

HHA# 00795

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
Houston History Class

Interviewee: Jewel Brown

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

Place: Jewel Brown's home at 2502 Eagle Street in Houston's Third Ward

Interviewer: Hadley Hollingsworth

Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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Abstract

In this interview Brown discusses what it was like growing up in the Third Ward, going to Jack Yates High School, and becoming a successful singer. She began singing at the age of 9 and was told that she was no longer an amateur at the age of 14. Jewel sang in Houston at the local venues until she moved to California to work for her brother-in-law and sing at the club where he worked. She knew all of the prominent Houston musicians of the era and performed with many of them.

Later she moved to Dallas where she worked for Hack Rudy and received an opportunity to sing back-up with Louis Armstrong later in his career. Eventually she moved back to Houston to care for her parents and their house. She tells of a time when the Third Ward was a more unified community and she talks about the ways that the Third Ward has changed since she was a young girl. Still performing, Brown discusses how her career trajectory has changed.

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Jewel Hazel Brown

Interviewed by: Hadley Hollingsworth

Date: Feb. 22, 2013

Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes

Location: Jewel Brown's home, Houston, Texas

HH: I'm going to start with what is your full name?

JB: Jewel Hazel Brown.

HH: I know where you live because we are here but for transcription purposes what neighborhood do you live in?

JB: This is the Third Ward they call it Third Ward, Texas. Some of us call it "The Trey."

HH: And where you born in this area?

JB: I was born a few blocks over on Anita Street.

HH: And when were you born?

JB: August 30, 1937.

HH: Is your family originally from the Houston area?

JB: Is my family from the Houston area?

HH: Right.

JB: My mother was from LaGrange and my father was from Opelousas.

HH: When did they move to this area?

JB: My mom and dad... let me see my mom was about 18 when she moved here and my

dad... well when they got together they chose Houston because my mother was working in

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

Galveston when my daddy met her at the docks. But at any rate she was 18, I believe, and daddy was about 4, 5 years older than her because she was born in 1906 and he was born in 1901.

HH: What was it like growing up?

JB: Well to be honest with you we lived in a... see all the way from the front to the back, we called it the shotgun house and it was loads of fun and multi-loads of love. And it was as you might call a rural, you might call it rural conditions but the love and the hard work of my father it was just, us kids just had loads of fun. He worked very hard however still and all when he came home in the evenings he played with us. My mother was the one that did the sewing for the neighbors and she loved her garden outside and she would help daddy with the vegetable gardens and stuff that he grew all of our food and then inside she was for cooking and preparing dinner and so forth and so on you know. Now breakfast we did our own with cereals and all. At lunch you know we did the school but dinner she would always prepare dinner for my dad when he got off and all of us kids.

HH: How many siblings did you have?

JB: There were six of us.

HH: Wow.

JB: Uh huh there were six of us. Now there are three of us left. My oldest sister passed in 2007 at 85. My brother passed in '87 I mean in 2007. My sister was 2007 in April. My brother was 2007 in November, no October it was, October 25th. I had a brother that passed last year in California. So now it was three boys, three girls. And now there is two girls and one boy left. The boy is here in Houston and the girl is in California.

HH: Can you tell me about any of your favorite childhood memories?

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

JB: Well to be honest with you I had a dad that really fulfilled our lives really. As hard as he worked he still found a lot of time to deal with us. But then I wound up being the baby I wound up getting most of his time everybody else was getting married and gone and my brothers gone in the service and all that sort of stuff. So my dad taught me to hunt when I was six years old. We used to go down to Brazoria County and hunt and it was quite fun you know. As a matter of fact it was like he was, I was a little boy you know. I had just loads of fun with my father. And then well at 9 years old I prayed and asked God to please help me to be able to help my mom and dad and I believe it was at that time I was appointed to be a singer.

HH: That's wonderful.

JB: In short story.

HH: Where did you go to school?

JB: Well I went to Blackshire Elementary School first grade teacher was Miss Money and on from there to Jack Yates we called it all my old friends are still lasting and living around here we called it Jack Yates University because that was back in the day when the teachers truly, truly did oh the teachers truly did care back in the day.

Phone interrupting

JB: I forgot where we were?

HH: Jack Yates University.

JB: Oh yeah we called it Jack Yates University because as I said the teachers back in the day they made sure you got it! I never shall forget they would call it cruelty now. But Miss Sneed was my algebra teacher and baby you got that algebra under her or if you didn't she was a huge lady and she would step on your toe! You know it was funny but it still hurt. And we knew you know we didn't take it as a vicious thing you know we took it as somebody "you better get your University of Houston

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

lesson or that woman would step on your toe.” It was just fun really and it was the kind of day that you know I believe a lot of us kids turned out to be pretty good kids because you know the teacher could whip you if you didn’t get it together you was out of sorts. The teacher could whip you if the neighbor didn’t... if the teacher told the neighbor and the parents weren’t home that day the neighbor would whip you and if it was bad enough when my mother got home she laid something on you and oh my goodness if it carried on then daddy with that razor strop. You know so that’s kind of the way it went and we just knew to try to hold it together back in the day that’s the way it was. But today it’s cruelty. It’s what they call it? Abuse and all that sort of thing you know.

HH: So you said you became interested in singing when you were around nine?

JB: Well I was nine years old and as I said I prayed and I asked the Lord, “Please show me, direct me in a way to be able to help my mom and dad.” They worked so hard. They walked in the rain and they stood in the snow and everything back in the day. We did get a little snow back in those days. And it just didn’t matter they went you know. It wasn’t no “It’s too cold today. It’s raining too hard today.” Regardless of what the elements were they went. And I saw that and my dad would come home with his hands bleeding and so forth from working so hard and I just stopped and said, “Lord please show me a way to help my mom and dad.” In class I never shall forget the 4th grade with Miss Mitchell she was my teacher back then at Blackshire and the kids were really unruly that particular day because the teacher was out and they had not hired a substitute. So they brought in the assistant principal because the principal was also out. And the assistant principal at that time was Mr. Dawson. And he came in and being that I knew what would be waiting for me if I was unruly I laid my head on my desk and went to sleep. So I dreamed that somebody asked me, “When you grow up what do you want to be?” That wasn’t

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

the case in actuality it was Professor Dawson saying, "What's that girls name back there with her head on her desk?" They said, they were saying "Jewel Brown" but I'm dreaming that it's somebody asking what I wanted to be and when I raised up I said, "A singer!" and everybody in the class just laughed at me. And but the case was that's what happened and there was this deal about Lonnie Roshon and Trummie Cain who were disc jockeys back in the day (long years ago) and he said they talked about it being talent shows so I started the talent shows at the Masonic Hall in Fourth Ward and I used to win them every week until a young lady came to town from Chicago, her and her mother named Betsy Travis and she beat me out because they held their hand over her head longer than they did mine. Oh but anyway after that you know I started working all around the areas of Houston and Galveston and Dickinson. I used to sit on Bobby Bland's knee in Dickinson, Texas and sing blues with him and just all over the whole entire Texas area we used to work you know. So it just went on from there and, "Boom, boom bang!"

HH: That's amazing, what sort of music did you grow up listening to?

JB: All of it. Jazz, blues, they didn't have pop back in my day they had we called them tart songs and ballads and all that and so we just did it all because whoever wanted us to work we gave them what they wanted you know whatever the house people the clients of the house wanted. We just did the best we could do to please people.

HH: What were some of the experiences you had while singing? Did you travel a lot and that sort of thing?

JB: Well my first experience that really kind of made me know what I was up against or what I had to be about is I went right after the show at the talent show that is at the Masonic Hall. Nat King Cole was at the Club Matinee in the Anchor Room in Fifth Ward at the Club Matinee.

And somebody you know they had told him, you know, I was a little girl, 9 years old and all this

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

and I got a chance to get with him and talk with him and all that sort of thing. That kind of gave me what you might say today an avenue of the way I need to set my pace or direction I need to kind of assume you know? So I did and then as I said I worked a lot around Houston and all the areas of Texas. My sister was in a car wreck going back to California and my dad didn't want to take her word for it, he wanted us, he took a vacation from his job and we all went out there to go and check on her. And in the process her husband blew saxophone so we started jamming in the garage with a friend of his named Louis Rivera who played piano and organ. So after we got through jamming he said, "Man look you all need to come down to the club tonight." He worked for a club there in Los Angeles. So we went on down there and we jammed and had fun in the club. Then later on after he finished rather he says, "You know I know someone. Do you want to work in California?" I said, "Man I'm working!" He say, "Well I know somebody who would hire you right now." I said, "Oh?" He say, "Yeah do you mind going to this club? Can I take her to this club?" He took me to the Pigalle on Figueroa in Los Angeles and that's where Earl Grant had his show. And after we finish and I sat in with him he went to his boss, Leroy Baskerville I never shall forget and he said to him, "Hire her." He said, "How do you know we can afford her?" He said, "Hire her." Because he was the man. He was the man and he had the band and all of that. So that's what happened. So they came back to Houston without me and I stayed out there and worked for about a year and a half. And then I came on back and I got a call to go to Dallas. And that's where I went. Usually everywhere I've gone they've kept me for a length of time you know (which is good you know I enjoy that). And so went on to Dallas and that's when I was working for Jack Ruby and wow you know. As everybody knows that name.

So Tony Pappa who was over the Associated Booking Corporation there Velma Middleton rather had died that was the singer with Louis Armstrong, the featured singer with Louis Armstrong. I

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

didn't at the time I knew nothing of this but they were looking for somebody else to put with him and they were extremely choice-ey. So Tony told Joe Blazer in New York about me and he flew down to catch a show. And after he caught that show he got on a plane and flew right back. So I mean that's how important it was to him to who they put with Louis. So my ex husband was living in New York and he's a writer and he had said, he called him over and he said, "Hey we thinking about pulling your ex wife in with Louis." He said, "Do you think she can handle it?" I don't know exactly what he meant to this day but his word was, "Oh man yes she's nerves and all. She's all nerve and no nerve." Whatever all that meant. So at any rate they Mr. Glazer called me one day in Dallas and said, "Jewel" I said, "Yes." He said, "If we put anybody with Louis we think it's going to be you." I said, "Well that would be nice." I said, "If you decide that you want me give me a call because I would need to go to Houston and do some things before I would leave town like that." They called me like about a week or two later. "Jewel I want you to be on a plane in Houston at 3:00." Now it's 11:00 or 12:00 in Dallas! So believe me nobody wants to believe it. And we didn't have the highways we have today. But I got to Houston in like a little very little over 2 hours and I was driving all that car. You talking about the pedal to the metal. It was the pedal to the metal! And I was stopped by a trooper and I explained to him just very quickly with tears rolling out of my eyes. I don't have time to stop. You've got to let me go and when I looked at that man with them big crocodile tears rolling out of my eyes letting him know I've got to get on this plane. He said, "Ma'am you go ahead on just be careful." And that was exactly I wish I knew him today if he was still living because he did me such a favor. He said, "Ma'am you go ahead on just be careful." And that's the way it was. You know I was 21 years old. And so luckily for me I had been working at a club here called

Club Ebony and I knew all of the sky caps out there. So I called out there and told them, "Hey

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

this is Jewel Brown tell them to hold this plane for me and blah blah blah..." and they sanctioned it. When I got there they was waiting on me and buddy they took me the short cut. We didn't have (18.55) then you know. But they took me the short cut on the outside. I had to run down and they got me on that plane as soon as they rolled the stairway away and shut the door and the plane took off for New York and when I got to New York they let me off the stands and they let me be the first to get off and the charter bus was at the foot of the stairs. So my foot never touched the ground in New York. I stepped off the steps of the plane to the steps of the bus and they backed off and the first gig was for George Wing at Storyville in Boston, Massachusetts. It was really something. I didn't have time to think. I didn't have time to get afraid. I didn't have time nothing just do it, do it, do it, do it!

HH: That's amazing! So I know you sang with Louis Armstrong. Who else were some of the people that you?

JB: Well when I was 13 years old Lionel Hampton came here and I worked with him at The Auditorium. I you know back then in the day we had an Auditorium they had it here. We didn't have but two places. We had the Coliseum and the Auditorium and so at the Auditorium I worked with Lionel Hampton and somewhere I have some pictures with him but at any rate that's what I did at 13 years old. Then I've been with several it's hard to really just think of everything but you know I've worked with some of the greatest. You know and then I've been on shows with some of the greatest. It's I've enjoyed the gift that God has given me you know.

HH: What were some of the places that you performed? I guess you kind of talked about it but in Houston where were some of the?

JB: Oh let's see if I can remember that. One of the main places that I said was the Club

Ebony and why they changed the name of the Ebony they should have kept that name because it

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

was known all over the world. Reason being is because we had an Ellington Field here and they sent men out of there those military men all over the world and when I got to places you know when I was with Louis they showed me pictures of their boyfriends and blah blahs and etc. you know guys that they had gone out with over there in Europe and Australia and South America you know, Japan. All like that people had pictures of guys and they said, "Did you know him?" I said, "Well it's hard to know everybody that came to the club do you know what I mean?" But the club was quite popular. It was they didn't... the people that took it over didn't really realize that I do believe they didn't realize what they had. You know because people was coming in here from all over the world. To see the Club Ebony. Do you know what I'm saying?

HH: Yeah that's amazing.

JB: And they had several clubs around here called The Riviera on Pierce Street and just all around here I can't even remember that's been too far back sister girl!

HH: What about the Eldorado Ballroom?

JB: Oh Lord, the Eldorado Ballroom. I did that when I was 12 years old. I never shall forget. And that's when they acclaimed me a professional. All the entertainers that was on the show back then they all, they say, "Girl how old are you?" I say, "12." They say, "Well you know what you are not an amateur anymore you are a professional." That's when they acclaimed me a professional right there at the Eldorado Ballroom. You know I was hauling them blues baby! Mourning those blues, yes, indeed!

HH: What about I know the Dowling Street has been an important street and kind of the growth of blues in Houston?

JB: Yeah Dowling has quite a history. Like I said it was a grill or a night spot I can't quite remember my sister used to work there when she was a young girl and I was even younger than 9

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

years old at the time when all kind of entertainers came to Dowling Street at the G & A Café and places like that Hoger Brooks (phonetic) and just it was all some of everything up and down Dowling Street. Just like the Apollo Theater there was the Dowling Theater and all kind of acts came there. We had a dance team that really made it pretty good called Ace and Max it was A. C. Avington and Maxcella Avington (24.32). My mother was good friend with their mother and at any rate it was so much talent in Houston. Illinois Jacquet and Arnette Cobb and Hubert Laws and it just on and on and on the talent that came out of Houston but it's so sad to say that nobody made it big until they left Houston. Nobody made any noise even until they left Houston. You know what I'm saying?

HH: Yeah.

JB: It's a little different now. We've got a Beyoncé and we have you know... but back in the day you know it was we all locked on the good entertainment that was here.

HH: Did you grow up going to a church in the area?

JB: Rose Hill Baptist Church on Holman and Sawyer that's in between this house and the house I was raised in. Right on Holman and Sawyer there used to be a track there. That's the track my father use to work to work all the way to Harrisburg every day rather than spend a nickel he would walk that track so my mother could have that nickel to buy groceries at the store. That's right. He was quite an honorable man my father.HH: What were some of your favorite places in the Third Ward growing up and what are some of them now?

JB: What was some of my favorite places growing up?

HH: Yes.

JB: I didn't have favorite places. I worked and I went to school and I tried to sleep.

HH: Okay.

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

JB: I never did go out and I don't go out now.

HH: Alright and how do you think the...

JB: When I'm home I'm resting or I'm trying to put or keep things together. And it takes a lot to do that sweetheart.

HH: I understand.

JB: Yes.

HH: How do you think the community functions like as a whole in the Third Third Ward? Do you think do you feel that people know their neighbors? And they spend time with one another? Do you think that people more often keep to themselves?

JB: Well it's been my outlook that at the age I am now especially so people are trying to either rest or catch up with what's going on with the grandchildren as I am. I had four I have three now I had one drown in '98. But with the pace of finance in keeping up there's really hardly any time unless sometime I'll have a neighbor across the way, "Ms. June I haven't seen you in the yard. I haven't seen you for a while" or whatever. You know because I'm watering the plants or this or something of that nature. "I just had to call and say hello." And then they don't have long to talk because everybody's got something they've got to do. That's the pace. The pace of America is [phew, phew, phew] you know. Nobody have any time hardly in America. It's a fast paced. Just trying to keep up with just simple things you know. Well that's me and my capacity, financial capacity or whatever you might call it. We just, you just got to stay busy and even though I'm an entertainer I've sold insurance, life insurance, etc. for an insurance company. I've done hair. You know I'm a licensed cosmetologist and then a top (28.52) solo artist. It's just keeping up because most of my work is in foreign

countries. You know as I say, Australia, Japan, Europe, South America that sort of thing. And

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

the tour I have coming up you know it's Holland, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Japan. That's what's coming up. I have nothing in Houston.

HH: Wow. When did you come back to Houston to live?

JB: Well what happened was my mom had had a stroke and my dad needed some help with her. So I retired really I was thinking of quitting show business period. Come home to take care of my parents you know in their elder years. So I left the strip. I was headline a show at the Sahara. The show was called "Fillies de Soul" and oh it was such a great show and the guys were such great guys and they were all married and it was such a beautiful, beautiful thing. And when the show was going to leave Sahara after about a year and a half then it was going to Stardust and I told them, "You all put in mind to get another headliner because I'm going home to help take care of my mom and dad. I'm going to help my dad take care of my mom." Then my daddy grieved so much after my mom passed Daddy wound up actually I didn't I was going to go to New York and tell them to start booking me again but then Daddy was missing her so much he needed me. You know so I just kind of threw my hands up and then all of the sudden people started calling me to come to Europe and all that sort of thing again and that's what made me start going around after they had passed I said, "Well I've done what I'm supposed to do. I raised my son, educated him and so forth." He went over there right there to Texas Southern University so after educating him and him getting a degree. Like I said, my mom passed, my dad passed. So there wasn't anything for me to do but go on and live for myself and that's what I do now. I take it all in stride. Whatever seems good and fair I deal with it. If it doesn't seem in its proper order then I turn it down. I tell them, "I ain't hungry baby I ain't got to take that one."

HH: Right. What sort of changes have you seen in the Third Ward communities since I guess growing up here and being here now?

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

JB: Well most of all of the neighbors have passed on. Myself as a matter of fact my parents have passed on but of course like I said we all moved here in '54. But the only original neighbor here now is myself I mean from the time from the year 54 the only original neighbor now is myself and my neighbor next door and she's 91.

HH: How do you feel that race relations have affected the Third Ward?

JB: Well I can't say that it hasn't affected the Third Ward it has affected the Third Ward in a lot of ways that's why the Third Ward isn't what it used to be. This used to be a great neighborhood. I never shall forget when I was a kid. We had the Emancipation Park and they used to have movies for the children. They kept everybody busy with nice things, with good things and through the years I've seen those things cut out. Now I don't know who paid for them but I don't... nobody I don't know anybody had the money to pay for it. I believe the city just did those kind of things, you know for the neighborhood. Now it's all together a different story and there's nothing to keep the children busy or involved in my conception and what I can see that was there back in the days, you know. When I was growing up you see. It's... it's a lot of things you really can't just divulge how you really feel about some things because you don't want to seem like a controversial kind of a person or anything you know. But it's a good neighborhood, well it's good territory. This neighborhood is good territory and we've survived quite a bit when a lot of other areas have not survived a lot of things. That's prompted eyes to do a lot of different things in the area here, this neighborhood.

HH: So you said something about this house surviving all the hurricanes. How do you... what were some of the effects of the hurricanes like Ike and Katrina and...

JB: The only thing it did to this house was the spinning deal on the top it knocked it off and a friend in all of that wind and rain said, "Oh Ms. Jewel I'm going to put that back up there

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

because it will ruin your inside.” I said, “honey I don’t care about the inside I just don’t want you up there.” He said, “I’ll be alright.” Before I knew it he was up there stuck it on there and it’s been there ever since. Other than that nothing! You know these houses to me was built with care. They were built when people really did take pride in what they did. You know just like in the school the teachers took pride in teaching those children and everybody took pride in what they did, what their job was. They took pride in it! Today it’s quite a bit different. It’s how quick and how fast can you do it so I can so a dollar can start rolling in. And it’s been really sad in a lot of ways and it’s really hurt in a lot of ways. But it seems that the name of the game now is like I said, “How quick and how fast can you do it?” Because how quick and how fast you can do it is how fast I can get paid. I noticed in the European countries they are more laid back and they really do things in well. I’m going to say they do it well. I’ll leave it like that. That’s what I’ve found.

HH: That’s fascinating. I read somewhere that you had sung with your brother some?

JB: Oh yes my brother is the one that actually put me in the business. Theodore Brown. He’s the one that passed October 25, 2007. That was a band called it was Elmo Nixon and Henry Hays was the leader of the band. And they were leaving one day and I was standing in the doorway watching them leave and my brother said to Henry, “Hey man can I take my sister with me?” He said, “Well we ain’t got no room for her.” He said, “She can sit in my lap.” He said, “Well we can’t pay her.” He said, “She didn’t ask for no pay she just want to go.” And that night it was called the Manhattan Club just outside of Galveston right on the beachfront. That was this club and they were working it one night a week and after I sang and played for myself and all that we just had a good time then Henry came and he said to the band, “Hey fellows” he said, “The owner has said that we can have this gig six nights a week and the other band can

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

have it one night a week if we can bring Jewel.” He said... they all looked at my brother and my brother say, “Yeah.” He said, “Do you think it will be alright with your mother?” Thiddle say, “Yeah!” We called him Thiddle. We didn’t call him Theodore we called him Thiddle. And he said, “Yeah” let me go back and tell the man. So they went back and told “They say yes.” So when they came back he say, “We got it. We just got to bring Jewel.” And so he says, “Now I think it’s only fair that we all give Jewel a dollar a piece” they weren’t making but \$6 a night and they said, “Well I think it’s only fair that we give Jewel a dollar a piece.” So they all up’ed that dollar a piece because they know they fixing to work 6 nights a week now right? But what they didn’t know, those men and those women were all inebriated and the first one thing and another and they were walking up to me, “Play that again girl. Sing that song girl.” And they putting \$5 and \$10 in my pockets and stuff and on the way home scared even to tell my brother I got this money. And when we got home I came inside. My mother was waiting up for us in the living room and I pulled... he say my brother was grinning. Mother say, “Oh you must have done well.” My brother say, “Yeah they really did like Jewel, Muh.” (We called my mother Muh.) I say, “Here” and I started emptying my pockets out and Thiddle looked at me, “Where that come from?” I said, “Those people gave it to me!” And oh it was on to know I could make some money and help out. It was on. That gave me my courage and my incentive and the whole bit.

HH: That’s wonderful!

JB: Yeah!

HH: Let’s see in the other cities that you visited in the United States, what did you miss about Houston? What were some of the different things?

JB: Well its just I believe a normal thing with most people. I’ve been everywhere that’s worth talking about in the world but ain’t no place like home. And here I am a grown 75 year old

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

woman. I don't have anybody I just got to do this for, got to do that for but the fact still remains when I'm called out to go I'm happy to pack up and go. When it's time to leave I'm happy to pack up and come back home! You know but I guess you know it's what you grow up believing in, feeling, loving you know what I mean? So this is home. This is where I was born and raised. I was born in Jefferson Davis Hospital. They had closed and when my daddy got off of work and he crawled in the window to go see my mom and me and I don't know it's just, it's just that bond or that attachment or I don't know you know. People ask me, "Jewel how can you live in that big old house by myself?" I'm not by myself. I'm the spirit of the Lord and the memories of my mom and dad and that's here with me you know. I don't have bad times in this house. Now a lot of people say, "Woo I couldn't live in a..." I don't have bad times here. I'm, these are my happiest moments even if somebody make me sad. I come home. My happy moments are here.

HH: That's wonderful. Are there any restaurants that you particularly like in Houston?

JB: Oh, honey, please! Oh, I don't want to make nobody angry but I just love Passé, right across the street from Whole Foods where I go and purchase my things what I eat and so forth. Because it is a fact you do need to try to be careful about your food consumption. You really do. A lot of people don't understand. A lot of people just don't understand really. But it is... with what's going on today, you know with the droning and this and that. But see I grew up on what I buy at Whole Foods today. My father had a garden. I don't care how tired he was we had tomatoes, we had lemon tree, we had corn. When the crop was over Daddy would redo that turn that grown over and all that sort of thing like in Europe what they do when they finish a crop they burn the land. That keeps it from getting fungus and all that sort of stuff. Well like I said America is a speed country you know what I mean. It's a speed demon in so many ways. Like I said my growing up on the kind of food I grew up on has helped me under physical conditions. I

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

once had a tumor in my head and then I had gall bladder problem and all and because of what I had and the strength...

Phone interrupting

HH: About being healthy with your food...

JB: I was some place where I wanted to pick up where I left off.

HH: You were talking about your father's garden...

JB: Oh yeah where I was extremely so it's a thing where in each time I was in the hospital the nurses and the doctors they came to me and they said, "Ms. Brown you are one strong woman."

What it wound up being was you know the content of what you consume as a young child is the make-up of your body. And I hear them talking about it all the time about the kids growing up on the fast foods and then one thing or another. That's not really good strength for the body for the times that you are going to need it the most. You know I've learned that after 30 you know it's what you do for your body that keeps you intact. Like I said growing up the way I did on organic foods and so forth and so on. I believe it's contributed to my longevity here. You know through what I've gone through in my life medical wise you see.

HH: That's good. You mentioned something about the community offering a lot of services like movies at Emancipation Park and that sort of thing. Did you and your family go to these?

JB: Oh honey every Saturday! Every Saturday honey! Yes ma'am. Let me see I don't remember exactly whether it was Fridays or Saturdays but they did it without fail. And they have the shows at the Dowling Theater without fail every week. And it was just fun! Those were the fun times for me. Now it's a whole different thing. It's night clubs with the drinking and all. Back then it wasn't drinking and going on we just was having fun. Soda water was good enough back then!

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

HH: Did they show movies?

JB: They showed movies! They showed movies they did it all. It was lovely times just actually lovely times.

HH: That sounds wonderful.

JB: Yeah just good old down home clean good fun back in my day!

HH: And did you ever, I guess did they have live performances there too?

JB: That's what I told you. Everything was live and wonderful. Yes!

HH: That's wonderful. Okay I don't really have any more questions but are there any stories or anything you'd like to...?

JB: I don't know I kind of fall in groove with whatever they ask me because my life is a historical kind of thing you know. Whatever you come up with I just deal with what is. I could talk forever about my life!

HH: Well alright could you tell me a story about whenever you were I guess first coming back to Houston and kind of getting used to the big sort of life changes that took place for you?

JB: Well when I came back to Houston I was loaded down. What I mean by that I came here primarily to take care of my daddy, take care of my mom. So I had learned while I was in Las Vegas under a lady named Viola Maddox and she had worked for Vivian, for Edith Head and Edith Head was the top designer at one time for all the movie stars in Hollywood. So she taught me how to sew while I was living... my mom had taught me some but Viola Maddox who had worked for Edith Head taught me a whole lot more than even my mom knew about sewing. So when I came home in order to continue to try to make a dollar, you know and be home and watch my mom I took in sewing and that's what I did. So I didn't have time to go anywhere. I just

wasn't going any place. I was just right here at the house. I came home wearing a size 8 and

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

when I looked around I was in a 14. You know from just wearing the mo moos and the house coats around the house because I never went anywhere. You know I left show business to come home and help take care of my mom not to run the street. Well we call it running the street.

HH: Excellent. What are some of the... what do you think some of the changes in the mentality of the community are?

JB: Well there's so much I could say about the mentality of people today. Some people have held on to what I call is beautiful in life and that is to be honest and fair and neighborly and all those good things. But we have an influx now of so many different and various types of people you know that have just made a change from that and it's not the same when we could leave the doors open and I used to sleep... as I kid I used to sleep out on the front porch. You know we didn't have air conditioning and all that stuff so we'd sleep out on the front porch nobody would bother us. You know it's a vast change from the mentality of the yesteryear to what it is today. I mean today we are using all the rod iron bars. We are jailing ourselves in order to protect ourselves. It's not I was raised look with your fingers and touch with your eyes. You know that's how I was raised. But today there's a mentality, "I ain't going to be broke, I ain't going to be hungry as long as there is a grocery store. I ain't going to be broke as long as somebody else has got some money." Do you know what I'm saying? So it's vastly different today from the way it was in my day. That was a lot more honor you might say in most areas. We still have it but it's almost a rare thing now.

HH: Would you say the community was more unified when you were younger?

JB: Oh yes! Oh yes indeed! Oh everybody looked out for everybody. My daddy raised rabbits in a coop against the back of the house on one side. He raised chickens against the house on the other side. He'd come home every evening and take the newspaper out and from all their

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel**Interview Date: February 22, 2013**

waste and so forth and bury it. He kept everything clean. I was the youngest I used to have the crawl under the house and get all the paper. We kept everything clean you know. And my dad shared with everybody. There was one man that had some equipment or had a place he could go to keep the blades on the lawnmower sharpened so my daddy would give him a rabbit or a chicken or something do you know what I'm saying? It was just like a swapping kind of thing. "You have this for me. I have this for you." Now no, "Pay me I need the money. When I need so and so I'll get it done but right now, pay me." It's just a lot of unity it just was a lot of people caring about people. Yes, yes...

HH: Do you think that?

JB: I wouldn't want to be young again but I certainly wish it would be like it used to be again!

HH: Of course. Do you think that the mentality affected the type of music and culture that came out of Houston? You said that there was a lot of talent.

JB: Talent is talent. Now the kinds of talent have changed maybe a little bit but I don't believe that is a proper way to make that statement. You know we didn't have hip hop and rap and all that stuff back in my day. Everything we had back in the day was an authentic pure thing you know. Illinois Jacquet, Arnette Cobb I mean that was purity you know and there's still many people in the European countries they call them the purists because that's what they like they like authenticity you know and I guess that's why I have more work because I don't use gimmicks, falsettos and all that kind of stuff I'm just a flat foot floosey! You know just belt out the real thing.

HH: That's wonderful well I think we are done unless there is anything else you want to...

JB: No I'm good if you're good!

Interviewee: Brown, Hazel Jewel

Interview Date: February 22, 2013

HH: Okay.

JB: God bless you. Bless your journey.

HH: Thank you.

End of interview

