining room, as the busboys, we would sit down and read the newspaper, do our homework for school. But they're talking to us about life and what is out there. And it was Pinckney Plaza up in Union [00:59:02 Hike], and he worked in the restaurant, and he also had the club. So, right there in 1969, I think it was '69, he had this fella come in, this comedy show, Rudy [00:59:22 Ray Moore]. And we went up there, me and my brother, summertime now. And we're there until 2:00-something to 3:00. And the waiters brought us back down, drop us off on Columbus and Meeting. We went in the Luncheonette Restaurant right there.

AW: At 2:00 a.m.?

JW: At 2:00 a.m., playing the pinball machine. I said, Ben, mama going to be angry with us because we ain't come home yet. So, he said, I playing the game. She ain't going to be mad. So, I left him and I came on home. And soon as I walk in the door upstairs, here's the strap and the talking, and she beating. And my skin rippled up on me. I said, why you do this to me? That's just how I felt. Why do this to me? And, I mean, my grandfather looking at me, and she talking. But, damn, and she thought about it. Where your brother? And she stop. And I told him that he was around at the Luncheonette.

She left and walked in. I stayed behind about 30 yards, and she caught him on the park up there with all the benches around, and he's walking through whistling. And in the dark she just spoke to him. Why you coming home this late? And started cutting his behind. Now he's 18. I'm right there behind him, but that was the worst part of that. But from then on what did we learn? Call and tell me where you at, right. And that was important that you got that from her, that she wanted us to respect her and be home on time.

AW: Where were those nightclubs that you went to?

JW: Those nightclubs, the Glass Door was there on Spring Street. The Brown Derby was on Spring Street. Latin House is around the corner on President Street right there across from the project. Building is still there. What was good about those places is that you had jazz groups were playing in there, and a lot of the waiters, you had a couple of waiters that played and, well, would join in in that. So, you would get that atmosphere where you sit down, and we couldn't drink anything, but they wanted us to see what problems, what there, and what you should stay away from. So, the next day when we're in the restaurant, they're talking to us about what you seen, what went on. And that help us to know whether or not you wanted to be in that type of atmosphere.

AW: What years would that have been?

JW: That was 1966 right up until 1971, when I left there and went to General Electric.

AW: So, if you had like a girl you really wanted to impress, what would you do?

JW: What I would do, first thing I would do, I'd talk to them serious about what I wanted and what we could do. My brother was already focused on his wife that he's still got now. But me, no, I wasn't focused on that. I was focused more on dating and stuff like that, a nice, quiet time on a Sunday to walk down around King Street, do some window shopping, have a conversation and stuff like that. Girls in the church, you talk to them about doing that with you. Also, during when we have the summertime vacation Bible School and different things like that, now you could ask one to go out with you, take them to the movie theaters down there, the Riviera.

AW: The Riviera?

JW: Yeah, the Riviera, American Theatre, we went in there. Also, there was the black theatres they had up there. The Lincoln Theatre, that was one. Now the Palace was the worst one. I'm glad that went away before I became a teenager. Because it was so dilapidated inside, just getting past that entrance was just awful to get there. But, no, those were the things you would do like that. You would leave here and ask the girl, come on, go with me over to the ice cream parlor, which one main ice cream parlor, it seemed like they sold over 40 different flavors, it was all the way over on Rutledge Avenue between Spring and Cannon. It was there, so that was a nice, social, calm time that you would leave on a Sunday and take that walk.

AW: What was the name of that place?

JW: I can't remember. I don't even remember if there was a sign outside.

AW: Did you ever go to the beach?

JW: Yes, we did. Before the Isle of Palms became what it was there, my sister's boyfriend, which he gotten out of the Service – they wasn't married. She was just finishing high school. I

tease my sister about it, too, because when my mama let him come upstairs to talk to her in the living room, and she started crying, and I'm there on a Sunday evening, and you're crying, I said, this could be your husband, and look how you're treating him. You're still crying like you're a little girl. Mama didn't cut your tail. It was something else.

But he was the type. Charles would actually get us together and take us over there on Sullivan Island, and then down on the end we would actually go through the woods and actually set up a table and a tent top and be on the beach. And all where they got the houses now, we were down there, and there was no one there. We could be out there on the beach enjoying ourself. Before that they had black beach section here in town, of course Mosquito Beach, but Riverside Beach.

And as a child – again, I should've brought the picture because the picture, we got eight of us there on the beach, all of us lined up on Riverside Beach. That was one of the hubs where you had well-known artisans coming to Charleston that played in there, and that's right off of Remley's Point what you have down there now. And when you would go down Fort Johnson Road, you'd take a right there, and going around you would run into it back there. That was one gathering point with several of the clubs, and all of that was going on big time.

But being I didn't have a car and had been in high school, no, I didn't visit there unless someone would take us there. And of course my sister's boyfriend then often would get us together, and we would plan things like that when we'd go to those areas like that. Before that on a Sunday was a nice, quiet bus ride from downtown over to the Isle of Palms. Lazy back and nice and cool and stuff like that was something that we did a lot of, yeah.

AW: Well, I think we've run – oh, wait. What do you think the future is for the east side?

JW: My hope is that – and we're the architect of bringing back what was here. It's just like with the kids you see coming here, the Egyptian or the Venezuelans from down the street, and we have to use our phone to talk. But they trusted me from day one when they moved in the two houses around here. To see that you have those different races able to talk. So, whatever happens within this area, you're able to [01:07:02 lend] to that person's life so far in the future. I hope the digital corridor that we in becomes something like what the Navy Yard was, that it provides a job that everyone can really buy and maintain this area.

I don't want it to be like San Francisco, no, because they don't have an idea. They didn't have the mayor like what we've had and the one we got now that has that idea that we must make a way for everyone, not [01:07:32 unintelligible]. Our Constitution says we. It didn't leave no one out, and we must make an effort to make sure everyone can have a job. And that's why I wanted and still want to start with our training program now. That's one, but I want the computer training one that I'm going to try for coming up, too. And hopefully with our St. Philip Street campus, we can put in for this grant from the National Mayors Association where we can do that.

Talk to people at Medic University and see that before they build a biotech/nanotech center over there, that you start training people here in the area. Or hopefully that these buildings they're building on Columbus and Meeting Street, that in the evening time I often speak to the

young ladies that clean hotels and stuff like that, the three of y'all can start your own business and say, well, you can have a evening job. Then probably each one of y'all will make \$1,000 off of that in that office building, but you got to go at it and have someone help you to start your business. Those are things I want to see, and I know that it's hard, but I just believe hard things are what we have to do.

AW: Is there anything else that you wanted to make sure we get on camera that we've asked?

JW: Well, all the perspiration should not be on there. I heard that from y'all but, no, there's nothing else. I think what I said when I spoke, and it got to the place where I came from here, I think that a lot of it touch people, and that's what I want to happen.

End of recording.