

Interviewee: Joe Louis Jefferson

Place of interview: New Israel Reformed Episcopal Church

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Interviewer: April Wood, Historic Charleston Foundation, with occasional questions by Katherine Pemberton

Videographer: Katherine Pemberton, Historic Charleston Foundation

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BEGIN INTERVIEW

April Wood: This is April Wood, I'm the interviewer. This is October 4th, 2017 - we are at New Israel Reformed Episcopal Church in the sanctuary, and I am with Mr. Jefferson, and I wonder if you would mind saying and spelling your full name.

Joe Jefferson: My name is Joe Louis Jefferson, J-O-E, L-O-U-I-S, J-E-F-F-E-R-S-O-N.

AW: When and where were you born?

JJ: I was born 1940, July the 17th, 1940, on Edisto Island.

AW: What were your parents' names?

JJ: My father's name was Samuel Burnell, and my mother's name was Virginia Flossey Major.

AW: How long have you lived in this neighborhood?

JJ: I've lived in this neighborhood for 26 years.

AW: Okay, so I'm going to ask some background about your family, and then feel free to talk about whatever you want, and just be natural. But - so when did your family first settle in this neighborhood?

JJ: Well, my way of coming up is a long way. I was born on Edisto Island to a mother, and she moved to Charleston, and then 1941, I was adopted by the Jefferson family, and I lived in Pineville, South Carolina for seven or eight years, and we moved back to Charleston on 65 Simmons Street, and that's where I grew up at.

AW: Is that the house that the church bought, that Gethsemane [Church] owns, right?

JJ: Yeah, the house is still standing there at 65 Simons. Gethsemane bought up about 35, 38 years ago.

AW: From your family?

JJ: From my sister, Mary Jefferson Cox.

AW: Did you live in that the whole time you were growing up once you moved into 65 Simons Street?

JJ: Yeah. Once I moved into 65 Simons Street, I went to A.B. Rhett Elementary School, from A.B. Rhett Elementary School, graduated Burke High School, and spent a year at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Financial problems caused me to relocate to Area Trade School in Denmark, South Carolina. Graduated from Area Trade School in Denmark, South Carolina in '64. Still lived at 65 Simons Street, got married, had four kids, and we left in 1971.

AW: Is that a duplex, that house? Or is it -

JJ: It was single-family originally, but it was changed to a duplex in the early '60s - around '60 or '61 it was changed to a duplex, two-family. Prior to that, it was a single-family, because you had a living room, dining room and kitchen, and a hallway, and three bedrooms upstairs. And you didn't have a bathroom - you had a lavatory.

AW: Can you describe what that means?

JJ: A lavatory is just a commode. No sink - just had a small bathroom with a commode, and at that time had basins. You washed your face in a basin.

AW: Did you have running water, or -

JJ: Yeah, we had running water, but not hot water. We just had one kind of running water at the time was just the cold water, and later on we added a bathroom - we had the tub and the sink and the hot and cold water.

AW: That must've been exciting -

JJ: Yeah. Well, you know, it was a sign of the time. We thought, you know, that was really great. We didn't have air conditioning during those times. In the summertime, you put the windows up and put a screen in the window, but we was blessed then if you could afford a box fan or a fan to put in the window. Most people didn't have any. In the wintertime, you had - probably the older folks know about trash burners. They're the thin metal heaters that you'd catch a fire in, and then later on, I would say around '62, we had gas heaters in our house - had the natural gas heaters, the small open type gas heaters on the wall.

AW: Did you use your fireplace?

JJ: We didn't have a fireplace. Our house did not have a fireplace. We just had -

AW: Gotten cold then, for sure, huh?

JJ: Yeah, you got warm in one room, run and get into bed in the wintertime, and in the summertime, most people had little oscillating fans, little 8 or 10-inch oscillating fan. Then later on, we got the big window fan.

AW: Did you have a TV when you were a kid?

JJ: No. I grew up without a TV. During the time I was growing up, we only had, on this street, among Black folks, there were only two TVs on the street, and that was in, I want to think - what year Channel 5 came on? I think '56 - Channel 5, I think, came on in '55, but I think the first TV I can think of on Simons Street was about '56, and Miss Harvey, the Browns - I lived next to Reverend Willis Brown, who was Mrs. Harvey's father - they had a TV, and Mr. and Mrs. Jewel Fogel, who lived three houses down from me, they had a TV, and back then it was a little bullet TV, like a 12-inch screen. And Miss Susie used to let the young kids on Saturday afternoon, come in and watch The Lone Ranger. That was a big thing.

AW: Yeah, you had a lot of kids that went over?

JJ: Well, she didn't allow no more than six or seven in her house at the time, because - we were friends with her son. Her son was Richard Fogel, and he has passed away now, but we were the local neighborhood friends, and we watched TV at their house only on Saturday, watched The Lone Ranger. And they were the only two TVs on the street. The first TV I bought was 19 - I'd say 1966 - bought a TV from Montgomery Ward, a 19-inch black and white, and I was married at the time with two kids, so we had to get a TV. But prior to that, I was raised by two older people. I was adopted into a family that were older, because my adopted mother, when she adopted me, she was past child-bearing age, because she's got two daughters - one had passed on - but both of her daughters were old enough to be my mother, because the one daughter that is my sister that's living from my adopted side, she is 98 years old, and she is still self-sufficient, and lives by herself. And so, that's the way it was.

AW: Did you have to share your room with anyone?

JJ: No. I was the only one in the house, because like I said, my adopted mother - back in those days, the schools in the rural area wasn't as up to date as the schools in Charleston, so when I was in sixth grade, she put me back here in Charleston with her sister, which was my aunt and uncle, and they were elderly. So, I grew up with elderly people. They were old enough to be my grandparents. So, I grew up around a bunch of females - bunch of sisters and uncles on my adopted mother's side.

AW: Did you have a lot of family on the neighboring houses -

JJ: Yeah. Charleston was very, I guess you would say, family always within reach of each other, because we had family on Simons Street, we had family on Romney Street, and we had family on Poinsett Street - then you had some ventured out farther downtown, like Harris Street and up on Union Heights, but family was always near.

AW: That must've been nice.

JJ: Yeah - it was more caring then, and not only your family, the neighbors was like your parent also, because - I guess that's why I never learned to smoke, because if someone 10 blocks away, or five blocks away see you with a cigarette, that was just like your parents seeing you with a cigarette. They could chastise you and tell you to put it out, and you didn't question that.

You put it out. Then when you got home, you got chastised again. Without telephone and all of these things, the news got around. The message could beat you to the house.

AW: That's awesome. The next is about the neighborhood. Can you define the neighborhood that you grew up? When you told people where you were from, did you say from North Central?

JJ: No, I tell people I'm from Charleston. When we were growing up, this was known like uptown, not like the borough, like on the East Side. There was the East Side. My wife was off Grant Hill. That was an area where the homeless shelter is now. My wife grew up right behind, on the street where you go into the homeless shelter, Walnut Street. My wife grew up on that street, but back then it was called Grant Hill - all Black folks. Now, this area here is called Uptown, and basically, Simons and Romney Street was a mixed neighborhood even in the '50s, because I lived [at] 65 Simons Street, and right on the corner, Enston Avenue and Simons Street, you had White families living on those corners. In other words, I could stand on my porch and talk to them, because on one corner you had the DeWitts with their family, they were a White family. And right across the street, there was a White family. There's a yellow house here on Simons Street now, which this church owns, that was a White family at that time. And farther down Simons Street near the corner, it was White families. And the Black kids and the White kids played together in a big vacant lot, which is - back when I was growing up, when they built it, it was the Salvation Army Building. They still call it the Salvation Army Building, but when I was a teenager, it was a big vacant grassy lot, and the Black kids and the White kids played baseball and football against each other. We were divided but friendly. All the White kids played the Black kids. The football team - all the White kids were on the White team - the only time we would cross over, if we didn't have enough to make up a team. We were friendly in that aspect, because you had the Condons, and the Utsees, and the Lavalls - they lived on Poplar Street. Charleston was always like, had a little alleyway you could walk through to the next neighborhood or the next house. So, that's the way it was.

AW: Do you feel like it was more integrated then than - or more mixed races then, and then it became more African American families, and then now it's reaching back - or do you feel like it's changing, or has changed?

JJ: Oh, the neighborhood has changed a whole lot. It's not near like what it used to be, because when I grew up, where they've got these houses on Simons Street here now, those \$400,000 houses, when I grew up, that was a project. That was a Simons Street project. It may be another name, but I remember it as Simons Street Project, and was all Black. That's where none of the houses had what you call a restroom. There's only a commode. It had two commodes set up outside, like in a house in the center, and that's where you went to use the bathroom. But everybody had like what you call it back then, a wash basin, or whatever, to wash, and a towel, whatever. And then they sold - I was a young fella, so I don't remember who sold or what. And after Simons Street, then it became a housing area, more updated. We had to build all cinder block houses, and had bathrooms and they were nice. At the time, when they came along, they were nice, and that stood up until a few years ago. Then they tore it down, and then it was empty for about some years, four or five years. Then they built these homes there. Then on the corner of Simons and King Street, you had a store. Then you had the St. Charles Apartments. The St. Charles Apartments, when I was a kid, was all Jews.

AW: Where was that? Where the church's building is, is it in there?

JJ: Yeah. You see all them houses right next to that? All them houses look the same? Well, that was St. Charles, that was the apartments, and it was all Jewish families, as I remember. And they had garages. Where you see the parking lot on Simons Street, they had individual garages with doors to it where they parked their car and could lock the garage door. And during that time too, Suburban Gas - they're not in business anymore. You had Suburban Gas -

AW: Where was that?

JJ: On Simons Street, right. Suburban Gas, you know, where New Israel [Church] got the building on the corner? When I was growing up, you had two businesses where the educational building is now. That's two parcels of property, because you had Miller Grocery Store on the corner, and behind Miller Grocery - Miller Grocery Store faced King Street. And then Suburban Gas faced Simons Street - so you had two businesses, and they had this old refrigerator - all your appliances back then. The gentleman who had owned the business then was Clyde Dangerfield. He eventually ran for the House of Representatives. He was in the South Carolina House of Representatives, I think, 15 or 20 years, or maybe longer. And then he moved from the corner, from behind there - then he moved on the corner of Simons and King, and the building now which is a little office building? Suburban Gas went over there. Then, as I remember it, at one time Mr. Dangerfield lived on Simons Street also. Simons Street was checkerboard. You had White, White, Black, White, Black. It's like coming down - this side of Simons Street would be, you had the White families live in the St. Charles Apartments, then you had a Black family - then Blacks lived all the way down to where our church is now, and they're going back to it. It's a White family lived on the right-hand side of the church - when I was growing up, a White family lived on the right-hand side of the church, and as I got to be a young man, then you had Black families move in all these cottages all the way down, except the last two houses on the left on Simons going toward the west. Those two houses was always White, and the house on the - what would be the southwest corner, it was always White. And then you'd cross Simons Street - on the corner it was White. Then it was White house, then you had a couple of Black. Then you had Joyce [Howard], who you'll be interviewing - Joyce then lived on the corner of Kyle Court. Now, they lived other places in the area, but I remember them from Kyle Court, Kyle and Simons Street.

AW: Did you ever go watch TV at any of the White people's houses?

JJ: No. We didn't intermix. I didn't intermix like that, you know. We were - you didn't have it, you do without. At the time, people listened to radio - just like when I was a preteen and teenager and boxing, Joe Louis, the great fighter, when we knew he was boxing, everybody crowded around the radio. And that's how you got it. You listened to the radio. Everybody had a radio, and the funny thing, the inconvenience - you didn't know you were inconvenienced back then. Like today. Everything's got to be at hand. We lived in a two-story house where the telephone sat at the foot of the stairs on a little table. They had a party line. Our phone rang with a long ring. The other person on the party line was a short ring, so when you hear the short ring, you didn't answer the phone, because you know that's not you. But you'd snoop on other people then [laughs]. The people used to snoop, you know. You really had no privacy, because people could use the phone up, and the only way you could tell, sometimes you hear them breathing. But if they was - I'm telling you the truth, if they was to cover the phone, you wouldn't know they're on the line, and you would know the neighbor's business. And the thing about it, they didn't segregate the phone. Your neighbor could've been a White person - I mean, on the phone.

Your party line, the other person could be White and you're Black. You don't know who they are. And, like I said now, the phone rings three times, you don't answer, they hang up. Back then, it was nothing for the phone to ring 10, 12 times, because if you're there and you were upstairs in bed and the phone rings, that means you've got to get up and walk all the way down 12 or 14 steps down to the phone. And we didn't have the modern technologies like now, mash a button and call back. If you didn't answer the phone, you didn't know who called, because you ain't had no callback, you didn't have no Caller ID. You just didn't have those things.

AW: Do you remember your phone number?

JJ: R-A-247681.

AW: How did you make a call? Like, what if you wanted to call Joyce - what did you do?

JJ: I would have to dial the whole number. Her number would be, back then, R-A - all the numbers in here, the prefix was R-A, and I don't -

AW: What does R-A mean?

JJ: I think that's like now, when they run out of numbers or stuff like that - because our numbers were - I forgot what I just told you, but anyway, our number was at first, without the R-A. Then they put the R-A - just like now, you've got dial your area code before you make a phone call - now you've got to dial your area code, even if it's local.

AW: I didn't know about the phones, so it's really interesting -

JJ: Yeah, but that's the way it was with the phone. You had to get up, and it was - another thing. If your phone rings 9, 10 o'clock at night, there was a problem. And I say the problem - there was something in the family or something in the community - there was a problem. Because your phone didn't ring like 10 o'clock at night. It was like, you know, closed-down time. But you didn't have all those convenience to stay up half the night like now. You went to bed - when you come from work, you go to bed. You go to bed, sit around, listen to the radio.

AW: Define downtown when you were a kid. What did you consider downtown?

JJ: Downtown, when I was a kid, it was the thing to do on the weekends. It was this 5 and 10 on the corner of Morris and King, you could go down and get 10-cents worth of hot salted peanuts or cashew nuts or candy. They had it in the counter, and had the little scale up on the top, and you'd say, I want 10 cents worth of lemon slice, orange slice. You'd get it in a little bag. They weighed it and you might get what, 10 cents, you might get 12 or 14 pieces. And that was basically downtown, and the Market, when I was a kid, was just a big old obsolete place. We used to go down on Sunday, and we used to pay ball in the Market, football in the market, because it was nothing but the Black kids and pigeons down there. And this was in the late '50s. The Market was empty. Like the Market is today, a bustling business? No! At the end of Market Street, [?] as a teenager, you had the Seaman Club, which was a White club. And then you had a restaurant, a Black restaurant right next door that served soul food.

AW: What was that called?

JJ: I don't remember the name of that restaurant, but we used to go down there and get lima beans and rice. Back then, it was 26 cents. Then if you wanted meat, then it was 35 cents, and you'd get a slice of bread and, it's all in a little white bowl. I would say the original aspect of Charleston was, when I was a kid, as I remember, much more harmonious than today. People was respectful of each other, more so than today, because you had a White club - three feet, the doors are five feet apart, but you didn't have nobody having no disagreement. You know your place - stay in your place, you know? [laughs] Both sides - you know, hey - but probably your experience, Black people, or the Black race always sort of welcomed people more so than other people. Because the White guys would come into the restaurant all the time, but we never did go in theirs. Of course, I was too young at the time anyway to go in the club. And then, back in those days, we were young kids, and every young kid had a job. You had a job. I rode a bicycle for the drug store - I worked for the drug store for two years.

AW: What did you do?

JJ: Deliver packages. The young Black kids, back in those days, the young Black kids rode bicycles and delivered packages after school. They'd usually have a Black young man or Black person in the daytime - he was the delivery daytime fella - he didn't go to school or whatever. But in the afternoon, it was the high school kids. I got out of school at 2:30, and would have to be at the drug store at 3:30, and work from 3:30 to 10 o'clock at night - deliver packages.

AW: How old were you?

JJ: 14, 15. But then, we took our books and stuff, and you didn't have no delivery, you sat in the back of the drug store, and you could do your homework. And it was the White kids who were the soda jerks. So, the White kids my age, where I had to ride the bicycle and deliver packages eight and ten blocks, or five blocks away, the White kids my age were the soda jerks. He worked at the soda fountain, because all your drug stores had soda fountains. He worked at the soda fountain, and he would be my boss. Although I could be older than him, he still was, when it's time to go make a delivery, he calls me and tells me, hey Joe, I've got a delivery for you. And if the package was - simple things we used to deliver, and people laugh at us today, was you'd deliver a pack of cigarettes and a bottle of Coca-Cola. In that time, it was 26 cents - the pack of cigarettes was 15 cents, the bottle of Coke was 10, a penny tax. Then he would give you change for a dollar. So, that means you'd get to the customer, if the customer hands you a dollar, you'd give them the change. Then the customer may give you a nickel tip. Maybe. Sometimes you didn't get no tip. Now, if the customer had five dollars or 20 dollars, what they did with us, they'd put the change in a bag and staple it. Now for a dollar, they'd give us the change in our hand, but if the customers tell him say, I'm gonna have a 20 dollar bill, they'd put it in a small brown paper bag and paper clip - not paper clip, staple it together so when you get there, then the customer hands you 20 dollars, you hand them the brown bag. But now, we could hold 20 dollars in our pocket, but the change, they had to - don't ask me why, but that's the way it was at that time?

AW: Where was that drug store?

JJ: Right on the corner of Simons and King, yeah - Rose Garden Pharmacy.

AW: Was that, not the New Israel site, but on the north side?

JJ: No, that's the other side. The boarded-up building on the corner of Simons and -

AW: The two-story building?

JJ: Right. The people always lived upstairs, but the drug store was on the bottom, on the ground floor.

AW: Was that owned by White people or Black people?

JJ: White people.

AW: Were all the businesses in this area owned by White people, and some Black people too?

JJ: We had corner stores. We did have stores owned by Black people, but they were not the mainstream stores. They're - what do you call, nighttime stores, or the community stores? That's like we had a store on Romney Street, the Saul Wright. That's what the gentleman's name, his name was Saul Wright, and his store was Saul Wright Grocery.

AW: Where was that?

JJ: That's on Romney Street. I can't think of the number on Romney Street, other word they're doing it now - it's a house now. They just renovated it.

AW: On this section?

JJ: Yeah, all the -

AW: [unintelligible] Gethsemane?

JJ: No, no - right in front of Gethsemane, the big tan-looking building, yeah. But this part of Romney Street was always known as The Bottom. Because you've got Tram Court at the bottom of Romney Street, and you've got Page Court at the bottom of Romney Street. That shows you how much it changed from the time I was growing up. Tram Court was all Black folks, Page Court was all Black folks. Now, you don't have no Blacks live in Tram Court. That's the first court right here behind the church, is Tram Court. White folks live in there now. Of course, Israel Church owns property. And then you go to Page Court, was all Black. Now, you've only got one Black family lives in Page Court. Page Court basically is owned by Whites now.

AW: Yeah - we interviewed Mr. Ravenel a few months ago.

JJ: Um-hmm. He told you the same thing?

AW: Yeah.

JJ: Yeah. Page Court - I'm sorry. When you asked me about Ravenel, I'm sorry - Rufus. Yeah, we lived out here together. He's the - I wasn't thinking at the time. Rufus was the only - Rufus been around here, the second-oldest around here, because Miss Harvey's been here longer than Rufus. Rufus's whole family lived on Page Court, yeah. But Rufus is the only Black on

Page Court now. Tracy is the young lady lives down on the end, and owns several pieces of property on Page Court. But Rufus is still a landowner. He's not going to sell.

AW: And Miss Edwards -

JJ: Huh?

AW: Dorothy - or Deborah Edwards, his sister -

JJ: Yeah. Yeah, she lives at the end. But we were talking about the court now. His sister lived at the end of Romney Street, right there by the Garden, the Romney Garden. Our church owned all of that property, yeah. They just [re-did] her house about a year ago. That's where she lives. But he's the only Black in Tram.

AW: Why is it called The Bottom?

JJ: Can't answer. I grew up - because it's a dead end. That's my assumption. It's a dead end - the only reason. We always said, we're going to the bottom of Romney Street. When you said you was going to play something, let's play football - you'd play at the bottom. Because of the dead end - that's the only reason I can think it's called The Bottom.

AW: So, where did you go to the grocery when you were going to the grocery?

JJ: Oh, we had plenty of grocery stores. You had - going back, you had the grocery store right on the corner. Miller Grocery was on the corner of Simons and King. Addlestone Supermarket was on King. Then Addlestone Supermarket became Addlestone Piggly Wiggly. Where the mosque is now, that was a big Piggly Wiggly store at one time, where the mosque is. And we had Dart Hall Library. The big building in the front, the tall building they're renovating now? That was, at one time, a big grocery store, Eden Food Store. Then after Eden Food Store, it became Colonial Grocery. And the skating rink was up top. Where Dart Hall Library is now and the Food Lion and all of that area, at one time that was a housing project for White folks. That's the way that was back then. You had all White folks live in - and they called it a project, because it was housing. And that was back there then - that shopping center, they built a shopping center. They done changed several names in there from the time I was a kid to now.

AW: Mr. Ravenel mentioned something about a farmer's market, or something in that, where Food Lion is.

JJ: I don't remember that.

AW: A farm or a garden -

JJ: Oh yeah - Farmin', yeah. Oh yeah - we used to farmer's market. You threw me off - no, it's farmin', yeah. Yeah, people had little farms, yeah, back there.

AW: Right on the corner?

JJ: I can't exactly remember if it was right on the corner or not, but it was housing and farming all back there. And see, like this Romney Street - had a junkyard on Romney Street. He told you that? They had a Garfinkle junkyard.

AW: Where was that?

JJ: On the corner - on Romney Street by the railroad track. Like right now, when I was a kid, you could hear the heavy machinery, the crane and stuff. The freight train used to come down there every day, and the freight train - the passenger train, when I was a kid, the passenger train came down -

AW: Simons Street?

JJ: No, came down the track out there. The track off of Romney Street, the passenger train used to come down there in the street. That's when I was a kid. And also, Grove Street. The train used to come through Grove Street. There's no - it was Seaboard Coast Line Railroad. They're no longer - I think, Atlantic Coast Line, I'm not sure. I think Atlantic Coast Line bought Seaboard Coast Line Railroad. And Seaboard Coast Line used to come out of Florida, and Atlantic - like Amtrak. It's Amtrak today - back when I was a kid, it was Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, and Seaboard Coast Line Railroad. Seaboard came through by the Citadel, and if you go over to the Citadel now and go on the back side of the Citadel, you see the area. The train used to come on the outside of the Citadel. In fact, they had a passenger station, and the freight place right on Grove Street, right off of Rutledge Avenue. That was the Seaboard Coast Line passenger terminal and freight place. And Seaboard Coast Line came right through Grove Street, right at the middle of Grove Street. And they would - if a long freight train would've blocked the whole city. It would block King, it would block off King Street, Rutledge Avenue, and Meeting Street - it turned to go north, up on the other side of East Bay Street. That's when you'll see the train now cross the Magnolia, what we call the Magnolia. Are you a Charlestonian?

AW: No, not originally.

JJ: Okay, because you've been -

AW: I've been here for a while -

JJ: But you know the Magnolia - okay, yeah. Let's see, the Magnolia - that's where the train would make the bend, and come across right there.

AW: It did, like a big U.

JJ: Yeah. And during my time, at the Magnolia now, you know where the storage place, the Carter Storage and all of that? Across the street is Carter Lumber, and the big storage place - well, that was meat markets, individual meat markets. They had about fifteen. Everybody had their individual cubicles, and you'd go buy fresh meat, fresh everything up there - vegetables, meat, everything. Some people, some guys used to slaughter right behind the place.

AW: Your family - you would go up there and get -

JJ: Yeah, you'd go and buy meat - yeah. Everybody did. It was the meat market - that's what they called the meat market on Heriot Street. Everybody'd go and buy meat. And that's the way it was back during those times. Now, back when I was a kid too, you had this northwest section here, had a lot of Jewish families lived up in here.

AW: Like on -

JJ: Like Peachtree Street, like the Shahids - the Shahids, I can't remember all the different Jewish folks, but they lived over here on Peachtree Street and Longborough now - Longborough, when I was a kid, can't think of the name we used to call it, but it was all White families lived back there. Then when integration came around, and everything had to be equal, then you had a lot of families, Black families move in there also. Then it became predominantly Black. Then they tore it down. Now it's called Longborough. But the same pier, little piece out in the water they're arguing about now with the City of Charleston and the homeowners over there? When I was a kid, that's where we crabbed for - crabbed and swim out there. As far as we knew, the City of Charleston owned it - you didn't need no permit, and they didn't have no thing about closed after this time - you could go out there and crab all day long and fish when I was a kid in Longborough, and Simons Street end at 12th Avenue back then. All these nice houses you see at the end of Simons Street now, that's the marsh filled in. Because when you've got end of Simons Street, that was 12th Avenue. That was the end, and nothing but marsh through there. And they had the sewage pipe run all the way over to 10th Avenue. We were kids, we had to make deliveries - to keep from riding five blocks around, we used to push our bicycle in the marsh and walk on the sewage pipe over to 10th Avenue to make deliveries over in that area, you know, back in the days.

AW: Did your family have a car?

JJ: No.

AW: So, you went by bike pretty much everywhere?

JJ: Bicycles. Everybody - like now it seems like everybody's so excited about bicycles. That was a big thing when I was a kid. That's all the - not only young people, older Black men rode bicycles too. And a thing that's not - I don't know if they make it anymore - they had Robinson's Bicycle Stop, used to sell a bell for two dollars. Now, two dollars, back when I'm talking about now, that'd be like probably 35 or 40 dollars today. But they had a bell, a chrome bell that they'd put on their bicycle. And you had men - I'm talking about adult men riding down the street playing a tune. You know, and then they could then be going, ding-a-ling-ding-ding, you know. They're making their own music, how to muffle it and everything with the hand. Yeah, that was it back in the days. But everybody rode a bicycle, and every place had a hardware store, because we had a hardware store right - do know where the Chronicle is now, that was a hardware store first. When I was growing up, that was a grocery store. That was Colonial Grocery Store. Then, from Colonial Grocery Store, it went to Seigels Hardware, and you could buy bearings - you could buy everything you need to fix your bicycle. It was a big thing for a kid to just make their own, we used to make our own bicycles. Get the frame, make you a bicycle. And now, right here on Simons Street where they're building these new houses - like I told you, when I grew up it

was Simons Court, now it's Fields Place. But Fields Place [had] always been there, but Fields Place had run from King Street - Fields Place had about 12 houses on it - not 12, I'd say 10 houses, roughly - maybe more or less. But Fields Place had like five houses on each side. Now, Fields Place was completely White - all White families. But Fields Place came right up to Simons Court, dead end. And then you had Simons Court, all Black folks. But now today, after they built all these expensive houses, you've still got Fields Place, but Fields Please runs from King Street to Simons Street now. They opened it all up. That's the way it is.

AW: Did you always go to New Israel Church?

JJ: I started out in New Israel in '53. I became a confirmed member in '55 - full membership, '55.

AW: That's a long time.

JJ: And I've been in - got married, brought my wife here, my kids grew up here, been a member of this church ever since.

AW: This is an awesome church.

JJ: From then to now.

AW: When you were a kid, what did you do for entertainment? Did you go out to restaurants or -

JJ: Are you kidding me? [laughs]

Katherine Pemberton: Did you ever go to Hampton Park, or visit the zoo?

JJ: Oh yeah - but that wasn't, we didn't do that. That was just part of our life. Hampton Park was an everyday thing for me. It wasn't - occasionally. Funny, you must've spoke to somebody who knows about Hampton Park. You see, Hampton Park had elephants, had monkeys, had lions, had parrots, had snakes, had an aviary. When you walked in - well, they brought the, they call it gazebo. See, the gazebo was on the other side. They moved the gazebo around facing Cleveland Street in the last, maybe, I'm not good on dates - but maybe the last 20 years. When you turn onto Cleveland Street now, and looking at the gazebo, that wasn't there. That was around where you go, where people go park their car now to go walking, the gazebo was on that side. And Hampton Park had the aviary, and the stuff where they kept the animals, where you could walk right straight through, and it was sand - there was no floor or nothing, it was sand, and you could walk right through it with the snakes and everything. But they were in their cage in cubicles, and the lion - When I was a teenager, you could hear the lion roar at night. You know, when he roared, oh yeah - you could hear him just as clear as day. Especially if the weather, you could tell - he would let you know when there's lightning. Lightning could be way off, and heading this side. And you hear that lion start roaring at night, you know that was unpleasant. And see, something he didn't like in the elephant at Hampton Park, because I used to walk through Hampton Park every day - at least four days a week ['cause I?] went to Burke School. And we walked to school - we didn't have no bus. Back when I went to school, to ride the bus was a nickel, to ride the city bus - then it went from a nickel to a dime, then it went from

a dime to tokens, three tokens for a quarter. But you kept that nickel, because that helped pay for your lunch. You walked to school. You had a group. You know you'd pick up people on the way. The kids all - I'd leave Simons Street, and you always had to walk through, like I say, in these neighborhoods, you had a walk-through. And you'd walk through by a certain house, and then this one's ready, and we all walked to school together. But Hampton Park was always a nice place to go.

AW: Was it free?

JJ: Oh yeah. Hampton Park was always free, and during segregation, we could not - funny thing. We could go in Hampton Park, and walk all around Hampton Park all we want, but we couldn't walk across the playground at Hampton Park. You know the playground right there on the corner of Cleveland and Rutledge. We'd do the basketball rack and got all that [out there?] - they had a policeman station there. Not for us, but that was, it was foot patrol - that was his area, and you couldn't walk across. We used to walk around here, but you couldn't walk across it. He'd shake you up - and lock you up, you know. But he'll stop you - and he'd stop you and make you go back the same way you came, and walk around on Hampton Park. But Hampton Park was always a nice place to go.

AW: Did you go to restaurants or anything?

JJ: No. No restaurants - we didn't have the money. We didn't have no money, you know.

AW: What did Sunday dinner look like at your house?

JJ: Sunday dinner was always a feast in the Black house - you know, family. Not the Black house, but the Black family, there's always a feast. You'd eat good on Sunday if you didn't eat the rest of the week, okay? You would have your potato salad and your macaroni and your fried chicken and your cake and pies. We didn't starve on Sunday. You ate good. Always a feast, and not only at your house. If your house didn't have the feast, your neighbor had the feast. I remember my uncles and stuff - my aunt would fix this big, she'd start cooking Friday, Saturday night. And my uncle, he didn't go home until he came to the house and eat - then he'd go home. But, you know, families were closer then, more considerate of each other, more compassionate. Nowadays, it's what can you do for me? And it's forgotten. But family was close. There's no closeness - it's not like that no more.

AW: When you - if you had a girlfriend, did you do dates like people do now?

JJ: Oh yeah. We did normal things, yeah - sure, I had a girlfriend. My girlfriend is my high school sweetheart. We started in 10th grade. We've been together 61 years. We started out in 10th grade, and then after we graduated, three years later we got married. We were graduating from high school, and three years later we graduated - but yeah. You could go to the movies - there were no - this was separation. It was, at the time when I come along, the kids today would never understand that. There was no confusion or hostility like it is now. You get two kids walking down the street now, a Black kid or White kid, and if one don't move, they're ready to go to war. Now, it wasn't like that when I was growing up. Hey - you're walking down the street, White kid's coming, if you stayed to the right, they'd stay to the right. If you know them you'll speak, if you don't know them, you don't speak. But like now with kids, it's crazy.

AW: They want to get angry, or make an issue of -

JJ: Oh, yes, yes, yes. That's crazy. But we had, like I said, we had - go to the movie, you had a lot of movie theaters. In fact, Charleston don't have no movie theaters like they used to have, because back in the days, you had the Gloria Theater, you had the Palace Theater, you had the Riviera Theater, and - you had a slew of movie houses. Then you had the Lincoln Theater, which was all Black. Owned by a Black guy. Then you had Taylor's Bakery on Spring Street, owned by an all-Black family. But we'd go to the movie. Only thing, now - when we went to the movie, we had to sit in the balcony. Like, we went to the Gloria, like, all your theaters, White folks enter right off the street, front entrance. We had to go around to the side door, either a stairs inside or a stairs running up on the outside of the building. That's like when we went to the Riviera Theater - we had to enter what, George Street or what - whatever street it is I don't remember. But the same seat, far as I know, the same - it looks the same, but I was looking downstairs. But we had to go to the side, and you go up in the balcony. And the same air conditioning that would cool them cooled you too. Same heat that heated them heated you too. But you had to go up in the balcony, and that was at all the theaters.

KP: Was the Lincoln Theater - it was a Black-owned theater.

JJ: Yeah - complete Black.

KP: That wouldn't have been the same way then. That was -

JJ: Well, you didn't have no White folks go to the Lincoln Theater. You just had all Black folks go to the Lincoln -

KP: I think I remember about the Lincoln Theater, because it's not there anymore. Actually, that parcel's getting ready to be developed.

JJ: Yeah, they tore the building down. You had, back in that block, that area, you had the Lincoln Theater, and you had a restaurant back there called Bacardi's Restaurant. That was a real nice restaurant back in the days. But all that family have - well, that place was closed years ago because they had some issues. But it was closed when I was a teenager, but in my late teens. But you had Bacardi's - you had a lot of Black businesses back when I was growing up, because there was separation. Now, that's like - I don't know how much you know about the city, but on Bogard Street there's a place called The Patio. Now, it's not The Patio no more, but when I was growing up, it was The Patio, all Black. Then you had the other place there on Spring Street called Cutler's Restaurant. That was all Black. You had a lot of places where Black went out - but now, the White establishments then refused to serve you, far as I know, but you couldn't come in and sit down. You could go to the back door and order. You know, you could go to all the back doors and order. That's like on Spring Street - we're getting away from this area, but downtown Spring Street where the Wendy's closed up now - back then you used to have the Patio Drive-in Theater, and - I can't think of the other - Mama Kate's. See, Charleston back when I was growing up, you had a lot of drive-in restaurants - what you call, like you've got the Sonic now. You had a pile of Sonics around Charleston, because you had Mama Kate's and The Patio down there. Now, we could not drive in there in our car and get served, but we could drive in the parking on the other side and go to the back door and order, back in those days, from the restaurants. But you had several, you had a lot of drive-in restaurants around. And LaBrasca

Restaurant used to be on the corner of Cleveland and King. It's a vacant lot now, but that used to be a top restaurant. But a lot of these places - the younger children then [59:46 unintelligible] back into this area. When the richest man that lived in this area when I was a kid, J.C. Long. J.C. Long used to live on the corner of Maple and Enston Avenue. I talked with the daddy, because he was in a wheelchair. And then the son, one of the sons that owned a house around there on Rutledge Avenue - Rutledge and Peachtree, I think it is, you know. But J.C. Long - and Joyce will give you some insight. You haven't spoken to Joyce yet?

AW: I did. .She said her dad worked with -

JJ: Her dad worked with J.C. Oh you've already spoken to Joyce. Yeah, her dad worked for J.C. Long. Her dad was an officer of this church.

AW: She didn't say that.

JJ: Yeah, her dad was an officer of this church for years, and yeah, her dad worked for J.C. Long for years.

AW: Did you have any other -

KP: I was just wondering, you know with a lot of downtown churches that don't have a cemetery right adjacent to the church. Has there been a traditional burial ground for the members of this church nearby?

JJ: No. That I can't - I can't expound on that, because, you know, most times - I guess the way I can answer you, the Black churches, a Black congregation, I should say, we all come from someplace else. We're never from here, you see? Just like me, I born on Edisto Island, and most likely, when it's time to bury me, that's where they're going to take me, Edisto Island. Not unless - now, I'm talking about old time now, I'm not talking about modern times. Modern days now, you just buy you a plot in Live Oak or wherever and bury somebody. But when I was a kid growing up - say, like my aunt, my uncles, all of them - they're buried at home, because that's what they wished. No matter where they went, when they die they want to go home to be buried. So, that's, they never - a lot of places never had that. And just like most Charlestonians are not Charlestonians - they're transplants. Most Charlestonians - it's hard to find a true Charlestonian, because with the Navy yard being here, and all the stuff - you've got a lot of people that have been here 70 years, but that's just not their home. Like me - I was born on Edisto, came to Charleston, and up in St. Stephen, South Carolina, back to Charleston - so I've got a choice when I pass away, whether my family wants to carry me to Edisto, or carry me to St. Stephen, or bury me locally.

AW: Did your family have like a graveyard in Edisto?

JJ: Well, most of my family are buried at the First Baptist Church graveyard on Edisto. And that's on my biological side - on my adopted side, most of the people are buried up in Pineville. Now I buried my daughter four years ago, my baby girl. Now, I buried her in Red Top because she was going to Mt. Olive Reformed Episcopal Church. She was a member there. And so when she passed away, I buried her at - now, they have a church cemetery, so I buried her there, because she was a member there. But for me, I don't have a preference. Wherever - if I die first,

wherever the wife decides to put me, I'm fine, you know? But we don't have per se - now, my mother, my biological mother is buried at the Magnolia, right up the street there. Now, my adoptive mother is buried in the family graveyard up in St. Stephen or Pineville. And so is all my adoptive people who have passed before. But we never - I'd say "adopted" because in this interview, I needed to be clear - but I don't use adoption when I speak about my family, the people who know, because my adoptive people, I was there since I was a year and a half old. I don't know nothing about adoption. I just know my family. I don't know if this is my adopted sister. I never say that. But, for the record, I make it clear, but no - I don't distinguish adopted sister, because my adopted sister and I look alike, and born 100 miles apart - but we look alike.

AW: Do you have anything that you want to talk about specifically that's recorded about the way things used to be? Anything that you feel like maybe I didn't ask a question that you wanted to talk about?

JJ: No, because things - I look for changes. I don't want things to be the way, I don't my kids to come up the way I came up. I want it to be - I want them to have a better life. I have a good life - I'm not complaining about my life, but I mean, I just wanted them per se, a daddy and a mother in their life, that they knew family, that they know what it is to be born to a family, not just-- In other words, if my kids walk in here right now, the first thing, he's going to say "Daddy." I mean, just that - Daddy, so and so. There is not no off the wall stuff, you know - if they've got an issue, they're going to come to me. But I set up a chain of command with my children. That started when, back then, the wife, after all the kids went to school, elementary school, my wife was working also. So, we set up-- The chain of command is the oldest is the boss, in charge. Like right now, that still carries on to this day. If something happens with my other kids, they always call their sister first, and then we'll get to hear about it when everything's taken care of. But they still, to this day, you know. And we had four kids, and they're all successful. We buried the one, but the other three are very successful, you know, so they have had a good life, and made a contribution to this society as far as I'm concerned, because-- One of my kids is real well, and the other one, he retired a military officer after 26 years, so--

AW: Are there any things - like this neighborhood, as you mentioned, is changing a lot - or are there things -

JJ: Well, I don't hardly know anyone in the neighborhood now, you know. It's just a tradition of me coming to Israel Church because I want to, because there's other Reformed Episcopal churches near. I can go to the one my daughter used to go to, which is five miles away. But I grew up here - this is where I want to be.

AW: Where do you live?

JJ: I live West Ashley. I live in Long Branch subdivision.

AW: So, you come here mostly on Sundays?

JJ: I come here all the time. Mostly, I come on Sunday, but if things, and we've got to do certain things, I come here during the week too.

AW: You feel like this is your home?

JJ: This is my home church, yeah. I don't want to go to no other church. Not no time I see in the foreseeable future. I don't have no reason to leave here, because I know everyone here. Just like Joyce. See Joyce and I was from school together. Joyce behind me age wise, and school. I finished school before Joyce, but Joyce and her family - I knew Joyce's father. I know - but like Miss Harvey - Miss Harvey knew me before I knew myself, because I knew Miss Harvey when she been dating. Before she got married, you know, because I grew up. But I was a teenager when she got married, but yeah, Miss Harvey, she should have some very good information, because she's lived here - like I said, she was here all her life on Simons Street.

AW: She lives right next door, in that house right there? The yellow house.

JJ: Um-hmm. That's her house. That's Miss Harvey. That's where I was before I came here. I go, I talk to her sometimes twice a week - talk to her every Sunday. Yeah, talk to her every Sunday. She had her family, she had twin sisters. Two of her sisters were twins. She had a brother who was a midget.

AW: He was a midget?

JJ: Yeah. He passed away - he got hit in Washington, DC. He was a minister. He was a minister. [1:10:08 unintelligible] you know, off the block - everybody did. Everybody did okay - everybody did okay, you know, considering. Go back, off the cuff again - the city bus used to run through the street here. Rutledge and Heriot - I don't know what they call it now, but the bus stop was right in the center of the apartments. Right where you turn to into the apartments street, that apartment, them homes over there now - the bus stop was right in the center there. The bus just come right through Simons Street. But there had never been no racial strife. I don't know any in this neighborhood when I was growing up. Not like this thing, that thing, no - everybody lived to theirself.

AW: Did you ever interact with the East Side neighborhoods very much, or was it really -

JJ: No, Charleston was very territorial when I grew up, now. I'll never forget that - Charleston was very territorial. You had the East Side, I know you hear about Back of the Green, I know you hear about Mexico - all that's territorial.

AW: But did you all go to the same school -

JJ: All of us go to the same school. We ain't had but, when I grew up, they didn't have but two high schools in the City of Charleston. Now, they had three before my time - because they had, well, that's before my time, as I remember. Because you had the Avery Institute - I know you hear about Avery, the Avery Institute. Now that was Black, but now I never went to Avery. My brother went to Avery, because he's older than me. And then you had I.C.S., Immaculate Conception High School, that was the Black Catholic school. And then you had Burke High School, where everybody went. See, you had - elementary school, you had Simonton Elementary, you had Archer Elementary, you had Buist Elementary, you had Rhett. All of those feed into - when you went to eighth grade, you went to Burke. So, the kids I didn't know until I went to eighth grade, because you had some kids, like the line for our side of town was the railroad track on Romney Street - everyone east of the railroad track went to Archer. Everyone west of the railroad track went to Rhett. Then you went downtown, you had - I don't the cutoff

there was - went to Buist - then you go on across town, they went to Simonton. And there was, basically they were a feeder school. When you went to high school, you went to Burke.

AW: And then when you went to high school, did you become friends with the people in the other neighborhoods, like -

JJ: Some. You couldn't friend everybody, you know because just like, in other words, they had Grant Hill. Now, I could go on Grant Hill when I started dating, and me and my wife, girlfriend at the time, started dating - I could go on Grant Hill because some of the kids knew me. It was like, I had a pass, but you didn't, you just didn't go hang on Grant Hill because you feel like it, because, like I said, it was territorial. Now, I could go on to Grant Hill and they didn't bother me, but now, some of the areas you went through, if you're with somebody else's girlfriend, you better not go back [laughs] 'cause you just didn't do that. But Charleston was territorial when I grew up. Like I said, Back of the Green, the Borough and everyplace else. So, -

AW: I think we've used up a lot of your time, and it went over, but this is so exciting.

JJ: I'm going to charge you.

AW: [Laughs] I really appreciate your time.

JJ: I charge by the hour. 30 minutes free. Everything after 30 minutes, you pay.

AW: [Laughs] it's been so -

JJ: I hope I was helpful.

AW: So, helpful - thank you so much.

JJ: I hope I was helpful - that's the best I can tell you. But it's the way I remember - you know, it's, you move on. You move on and make life better.

AW: Yeah. Well, thank you.

JJ: Yes, ma'am.

END OF RECORDING