

Interviewee: Burney, Zinetta

Interview: July 14, 2006

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

Interview with: Zinetta Burney

Interviewed by: J.R. Wilson

Date: July 14, 2006

Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

JRW: The date is July 14, 2006. I am sitting here with Zinetta A. Burney. What are you doing these days?

ZB: I am Justice of the Peace, Precinct 7, Place 2. I have been in that position since January 1, 2005. Also, senior partner with the law firm of Burney and Foreman. Most judges are not allowed to practice. The exception is the Justice of the Peace. So, while I am not doing a lot of practicing of law, I can.

JRW: Jupiter aligned with Mars.

ZB: Right. Jupiter aligned with Mars. I can, but the JP position takes all of my time, so I am not practicing.

JRW: Do you mind that at this point?

ZB: No, not at this point in life. I don't think I could have done it at an earlier stage.

JRW: I guess also it is a culmination of a career where you bring all those experiences with you to the bench.

ZB: It was important for me. In this particular position, Precinct 7, where there are 8 justices of the peace precincts, this is the only African American precinct where predominantly, the people who live in the precinct are African American and the JPs are

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both African Americans, elected. Because the constituents are Black, they elected Black JPs. So, it was important to me to know that there was some experience, some legal experience . . .

JRW: In the law.

ZB: In the law on that bench, yes.

JRW: Well, the first thing I'd like to do, because we are sitting here in your office overlooking the heart of Houston's African American community, as it is called "Third Ward Texas" and from here, we can see Texas Southern, we can see University of Houston, we can see SHAPE Center, we are on Almeda, we can see Scott Street, 288 [freeway]. We can see the entire community. What we will be talking about in this, about the law firm that 5 of you African American women established in, I think, 1976 from the north side of town and Acres Home but initially what I want to talk to you about is you being a native Houstonian and you being a native of Third Ward. And as we sit here in 2006, I'd like to just kind of go back for you to tell me a bit about your family origins, your family trek here, how you came to be here and growing up, and just a little about the flavor of Third Ward – some recollections of childhood and then for us to be able to move forward from that. What is your maiden name?

ZB: Arceneaux.

JRW: Is that French or Russian?

ZB: It is Creole. Both [parents] were born in Louisiana, both moved to Texas. It is my understanding that they met here in Houston.

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JRW: When would they have moved here, roughly?

ZB: I don't know. Not as children but as young adults.

JRW: O.K., so, World War II era?

ZB: World War II era. My mother was born in 1910 and my father in 1906.

JRW: Or maybe Depression era.

ZB: Yes. Young adults. They moved from Louisiana to Houston.

JRW: What part of Louisiana?

ZB: Near Lafayette. Small towns bordering Lafayette, Louisiana. And met here, married here.

JRW: Where did they meet?

ZB: Probably a church.

JRW: Probably a church or a dance.

ZB: Mother had 2 brothers and 1 sister, all of whom eventually moved to Houston. I think she was the first out of her brothers and sisters to move to Houston. My father was the only boy with 2 sisters, and I think he was the first to move to Houston and after that, the 2 sisters followed.

JRW: What was your mother's family name?

ZB: She was a Rainey. Gathe was her mother's name. Rainey was her father's name.

JRW: Are you related to Dr. Gathe here in . . .

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ZB: He is Dr. Joseph Gathe, Sr., who is now deceased. You are talking about Dr. Joe Gathe, Jr. Joe Gathe, Sr.'s mother and my father were brother and sister – related to Dr. Gathe by way of my father. And a distant relative by way of my mother, maybe.

JRW: On both sides?

ZB: On both sides but I am not so close with my mother's family, but with my father's family, that is my . . . Dr. Gathe, Sr., was my first cousin. Dr. Gathe Jr. is my second cousin.

JRW: Your mother was a Gathe?

ZB: She was a Gathe.

JRW: A Rainey and Gathe.

ZB: Yes. I don't think they were ever married, maybe they were, but I don't think the father...

JRW: Blood lines.

ZB: Blood lines, yes.

JRW: And so, where in Third Ward did you raise up?

ZB: On Winbern Street, 2828 Winbern. It is my understanding that when they moved to Houston or got married, like most young couples then, they lived with someone for a while. They lived on Dowling Street, Live Oak, Dowling/Live Oak – Grey area. That is what I have been told. In that area. They lived there for several years. Then, they eventually bought a home at 2828 MacGregor, now 2828 Winbern. The street was later

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changed to Winbern. I will have to get it but I think my birth certificate says 2828 MacGregor.

Now, as I understand it, and my brother still lives there – 2828 MacGregor – still has the home in the family, he owns it now. But as I understand it and if you look at Houston, many streets changed names as Black and white moved; whereas, it may have been a white neighborhood then when Blacks moved in or Blacks took over the population when street changed names. If you crossed Main Street, if you were on the east side, the name of the street is Binz, the west side is Bissonnett.

JRW: That's right, or Wheeler and . . .

ZB: Richmond. That is the way I have always understood it coming up that it is Almeda and Crawford. It changed names depending on all the communities there. So, I think my birth certificate says MacGregor but it is 2828 Winbern is what I have always known it as.

JRW: Am I correct also that in your childhood, that there were major streets that also served as a dividing line between the African American community and the white community?

ZB: Yes, in Third Ward, Alabama was the dividing line. If you look at the housing north of Alabama, go into the northern end of Third Ward, distinctively different. It is where African Americans live. Alabama was the dividing line. If you look at the housing south of Alabama, distinctively different. As I was coming up, my mother was a maid. In many of the homes that African Americans live in now on MacGregor, I remember as a kid, she'd take me and my brother – we'd have to sit at the kitchen table

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while she cleaned somebody's house. I don't remember which houses they were but they were these large houses over here on the southern end or past Alabama, you know, MacGregor and Binz – in those areas, she cleaned houses - houses that African Americans live in now but as a kid, we could not have visited in that area.

JRW: As a child and having those experiences, were there any recollections from those experiences that particularly colored your world view or your view of ethnicity or your view of work or your view of people?

ZB: Truthfully, like I say, I was born in 1941. Integration came along, when? Civil Rights Act – 1965. Integration really didn't start until the 1970s, 1980s, and some people might argue – still waiting but as a kid, we lived in a segregated world. Rode at the back of the bus. I guess what, as a kid, disturbed me most . . . my father was a bartender. He initially worked as a porter on the train. I don't know what happened . . . I understand he one day just told them he was sick of it, he was tired and he quit. And he worked . . .

JRW: Was he a proud man?

ZB: Very much so. He told them where they could get off and left. He worked during the day as a chauffer, in the evenings he worked as a waiter and he worked at some of the old restaurants that were on Main Street – Kaphans, College Inn - they no longer exist but he worked at those restaurants. We had one car. My mother would drop him off at work and pick him back up. So, we rode through the city, we rode through MacGregor, Hermann Park – places that, as a kid, I just always wanted to go to to visit. I'd see Rice University. I always wanted to go there and asked why we couldn't . . . but it was disappointing that we could not get outside of the circle. I always wanted out of there. I

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always wanted to be in the park.

JRW: Consciously?

ZB: Consciously. I wanted to get out and roam through the park.

JRW: What was the deal on Hermann Park?

ZB: We went to the zoo . . . I guess I got that from my father. My father took us to the zoo often. It was integrated . . . you could visit but I never felt I could get out and roam free. I never felt free. There were amusement parks that opened for Black people on Juneteenth only.

JRW: Once a year.

ZB: Once a year on Juneteenth, and we visited – my father took us.

JRW: Up on Main Street was the kiddie playland park?

ZB: Playland Park. Nonetheless, it was that restriction. I just always wanted outside of it.

JRW: And so, you were always conscious of the isolation, the restriction?

ZB: Always conscious of the isolation. Always conscious of the restriction. Always wanted to cross Alabama. Just walk across it. When I went to Texas Southern undergrad . . .

JRW: When was that?

ZB: I think 1962. U of H was not integrated. I could not have gone to the University of Houston. Well, I couldn't go on to Rice. I had dropped out of school and had go to

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back to get my G.E.D.

JRW: You dropped out of high school?

ZB: I was a high school dropout.

JRW: Why did you drop out of high school?

ZB: I was pregnant with my child, Sharon Maria Burney. Back in those days, they didn't have school for pregnant kids. You got pregnant, you were out. So, a dropout might not be the . . . a pull out was more . . . so, I had to leave school. I was maybe about 19. I left school at 16, got married, divorced, and at 19, realized I was uneducated, unemployed and unemployable.

JRW: Let me back up a minute to this sense of living in an apartheid world, you know, and being isolated. In terms of family and discussions within your own household and all, do you have recollections of family discussions of those kinds of issues or the limitations or discussions about segregations or to-dos and not-to-dos?

ZB: I guess we had to-dos and not-to-dos, what you could and couldn't do. Was there a discussion, I imagine like in some households now, about civil rights and marching. I remember my father as a very proud person and while he never discussed it or we never just really talked about it, I always thought that that was something real disturbing for him because I could see it was very . . . my father's family was very intelligent. The Gathes. He was a very intelligent man, a very proud man. A person with a third grade education who read the newspaper from front to back every morning. So, I always thought it was disturbing to him and I guess it was, with going to work, with the seeing of

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the things he always wanted to explore. I could feel it in him. He wanted the freedom. My mother was content. What can I say? She had 4 children. So, freedom was not necessarily a part of what she envisioned of the world, but I always thought my father . . .

One time, he was chauffeur in the daytime and a bartender/waiter in the evenings. He worked 2 jobs to support us. In the morning sometimes, he would take us out on Saturdays to the River Oaks home where he chauffeured and did the yards and it was that freedom of running across the yards, it was that freedom of a big house, it was a different lifestyle that I could feel in him. It was the freedom of putting that chauffeur cap on and driving people across the United States of America but I could feel it here from him, even though he was a chauffeur, it was being able to get out. Like I say, it was in evenings; it was riding through the park, being able to go to the zoo, that he was just so proud of. That was a big part of him. And while it was never discussed, I guess I could always feel it . . . I picked it up from him . . . both parents who were very insistent that the children be educated and neither one, like I said, had more than a 3rd grade education, were both insistent that we go to school, college – no matter what it took, we would get educated through college. Two sisters graduated from Xavier which was awesome for people of such little means. My brother attended 2 years at Xavier and then I went to Texas Southern University. It was not talked about because way back in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, there wasn't a whole lot of talking about civil rights.

JRW: Yes, there wasn't too much to talk about.

ZB: There wasn't too much talk about it until the 1960s and by then, we were all grown.

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JRW: Do you remember, as an adult, the first time that you perhaps stepped into one of those homes or one of those areas that, as a child, you had always seen from afar necessarily? Is there an instance?

ZB: Not really. I have to tell you, as a young . . . I hate to put this into words but as a young adult, sometimes I'd drive River Oaks and look at those houses. I don't anymore. And, of course, now I have been to many functions at some of those homes in River Oaks. I am just as happy to get back to my house, close the door, look at my TV, have that peace. When somebody tells me that a person of color purchased some home in River Oaks, there is just a little quirk and a little smile . . . so and so bought a home in Memorial. But no, I am at peace with it. You couldn't pay me to move out of Third Ward. You couldn't give me enough money to move from it. I like it.

JRW: Let's go back to TSU. What was your major when you were at TSU?

ZB: Mathematics in undergrad school, and I guess it was a part of that . . . let me put something else on record . . . There were entrance exams. Rice University was always where I wanted to go. I've never said this before. I wanted to go to Rice. And I think it is all a part of that trying to get out and beyond.... So, once I dropped out of school and had to go back and get the GED, University of Houston was not integrated. So, would I have considered it? I don't really know because it was not integrated but I had to take entrance exams at TSU. They don't keep you out because it is open admissions but I flunked the entrance exam. I flunked everything. So, my first year at TSU, it was study, study, study. Work, work, work. Study, study, study.

JRW: You were working at the same time?

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ZB: At 19, when I realized the predicament I was in, I went to LVN school – licensed vocational nurse. So, I got my LVN, my license. I worked at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital for 1 year.

JRW: What was St. Elizabeth’s? What was it then?

ZB: It was a hospital. It was a Black hospital. Then, even the Black doctors were restricted to St. Elizabeth’s and Riverside hospitals, and I think maybe they could have practiced at St. Joe. But they definitely weren’t in the Medical Center. So now, St. Elizabeth’s was the Black hospital in Fifth Ward. Riverside, in Third Ward.

JRW: What street was St. Elizabeth’s . . .

JB: Lyons. I can’t remember what they call it now but it was some kind of health facility. But I trained . . . I did my LVN training at St. Elizabeth’s and I stayed on as a licensed vocational nurse for one year thereafter. I got up in the morning, rode the bus to Fifth Ward from Third Ward, saved my money for a down payment on an automobile. I realized that if I purchased the automobile, I would be bound to that payment for the rest of my life. Thought about it. Went back to school, got a GED in the public schools, HISD. Night school, got a GED. Then took my down payment and paid my tuition at Texas Southern University. I was close enough on Winbern to walk to TSU. I walked across the tracks to TSU every day. After enrolling like I said, the first year, I had to take those remedial courses. I majored in mathematics. Interestingly enough, as fate would have it, I had applied for a job as an LVN at Hermann Hospital a year earlier when I got out of LVN school. I had just entered college when somebody called me and said, “We have a night position open.” How naive I was. I took my mother with me that first night

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to make sure this was a real job with a real person who called me from Hermann Hospital. I had her going into the nurse's office with me. How silly. But they did have a position. They hired me. She picked me back up the next morning at 7 a.m. My parents let me use the car at night. I worked a full-time 40 hour week and went to school during the day. Worked the midnight shift, went to school during the day. Walked back and forth to classes. And then, in the afternoons, I had my daughter, Sharon. So, I lived at home with my parents. It took about 6 years but I made it through undergrad school. Got out ... and just was not . . . still had that thirst. That thirst for additional education.

JRW: Yes, you knew there was more.

ZB: I knew there was more. There had to be more. There just has to be more.

JRW: Did you like school? Did you enjoy the classroom experience?

ZB: I enjoyed the classroom experience. I don't think any more than any other person, you know. I'm not a school person but it was, as I tell so many kids now when they come to truancy court - I can't play ball. I can't sing. I can't dance. I don't have any talents. I can't write. I can't speak professionally. But I can read and write. I can study my way through something and become somebody through education. So, that is the one thing that, you know, you don't put aside. You make sure you get your education because through education, you can get anywhere you want to go.

JRW: Access to opportunity.

ZB: Yes, access to opportunity. It was my only route. So, education for me was a way out. And after I got out . . . it was mathematics because I saw that also as an

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opportunity. I wanted to make sure that whatever was available, I had the best opportunity and at that time, science, mathematics – it seemed a new world. There were not a lot of African Americans in that world, especially women. And I wanted to enter a new world – the best opportunity I could get.

JRW: What year would this have been?

ZB: I was in undergrad school from 1962 to 1967. I graduated in 1967. I got a job. I think I did substitute teaching maybe about one year. And then, I applied at all of the oil companies. I went back and back and back until finally Shell Development, Shell Research and Development – still out there on Bellaire – hired me. And they hired me as a computer programmer. Here is a person who can barely figure out a PC now! But at the time, they had the big main frames and you had to write programs, so we were writing in Fortran. I can't figure out a PC on this thing. Don't ask me to go too far other than an email. But at the time . . . so, I worked for probably one year, then decided there was still this craving, still this urging to do more. So, I enrolled in law school.

JRW: Why? Why law school? Why not THD school? Why law school, per se?

ZB: That is something I really don't want in my history. First, my true love was medicines and natural knack . . . wherever I was in a former life, it was as a medic.

JRW: O.K., either a doctor or something . . .

ZB: Something. And when I was at Hermann, either though I was an LVN, after about one year or so, I got to be the charge nurse. It was a natural knack for medicine. Always the urging. And I guess that is maybe why the math and science. The urging

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was always medical school. I could not do that at 16.

JRW: At least so you thought.

ZB: Well, I always thought so but teaching was just not something I wanted to do. Maybe because it was the confinement of that class room why not? It is that confinement. It is the love of freedom that has always driven me alot. So now, medical school is out of the question. I looked at other professions.

JRW: Because of your responsibilities?

ZB: Yes. There was no medical school in Houston.

JRW: For Blacks?

ZB: Yes, for African Americans. There was no medical school here that I could have gone to and I would not have left my daughter. I'd have to leave. Maybe I would have been admitted to one but I would never leave here, I had responsibilities. So, the next professional school for me was law school. I went back to nursing, went back to doing private duty nursing, held down a 40 hour per week job and went to law school. Now, when I got out of law school, I was crawling. I got through undergrad still full of energy but law school . . . going to law school, and working, and a daughter, I was crawling.

JRW: And by crawling, you mean?

ZB: I was just tired, worn out. Barely . . . I could hardly stand. But I made it.

JRW: This would have been what time span that you were at Texas Southern Law School?

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ZB: I should have come out in 1973. I had to stay over until 1974. My class would have been the 1973 class but I had to stay over to 1974 to take a course.

JRW: One course?

ZB: Yes. I needed 90 hours to take the Bar. You needed more than that to graduate. But I got out after I took that one course and I took the bar. I could not take a full semester because I was working. I was doing private duty nursing, come to think about it. So, the one course I could not take made the difference in the 15 hours or whatever it was. And the person who was over enrollment would not allow me to take that course.

JRW: I was about to ask you - had you been a man . . .

ZB: I would have been able to take it. Exactly right. So, when I graduated from law school, there was still the urge to be free. An African American female . . .

JRW: Who is your most memorable instructor in law school?

ZB: Eugene Harrington.

JRW: Eugene Harrington? Why?

ZB: I don't know if you knew Eugene Harrington. I knew Eugene Harrington before law school in a different capacity. Gene visited the Sportsman Club for a period of time, and so did I for happy hour drinks. So, when I got to law school, naturally I took his class. Eugene Harrington was white and gay. He was not in the closet so he didn't have any problem with his lifestyle. There are others. The roll call. Great instructors. Eugene Harrington was a no nonsense, no play . . . if you didn't get to class on time, you couldn't come in. If you didn't know your lesson, if you hadn't read the cases and you

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could not discuss the legal issue when you got called on, you got put out of class. So, while I knew him from the clubs, I enrolled in his class, I had no idea what type instructor he was. So, I got put out! But after that, I enrolled in Eugene Harrington's class every semester. Every class that he taught, every year. He taught like negotiable instruments. He taught the complex class. The first year was contracts. The next year, negotiable instruments. Because that was the kind of discipline I thought I needed anyway.

I am here and practicing. When I got out of law school, I spent the last 3 or 4 years trying to get past this Bar. I had been on somebody's job all my life at this point, had no credit. I had blown all of this. I might as well try the private practice of law.

JRW: By this time, how old were you, roughly? In your late 20s?

ZB: Oh, no. I didn't go to law school until I was 30. I went to law school . . . I was born in 1941. I guess I went to law school in 1970. I was admitted to the Bar October of 1974, so 41 from 74? I'm 33 years old. Like I said, school and education, I've been in it

JRW: A life process.

ZB: It is a life process. So like, with some other people I know . . .

JRW: I was about to say, it is like my 30 year degree plan that I took.

ZB: Yes, ask my child. Education is a life process.

JRW: Yes, thank goodness.

ZB: Learning and teaching is a life process. You are either learning or you are teaching throughout life. So now, I am 33 years of age when I graduate and was admitted to the Bar at 34.

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JRW: Which actually isn't unusual for a period. It is just not like other professions.

ZB: I guess I really began, I would call it January 1, 1975, my law practice since I was admitted to the Bar. October. So, January 1, 1975, was 41 from 75, 34. I was going to turn 34 that February. So, I am 34 years of age, I have a daughter in high school. I think she was 13. She doesn't say but I remember I had to go to the counselor and get her some time with me where she could come and spend some time in the afternoons because she had some rough periods during that period of time. We both did. We had some rough periods in terms of adjusting.

JRW: And time allotments.

ZB: And time allotments. So, there is such a thing as . . . what do they call it at school . . . where they go out and do some kind of work?

JRW: Community service?

ZB: A work program kind of co-op but anyway, I got that time allotted for her to come to the office and we could spend the time together.

JRW: And she could see what you were doing.

ZB: She could see, although she was a part of law school, too. When she entered law school . . . ask her to show you her entrance letter. You had to give the law school a reason and in the letter and I remember her saying, "I've been here before. I went through law school with my mother." She talked about Gene Harrington in the letter. For admissions. But keeping her close throughout this whole, I don't want to call it an ordeal but it was a process. So, 1975, I am 34 years of age, about to start a new career, one

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where my livelihood depends on my abilities. Not something that was totally strange to me but . . .

JRW: Was it scary?

ZB: Absolutely. Yes. You get before a judge. You are probably shaking more . . . the client is not shaking, it is the lawyer who is shaking on my first go-found.

JRW: In particular, as you are saying about not picking up a check every Friday whether you were there or not . . . I mean, you get paid anyway as opposed to, as you say, really getting paid is solely . . .

ZB: You have been there.

JRW: Collecting.

ZB: When you are the last person to get paid because as you start, you have got to pay rent, the people that work for you - all of that comes before you can take your money home.

JRW: Yes. My saying was always I am the last person in line at the bank. When I take my employees to cash their check over there at the Bank of Houston, you know, I'd be the last person in line, made sure everybody got taken care of. If there were any problems, I'd be the . . . just whatever, you know.

ZB: `Thirty something odd years of that. Right, you are the last one on the totem pole, the last one in the feeding line. But I've had 30 some odd years of that. It has worked and I am grateful but it has also been, as you would understand more than anybody else, it is the freedom to sit up here and look right out of my window in Third Ward and know

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that I am free - I am still able to do it. It is hard but I am doing it as I would want to do it, as I planned it. And it may be that other people couldn't appreciate it. I like my freedom. In this arena, it meant working seven days, it meant spending all day Sunday in the office, but the return was gratifying enough for me.

JRW: Yes, because I can remember in the past, I have always seen the light on in here in driving . . .

ZB: Every Sunday.

JRW: I would tend to look over just to see . . . I would expect to see your light on.

ZB: Late at night. No ifs, buts or ands about it. I remember John B was on the second floor.

JRW: Dr. John B. Coleman?

ZB: John B. Coleman would call me sometimes . . . "Come on, let's go home. Get out of there." He'd see the light - as he just left 5 minutes earlier, right? He'd call up, "Come on, let's go home. Get out of there." No, it was probably far more stressful, longer hours, harder work, but it was still . . .

JRW: Most beneficial.

ZB: For me personally.

JRW: And we will get to the Sisters in the Law in a second but overall, did this approach that you took actually allow you to be more productive and active in the community, do you think?

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ZB: I think it did.

JRW: If you think back through the late 1970s and through the 1980s into the 1990s just what you were able to be involved with by virtue of the choice that you made?

ZB: Absolutely, since I didn't have the 9 to 5 where I just had to be someplace with the restrictions of 9 to 5. I didn't have to be on somebody's job. Absolutely.

Tape #2

ZB: . . . I could designate. And I guess, as I got involved, more involved in the community, being able to do that. I have been single almost 40 years so I have had the time and with just the one child, I had the time. I made her do, too, because I went, she had to go. It was like law school. She had to go to places I had to go to. But yes, it gave me the timeframes I could just design myself. It was good for the business, too.

JRW: In what way? For Burney and Foreman?

ZB: Yes, for the law practice. People got to know you. It is really, private practitioner – that is, referral work. If you do a good job, you get referrals. So, people refer you. So, a lot of this is referral work.

JRW: So, having the flexibility to be out in the community.

ZB: And since it is referral work, people get to know you, want to make sure, and it is the same now . . . I am going to go to the grocery store in the community, I am going to

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go to the drug store in the community, live in this community. I am involved. And people who have been in court, I can see the smile on their faces. They are satisfied. They are pleased. I want to make sure that this community receives good service. I advocate that in the court. Good customer service. With the practice of law, it is customer service. In the court, it is customer service. That has always been something that I strive for. Like I said, I am not moving out of the community. I am going to see you and I do want to know that you are satisfied with the work, the service. So, you know, it is referrals. And if you provide good customer service to people . . . it is part of the reason why I moved back and moved the practice over, moved back into the community. When I first started, we were downtown. My impression – lawyers are downtown, they go to the courthouse, their office should be downtown. So, the first 10 years of practice, we were downtown.

JRW: Where were you?

ZB: 609 Fannin, Suite 509.

JRW: What cross-street is that?

ZB: It is the hotel now. The new hotel in that spot. It is Fannin and Texas. And there was an office building. Mostly lawyers in the building . . . it is now converted to a hotel. I just don't remember the name of the hotel. Fannin and Texas, right on that corner. 10 years. Then we moved . . .

JRW: Magnolia?

ZB: Maybe the Magnolia. Then we moved and bought a building on Calumet. After

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the Resolution Trust Corporation debacle, we moved into this building where we are now and it was up for sale. Put together a group – purchased the building.

JRW: You were one of the purchasers of this building?

ZB: One of the purchasers of the building. And then, we sold it about one year ago. We have been here since May, 1992 or 1993 – something like that in this building. Like I said, we came back in the community maybe 10 years after we started the practice – decided I can do everything from here that I can do downtown. They won't have to pay a parking fee. Saves them a lot of money.

JRW: Yes, rent is much lower, I am sure.

ZB: Rent was lower.

JRW: And you could go across the street to Greens Barbecue.

ZB: And go across the street and visit . . .

JRW: The art gallery.

ZB: The art gallery. More so, the art gallery. And Greens Barbecue, and Harlon's across the street, days I didn't have to go to court, just didn't have to dress up.

JRW: We all are accustomed to seeing you in your sweats in the neighborhood.

ZB: Even more so . . . if I had to go downtown . . . I never knew whether to come in or if you had to rush to court. This way, I am close to home. If I do have to rush to court and go put on a jacket, I can.

JRW: When you came into the Bar in 1975, how soon after that did you and the other

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Sisters-in-the-Law come together, the women law firm that was formed?

ZB: I think 1976. You've got the article. You check to make sure if I am correct on this. When we started, at the downtown office . . . it was Burney, Edwards, Smith, Williams. It was me, Joan Edwards, 2 guys. Joan was with the city but she never left the city but did start practicing. It was me, Charlie Williams, Clayton Smith who started the practice at 609 Fannin, Suite 509. Shortly thereafter, we were joined by Don Caggins who had just really gotten out of law school. Haroldeen Hartsfield was working for the Legal Foundation. Houston Legal Foundation, Gulf Coast Legal Foundation – whatever the name was way back then . . . she joined us.

JRW: The legal aid kind of . . .

ZB: Legal aid. She was a lawyer for them. Haroldeen is from Detroit. She had gone to school in Detroit and she then moved to Houston. I am not sure what the motivation was but she moved to Houston and when she got out of law school and got licensed, she was working for the legal foundation who officed in the same building – 609 Fannin. So, she got on the elevator often. I was either on the elevator or we saw each other in passing.

JRW: O.K., were there very many other African Americans in that building?

ZB: We were the only African American law firm in the building.

JRW: Were there very many African American women at that time?

ZB: I want to tell you that I was the only one and Haroldeen was with the Legal Foundation. Haroldeen says that I was nosy! Deenie said that I stopped her and always

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tried to talk to her, get in her business.

JRW: And she really didn't want to be bothered . . .

ZB: Right! She really didn't want to be bothered. That is Deenie, right. We both had this thing for fried chicken. We'd go down there . . . then, there was a Church's Chicken, I think, downtown. So, we'd go there to get chicken together for lunch. It was cheap. We liked the chicken. And the conversation and the friendship started from there. And Deenie left the Legal Foundation and joined the firm. Well, by now, I think, Charlie Williams and Clinton Smith had gone – somewhere in that period, they left, so it was me, Don Caggins, Haroldeen. It was Burney, Caggins and Hartsfield. And I guess . . . I don't know how long we stayed Burney, Caggins and Hartsfield but we left there and it was Burney, Caggins and Hartsfield that moved to Calumet and the Third Ward.

JRW: When did Sisters in the Law . . .

ZB: During that period of time, 1976 maybe, so I guess Deenie was with us in 1976, Algenita . . . you need to get with Algenita.

JRW: Algenita Scott Davis?

ZB: This was her idea. Algenita's brain child. Algenita felt that there should be service in the Acres Home area. This was an area that I think there was one physician out there, Dr. Royal Andrews . . . There was a pharmacy.

JRW: This is on the north side, right?

ZB: Far north side. There was a pharmacy, Al Hopkins. Al Hopkins is now deceased. I knew Al Hopkins and his wife ... used to call him Hop.

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JRW: Old African American settlement.

ZB: Yes, Hopkins Pharmacy. Hop, I knew him from St. Nicholas.

JRW: Catholic church?

ZB: Catholic church. School. He and Joe Gathe Sr. best of friends. One is a physician, one is a pharmacist. So, I knew Hop.

JRW: You were raised Catholic?

ZB: I was raised Catholic.

JRW: Which church were you raised in?

ZB: St. Nicholas. At the Acres Home office, Hop was our landlord. But it was Algenita's brain child to provide great service to this community that did not have a lot of professional services. Maybe the one physician, one drug store. I don't know if there were accountants. I don't remember . . .

JRW: Maybe dentists?

ZB: Dentists. I don't remember a lot of that.

JRW: This was around 1976-ish?

ZB: This was around 1976-ish. I think the article was written in 1977. So, Algenita was an accountant, a Howard Law School graduate. She worked at Shell Oil in their Legal or Accounting department. Shelvin was a graduate . . . I can't remember. Shelvin was from Chicago. I can't think of why Shelvin was here. Like I said, Algenita would have all of that. I can't remember yesterday, never mind way back then. But Shelvin and

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Algenita were very close. Shelvin is a minister's daughter out of Chicago. Her father was Reverend Shelvin Hall. Shelvin has since gone back to Chicago. But Shelvin mostly was the lawyer who was there during the daytime. The idea was for services in the evening. None of us left our day jobs. Haroldeen and I were lawyers with Burney, Caggins, Hartsfield. We went to 609 Fannin during the day and then in the evenings, you went to Acres Home. Joan was still with the City so she went out on weekends and in the evenings.

JRW: An assistant DA, right?

ZB: No, Joan was head of the Housing Department. Where is that article? She was not in the legal area with the City. They called her Housing Director and one other person in one of those areas. So, it was all of us went out in the evenings and sometimes during the day . . . Shelvin was there during the day. We were all out there on Saturdays. We had a secretary. And sometimes during the day, my self or Haroldeen went out. So, while we operated the law firm out there, all of us still had other base jobs. Acres Home community would not have supported a firm of lawyers right without some other source of income coming in. And, you know, really, what was interesting about Acres Home – I always thought . . . because by now, Burney, Caggins, Hartsfield, we were all lawyers doing a little bit of everything, doing fairly well. When I first started, I did family, personal injury, criminal – whatever walked through the door, I'd take. There were clients from Acres Home and they'd come downtown. And I used to say to them, "Now, me and Deenie, we're the same lawyers who will be out there in Acres Home. You can come see me free in Acres Home. Here, at least you have to pay parking." I never

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charged a fee for just consulting. I will consult with you fairly friends style.

JRW: Why do you not charge that, as most lawyers charge . . .

ZB: I don't know. Community. If you ask me why . . . like yourself, just never driven by money. That is another thing we have in common – I have never been money driven. I just am not and never have been a money person. I'd say to her [Peggy Foreman], "Do you know, they'd rather come downtown?" They'd rather come to the downtown office, big fancy office . .

JRW: And be able to say, "I went downtown to my attorney's office."

ZB: I don't know why. I don't want to be in that small Acres Home office. What is the name of the street? And I think maybe some dentists moved in after we left but a lot of the Acres Home clients that we had . . . as I said, we had clients from all over the city – Burney, Caggins, Hartsfield.

JRW: At the downtown firm.

ZB: At the downtown firm. And some from Acres Home and others of them said they would say no, they're rather go downtown. Thank you. Come right in.

JRW: That is interesting.

ZB: Real interesting.

JRW: Intriguing.

ZB: Most of the people that came to the Acres Home office couldn't pay or didn't pay or couldn't pay the price, you know? There was not, as I remember it, interesting,... but

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not the mentality of our people. Those who came to the Acres Home office were poor. If they had any money, same lawyer – they'd go downtown. Same lawyer.

JRW: All the internal stuff.

ZB: All the internal stuff. Right. That is just a side bar and you need not put it in any article but interesting. But no, it was a service to an unserved community.

JRW: Did you represent Acres Home in court?

ZB: Oh, absolutely. The clients?

JRW: Yes.

ZB: Oh, absolutely, yes. Some of the same problems, same issues, same concerns, same kind of lawsuits that we did downtown, we did in Acres Home.

JRW: What kind of cases do you think would have been most prevalent in that Sisters-in-Law firm in Acres Home? What pops out that perhaps you dealt with a great deal of arising out of that community and the condition of that community, was a recurring theme?

ZB: As I remember and probably Shelvin can address this better, I think Shelvin, being there during the daytime a lot, was doing a lot of family law. You will have to ask her. As I remember, family law. Algenita was doing taxation, tax issues. I am doing criminal law. I don't remember if Shelvin was doing as much criminal in the courts and what have you. I was still doing a lot of criminal but I think we did a lot of family. And there was some personal injury – people who got hurt in accidents. We did do some personal injury, there was some money made out of Acres Home.

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JRW: Did you ever find at Acres Home where you had to take on the big boys or take on the government or take on, in some degree . . .

ZB: I want to tell you that I cannot remember from whence the lawsuits would come. We did some discrimination stuff. I remember we did some, not housing but job discrimination. Then there were a lot of Equal Employment Opportunity type suits. And I think we did some of that from Acres Home. Like I say, I don't remember whether it was here or Acres Home but yes, we did do some of that. Housing so much. Nor land. Maybe Shelvin did some of that. But I don't remember. I remember personal injury, and I remember the employment discrimination suits. I just don't remember whether they generated out of Acres Home or downtown. That was fairly common but we did some of that.

JRW: Was there a collective sense about the Acres Home firm that all of you shared, a sense of blank . . .

ZB: Commitment? Probably commitment, and, you know, all of the Sisters-in-Law except Shelvin . . . I don't know if you got to meet Shelvin but Shelvin also . . . all of us have that need to give back. All of us are community oriented. But yes, three, maybe four of us are right around the corner from each other right here in Third Ward.

JRW: Right, all within walking distance of each other actually.

ZB: Right. And Joan is not too far away.

JRW: Yes, still walking . . . long walk but walking distance.

ZB: I am just right across the street in Third Ward. She is right there on Montrose.

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And she was in Third Ward forever. She lived . . .

JRW: Right here on Blodgett. Right off Blodgett and Labranch. Joan Edwards.

ZB: I think she lives off of Montrose now. Her office is right . . . Joan lived on these roads. She lived over there right off of South MacGregor. She bought one of the high rises or the condos on Montrose. But no, still office here. But we are all still very much committed, still active. Algenita. Myself. Still active on the boards and what have you. Don Caggins lives on the north side. And much of his activities are in the north, on the north side. He is a minister also. So, Don wanted to go back, Rev. Don Caggins.

JRW: Truly community.

ZB: Truly community. Right. All of us. John Ogletree is a minister. Don Caggins is a minister. The two of them go out and just . . . But when Don wanted to go back to the north side, we all kind of agreed to move when the Calumet office closed or was closing to move to the north side. I just have been a Third Warder. Can't leave Third Ward.

JRW: Home girl.

ZB: Home girl. So, I stayed. And by now, Peggy Foreman has joined us in Burney, Caggins and Hartsfield. Peggy joined . . . I met Peggy at Al Green's campaign for mayor. She was working in the campaign contemplating law school and I was working on Al Green's campaign. So, when she entered law school, she asked if she could intern with us. So, Peggy started working with us as a first year law student and has been with us ever since. So, when we moved off of Calumet and Don wanted to go to the north side, I just didn't . . . kind of at the last minute, just didn't want to leave Third Ward for

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the North side. I wanted to stay. So, Peggy and I came over here on Almeda and we changed the name to Burney and Foreman. I am not sure whether they are Caggins, Hartsfield. Attorney Prince Cartwright is out there. I am not sure what the name of the firm is but still remained very, very close. Don is like a brother. Haroldeen is like a sister. Prince Cartwright is like a brother. We all remained very close. You know, you get to the last minute – I can't go! I'm staying here.

You may not remember but at the time, on the first floor of the Almeda building was the Harris County Medical . . . I am not sure what they called it, but you came here to get some card, some qualifications.

JRW: Yes, where the bank is.

ZB: Yes, where the bank is now, right. And Dr. John B. Coleman was on the second floor. And there were vacancies, whatever. John B. over there . . . a bunch of admiration for John B. Surely, I can deal with John B., he's involved, he's active, it's a good place, I think. So, we came over. We moved onto this floor, this office space where we are now. Have been here since. 1993, 1992. We have been here since then so, you know, it is . . . no desire to leave.

JRW: And your daughter is now in law school?

ZB: She will start her third year of law school.

JRW: The next generation.

ZB: We used to call them first, second, third year law students. They are one L, two L's, three L's. So, she will be a 3L in September. Joan has a daughter who has

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graduated from law school. Shelvin has no children. It would be good for you to meet Shelvin. Very interesting. Very intelligent. Very conservative. Like I say, also involved kind of person. I am going to show you the Sisters-in-Law in 1990.

JRW: Part of your community service, and you mentioned earlier about certainly that your childhood dream was Rice University and that living in the community with University of Houston being part of the community right here in Third Ward – I know that at Boston University, I met one of their distinguished alumni who lived on the other side of the Charles River, an African American brother who he also as a child always looked across the river longing to go to Boston University and eventually, was able to. And I think it is interesting that as we see your path, that your path actually did eventually take you to University of Houston, not as a undergrad and not as a law student but on the Board of Regents, if I am not mistaken.

ZB: I did the commencement address for downtown campus and I said to them, “Couldn’t wear the Black robe but I got the red one now.”

JRW: I am putting that in! I am definitely leaving that in.

ZB: I could not wear the Black one. I could not have graduated from this university because you know the Regents wear red ones, but I am wearing this red one now! Not facetiously but just wearing it.

JRW: How did that come about?

ZB: I can only tell you what I think and I don’t want to put Rice in there so much because I couldn’t do anything without TSU, I couldn’t have gotten in anybody’s school

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and I think the experience of the law school was the best education that I could have received in law.

JRW: Well, I think Rice perhaps may represent the forbidden fruit also.

ZB: Yes, right. For me. Right. That is what I am saying. That is what it represented but I don't want TSU to ever think . . . read something or hear something or even U of H.

JRW: Oh, I know you are TSU until you die.

ZB: Until I die. When I got out of law school and started practicing, it became a new world. I got introduced to politics and issues. Part of it I started because when I got downtown, there were no African American judges on those benches. It concerned me as an African American that we had no African American judges.

JRW: Were there African American professionals downtown to speak of? Not just the law but just . . .

ZB: No. The courtrooms were all white. White judges, white clerks – you name it. They were all white courtrooms. So, I along with . . . it wasn't just me . . . there was a group of us lawyers who decided that we should try to bring other people into the consciousness that there are no Black judges. These courtrooms are filled with Black defendants and there was no diversity.

JRW: We were talking about the U of H . . .

ZB: And this starts really my activity other than maybe marching . . . in somebody's march, I wouldn't have been a marcher in a march but when I got downtown and realized that you had this whole area where there are no Blacks at all – not a Black judge down

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there, not an associate judge. It was all white courtrooms. And as I understand it, and you will hear from the Judge Matt Plummers of the world, they used to have seats in the back of the courtrooms for Black lawyers but nonetheless, a group of us got together and decided we would try to run Blacks for judges. Henry Doyle, Matt Plummer, Harold Tillman ran for judgeships. I don't even remember now which judgeships they were but there were 3 different positions downtown.

JRW: Who got together to brainstorm this?

ZB: It was Algenita. I can't even remember who we all were because it was a group. And several of the lawyers, Black and brown, spun it. And while our campaign – I am the new kid on the block - Plummer asked me to be his campaign manager. Other than going to a poll and voting and maybe march every now and then, I didn't know much about politics. But nonetheless, got involved in the issue, in the cause, met with ministers, activists, and many community members. Met the minister at the mosque, Rocman was the minister, first minister to come to Houston with the mosque. I went over and met, introduced myself.

JRW: Mosque 45.

ZB: 45.

JRW: Orthodox?

ZB: I don't even know if they had the Orthodox then. But it was a matter of finding all of the community organizations, different churches on Sundays, advocating, putting posters out, and from there, from that very first election, it raised some consciousness

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about African Americans and there being no Black judges. Thereafter, Henry Doyle was appointed to a bench, Matt Plummer and Weldon Berry got appointed to a bench. At one point in time, we had maybe about 8 African American judges. So, I got involved politically, came to a realization that really, politics, like it or not, is just a part of the power structure. You've got to pay attention. Who sits in those seats makes a difference. So, I continued from there into community involvement, into other areas. I mean, involved with other community organizations but also continued political involvement.

Ann Richards ran for governor. I liked her. I thought it important to have a woman governor. This was just another issue or cause. I didn't know her but I got out and worked very hard in her campaign because I just thought it really critical that we have a female governor. I thought she was qualified.

JRW: You liked her style?

ZB: I loved her style. I laughed at every joke she told me. When the position came available at the U of H, U of H, throughout its history of having Blacks on the board, had 1 Black out of 9 regents. Now, there are 2 in the last few months. I think that is a history making event. There are 2 African American regents.

JRW: Simultaneously.

ZB: Simultaneously. There was 1 Black, 1 brown always. She was looking for a female and someone who knew me and knew her recommended me. So, after we got acquainted and she got to look at my credentials, and I am sure she talked to Rodney [Ellis], Garnet [Coleman], who had to give a nod probably.

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JRW: Who recommended you that was a common . . . this is historical. We need to know these things. I ask you this not politically but historically.

ZB: A lawyer.

JRW: African American?

ZB: Yes. And he was very close to Ann Richards. That is the person who called me first. Now, for a long time, I had these very strict rules that I would not serve on boards.

JRW: Why?

ZB: Because I always thought you could be more effective from the position of being able to advocate . . . you are restricted when you are on a board as to what you can say and do. I've since.....I think differently now because I think it helps to be in those positions and the white people in those positions ...they can be just as effective.

JRW: Though that perspective is consistent with your life perspective of freedom and liberty to . . .

ZB: Freedom and liberty. Correct. It was the first time because I got asked many times to run for stuff. Once I really became active out there was no no. Kathy Whitmire got to be mayor in, maybe 1990. But I was active with one of the political groups and somebody recommended me for the Housing Authority Board.

JRW: During the Whitmire . . .

ZB: Yes, when she first got in. Must have called 3 or 4 times. I wouldn't even return the calls and I thought, how impolite - the mayor's office is calling, at least I ought to

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return the call. But I knew what they were calling about and I was still of the frame of mind that my position was activist. I thought maybe after 2 or 3 calls not returned, they'd go away! I didn't want to say to the person who recommended me, hell no but I said the best way to do this is just not respond. So, I didn't respond but they kept calling. So, I said, well, maybe go serve on the board 2 years ... be through with it.

JRW: That was the Housing Authority?

ZB: That was the Housing Authority. I didn't want to be an insider. But, after that though, I realized that you can be effective if you were on the inside. This is what I was. But ... I didn't want to be an insider.

JRW: Well, it is an interesting progression overall . . . if you are moving yourself through the 1970s, through the 1980s and what you bring - the experiences and the perspectives that you brought into the 1990s to be able to take a slightly different tact, you know, based on everything that you have brought.

ZB: Based on everything that you brought, all your experiences . . . it helps and I found this to be helpful in the last maybe 10, 15 years. I've served as what is called a special judge. Did relief for the county criminal court judges.

JRW: Is that like a substitute teacher?

ZB: It is like a substitute teacher. But I had gotten so I really almost stopped practicing anyway because I couldn't serve as the judge and still represent the clients. So, while I didn't say much, I had stopped taking a lot of cases and was serving as a special judge in an all Republican environment: female, defense lawyer, all of the judges

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criminal judges downtown, up in the prosecutor's office primarily with all the prosecutors. So, I am defense law, I am female, I am African American, Democrat, but everybody was comfortable enough with me. I felt prosecutors were comfortable, defense lawyers were comfortable, people were comfortable enough with me that I did a lot of that, served a lot. In 3 years, I got asked to do a lot in terms of service. So, by now, I recognized that when you are in positions, while I wouldn't do any favoritism, I could at least be fair and I could at least know that you are getting the same treatment as anybody else would have gotten. It is not a favor but it is the same treatment out there. And the judges understood it. I mean, I think the court understood it. It was a level playing field, you know?

JRW: By your presence.

ZB: By your presence. Yes. Like I said, I would never do anything illegal and they understood that. Otherwise, they would not have asked me back. At least I could bring that element. So, by now, I am comfortable enough to know that from that perspective, yes, I can bring, assist in having a level playing field. It is the right person. I think it works whether inside or outside. I still play both positions. I can't play with much outside anymore as a Justice of the Peace. I have to be careful about what issues because I am a judge - I can't take a position. So, I am cautious about what I do and the positions I take now.

JRW: Coming back to the Regents process, so what happened? You were talking about getting a phone call, I guess, and being asked . . .

ZB: Being asked would I serve. So, after I agreed . . .

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JRW: Did you think about it?

ZB: I did.

JRW: Marinate on it.

ZB: I did have to marinate on it. Well, those things are special, important opportunities. But I have never been a person who wanted to be in the spotlight. You know, I'd rather not. And by now, I have also learned another thing - irrespective of what they say, these are positions that require a lot of time. You can't just blow them away. You've got to spend . . . and what you are told is there is a monthly meeting. Like I say - but by now, I know better. There is more than just going to a monthly meeting.

JRW: There's one formal monthly meeting.....

ZB: There is a formal monthly meeting but there are issues every day they are calling you about that require time. Go back to when you are the person who has to bring home the bread, the butter . . . you've got to stay here all night. And then, I put on my suit, go over and act like I'm a board member, comparable because you can't go . . . you've got to kind of have the same attitude. When I went to the U of H Board of Regents, everybody on that board had a private jet except me. Ken Lay was on that board, John O'Quinn was on that board. Phil Carroll. Phil Carroll just went to Iraq not too long ago. He was the president of Shell Oil. I mean, they've got a private plane to take them around. I've got a 1990 Buick Skylark! They are the John Moores. They are jetting around the country.

JRW: Was that intriguing, I mean, just to kind of be in that mix and just to kind of see . .

ZB: It was intriguing to the point that you get an opportunity to witness real wealth

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and power first-hand. It was intriguing from that perspective. You get an opportunity to witness. You get an opportunity to see and really be careful. I sometimes study people. I got an opportunity to look at Ken Lay first-hand. How this all came about, about the trial and how he reacted, I could relate some of my experiences, especially being the only Black on that board.

JRW: And that is why I wanted to ask you about also the dynamic of being the only African American on the board.



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TAPE #3

JRW: I want to ask you about the dynamic of being the only African American, and

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being an African American woman – not only the African American, and being an African American woman – not only the African American but being the African American woman which is a dynamic that absolutely comes into play when you are in the mix of the “rich and powerful,” that gender does matter as much as we may know but certainly . . .

ZB: Yes, race and gender always matter. I think it has lessened to a degree now, I really do, and maybe because I come from 1941 and I remember when I had to go find the sign and sit down at the sign that said “colored.” But I think there is opportunity now and it has softened but in that dynamic, first, I am a lawyer with my own firm. That is a different connotation when you are a lawyer with your own firm in a white world and a lawyer with your own firm in a Black world. There is still hope. Still have not . . . I am not Vinson and Elkins but I am not going to walk into the room like I am not Vinson and Elkins, you know? You still have got to uphold that. First, as I used to say to them, there are 9 people on this board, one Black, one brown. Out of 7 whites, if 2 go to a graduation, you represent the white student population. Even if only 1 out of 7 of them show up, I can miss no graduation ceremonies. I wouldn’t dare let the University of Houston have a graduation and the regents march in and there is not a Black. I am the only Black. I have got to go to every graduation. I think it is important for the Black students who graduate to see a Black regent march in. The only ones I missed were some in Victoria because they may have been the same day as. But if it meant downtown, Victoria, Clearlake, wherever graduation was, wherever there was anything important and important to students in particular, students of color, it meant that I had to put that

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red robe on and come down that aisle and to make sure that the students and their families all saw that there was a Black who could be a regent. It wasn't important to me but it probably was important to them so that was the first thing. Monthly meeting, no. Every occasion of any importance, I thought it was a responsibility that could not be filled by - maybe the Hispanic but not any of the other Regents that I had to the Black students who were trying to get through and to the Black mothers at graduations who were there, who never had an opportunity to go to college but to see their sons and daughters there, to know that there was a Black in that line and they could maybe one day be a regent if they wanted to. I had to do that.

JRW: That's right.

ZB: Secondly, there was a lot of power and money on the U of H Board of Regents at that point in time. I grew to really love the University of Houston and I thought that they grew to really love me. I have not been close to U of H since then but I have real . . . by the time it was over or we got deep into it, I had a real love for some of the people there and I think they grew to love me. We battled. What was his name? The basketball coach? I cannot remember his name. I didn't really know him. Never seen him.

JRW: Not the one that played with Olajuwon.

ZB: No.

JRW: The one that came from Bowling Green? Came from . . . fair-skinned guy?

ZB: No, he was brown-skinned – Alvin Brooks. We had a meeting. They were getting ready to replace the athletic director, the football director and they were about to

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have their first African American basketball coach. With the athletic director, they were raising the salary. With the football coach, they were raising the salary. And with the basketball coach, he was already a coach but was not the head coach. Well, they were going to lower the salary.

JRW: Of the U of H head coach position?

ZB: Yes. What they thought was that I would be so pleased and happy because this was their first "Negro." And everybody thought that I would lead the parade. So we had a board meeting and by now, they picked up the fact that I am really not on board because of the proposed salary cut for the position, if taken by the African American coach.

JRW: And by now, have you been on the board for a while?

ZB: A little while, yes. We had meetings, against the law to say what was said, but of course, everybody is explaining when they are bringing all these folks as to why the salary is different and I looked around the room, being the only Black in the room and I thought should I walk out, or should I just go around the table pointing over every body's head? But I sat through it. We got out to the board meeting and everybody had . . .

JRW: To the full session board meeting?

ZB: To the full session board meeting. And they laid it out real well about why they were doing this and why they were doing that and why they hired everybody. And then I had my say. I told them I thought it was racist.

JRW: Straight up?

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ZB: Straight up. And if he doesn't qualify – if he doesn't qualify, just don't hire him. Don't hire him because he is Black. If he is not qualified and you can't . . . what they did was postpone the hiring. They were going to do a comparable study of all of the coaches . . . you hired the other two and now you postpone this one to bring in some kind of study, analysis . . . “Go on, this is just racist.” Alvin Brooks. Don't hire him because he is Black. Hire him because he is qualified and pay him an adequate salary just like you were able to do with the other two positions. The *Chronicle* wrote me up. It was holy hell. But I can tell you, after that, it opened a door . . . I think some of the presidents had to understand what was really clicking in my crazy head over here, and things opened and it has changed. And I got to know them and it was like click - we've got to get to know either her or get to know Black folks ... with some of them.

JRW: Was this unconscious on their part, at least the racism part?

ZB: I never called them racist ... what I said was that it was a racist act.

JRW: Internalized. Let me rephrase that. Let me use Hitaji Asiz' internalized racism, you know, that just doing it but not really thinking that deep, that it really is a racist . . .

ZB: I don't think they thought it was racist. I think they thought they were doing a good thing and couldn't understand why I was so upset - you are about to get your first Black coach . . .

JRW: We are giving you ham hocks.

ZB: Yes, correct. Give him the same steak as you do others. There are some Black steaks out there. If you want a Black coach, don't just take anybody if you think he is not

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up to being paid the salary. They cut his salary by \$50,000. When it was all said and done, he got it but nonetheless, it was the idea . . . that implies to me that you are hiring him because he is Black and you want to make a statement, you want to show that you are anti-racist. By now, you've got Phi Slamma Jamma in basketball at U of H . . .

JRW: Money maker.

ZB: Right, correct. So now, if that is the act, understand and go find you a Black coach who could do the job and should be paid but if you don't think he is up to it and you just want to make some statement, you've got a Black coach - I don't think that is appropriate either.

JRW: And you feel that that forthright discussion on that particular issue was enlightening?

ZB: I think maybe not to the whole university

JRW: But certainly for that board of Regents . . .

ZB: Yes, for some of them but also to some of the personnel, presidents and people who were in positions to say, what? What is she talking about? Like I said, after that, I really just grew to love them because they took an honest effort to try to figure out what is she saying? Why is she saying that? It didn't make sense to them. They really thought they were doing something great and wonderful by hiring a Black coach.

JRW: When you were first offered this, did you have concerns about divided loyalties also, in terms of your loyalty to your alma mater, your undergraduate and your law school alma mater, TSU? Was there a twinge in you about you training TSU to be

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involved with U of H at that level?

ZB: No, not a twinge then, not a twinge now. Like I say, you know how I feel about TSU. And it is because TSU offers the opportunity that most of us, a lot of us . . . that most of us can't get anywhere else. TSU has to be . . . it is like Prairie View - you have to exist. I'd be happy when the day came that we didn't have specialties but until then, do I recognize and understand? Yes. I'll have a twinge about that. But understand that that just has to be. Education is just critical to a child's success.

JRW: Is the opportunity that you were presented to be a regent part of the reason that TSU and HBU's exist? That is, to help you gain access, to help our community - African American community - gain access to those positions of so-called power, certainly to be able to affect decisions and outcomes and we will call that power, for lack of a better term. But TSU's contribution, to be able to give you the knowledge and the information that you can be put in that position and . . .

ZB: Not just put in that position. I mean, TSU has produced, I mean, especially the law school . . . TSU has produced . . . well, not the law school for Rodney Ellis but TSU has produced Barbara Jordan, Rodney Ellis, Craig Washington.

JRW: Mickey Leland.

ZB: Mickey Leland. Ken Hoyt, a federal judge downtown. TSU has produced a state judge - Belinda Hill - TSU has produced . . .

JRW: And on and on.

ZB: Right. TSU has produced, in addition to giving people opportunities, it has

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produced some of our best and greatest. So now, it is the open admissions that has to be there because still, even as I look at the truancy docket, I have concerns about the high school dropout rates of our youth. It is always of a social, as I hear it told, issues that children have. So now, until we can get past some of that . . . Education has to remain open. So, that is a different issue for U of H or Rice or anybody else. It is the fact that we don't come up, not enough of us, in an equal environment, on equal situations. So, there has to be an open door otherwise we may go backwards instead of forward. That is my concern. It is not so much the competition but if people understand the process of how to get a race of people through, I think with any of them, education has got to be a critical part. And until you understand that and get the masses educated, then everybody is in trouble.

JRW: And I understand from your point then that you are still actively involved consciously and actively involved in what you consider to be racial uplift in 2006, though that is terminology that comes from the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. But yet, still, 100 years later, that for your life and all of us, that there is still this great need for "racial uplift."

ZB: As I say all the time at precinct 7, "You've got to lift the ball." You had to at least remain where Al Green was. Otherwise, like I say, when I was 40 and 50, you couldn't pay me enough money to go and sit 9 to 5. No way. I don't care how hard it is, how many times they turned my lights off, whatever . . . I am not going to do that. But now at 63, I have adjusted and can go sit down and behave. You have got to raise the bar. To answer question, yes, we have got to keep uplifting. We have got to raise the level

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otherwise . . .

JRW: Do you have broader concerns for the community at this point here in 2006 in where the community is, where it is going in . . . you were referring to education and so on but just, you know . . .

ZB: I do, and since I ride the streets, you know, it is painful to see so many of us walking these streets -- it is painful to see so many of us unemployed, and it is painful to see so many of us who are not into consciousness. And, I mean, we really are not.

JRW: How do you mean "consciousness?"

ZB: We are not politically active. We are not concerned about the betterment of self. Some of the folks that I see, it is the walking dead. There is no consciousness about what is going on in the world that you are living in, you know? Turn the TV off. I'm concerned about America. What I see on this TV right now, what I see going on on TV on CNN and Fox News, if you are looking at the television, you ought to be frank . . . I might not want that on the record either but the Middle East is not playing and you ought to be scared. I am not sure that George Bush understands the quagmire that we are in.

JRW: The pathetic quagmire.

ZB: Has any great dynasty ever withstood time? I am not a pessimist but is it our time when I look at that TV and all the bombing and war that is going on, and know that it is more of them than it is of us, and they are on a religious kick! They will go to their mis-martyrdom in the highest level. I am not sure that the government understands what is going on here. It is like anything else. It is like the U of H and Alvin Brooks. You have

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not understood what I have said. And once they did . . .

JRW: Who was president of U of H at that time?

ZB: The person that I really loved was Alex Schilt. I really loved Dr. Alex Schilt.

JRW: Why?

ZB: Just a good person. Good president. I thought he was a good president.

JRW: In what way? How do you mean?

ZB: In terms of his ability to relate to the board, to keep the board involved. Do you ever see people who can keep the board going, keep the student population, the administration, all of us bouncing at one time. He was followed by . . . I want to tell you his name but I can't think of it.

JRW: Jim Pickering?

ZB: Jim Pickering. I didn't know Pickering, and had all kinds of anxiety . . . Pickering is going to follow Schilt? Grew to love Pickering. Grew to really love him. That is when it really started. Alex was a natural. I loved Alex. But Pickering . . . I remember the times that we sat across the breakfast table right there in that ..., right as he picked my head and as I picked his. And we got some understandings. I truly grew to love Pickering.

JRW: Particularly around some of those issues of Third Ward redevelopment and University expansion and all those kinds of things.

ZB: Your were there when Pickering ... right. That is how I grew to know, and he

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truly had an interest in understanding it and knowing it. Right. That is what I said . . . some of the people at U of H, if you asked me . . . not necessarily the board . . . yes, I got along fabulously with those two also - I loved those two also . . . but in terms of the administration here, Third Ward and how it went and as we sat there, you know, my mouth poked out, well ... as I learned you really don't hear me or understand . . . Let me stop.

JRW: No reference.

ZB: No reference, right. No reference. So, in going back, I learned a lot and, like I say, I grew to U of H.

JRW: You also spoke of Plummer and Wickliff.

ZB: Henry Doyle. Plummer and Wickliff ... prior to that, I don't know of anybody Black that ever ran for judge. We got 40% of the votes, 40 some odd percent.

JRW: The votes for who for what?

ZB: Judges. The three of them ran at the same time.

JRW: For different positions?

ZB: For different positions as judges, and we got 40% of Harris County's vote prior, the first time, which just said to me more people were looking at it and had paid attention.

JRW: What are these guys like?

ZB: Tillman is deceased. Doyle is deceased. Doyle had a famous law suit - Denton, Doyle . . . I don't know if it was ...? Henry Doyle had a famous lawsuit. Very intelligent

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guy, and he got elected all the way to one of the Appellate benches. He got appointed and the election process started. Matthew Plummer was very political . . . you might know his son, James Plummer?

JRW: We have been emailing each other. I haven't met him yet.

ZB: And he has a son who is a dentist. Matthew Plummer, Jr.

JRW: Yes, I am going there next Thursday.

ZB: Very bright. Very intelligent person but Matthew headed, maybe it was the Harris County Counsel of Organizations - whatever was the political arm. He was very active politically, community. Henry Doyle taught at TSU and Tillman was . . . I have to be careful when I say this . . . you may know Tillman's daughters - what is her name? He was married to Mack Hannah's daughter. Mack Hannah sat on UH as well as the TSU board. So now, Mack Hannah's son-in-law, he was married to somebody up the street. So, Tillman, not only an articulate person but also you can't be in Mack Hannah's family and not be involved. So, you had 3 guys - Doyle,...? Famous lawsuit - Doyle...? So, these were all civil rights activists kinds of community involved. I mean, to take on and run . . . you are practicing law and you have to come before these judges and you are going to run against them, what do you think is going to make that whole white establishment of judges think of you when you are there? And my concern was some of the brothers and sisters who get out and run here now, there are that very judge you run against, you're going to have to go before. So, this takes a real act of courage. These are people who don't have paychecks.

JRW: Yes, especially in this time period where the community, like you said, I mean,

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really wasn't just Acres Home in terms of people affording to really to be able to spend what we all think lawyers make, you know, that it was hard scrabble law.

ZB: It was hard scrabble law. They don't get a paycheck. They are active. So now to get out, put your name before the county against these judges . . . and you know people . . . they don't want him around because he ran against the judges.

JRW: Repercussions.

ZB: Repercussions. But after that, I think it was the next election that he did get some people elected. Doyle got appointed, so it opened the door. I won't even tell you off the record what happened after that. Wickliff was very active, was very much part of it. Did Aloysius get appointed to something or did he run for something? You know his son Marty. He has a son who heads up one of the major law firms here. But Aloysius was in there with us. We used to call him Papa.

JRW: Oh really?

ZB: Yes. Papa was right there with us every step of the way.

JRW: Why did you call him Papa?

ZB: I don't know. I guess he was distinguished, but he just reminded me of a Papa. And, like I say, there were several . . . Sheila ran for judge. Sheila Jackson Lee ran for judge. She lost. She lost on that one but it became a movement. It was a movement in terms of . . .

JRW: We are back live.

ZB: What were we talking about?

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JRW: We were talking about Wickliff.

ZB: I called him Papa.

JRW: Papa?

ZB: I don't know why I started calling him Papa. He just looked like a Papa. But then he wasn't the Papa. I started calling him Papa in the old days, in later years, but there were several of us . . . Deenie, Haroldeen for sure. Don Caggins used to say about me and Deeney – “they would rather go put signs out” . . . I kept a hammer in the trunk of my car. A hammer and a stapler . . .

JRW: O.K., just in case . . .

ZB: We put signs up. Can't do that now but on the telephone pole.

JRW: Oh, for the firm?

ZB: No, for the candidates. We had the flyers on the church, on the cars, were made right out of this office. We were downtown when we started that. I don't think you could do any joint . . . The Shrine came up with that slate. We did a flyer right out of the office with the judges' pictures came right out of Burney, Caggins, Hartsfield. We did that, designed that flyer. Be careful, we didn't put no disclaimer on it. Of course, the statute of limitations probably passed on that, they probably can't prosecute. But to give the African American community notice . . . put pictures on it . . . the Shrine helped us pass them out. We had a lot of ... you weren't here in the city but we had them through churches on Sundays, everywhere. Don use to say why didn't Haroldeen and me do that to just try go make some money. But yes, we worked very hard to try to change

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downtown. There is still a concern I'll finish my career where I literally started my interests Judges. There are none or not enough African American judges. There is not enough diversity. All those benches . . . when they sit in those judges' meetings and those rooms, there needs to be a voice other than just the courts that sings. Need to have a different note, a different tune. But when I say I finish, I finish up as a JP and judges were really what got me into the political system, into the community, into doing things . . .

JRW: Did you have a mentor, a legal mentor, someone that you considered your mentor?

ZB: Not really. I served as mentor to many students and young lawyers. They all over the United States of America. Don't ask me to start calling names. They're all over everywhere. Part of the concern, too, when we moved here into the community, was closeness to the law school. When we were actually practicing, I don't know.

JRW: To make yourself accessible to students as well as faculty, to be part of . . .

ZB: Yes. It has always been a part of this firm.

JRW: Have you considered this firm almost like an extension of the law school that is a part of a laboratory for the law school.

ZB: I'd like to consider it that. I can't tell you its always been that. But over the years, we have always had students.

JRW: Intentionally?

ZB: Intentionally. I don't know if you have met Vanessa, Sampson.

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JRW: Yes, I think so.

ZB: One of the young lawyers. Like I say, I can't tell you names but have always had ... like Oseye.

JRW: That is interesting. That is an interesting philosophy and conscious intention to serve that purpose, as a firm, consciously to open the doors to internships and jobs and experience for young Black lawyers.

ZB: Couldn't do a lot but there were always one or two interns or lawyers that, you know, intentionally . . .

JRW: When I opened up my art gallery in Memphis, the reason behind it was that my grandfather was an artist - I named it after him - but the real inspiration came from seeing all these Black artists in Memphis, these Black art students carrying everything they had under their arms as they came from the art school like right over there in what was Memphis' Hermann Park. They did like the Glassell . . . there is a Pink Palace Museum, I guess, and then carrying all their stuff with no place to display it. And that was the real impetus for me getting the building next to mine and joining them.

ZB: I guess those before us have done the same thing.

JRW: Service. They showed us a path of service.

ZB: Right. That is what I am saying. Some people do. Why? I don't know but there is something that leads you there that says you understand. Therefore remembering names is not.....

JRW: Right, names and numbers aren't really the issue.

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ZB: Serving on the boards. I got into it. Somebody has got to do it.

JRW: Did you ever serve on the HLA, the Houston Lawyers Association, the African American Lawyers Association? Did you ever serve on that board?

ZB: I don't think so. Have I been active with them? Yes, at times, very active.

JRW: Is that right?

ZB: Yes, very active, but I don't think I ever had a board position.

JRW: When did you become active with the HLA? The HLA was formed by Plummer and Doyle and that generation of African American attorneys, as I understand the story, coming out of, particularly, Plummer's experience in the cafeteria, the courthouse, getting slugged trying to eat there, suing and all that.

ZB: That was always the Houston Bar, the white organizations, and I belonged to the Houston Bar, too, I was just not as active. But, in the HLA because it was formed because African Americans couldn't belong to the Houston Bar Association. It was Wickliff... Papa and Matt were on the Houston Lawyers Association. Let me tell you who some lawyers are. A bunch of us, myself included. So, if I served as an officer, it would have been like a parliamentarian or something where you didn't have to do anything. I just have not been active recently... to be at that thing that you were. It is young people, you know, and more so than that, it is the fact that it is downtown. I guess if we were closer ... but I commit every time they send their notice, that I am going to go to those meetings because I remember, as we were young lawyers - Papa, Doyle, Plummer - they'd sit back there and say nothing and do nothing but the presence - they were there.

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The older lawyers came. And I have always said, I've got to do that . . .

JRW: Carry on that tradition.

ZB: Yes, carry on that tradition. It is the fact that it is downtown and I have to get up and go downtown at a meeting time but I intend to show my support by being present. I wanted to do that. I haven't done that.

JRW: What is the value of the HLA in the community for you as an African American attorney of the generation you're in?

ZB: As lawyers, to be able to gather and discuss the law and the issues, civil rights - that is all a part of the law. At the Essence festival, this last Essence festival, they had a seminar, the Houston Lawyers Association along with the National Bar sponsored a seminar on entertainment law. We have a couple of lawyers here in the city ... I can see them just as good who are real prominent, who are representing some of the Black athletes and entertainers. So, they were able to put on a seminar, the lawyers who came for the Essence festival, get the opportunity to be educated while here. And there are seminars occasionally that the lawyers will have, the Houston lawyers have, seminars, so you get the educational process. But in addition to that, a lot of the issues were before the Supreme Court - it is the lawyers who take the lead on that. And to keep informed. I might not have picked it up in the paper but I do want to know what is currently before the Supreme Court in terms of education. I know there are a couple of cases out of Tennessee or somewhere that I am not totally abreast on but I would like to be a part of. I know they had seminars. I just have not brought my tattered ass to learn them but it is that kind of thing that I appreciate hearing as well as seeing and knowing . . . if you saw

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the young lawyers, they are from the firms, they are from ... like being able to give back.

What is his name? Franklin Jones, this morning, is an example, with the library, who headed, who chaired the board, and brought the librarian in who is focusing now on the African American history.

JRW: Yes, for the first time.

ZB: It is that kind of opportunity. Like I say, I don't know if I want this in black and white but... but it is those things that I see the lawyers are doing. When you look at it, a lot of times, who gets appointed? Physicians don't have the time, really don't have the time. Medicine takes up, or emergency, takes up all of their time, but a lot of the times, who you see active or getting involved are the ministers or the lawyers ... have the lawyers in the right frame of mind. The fact that all of the lawyers want to go to the National Bar Convention and hear what Black lawyers are saying all over the United States of America. The convention is for the very same reason. They are seminars . . . I am going to be able to go on to the Congressional Black caucus, get an opportunity to do that - to hear the issues and to hear the seminars of some of the greatest minds in the United States, besides the fact now it is a tax write-off because you get your hours but to hear that and be a part of that, I mean, to me, gives you that energy to come back to see the good Goodwill Pierre's.

JRW: One of those.

ZB: One of those, that is right . . . who is working so hard and I mean, there is not a day I am on my computer that there is not some information spread out coming from Goodwill Pierre. But, you know, to be able to see that in action, being able to see a

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young, well-paid lawyer give time and attention and be involved in some serious issues, it makes an impact. I am glad to see it. Do you know what I am saying? It is not . . . would come from Matt Plummer walking in the cafeteria and being slapped to a lawyer being able to orchestrate getting to be head of the library.

JRW: And that is what I was about to ask you. Do you see progress within the HLA, within that generational . . . improvement on the generation, so to speak.

ZB: I see progress with African American people everywhere.

JRW: And I think there were a couple of young judges. These guys looked like they were in their 30s to me.

ZB: The Texas Supreme Court ... a Republican?

JRW: Yes.

ZB: To me, it is like Condoleezza Rice. You hear a lot about Condi. But I take my hat off to her, you know? We almost got a Black female president and he's got to step aside. If there is anyone up there with any sense and understanding and in tune with what is happening in the world is Condi. If it wasn't for Condi and I guess Colin left because he just couldn't take too much. He's old. Older, not old. Older and given his time. But if it wasn't for Condi . . . I am sure, with Condi's impression . . . when she is talking to Chaney and Rumsfeld . . . Bush may not be so far off - he just don't have enough sense to understand what you are saying but can you imagine Condi in the same room with Chaney and Rumsfeld? They can't be on the same page. They can't be coming from the same position. And Condi . . . Chaney and Rumsfeld got to listen because is young and

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of this generation and she is going to have some innate understanding of what they are doing in the Muslim countries and why, and why Kofi Annan acts as he does; where they are just total strangers, you know, and that has to happen. That has to happen. So now, even if she's Republican, no, she is serving a purpose. She is going to change some minds. She is going to open some brains. She is going to open some heads. She is going to turn some lights on just by the fact of her own experiences. So, yes, do I see it? What is trouble to me . . . I think the only thing is we have to fix, as Black people, the numbers. There are just not enough of us coming across the bridge. If you get enough numbers educated . . .

JRW: When you say "coming across the bridge," you are not referring to a professional bridge, you are talking about in terms of education and the access that it generates?

ZB: Correct. Right. Even if it is not a total formal education, some enlightenment as to how you survive in peace, if not total prosperity . . .

JRW: And you may not find that on the TV station or the radio station that you listen to. In fact, you are not likely to find that kind of enlightenment and consciousness on the stations that we find so many of us are entertained by.

ZB: And the masses have got to understand that you have got to make some effort. That is why I put so much on education and opening some minds. But I am saying, if we can get the masses or numbers, if we can increase our numbers . . . and I think once that is done, we are going to be OK. There is progress - it is just not enough of us.

JRW: As I tell my students at the University, you know, a bachelor's degree is the high school degree of the 21st century. That is the minimum. And so, I try to tell them all -

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you are really working towards a master's in the 21st century. If you want to actually do something, you are going to at least need a masters. Bachelors is just your entry level.

ZB: Right, and the further you go, the more you start to understand, the more you start to wonder. The more you start to know economics, the more you start to know politics, the more you start to understand what makes the world . . .

JRW: By the time you finish that bachelors, you end up going oh..... you are prone to go to another level.

ZB: Correct. So now, if we can get enough of us doing that.

JRW: Are you concerned about maintaining political control and economic control of Third Ward?

ZB: Not really, and the reason why . . . while I like Third Ward as it is in terms of politics and economics and who lives there, to be truthful, the world is going to change and you might as well get ready for it. It is going to change and as it comes about, you adjust to it. I don't think you are trying to hold onto the past. You remember the past but you don't hold on. You live for today. Prepare for tomorrow. And tomorrow is coming. So now . . . I like it as it is. I like knowing who my neighbors are but, you know, if I get new neighbors, I will just have to adjust to that.

JRW: Go meet them!

ZB: Go meet them! I'll adjust! Instead of bringing grits . . . we will have a sushi party. So be it. You just have to adjust. That is going to happen. The issue for me in terms of how it changes is that each one of the groups seems to have . . . they are not as

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open maybe as individuals ... whatever you have got to adjust to, and it is not a self-serving purpose. People have all these self-serving purposes. If we could get rid of that, it would be an OK world to live in and it really wouldn't make any difference who lived next door to you.

JRW: Your fellow human beings.

ZB: Yes, your fellow human beings. Right. But if you get to that point and you get enough African Americans educated and to that point, it would be an all right world.

JRW: Well, O.K., I think we have been all up . . . I did want to ask you, what was Almeda like . . . your memories of Dowling . . . I guess, really, your memories at, say, 10 years old, 15 years old, junior high to high school . . . what was the commercial center of the African American community?

ZB: It wasn't Almeda.

Tape #4

ZB: It was Dowling Street.

JRW: That was the commercial hub?

ZB: The commercial hub for Third Ward was Dowling Street. The commercial hub for Fifth Ward was Lyons Avenue. The commercial hub for fourth ward was West Dallas. And I guess a lot of people visited West Dallas. The El Dorado - I don't know if you have been up to the El Dorado Ballroom now.

JRW: That Project Row Houses now controls?

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ZB: Yes. I cut my first dance step there. El Dorado. I was still in high school, too. And there was an officer . . . there were not too many Black police officers - maybe 4 or 5 . . . Mr. Robey was a police officer. And I used to tell them, "distract Mr. Robey, " because he knew me and knew my mother and father . . . "Mr. Robey is not going to let me in here. He knows how old I am!" "He is not going to let me in here." But my first dance steps were cut into the El Dorado. Spooky Nancy was on the saxophone. Spooky is deceased. Dr. Turner, Polly Turner's husband . . . I don't know if you know Polly Turner but Dr. Turner, he has since gotten his Ph.D. What was Turner's first name? But his band played. Remember when we first used to do the slide? It was the first dances of the line dances, the type of line dances? We'd go to the El Dorado and do those line dances. But it was Dowling Street. There were two theaters - the Park Theater and the Dollar Theater. The Dollar Theater down near Grey is the one that you are talking about, you still see that . . . that was the Dollar Theater. The Park Theater was on the opposite side of the street right off of Tuam. Every Saturday, my brother and kids in the neighborhood, they had what they called those serial, those chapters we called them. You'd go see the serial chapter, like the . . . if you ask me, those stories on TV.

JRW: Like soap operas?

ZB: Like soap operas. Every Saturday, we'd go to see the next chapter in that serial but also, to see the movies and coming up, the theaters were segregated. So, when they got eventually to the Black theaters, the movie must have been 2 or 3 years old. We had the Park and Dollar. We couldn't go to the movie theaters downtown.

JRW: Or the Shamrock?

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ZB: Oh, absolutely not. Not the Shamrock, not the ones downtown. There were theaters downtown.

JRW: Loews and all that.

ZB: We could not go to Loews.

JRW: Delman.

ZB: The Delman was in Fifth Ward, I think.

JRW: Well, the Delman that we converted into Maceba right at Wheeler and Main Street across from Sears.

ZB: Oh, yes, I know where you are talking about now. No, absolutely not. That is what I am saying. No. There were only two theaters. There was a theater in Fifth Ward. I thought it was the Delman. But there was a theater in Fifth Ward. There were two and it was located on Lyons Avenue. There were two on Dowling Street in Third Ward.

JRW: How much was it to get in?

ZB: I don't know. I remember when I first used to ride the bus, it was 4 cents to ride the bus.

JRW: Four pennies then!

ZB: Four cents to ride the bus back and forth to school. I don't remember how much it was but we didn't have transportation - we walked on Saturdays. Then, it was safe to stay out until midnight.

JRW: Well, you mentioned also, and we will come back to the El Dorado, but you also

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mentioned the other . . . we are in Third Ward and Dowling Street. There is also Lyons. And then, in fourth ward, you said it was West Dallas. Did you go out of your community to . . .

ZB: Not if you were from Third Ward or Fifth Ward. Fourth Ward was probably neutral and yes, you could. A lot of people went to what is called the Pilgrim's Theater. I guess it was like a center. It was an office building. There were doctors and dentists. And on Dowling Street were dentists. The first dentist I ever went to was on Dowling Street. I can't remember his name but yes, there were doctors and dentists on Dowling Street also.

JRW: Fourth Ward was neutral turf? Everybody could go there?

ZB: But Third Ward and Fifth Ward, absolutely not.

JRW: If you were from Third Ward, you didn't go to Fifth Ward and vice-versa?

ZB: Fifth Ward, you didn't come to Third Ward. Those two fought. There was a traditional Thanksgiving Yates/Wheatley game and there was always a fight, depending on who won. You could not . . . if you were Third Ward, no Fifth Ward. If you were Fifth Ward . . .

JRW: Traditional game and traditional fight!

ZB: If you think about it now, you probably have not noticed the politics but Fifth Ward is Fifth Ward and Third Ward is . . . that is just a holdover from way back Yates. First was Wheatley when we had 3 Black high schools. Booker T. Washington was in fourth ward, Wheatley was in Fifth Ward and Yates was in Third Ward. Those were the

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only three Black high schools. The Yates/Wheatley war still.

Now, let me tell you another . . . I must have been 14. Oftentimes, got confused and people thought I was Hispanic. Back then, Blacks couldn't try on clothes downtown. The only thing you could go to was Foley's basement. You couldn't even really go in the stores. You certainly couldn't go to the theaters. And the movie came out which was 3D ... Jungle or something. I wanted to see a 3D movie and knew it would be 10 years by the time it got to the Black theaters. So, I, along with a classmate who looked white, we went to the theater. She paid. And they didn't detect that I was not Hispanic. I couldn't even sit through the movie. I was so scared that I'd get arrested!

JRW: Which you would have.

ZB: Which I would have, had they known. Had they know that I was not Hispanic - that I was Black or that she was Black, we would have gotten arrested. But we thought, let's go see the movie because it was in 3D. I couldn't even sit through the whole movie - I was so scared that they were going to find out, figure it out and arrest me - I just ran out that theater to the bus. Another lesson to tell you yet. I don't know if it ever came to the.....

JRW: What a wonderful story.

ZB: My favorite was Tarzan. Oh, if there was a Tarzan movie playing, you couldn't keep me out of the Park or Dollar Theater. But that was our Saturday entertainment and like I say, downtown - didn't go there.

JRW: And riding the bus, were you confined to the colored section of the bus?

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ZB: If there were no white people on the bus, you could sit anywhere. But if white people got on the bus - the Rosa Parks situation - you have to get up. Now, going downtown or outside of the community, we had to be behind the sign. But if it was a bus in the community and he owned . . . there were no Black bus drivers - all white. There were no Black police officers - all white . . . if you were riding the bus in Third Ward from my house to school, you could sit anywhere as long as there were no white or Hispanics. Hispanics were considered white. No whites, no Hispanics. If whites or Hispanics got on that bus, you had to get up and move to the back or move to . . . didn't have the front seats.

JRW: Get out of the way.

ZB: Get out of the way. That is what happened with the Rosa Parks situation. She was sitting . . . white person gets on, you've got to get up.

JRW: Did you ever not get up?

ZB: I was never on a bus that there was not enough room. Whenever they got on, there was always enough room in the back. Now, I always liked sitting . . . you know when you get on a bus, there are those first rows that are facing, I always liked sitting on them. I got on the bus once . . . my mother used to say the same thing, "Why do you want to be Black?" I used to wear that dark powder. "Why so hard?"

JRW: Trying to darken yourself?

ZB: Something else inside of me. If you look at that picture, I'm in an Afro wig. My mother . . . "Why do you do that?"

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JRW: Is your hair too straight to fro?

ZB: Right. It is too straight to 'fro. As a kid, I always wanted to be chocolate and maybe it was because people were always mistaking me . . . white people, they always assumed . . . Black people, when I walked . . . you know, we know each other. White people thought I was Hispanic. And I remember on the bus once, I was sitting . . . no, I got on the bus and a Black person was sitting on those facing rows and the bus driver told her to get up. I was a young kid. So, I paid my money and went all the way back to the colored side.

JRW: Intentionally?

ZB: Intentionally.

JRW: Because of what had happened?

ZB: Because he was going to make that Black person get up. And, like I said, I would ride the bus back and forth to the school or wherever you ride the bus. So, I had seen the bus driver before. But I noticed they don't speak to children and you sure didn't speak when you got on the bus . . . I put my money in and sat right in that front seat. I liked sitting on that front seat.

JRW: You were just that little Mexican girl always riding the bus!

ZB: Just that little Mexican girl who rides the bus! When I got on the bus this day, there was a Black person sitting there and he told them to get up.

JRW: You had to show your true colors.

ZB: I didn't say anything but I went all the way behind the sign.

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JRW: You showed your true colors.

ZB: Yes, and I quit sitting on the front of the bus and went all the way to the back. From then on I'd go all the way and set on the back of the bus. Always an issue with me that don't mistake me . . . it wasn't nothing against anybody else but I always wanted to be who I was.

JRW: Free to be who you are.

ZB: Free to be who I am and what I am. You know, I don't want to be mistaken. This is who I am. So now, give me some of that dark . . . you wouldn't remember because you didn't wear makeup.

JRW: No, I didn't!

ZB: Right. But girls in particular, they wore a special powder kind of makeup, always got caught under here.

JRW: I have seen darker skinned women wearing the pancake stuff where they are trying to look lighter but just looking like they've got this light colored makeup on.

ZB: I wear pancake dark ... stop it right under here.

JRW: Like a minstrel.

ZB: My mother used to say "why do you do that?" I don't know. And, like I say, in my early years practicing law, I wore an Afro wig. It is who I am.

JRW: Where was your church, St. Nicholas? What part of town was that?

ZB: Live Oak and Polk.

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JRW: O.K., it is at the north end of Third Ward.

ZB: Right, and we lived over on Winbern right across the street from Blackshear. [Elementary School]. So, I would have to go to the corner of Ennis and Holman, or Delano and Holman to catch the bus and ride. So anywhere we went we caught the bus and went on to school, to the movies, went to church.

JRW: I know that Black folks didn't live north of Alabama traditionally.

ZB: Didn't live south of Alabama.

JRW: I am sorry - didn't live *south* of Alabama, but were there white folks that lived north of Alabama in the so-called Black community?

ZB: No. I don't remember any. The only white folks I ever remember seeing as a kid were . . . I tell people I was 30 years old before I had an intelligent conversation with a white person. And the bus drivers, police officers, priest at the school and Black nuns.

JRW: But the priests were white?

ZB: The priests were white. Other than the priests . . .

JRW: What about the neighborhood stores, the little . . .

ZB: They were Italian. All the Italians owned all of the grocery stores, so they were white.

JRW: Did they live above the stores?

ZB: I think they did. I know on Winbern and Ennis . . . if they didn't live above, they lived next door. And there was another one - the Delano Food Store on Delano and

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Alabama - I think they lived next door. I think both situations - a house next door and they lived right next door the store.

JRW: Those would be perhaps the only instances though where we would find of European descent actually living amongst . . .

ZB: Living amongst us. That was because they handled the stores. They were white but they were fairly comfortable living in the community. The kids were friendly to the Black kids. But otherwise, no white people. I remember my mother on the phone, "Yes, ma'am. No, ma'am."

JRW: Talking to the store?

ZB: No, talking to the people she worked for.

JRW: Oh, is that right?

ZB: My father was a "Yes, ma'am. No, ma'am" always. My father would hang the phone up and cuss. He is a very proud . . . but he was a hard working man. Always two jobs.

JRW: He'd say, "Yes, sir," but know that he didn't mean it.

ZB: He didn't mean it. No, he was a very proud man. He'd say, "Yes, sir," but no, he didn't mean it. A free spirit also, like I say. My father wore a chauffeur's cap, the man next doo to me wore a chauffeur's cap, Dudley wore a chauffeur's cap, my uncle wore a chauffeur's cap, my godfather wore a chauffeur's - all were chauffeurs. Out there at River Oaks because people hadn't moved to Memorial then. River Oaks . . . they were all chauffeurs out there in River Oaks when I was a little girl coming up, so they all had that

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suit, tie and chauffeur's cap on.

JRW: Actually, that would be considered in the day, a prestigious working class job.

Didn't have to get dirty.

ZB: Back then, we got the post office and the teachers later on, the mailman later on.

JRW: But the porters and the chauffeurs . . .

ZB: The porters and the chauffeurs. I mean, they got to take them to the fine restaurants and got some leftovers, I guess, and they drove them to the bank. My father would drive them to California, he would drive to Denver. He would drive across country. He was the chauffeur to . . . there weren't a lot of airplanes. They drove in the car. Someone would chauffeur across the country.

JRW: Were there Black businesses on Dowling or were there white businesses on Dowling or was it a mixture?

ZB: There were Black businesses on Dowling. The pawn shop, what is the name of that?

JRW: Wolfs.

ZB: Always on Dowling. Always a white .. always had Blacks in there.

JRW: Working in there?

ZB: Yes. But Wolfs was there. The cab company was there, Black Cab Company. Is it the Masonic temple?

JRW: Yes.

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ZB: Dentists, doctors were on Dowling. There was an office building on Dowling. And maybe the Black office building is still there. Lawyers are there. Across from Wesley Chapel Church. The dentists and doctors were in that building. But there were Black businesses all . . .

JRW: And Almeda was . . .

ZB: Barber shops. Beauty shops. Black.

JRW: Also, did Kermit Kyle's father have a clothing store or something on Dowling?

ZB: May have. I will tell you who is on that now is Caldwell. Kirby John's father is over there now.

JRW: O.K., by the El Dorado?

ZB: Yes.

JRW: Or, I guess, he was on Dowling proper . . .

ZB: No, he was on Elgin.

JRW: On Elgin there at the El Dorado?

ZB: Right. Caldwell's tailors.

JRW: So, he had been there forever.

ZB: Bobby Bland. Right.

JRW: O.K. If you played upstairs, he did your

ZB: Well, if he played anywhere. There was a time that . . . because there were other clubs they played but . . .

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JRW: But Caldwell Tailors was it.

ZB: There was the time when you couldn't go to Sakowitz. The entertainers all had their clothes made because they could afford to do the tailoring right. But they couldn't go to Niemans and buy a suit. They couldn't go anywhere and buy a suit so they had their clothes tailored. He tailored for all of the entertainers and for women, too, he did the tailoring. So, right. Shoe shops. I remember shoe shops on Dowling. I mean, you couldn't go in and buy a pair of shoes at . . .

JRW: A self-contained community.

ZB: Self-contained community. Like I said, I grew up in a self-contained community.

JRW: You had the Mack Hannah financial institution and all there.

ZB: Correct. But that is what you'd hear - some of the issues of change in fourth ward and we used to own and we used to have our businesses and we thrived in Third Ward, Dowling Street. It is a self-contained community now. Would I go to John Does shoe shop on Dowling as opposed to going and getting a pair of Ferragamos? Not that I can afford a pair of Ferragamos.

JRW: Yes. I tried that one year with my kids with Christmas and we decided we are going to . . .

ZB: Difficult.

JRW: Ended up out at Sharpstown after . . .

ZB: No, not these classy shoes.

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JRW: Good try! We were really determined that that Christmas, we were not going to . . . we were living on Wheeler, I guess it was 1980 whatever, or something like that, and we were just determined we were going to keep that money in the community.

ZB: Yes, like I said, there are a lot of . . . see, it has changed and the gentrification but if you think about it, how do we redo some of the areas: Dowling. Alameda seems to be catching on and I really would like to be able to see a study on how we redo Dowling, how we bring interest back.

JRW: Alameda was white?

ZB: Alameda was white when I was coming up, like I said. Then, it converted to Black and then it just went down. But coming up for me, Alameda was white. Like I said, we didn't come this far over. You look at the houses ... different. The circle was maybe as far up as 45. If you look at the housing all in 45, it is right up in there. That is where I went to school. All the way back to Alabama. That housing towards maybe as far as Cullen, U of H owns most of that now but you just look at the housing and the difference. And if you come all the way to Alamedastopped on Dowling. We didn't come much further across Dowling Street. Difference in the housing. No, Dowling was our street.

JRW: Yes, and you had no need to come much further, I guess, actually.

ZB: Unless you were going to work but other than that . . .

JRW: Where did you grocery shop?

ZB: Coming up as a young kid, I really don't remember a whole lot about where we shopped. For a period of time, as a young adult, on Blodgett where the Rice Food

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Market. . .

JRW: By the bank, yes.

ZB: Yes, there is a Rice Food Market. There is a big Rice Food Market. I remember, not as a young adult but maybe then as a teenager, my mother - we would go into that Rice. And then, on Almeda, opened . . .

JRW: There was a Weingarten down there where the post office is now, I think.

ZB: The post office is there now but that is where the TSU kids . . .

JRW: Sat at the lunch counter.

ZB: Yes, right. We came up Wheeler, marched up Wheeler to that Weingartens. While we shopped in there, we could not stop and eat in there. There was a Weingartens and a Rice.

JRW: Where did you do your dry cleaning?

ZB: Probably in a little business that was on Dowling. I can only tell you that Scientific Cleaners . . .

JRW: They just closed this past few months.

ZB: Yes, right. When his uncle .. its not his father. Kelly closed the club. When Rayfield [Lawrence] was alive, I dealt with Scientific Cleaners in these 40 years from the time they opened, and they were initially right across the street from Cuney Homes. So, I dealt with them from the time they opened until they closed, when his uncle started the business and owned the business and they moved to Dowling. So, I guess prior to that

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we probably would have had some old Black dry cleaners. I'll tell you, too, what I remember if I think about it, that area right where the Cuney Homes ... right across from Cuney Homes, there was like a little five and dime store. I can't remember what we called it. It was white owned but they had like . . . the Dollar Store. They had little stuff like. They had little stuff, come to think about it.

JRW: Now, where was this, on what street is that? When you say across from the Cuney Homes, you talking about on the Elgin side or the Tierwester side?

ZB: Elgin side. Not quite as far as Elgin. There was a little five and dime.

JRW: Just up over the tracks?

ZB: I can't remember what they called it because I used to love to go in that little Five and Dime store right by the tracks. You know, we'd go out those tracks, we'd walk up those tracks right on in to the Cuney Homes. But no, my aunt lived in the Cuney Homes, my mother's sister. So, we'd go there every Saturday and bring . . . because they had playgrounds.

JRW: What about Emancipation Park? Was that part of your world?

ZB: I learned to swim in Emancipation Park.

JRW: Oh, is that right?

ZB: That is where I learned to swim, my brother learned to swim. Absolutely. Emancipation Park used to have stuff, activities. But yes, we would go. I learned to swim in Emancipation Park. My brother and me. But it was, like I said . . . I don't know why we didn't go to Hermann Park but we didn't. Was it integrated? I don't know. We

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went to the zoo.

JRW: That was desegregated. And was it a colored day that you could go there?

ZB: I don't think so. You could go to the zoo at any time. My father would take the time. He liked the zoo so he took us to the zoo, but I never remember Hermann Park. But Emancipation Park.

JRW: Well, that is a good question - at what point did it . . . it seems like somewhere in my research, that there was a colored day for the zoo up until some point.

ZB: There may have been a colored day. Like I said, it may be the only colored day that we went. I remember the monkeys. I don't remember the people.

JRW: That general access to the park was severely limited.

ZB: I thought it was.

JRW: And what elementary did you go to?

ZB: It is called St. Nicholas School.

JRW: And you went there all the way through what?

ZB: 11th grade, and then they put my ass out pregnant.

JRW: You were pregnant at the Catholic school.

ZB: The Catholic school! My oldest sister graduated from St. Nicholas. My brother, who is 2 years behind me, left in my junior year and went to Yates. My younger sister left maybe in junior high. Maybe they went to Ryan and then Yates. They probably went to Ryan 7th grade. Sharon, St. Mary's up until the 4th grade and then I took her

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over to, not Turner but the street . . . Lockhart. Then, I ran her out to Lanier for 2 years and brought her back to Yates. So, I brought her back to Yates. All of her classmates went to Lamar. I remember they approached me . . . "Why would you do that?" I'm here to stay and the only way you change it is if you stayed there. Upgrade Yates. Lift the bar. Yates. You can't just take you better students out ... always a part of

JRW: Well, I just want to thank you so much for the University of Houston oral history project, coming out of the University of Houston Public History Program.

ZB: Although I am not there, I loved my years at the University of Houston. You know how I feel about TSU. It was, yes, I had some hesitation. But even so, like I say, Alex Schilt, if you ever . . . I don't know if you know him. Look him up. He is over there. Alex Schilt was so genuine.

JRW: He was president at the time . . .

ZB: He was president and Pickering worked right under him.

JRW: O.K., great. Well, thank you.