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## Johnson, Gwendolyn and Janet Banks

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Interviewees: Gwendolyn Johnson & Janet

Banks

Interviewer: Unknown

Date: 10 March, 2004

Janet Banks (JB): You want to know where I'm from?

Interviewer (I): Yes.

JB: I'm from Worcester, Massachusetts.

I: Worcester, Massachusetts. That's W-O-R –

JB: C-E-S-T-E-R.

I: C-E-S-T-E-R.

JB: A lot of people mistake it, they say Worcester, but it's Wuster.

I: C-H-E-S, or?

JB: No, no W-O-R-C-E-S-T-E-R.

I: Oh wow, I never would have guessed that. Ok and you were born – do you mind telling me when you were born?

JB: I was born March 31, 1917.

I: 1917. Ok, in Massachusetts?

JB: In Worcester, yes.

I: Ok and how did you get over here?

JB: How did I get to the Bronx?

I: Yes.

JB: Well I migrated here, I guess it was about 19 – I graduated high school in 1936 in Worcester, [inaudible] High School. And my mother came to live in New York, I was living with my grandmother, as a matter of fact, my grandmother raised me. And my mother migrated to New York and then I came over to be with my mother after I graduated. You know how when you grow up you go with you mother, so I came to New York – with a friend of mine the first time, then I visited with my aunt – my mother wasn't here yet, but with my aunt. And I was so impressed with New York, I went back, she never came back. And I was like, "how do you keep them on the farm after the see Paris." So that's what happened to me and I came back to New York and I've been here ever since, that's approximately, I guess, 1942 I guess something like that, because I got married 1940, something like that.

I: Did you marry somebody from Worcester?

JB: No I didn't. I married a young man in – from New York, he was from Florida. His name's Ernest Banks, he was from Florida, I forgot what part of Florida he was from. Anyway, and I had two children, after I got married, Pamela and Michael, they're both in New York. They were both born, baptized Catholics, both of them. But in the meantime, in the interim, between the births and the marriages I was converted, I was converted, I joined St. Augustine's Church in 1948, I was baptized there. But I was originally an Episcopalian, which is very much the same except for the confession and such.

I: 1948 you were baptized?

JB: Yes.

I: At St. Augustine's. How did that happen?

JB: Well, it's a funny story. My husband – my intended husband was overseas in the war at the particular time, the sailors, soldier were overseas. So I was working in the Internal Revenue, 161<sup>st</sup> Street and we used to have shifts, day and night. And a friend of mine who wasn't Catholic, she used to go to make novenas. So she encouraged me to go make a novena to the Blessed Mother and we used to go down to Holy Cross, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and that's where I started going, making novenas. Well from that time on I somehow was drawn to Catholicism, in particular with the Eucharist's and it just drew me to it so after that I took instructions and after that I was baptized in, you know, St. Augustine's.

I: Wow, my son received his first communion at Holy Cross.

JB: He did? Yes, we used to go there for, you know, they had the novenas. And they – we could do it because had the weeks – they had one day a week, when we used to do one session night and one session day so we would be able to do it. So that's what happened, that's how I became Catholic.

I: At the novena, did they have preaching, or did –what –

JB: I'm not sure now, you could – I'm not too sure what it was in that, from that on, I can't remember but I know it was something and I always remember that it just brought me back to wanting to be a Catholic with my feeling about the Eucharist and the body and blood of Christ. It just sort of drew me. That would seem to be the only thing really at that particular time, but since then, you know, things have changed. I mean I don't mean changed within – in the way we have different feelings and different, you know, you get instruction and you learn different things. But that was the main thing that drew me to the Catholic Church it wasn't anybody or anything, but it was just that. It wasn't any – you know, I mean my friend wasn't Catholic, she still, she's down, she's in, where is she? She's in Connecticut, with – she's elderly like myself but she still – I don't know if she goes to church, she doesn't have the luxury that I have. Not everybody has the luxury that I have, I have beautiful people from this church, they look out for me and take care of me and they younger than I and that's another story too.

I: So it was a mystical spiritual kind of attraction?

JB: Sort of yes, you might say so. I would say so since you put it that way. I never thought about it that way but it was, was that kind of experience that I had, that I just was drawn to it so I been here ever since.

I: And how did you happen to be at St. Augustine's though? Instead of Holy Cross or something? Because you were living up in this area, is that correct?

JB: What happened is that we – I was here with my mother and she lived at 140<sup>th</sup> Street. And she used to go to St. Charles, and then when we moved to the Bronx St. Augustine's was right across the street. I lived on Fulton Avenue, over where Sister Catherine lived, that used to be the convent and I lived across the street 1185 Fulton, and that's right across the street the sisters were there. So that was one of the things too.

I: I'm sorry, your mom lived in 140<sup>th</sup> Street and she went to St. Charles? She was Catholic?

JB: Yes she, she was converted too. But I don't know, now don't into it with my mother because I don't know exactly how it came about I can't remember, but I do know that she used to go to St. Charles. She became Catholic.

I: But it was a separate thing from you. You each had your own path.

JB: Yes, I had my own path. She was going to St. Charles, and then I came up here and I joined up here.

I: And your children, and your husband? What about him?

JB: Well no, after a while I wanted him to but he died before I had a chance to do – to convert him actually, until – which I really wanted to do because I really wanted to get remarried again, you know, to – in the church, but you know how men are trying to get him to do it, to do it, to do it, I'm going to, I'm going to, I'm going to, and anyway he died and it was a sort of a tragic experience. He died in bed. We went to bed that night, it was the night before the 4<sup>th</sup> or something like that and he died in his sleep. So when we – when I went to wake up in the morning, I was working in Macy's at the time and when I went to wake up in the morning he was just lying there like this. And then I – you know, I can talk about it now because nothing like time, time is the great healer and you can talk about things that happened then, you know, now I can do – and he was just lying there so, then I got kind of excited, ooh what a feeling, and then I called my mother and I – because I didn't know what was happening and she told me to call 911 and I did and they came and I – they didn't tell me he was dead, he was, he was DOA, they said no they weren't doctors and they couldn't tell me and I had the 2 little children. They were 3 and, 3 and 5, they 2 years apart, 3 and 5, so and – that was a tragic experience in my life. But, through the grace of God and the community of St. Augustine's, the sisters, we had sisters and brothers back then and they were very instrumental in helping me more or less raise, you know, my children. The strength, the backbone and, you know, because we went through time, trying times, but – raising 2 children, a boy and a girl. So we lived on Fulton for a lot of years, I forgot how many and then we moved over to the project. And I lived in the project 36 years on Washington Avenue, but I still came to St. – I came back to St. Augustine's.

I: All the time? You never stopped?

JB: All the time, I never stopped coming. But my activity in the church at that time was merely as a just a parishioner, you know going to mass on Sunday, holidays, you know and that sort of thing and raising my children and working too. So at that time it – that's the way my life goes in spans, raising the kids and

then when after they grew up and got some size and could go to school I put them in St. Augustine's and then they went through St. Augustine's and I was more or less involved with the school and then after they left the school, I was on my – I retired, I was on my own I joined church – I mean got more involved in church, and I retired, I was 65 now, I'm a senior citizen and then I attached myself to the senior citizens [Laughs] and now that's where I am, that's my attachment, the senior citizens, so that's about the way my story goes, unless there's anything else you want to know in between.

I: Where do you live now?

JB: I live over on Jackson Avenue, that's 1142 Jackson that's right behind Morris High School, you should come over there it's a landmark.

I: Really?

JB: Yes, that block is a landmark.

I: And is that far away from here?

JB: Nope, 2 blocks.

I: Oh, just 2 blocks away.

JB: Boston Road and then the school is on Boston and then the next is Jackson and it's between 166<sup>th</sup> street and Holmes.

I: Yes, we got lost so I know where Holmes Street is [Laughs].

JB: You do? It's 166<sup>th</sup>, it's right on the corner, it's a brownstone. But I've been there only three years though, going on, it'll be 4 now.

I: Do you walk over here?

JB: I told you, I have angels. I call them. They're not Charlie's Angels, Bank's Angels, they bring me over here. I always got somebody brings me and so I'm blessed in that way. Because I had two falls, two bad falls, two bad falls, one I had in here on Easter.

Gwendolyn Johnson (GJ): No, Palm Sunday.

JB: I mean Palm Sunday, I guess the whole church knew about that on Palm Sunday. I don't think anybody will ever forget that Sunday. I was [Laughs] – I don't know what happened. I was down here and right back there at the room there, there's a little step because I was, I was with the Sunday school then at the time and then I went to make a step or something or other and I fell. I lunged into the wall down there and it was terrific. And so that alarmed everybody because we were having CCD. So they called 9-11 and I remember I was lying up like this and one of the young altar servers said, "Mrs. Banks, don't close your eyes, don't close your eyes!" And then Father came down, Father [inaudible] came down and when he was looking at me I said, "Oh, I'm getting the last rites." [Laughter] I just knew I was going to -- But that was and – so I had the, three, yes three falls. That fall and then two others in the

house so now they have gotten for me the lip on the banister so now I don't have to walk up and down, I can ride up and down. Like a BMW, goes 5 miles an hour. Oh God. It's slow but it's a blessing.

I: In church they have a –

JB: No, in my house! In my home, my home not over there. Because I fell over there. And they had intended to have something in that when I first moved, that was going to be one of the things, but I fell twice before they could get it so then they sped it up and that was it. You know, so now I have it and I've had it for quite a while and it is a blessing. Bless all the St. Augustine's people who are really blessings. It's a – I don't know, they, they're – it's very hard for me to explain, I don't want it on tape.

I: What about that was so bad.

JB: It's not that it was bad. I didn't think it was – [Laughs] I thought it was ok but I just thought it was kind of personal. And that's the reason that I called my angels because they truly are angels. So I guess I talked enough for Betty can – that Betty is getting the words. Is there anything else you want to know?

I: Well I think that's good for now. We'll do Mrs. Johnson and what is your first name Mrs. Johnson?

GJ: Gwendolyn.

I: G-W-E-N-D --

GJ: O-L-Y-N

I: Johnson. And –

GJ: And I'm from the Virgin Islands, St. Croix.

I: Oh, St. Croix. That's a nice place, I've been there. So you were raised Catholic there?

GJ: Yes, there was no other religion, we all were Catholic. I went to St. Patrick's school. I graduated from St. Patrick's.

I: Is that on the islands or here?

GJ: The islands.

I: In the Islands. Ok. So you graduated from – that's elementary school or, and high school?

GJ: High School.

I: High School, Ok.

GJ: You know the school that started from Kindergarten all the way up to 12<sup>th</sup>.

I: And as far as you know your family goes back as Catholic.

GJ: It's all Catholic, except my father. He was Episcopalian. But I don't know when he became a Catholic.

I: Oh, and he was an Episcopalian but he converted to Catholicism. How many in your family?

GJ: It was 10 of us, but only 4 was alive.

I: Where were you in that?

GJ: I'm the last one.

I: You're the baby. Ok. [Laughs] What year were you born?

GJ: December the 19<sup>th</sup>, do I have to say?

[Laughter]

I: No, you don't have to say.

JB: I told my years, go ahead.

GJ: I will let you know.

I: Ok, and when did you come to United States?

GJ: I came here in 1946.

I: With your family?

GJ: I came to my sister.

I: You came to your sisters? Oh, so she was already, obviously already here. Where did she live?

GJ: We lived in Tinton Avenue, 970 Tinton Avenue between 163<sup>rd</sup> and 165<sup>th</sup>.

I: And that is in the Bronx right?

GJ: In the Bronx, yes, right here. And I used to go to St. Anthony's.

I: Oh, St. Anthony of Padua? Oh ok.

GJ: St. Anthony of Padua. That was my parish, but I had some – my family owned a building at 641 East 169<sup>th</sup> Street so – but they were not Episcopalian, they were Lutheran.

I: Who was Lutheran?

GJ: My family. My side was Catholic, the other side was Episcopalian and Lutheran. So I would come up to visit them, all the time, every day, I'm over on 169<sup>th</sup> Street. So that's how I moved on this side of the street, but I still – although I moved over here, I used to go to St. Anthony, all my kids, no 3 of them went to St. Anthony and the rest went to St. Augustine's.

I: How many children did you have?

GJ: 7.

I: And they all went, oh some went to St. Anthony and some went to St. Augustine's. So when did you start going to St. Augustine's?

GJ: And now this is a long story. When I moved over here in 19 – I moved with my cousins in 1960 and the other kids were still going to St. Anthony so I had my youngest son, my son Carlton, he was – I tried to register him over here in St. Augustine's, but they were crowded so I had to send him to the public school, P.S. 163. And so they used to pick them up in Wednesday afternoon for religious instruction and he used to come here for religious instruction. And him and one priest that was here didn't get along too well. So he got angry and he started to go to St. Johns, the Lutheran Church with his cousin. So, and he would go every Sunday and every Sunday he'd come back with his song sheet and he said, "Mom, I like to sing for all the saints." So one day he was coming down the block and he met Father King. And I come to Father King says to Genevieve, "Will it be Ok if I start to come over here with him?"

I: So he had a little talk with him? Is that what happened?

GJ: Yes, and he was still going to – he was maybe about 8. And that's how I came over to St. Augustine's.

I: So what – I wonder if Father was maybe asking him –

GJ: Are you Catholic? Are you baptized? Do you go to school? [Inaudible] and he just loved Father King and Sister Genevieve. And he became [inaudible]

I: Really? Sister Genevieve?

GJ: Yes, she's past. And he would go to Sister Genevieve every Tuesday evening to Sister Genevieve.

I: And just have a visit with her?

GJ: Yes, to have a visit with her. She encouraged him and then he came back to the church. And so since he came back I didn't go to St. Anthony anymore I used to bring him here to math and that's how I came. But my kids went straight back to St. Anthony, they didn't come with me. Only four to the end came over here, the rest went to St. Anthony.

I: What did they like about it? They just made friends over there I guess huh?

GJ: Yes, now they used to go to school there and I think they like St. Anthony because my friends from the Virgin Islands used to go to church there, I remember we used to meet each other every Sunday afternoon. And one of them became the governor of the islands. Yes, one of them became the governor of the islands, and the other was in politics. But we all go separate ways and so I stayed over here.

I: How did you feel about the involvement here with the Catholic Church? Was there any difference here in the United States from lay involvement over here than in the islands.



GJ: Yes, they was – everything had to be Latin.

I: Had to be what?

GJ: Latin. No English, everything was Latin and they were very strict. Everything, every holiday, Catholic holiday, you had to be to church. It was stricter than over here.

I: Is – was the country, did they observe the holidays as a country? In other words, if it was Easter, no, Easter's not a good example, let's say Good Friday or Holy Thursday, would you not go to work on those days?

GJ: No, you did not work from that Wednesday.

I: From Wednesday, makes it a little bit easier.

GJ: You did not work on Thursday, Good Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

I: So the government and the church were in unison on what was – allowing you to observe religious holidays.

GJ: The religious holiday. You had to shop Wednesday. Else you were going [inaudible]

I: Oh, because the stores were closed too.

GJ: The stores were closed for Good Friday. They was closed for Good Friday, they were very strict as I said, they were very strict.

JB: You know when you talk about that being interesting its very interesting how even in this country, observing of a holiday or even Sunday how they don't – there was a time when there was a blue law and there was nothing open on Sunday. Now you can get everything from the Fish Market to the building of a new building and all of that. And it's sad. It's really sad, they don't observe it at all. And you know what, Sunday I came out of mass and I stood on the steps right over there and they were refurbishing the homeless – and they were just working up there with the putty and whatever you're talking about just like it was Friday or Saturday and I said, "no regard at all." And I don't know, the time will come when I guess, when the liquor stores will be open on Sunday, that's one thing that's not open right now, I don't think. No, they not open on Sunday. But anyway, everything is open, Beauty Parlors, every single thing is open on a Sunday and there's no regard. And I think it's sad, it's really, really sad.

I: People don't get a day of rest either.

JB: No! And that – and you're supposed to have a day of rest. Doesn't scripture say that? You do, you need a day of rest. We all do. But that's the way it is. But what we going to do. Just take time out and do it yourself.

I: When you, both of you were – are parents in the 40's right? In this area. How was it in terms of being a person of color in this area?

GJ: I had no problems.

JB: I have never, I don't know of – I have never had that problem. I have never had a problem of color. It may – even in Massachusetts, they had it too. But I've never felt anything, because all of my life, before I came to New York, most of the time I was the only one. I've always been more or less in the minority and always accepted as one.

I: Because in Worcester there's not many black people right?

JB: Well there are now, but at that time they were there. But I just, I don't know, we lived next door to some Armenians and we lived, somebody here and somebody there and we just went to school together, played together. I think the only difference is when you come up to High School and boys and the dating part of it, you know. There's a little difference, you know, [inaudible]. But I never had any, I never felt any prejudice. Because even when I came here, one time when we were working down, during the war times, we were working in a factory I think, I was doing something, something anyway, I can't remember. And there was some girls there, there was a Jewish girl, Italian girl, and a couple other – and we took a bungalow together in Staten Island and I never, I never felt any, I never did, I don't know. I don't know, it's something [inaudible] but I never did.

I: And your children didn't have any problems either?

JB: Well no! They didn't ever have any problems. I don't know, they never told me of any whatever. Because they went to school over here, they didn't have this, St. Augustine's. And then in their lives coming up, I don't know if they encountered anything, but they never came home and said they got [inaudible] like Miss Jones's kids had problems. But my kids never had problems. I don't know if it was they were later, or if it was earlier or later, I don't know the year [inaudible] whatever. But my – on the neighborhood, they were raised up around here and –

GJ: I don't know if they did or not.

I: She was, she was the first one in this area, the first African American n this area. So maybe –

JB: Maybe that's the difference

I: -- maybe that's the difference.

JB: It wasn't down here either, wasn't it up in, where was it?

I: I can't remember.

JB: It's a little further up, it's not exactly the South Bronx.

I: So when you moved here, this was a mixed neighborhood or was it – were there Irish, Italian, Jewish families?

JB: Yes! Because there was – because in the project there was, next door to me was a little Jewish lady. The project was even mixed at that time. When I moved there.

I: And that's in the 60's you moved in?

JB: When I moved over to the project, was that, when was that? 36 years I said I lived there huh? So how much would that be? Must've been in the 60's, yes, it was in the 60's because I was living on Fulton Avenue when my two children were born so it had to be the 60's.

I: So when your kids were born, in the 50's you said?

JB: Yes, '53 and '56.

I: This was already, this was still mixed or was it mainly African American at the time?

JB: It was mixed, yes it was mixed.

GJ: I remember taking my son to the Hess station and all those houses were Jewish.

JB: To the Convent yes. That other house where the purses used to be on the other side of 68<sup>th</sup> Street, that big house was mixed. So it was kind of mixed in with [inaudible]

GJ: 169<sup>th</sup> Street there was a bank, it was [inaudible] Hanover Trust on the corner and Clinton.

JB: It was there? I don't know. You know it's a funny thing, I used to live like in, I always say I was in the valley. And until I moved on Jackson Avenue it was like a dividing line up on over this side of Boston Road I don't know that much about it, but on the other side – so I was down in the valley and now I'm up the mountain [Laughs]. And was funny because, I didn't, you know, when I moved over there, it's so strange over there, going out, you know I don't go out, well I don't get around as much as I – over the other side, down near Morris – over on Washington Avenue, back over there, I know all about over there, Park Avenue or whatever, but on this side I don't know too much about it.

GJ: And I don't know over there too much, I know –

JB: Over here.

GJ: back over by Prospect Ave.

I: Did you ever own cars or did you use public transportation always.

GJ: The Trolley Car.

JB: Always the Trolley Car. Always, always the trolley on 3<sup>rd</sup> avenue, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue El.

GJ: On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue El, we know when it was coming.

JB: It was something else, that 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue El, that used to be a stop on 169<sup>th</sup> Street by the school there where the, you know where the school is.

GJ: The brewery used to be there. On 169<sup>th</sup> street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue it had a big brewery there where they build that school. And Fulton terrace.

JB: Was that a brewery? I don't remember.

GJ: Oh yes!

JB: I re- yes, yes, yes. I guess you're right I'm trying to – I'm thinking about, maybe I'm thinking about the El.

I: So the El was very noisy is what you're saying?

GJ: Of course.

JB: Rickety! Oh my God, when they turned around that corner down there by 100 and, where is it, down there by the police station, around that corner, oh my God.

I: The screech.

JB: Oh yes, you think you're going to tip off [Laughs]. It was terrible.

I: How about safety? Has it changed or was it very – did you feel safe then have you, do you feel less safe now?

GJ: It was safe.

JB: It's safer then.

GJ: It was safer then. Because after – when I was a young girl now I would walk from Tinton Avenue and go on the bus route to the ends.

JB: Come home any time.

GJ: And come home any time! I would go down to Tinton Avenue and it had the [inaudible]. When it was warm they were always outside sitting down by the gallery and they would always call me, “Goodnight, dearie.” “Goodnight, dearie.” “Get home safe now.” And I would just dance and I'm going home right now.

[Crosstalk]

I: And this was the 40's? 40's, 50's?

GJ: Late 40's.

JB: 50's, late 40's going into early 50's.

GJ: And then about the early 60's it started to move about and the neighborhood started to change.

I: What do you think makes it less safe?

GJ: Drugs, and there are no jobs and drugs. The economy let's say. Because when your kids were going to school there were flower shops.

JB: And they could get those menial jobs in the 5 and 10. Ain't no 5 and 10's anymore.

GJ: No 5 and 10 anymore, no more flower shops.

JB: Do you know what I couldn't find believe it or not, a cleaner!

GN: No cleaners, yes.

JB: I was, you know, I was shocked the other day. I was looking for a cleaner to put some clothes and I couldn't – I can't find one in a radius. I think there may be one 169<sup>th</sup> street if my memory serves.

GJ: Yes, across the street from me.

JB: Is he still there?

GJ: It's a – changed to Orientals.

JB: It's changed, and there's a drug store next to it too. I wasn't sure, that it – that's the closest one and I'm over here. They had one, they had one in the Laundromat on Boston Road that – between 168<sup>th</sup> and 167<sup>th</sup> street. Now they going out of business, they not doing it any more. And there's no – I can't find any around here, it's amazing.

I: The education was always good no matter if you went to Catholic school or a public school or do you think there was a difference?

GJ: If you were a Catholic, you naturally were going to send your kids to the Catholic school.

JB: It's, that's all I know. I never went to Boston public schools.

GJ: Naturally my kids didn't stay in the public school.

JB: My kids went all the way through so I never had to deal with that per se as their education and then I know right now my grandkids, they got to public school and – well, however. But I never had that, you know, like the school, the education per se to have to really get involved in that.

I: And they had good educations in the Catholic schools.

[Crosstalk]

JB: They were very strict.

GJ: Some of the public school around here at one time had very good principals.

JB: Yes they did, good principals, very good principals.

I: How about getting into college? Was there help doing that? Or getting into high schools. When I spoke with the former priest, Jim Segu, he said that there were some programs to try to help kids, or he went and tried. He went to Cathedral, he tried to get kids into the high schools and sometimes he wasn't always successful in getting them in.

GJ: Right. You had to be in the neighborhood.

JB: Well –

I: They didn't take black kids he was saying.

JB: Well I would – my son went to Rice technically, I don't think he had any problems.

I: Where did he go?

JB: Rice high school.

GJ: So did one of my sons.

JB: My daughter went to, what's that, Cardinal – what's the girl's high school up on Banebridge.

I: It was a Catholic school though?

JB: It was Catholic, yes. She graduated from there and Michael graduated from the Rice.

I: Rice?

JB: Rice High School

I: Is that Catholic?

JB: Yes, it's down in Harlem on, where is it?

GJ: 124<sup>th</sup> Street.

JB: 124<sup>th</sup> Street, yes. And I don't know, I didn't have that much problems. Actually I've been very lucky, very blessed. God has been very good to me, he watches over me all the time. And I'm sure he's watching over all of us but he got a special plan, we got a special connection.

GJ: Me and God got a thing going on [Laughter].

JB: But anyway, what was I going to say? And then when it came to college, well my daughter – I was lucky in that way, my daughter got a full scholarship to Brandeis. And that was by the grace of God because I didn't know how I was going to handle that because that was – that's expensive. So she graduated from Brandeis, my son didn't graduate.

GJ: My kids went to college, but they went to City College. [Inaudible] go to City went to Queens. Because my sister moved to Queens and they would go and stay with her.

JB: No problem. Yes, that's good. That's good. They got education and now – She's a guidance councilor over at Jane Adams. My daughter is, she got 4 kids.

GJ: Pamela? Sohe's a [inaudible] taskmaster.

JB: My oldest daughter she's strict with her kids getting an education, I tell you. But she don't fool around, she really – I'm glad she not my mother. She is my mother to tell you the truth, she got 5 kids, 4 there and me. But anyway, God has been so good, I can't thank him enough.

I: At St. Augustine's, what would you say, each of you, is the most, let's say, either the most important person that affected your life or maybe the most important program or –

JB: Well, what I would say is when I think back, the most important person and people, persons in my life were the religious. Because they were my salvation through my hardship when I lost my husband. Brother Kevin, he was – no he's not a brother now. Brother – he was a Brother. But the Brothers and the Sisters, Sister Regina, and all of the sisters, I think all of them were always right there for me. And I guess that's what has given me the strength to carry on, and the faith, because they were always there for me.

I: And these were white sisters?

JB: Oh yes, they were white Sisters and Brothers too. All – Sisters of Charity and the Brothers of – Christian Brothers –

GJ: No, not the Christian Brothers, Franciscans.

JB: No the Franciscans came later, the Christian Brothers was Brother Ed and Brother Kevin –

GJ: Oh, Brother Kevin right.

JB: Brother Kevin and Brother – they were the Christian Brothers. The Franciscans are – was there when Giles was going to be a priest. But they were my salvation. They really helped me a lot, go through my troubles, help me when I have troubles with my, you know, your son, delinquents and things like that. Always came to my rescue. So that's what I truly say, they were my salvation

I: So in other words the fact that you didn't have – your husband wasn't there to be the father figure, they kind of provided that?

JB: They kept sight of – Well I wouldn't say – I don't know if you could call them father but they were more like – all I can say is they were more supportive of, to me and my children. They were very supportive both of them. I mean both sets, the Sisters and the Brothers. So that's – when you ask that question that's what I would say. So, not one person or priest or whatever, it was the Brothers and Sisters.

I: How about you Mrs. Johnson?

GJ: The Sisters of Charity. And the Christian Brothers, but not her Christian Brothers. My Christian Brothers were those from Rice High School. And I worked for the Sisters of Charity and from the Sisters of Charity I went to the Christian Brothers, right over there in the convent. And I still keep in touch –

JB: I do too.

GJ: -- With some of the Sisters of Charity who is alive.

JB: I just talked to Sister Regina not too long ago.

GJ: So did I. And I kept in touch with the Christian Brothers.

JB: And Sister Susan, I just talked to her. I still keep in touch.

I: Where are they now?

JB: They're more or less in homes or wherever they go for retirement. They're all retired.

GJ: Brother Ed is still going strong.

JB: He's a terrific guy.

GJ: And Brother Kevin, is married and he's up in Mashford and he has a family, he writes to me, but he's up in Mashford, Mass. And that's the story of my life.

JB: It's not ended yet.

[Laughter, Crosstalk]

I: Is there anything else that you would like to say?

JB: I need to get going but [inaudible] is there anything else you want to hear?

I: I'm trying to think if I missed anything.

Coleen (C): I had one question.

I: Coleen, go ahead.

C: You had mentioned that your block was a landmark block.

[Crosstalk]

JB: Yes, Jackson Avenue, yes.

C: Why would you say it's a landmark?

JB: Because the house is a landmark.

GJ: The house is.

I: It's become a landmark.

JB: The landmark is from the city. That's like Morris High School is a landmark.

I: You can't tear it down.

JB: You can't, they could not. In my house couldn't tear, you know, they don't tear down the outer, they work on the inner. So some, what do you call the guys that do the interior of the house. In my house, I'm



talking about my house. We have 1,2,3 floors and I think before that they had more people lived in there. I live on the second because it's more room. I have – my living room is almost as big as, no not quite as big as this and it has three – it has a skylight and it has three windows here. And you know, it just does something to you with the light, light is something it really, it truly is. You never – even on a sunny day there's so much – you feel like you're outside all the time. So people – you know, I won't stay in the house, I mean I do now, I enjoy staying in the house when I can't get out like I used to. But it's enjoyable. In the morning you have the sunrise, in the evening you have the sunset. And sometimes you can get the moon right through the skylight, you can see the moon.

I: That's beautiful.

JB: It's really, it is. And it's so – it has a Aura of satisfaction, tranquility, really, most people come over, they really enjoy being over there. It's not luxurious, it's not all that stuff in there, but it's just the atmosphere.

I: How did the building get remodeled, who paid for that, was it privately owned?

JB: I guess some realtor bought it. Because I see the house down the street is for sale, so my daughter just happened to buy it and she was looking for someplace, you know, she wanted me to get out of the project. And I wasn't going anyplace because I was set in place for 36 years and I was like, everybody knew me and I didn't have no fear. Because everybody knew me being there for that long, but it was getting worse, you know. So they just literally moved me out, they just moved my bed out one New Years Eve and I had to go, I had to go, I didn't have anything to sleep on. Anyway, as I was saying, he bought the house, well she was trying to find some place but she knew if she went up state or something or wherever I wouldn't go with her, because I wasn't going to leave my church.

I: So you live with your daughter.

JB: No, she lives downstairs.

I: She lives downstairs. Oh, so she bought this building.

JB: She bought the building and I'm her tenant. Oh, I play rent.

I: So that's the person who bought the building. And was she able to get a break from the city to refurbish?

JB: I don't know if she got a break from the city but she did – I know, I think she got a good deal on it from whom she bought it from. I don't know if she bought it from a realtor. But I don't think she bought it from the City. She got a realtor but I don't think she bought it from the City. She got a Realtor but she did, I think get a very good deal now because they going up much higher.

I: Because in Harlem they had this thing with the City that if you could get a really good mortgage and get it refurbished inside for a really good price if you would buy these buildings to get them restored. They were abandoned, a lot of them were abandoned.

JB: Yes, well these were abandoned on that block for years. There was only a couple of people left.

GJ: Mrs. Anderson.

JB: Mrs. Anderson, she been there 100 years too. But anyway there's a few people that live over there that been living there and they're doing refurbishing but they're paying much more, I think more than we do.

I: Great, anything else? Well thank you very much.

GJ: You welcome. We hope we made history.