

## **Joyce Bell- 23/01/2020**

(this transcript is the edited version, edits completed by Ms Bell, October 2021. Transcribed by JB, October 21)

### **When and where were you born?**

I was born in August 1954 in Marvell, Arkansas, a small town about 90 miles outside of Little Rock. My parents had ten children- the oldest died a few hours after birth. There were eight girls and two boys. I am a twin of one of my brothers. We also had a half-brother.

### **Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Washington, D.C. from 1960-1969. My half-brother left Arkansas, moved to D.C. and later convinced my dad to join him so he did. My mom told me after dad left and said he'll be sending for us later. I started crying "let's not go to CAGO." Being the age I was I did not know about Chicago or where I was. Mom also said she told me that we were not moving to Chicago so I stopped crying. While in D.C., mom had her last three kids- all girls. I attended D.C.'s public schools. We lived on Oakdale Place, N.W. Looking back, it reminds me of "Brewster's Place", a movie starring Oprah Winfrey, Robin Givens, Jackee, and more, because it dead-ended at a brick wall. The wall separated us from a dormitory of Howard University's male students. After a year or two, we moved around the corner to a larger house on 3<sup>rd</sup> St, N.W. From there we moved to another bigger house on F St, S.E. While in D.C. my dad got hurt on his job, a little before or after JFK's assassination, which later sometime after his healing we found out that his mother had become ill. My aunt was going to move to D.C. so my grandmother would have someone at home to look after her, but my dad insisted that he would move the family to Chicago since he could not work anymore. So I cried again because I did not want to go to CAGO. But we moved there anyway in 1969. People ask me why I did not want to move to Chicago- well, today I still can not exactly say why, just not sure at all. My grandmother died seven months or so after we moved to Chicago. I finished school in Chicago, got married, had a daughter, and got divorced. My dad died seven years after his mom. In Chicago, we lived on W Washington Blvd. Later the family moved to S. 86<sup>th</sup> St. I lived SE on Paxton. Growing up in Chicago was not easy but I learned and saw so much, which is why I am a strong person. And I thank God my brothers and sisters did not get involved with gangs. I just see Chicago as a city of mobsters and gangs living up to its reputation portrayed from back in the days during Prohibition and the Mafia. It's cold, it's rundown, and very dangerous. Yet, they have or had some of the best food and places to go out and party, but you had to be careful. My first job in Chicago was as a nurse's aide. Afterwards, I got into food service while I attended Medical Career Institute to further my education in the medical field. After I finished at Medical Career Institute, my aunt was talking about moving back to Arkansas and she did in 1980.

## **Living in Arkansas Again**

When my aunt did move back, I felt that was my cue to move away from Chicago. So, six months after my aunt moved to Arkansas, I asked if I could come and she agreed. I got everything I needed together and moved. While there, I got my first job again at a nursing home and I was not satisfied how the patients were treated so I found a job as a medical receptionist at the community hospital. After working at the hospital for two years, they closed it up and I started working at a wood plant that made bedroom furniture. Being in Arkansas everyone seemed to be kin, so I had people saying they were my cousins, but I knew they were not. It was interesting getting to know where I was born. The house most of us kids lived in still stood, but was empty, not really fit to live in. Small town with nothing to do or places to go. It was so quiet that during the evening all you heard was the sound of frogs, crickets, and other animals. There was a community store, grocery store, furniture store, restaurant, post office, a liquor store, two juke joints that sold beer only, a funeral home, two church, and the elementary school, junior high, and high school. We had to go to Helena, Arkansas, which is about 30 to 45 minutes away to have a few more choices of stores, restaurant, hospitals, jobs, and places to party, Other than that, it was just another town a little bigger than another. While in Arkansas, I got married for the second time. My daughter finished high school, had a baby, got married, and moved to Texas. Again I went to school at Forest City Community Collee and was studying Psychology/Criminal Justice. After I year, I gave up. By now the wood plant that made the bedroom furniture burnt down and not having transportation of my own and no public transportation either, I had to collect unemployment. My marriage was not going well either so I had to make some changes in my life. My aunt took ill and she passed away in February 1988. My daughter and I talked about me moving to Texas because there were plenty of jobs there so I told her I would think about it. My marriage did not make things any better and me being a go-getter, I decided to go to Texas in April 1988.

## **My Move to Texas**

Since my aunt passed away, my sister wanted to go to Texas with me. We left on a Friday, just a week before the end of April. That Monday I went job hunting. My first stop was at DFW Airport and I got hired on and started the next day. I again worked in Food Service at the airport for over a year. There was no public transportation in Arlington, TX so I had to depend on my daughter and son in law to get to work and they too were working at the airport. Our schedules were all different so that put a lot of wear and tear on their car. A new Mexican restaurant was opening soon, not far from where we lived. When the restaurant started taking applications, I filled one out and got hired. My sister did not seek work until a month or two after we moved to Texas. By the end of the year, my sister and I had enough to move into our own apartment and get a car. Things were ok for a while and I still wanted to do more and find something to make more money so I went back to school. This time I attended Mansfield Vocational school and took a computerized accounting class in 1989 and finished in 1990. As I was trying to figure out

exactly what I wanted to do, I came to a conclusion that I had lived in 3 states and really was not satisfied: the cold weather in D.C. and Chicago; had friends in D.C. and Arkansas, but none in Chicago; too quiet in Arkansas with nothing to do; no public transportation in Arkansas or Texas; missing something in D.C. and Chicago; liking the weather in Arkansas and Texas so I knew I did want to stay somewhere war, that had public transportation, with places to go, but where I did not know. There was a friend from Arkansas living in Texas that went to Mansfield Vocational that said she wanted to move to Atlanta after she finished school. I thought about it, then told my daughter and sister I might moved to Georgia. My sister said she would move with me. In June 1990, we moved, along with our friends from Arkansas the day after graduation.

### **My Move to Georgia**

On June 18, we moved to Georgia and got an apartment in Clarkston, off Ponce de Leon and Brockett Road, in the Tahoe Apartments complex. Moving into the apartment, we had help from two guys that lived across the hall from our apartment and a guy from the building next door. After the truck was unloaded, they brought some sandwiches and cocktails over and introduced themselves and welcomed us. The next day we started getting things in order and later that evening, we walked around the complex to get a view of it. That weekend we went out to a club called Chit Chats- had a great time! We were told about several places to go, but we ended up at Chit Chats off of Candler Road/Amber. Not sure why but not even three months of being here, my sister left and went back to Arkansas. The friend moved out in February 1991 so I was left by myself. I was going out seeing employment and kept seeing a young lady either coming or going to all the places I was at until I stopped her and said we must be destined to meet. We introduced ourselves and exchanged phone numbers. After communicating for a couple of months, she invited me to go with her to play cards, listen to some oldies and meet some others, who had the same interests as me. I got a job working at KFC on Ponce de Leon on the corner of Brockett, walking distance from the complex I lived in. I worked there until I got a call from IBM. All was not well because my sister and friend left me, but I was determined to make it. The people I was introduced to by the young lady I met turned out to be the best, most wonderful people I've ever met and today we are still friends. This is when I met Dorothy. After my sister and friend left me, I had to get a smaller apartment so I got one on Brockett right across from Tahoe apartments. At a community meeting, I talked with someone about this organization I overheard her talking about so she gave me her boyfriend's number because he was a member. Talking to him, I felt like I should get involved with the organization, meet new people, get connected, and stay in Georgia. The organization was the Black Newcomers Network (aka BNN) that started in 1988. I joined in March 1991 and during my joining I really started feeling I was at home. Meeting Dorothy and BNN, I felt really welcome and accepted.

## **My Involvement with BNN**

BNN is a non-profit organization that was run by people who came from other cities or states to help newcomers feel welcomed to the metro area. They were founded in April 1988. We helped raise money for GPTV, UNICEF, Junior Achievement; we adopted a nursing home and a school; during Thanksgiving and Christmas we gave food and clothing to families at the school we adopted. We started an ice cream social at the nursing home and donated socks, blankets, and other items to the patients. During our elections I became Eastside Chairperson. Throughout the years of my membership I held the roles of Chairperson of Community Service, Membership, and Publicity. We were also connected with other Black organizations and formed The Onyx Coalition. BNN was the only organization that had members from a variety of professions while the other ones were of one kind, like lawyers, doctors, etc. I was a member for almost 15 years.

## **My outlook overall**

Growing up was not so bad, but as I got older I guess I saw so many bad things not only outside my home, but also inside it. So I learned quite a lot of things like wanting to be better, stronger, and an achiever. I learned something about myself in each state I lived. I was very shy but I observed and heard so much, knowing I could do and be better. I thank God me or my siblings were not involved in the gangs and violence in Chicago. Living in Arkansas I found peace and quiet; Texas let me know that I had some prejudice in me because every guy who tried to date me was no an American Black man. While in D.C. I saw how my dad beat my mom and I swore that would never happen to me. And last but not least I found happiness and the meaning of friendship even though the same things goes on here as it does everywhere else. I called this home. The other places I just lived there, but I have friends from each place that I'm still in contact with.

## **Hobbies/Interests**

I love to travel, dance, word games, volunteering, writing poetry, and card games, especially Bid Whist.

## **Closing Statements**

Looking back over the years living here and there I call Atlanta home and that is because I survived. From the very first day I felt welcomed. I have learned to appreciate the contentment of my life, just living simple and happy. I have found true friendship. I am more knowledgeable of how to open up and be who I was meant to be. Even though all is not perfect, I have peace, love, and everyday things to keep functioning. I feel blessed and wanted, accepted, and appreciated by the people I met here in Atlanta.

Meeting Pam, who introduced to some card players, where I met Dorothy, Tony, Gloria, Jene, Bev, Butch, Deborah, and others have become my family. Joining BNN taught me to speak up and speak, gave me confidence to do and go places to enjoy myself. And putting the two groups together has been a blessing because we all joined together in doing things and going places together so my family has grown so much. The ones I met in Chicago, Arkansas, D.C., and Texas are still connected. I even met a couple on my first cruise. We are still in contact with each other. I am blessed and courageous now. I'm happy and live in peace, treated well and loved. Thank God for what He's done for me and for what He will do in my future.