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Berkeley, California

Valvia Jefferson

Rosie the Riveter

World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by  
Sam Redman  
in 2012

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Interview 1: April 11, 2012

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Redman: All right, my name is Sam Redman and I'm in Richmond, California today, with Valvia Jefferson. Today is April 11, 2012, and today we'll be talking primarily about Valvia's time as a student at the Maritime Child Development Center in Richmond. But before we dive into that, I'd like to ask, if you wouldn't mind, just stating and spelling your name for me.

01-00:00:31

Jefferson: Okay. All right, Sam. My name is Valvia Galloway-Jefferson.

Redman: Could you spell Valvia?

01-00:00:38

Jefferson: Yes, I will. Valvia is capital V, as in victory, A-L-V-I-A.

Redman: And your middle name?

01-00:00:45

Jefferson: Peyonne, P-E-Y-O-N-N-E.

Redman: And your last name.

01-00:00:50

Jefferson: Galloway, G-A-L-L-O-W-A-Y, hyphen, Jefferson, J-E-F-F-E-R-S-O-N.

Redman: Terrific. Okay. When and where were you born?

01-00:01:01

Jefferson: I was born the year of 1957, April the 26<sup>th</sup> or the 27<sup>th</sup>, in San Pablo, California, which was Brookside Hospital, which is no longer there.

Redman: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents and how they arrived in Richmond, California? Were they born here, or did they come here?

01-00:01:25

Jefferson: My mother and father migrated from Arkansas, from the South.

Redman: From Arkansas.

01-00:01:33

Jefferson: From Arkansas. Then in 1943, originally, my grandfather came out. He and my uncle and my father came out together, to scout the place; and then years later, they went back and got my mom and they came out here.

Redman: Okay, so they're part of this great story that's called the second great migration—

01-00:02:01  
Jefferson:

Exactly.

Redman:

—of African Americans.

01-00:02:02  
Jefferson:

That's right. That's about right, yeah.

Redman:

So can you tell me a bit about how your family talked about that, then, when you were a small girl? Did they talk about the war bringing them out for jobs and sort of the story of coming out first?

01-00:02:20  
Jefferson:

Well, let me share this with you. I have no problem in talking about my grandfather. When I talk about him, it's from what has been instilled in me. It wasn't stories; it was more of the reality of how we came to who we are.

Redman:

I see.

01-00:02:43  
Jefferson:

Okay? My grandfather's name was Paul Revere Linsy and his nickname was Spurgeon. And my grandmother's name was LeEthel—Bush is her maiden name—Linsy. And this is my grandfather.

Redman:

Oh, okay.

01-00:03:04  
Jefferson:

He was a welder-carpenter of North Richmond.

Redman:

I see.

01-00:03:11  
Jefferson:

He welded for Kaiser shipyard.

Redman:

So how had he received his training in welding and carpentry? Do you know that story?

01-00:03:22  
Jefferson:

I'm going to tell you this. My grandfather built, not so much as his house, but many homes in Richmond. He did not know how to read a blueprint.

Redman:

Wow!

01-00:03:31  
Jefferson:

He was very crafty. He retired at seventy years old. He built his own house. And he built it for my grandmother, LeEthel Linsy. He basically, with all of his friends, they got together— One, I know, Mr. Joe, specialized in electricity, the electrical part. But Grandfather had the knack for the carpenter part. He taught me how to use a hammer. At seventy years, when he retired

from physically working nine to five every day, he started his own cabinet making. He made cabinets, he built cabinets.

Redman: So by the time you came along, was he already working in cabinets?

01-00:03:22

Jefferson: When I was born, Grandfather was fifty-two years old.

Redman: Okay, so he was still building houses for some time.

01-00:04:29

Jefferson: He was still building houses. During that time, too, our family had grocery stores. When Grandfather came out, the way the story is told is that they bought a piece of property in North Richmond for fifty dollars, and they fixed up a house, a shack with cardboard. Cardboard and aluminum and stucco, or whatever. Scrappings, in other words. And that's what they had, until they built, finally, a home. What can I say? We had grocery stores. I remember so clearly, working in the grocery store, behind the counter.

Redman: Oh, that's great. So we'll get to that in just a moment. Let me ask, did your grandfather ever talk about the differences for him, of living in California versus living in Arkansas? Did he ever share those stories?

01-00:05:31

Jefferson: Yes.

Redman: Can you tell me about that?

01-00:05:33

Jefferson: Yes. Let me think of a standing-out story that he used to tell, of how in Arkansas, there was a means of doing what you had to do, as far as working in the field. My mom used to work in the field with them. My aunt, she had to stay inside the house. She had a handicap—her eyes—so she couldn't work in the field. So my mom worked in the field. Grandfather didn't have any boys, so my mom was more or less very, very industrious.

Redman: Was she kind of tom-boyish, almost?

01-00:06:11

Jefferson: Yeah, yeah. Even to this day, she's still considered to be that of she will outdo you, when it comes to even lifting.

Redman: Sure, I see.

01-00:06:23

Jefferson: Yes, very, very strong woman.

Redman: Okay. Then so they were in—

01-00:06:30  
Jefferson: They worked in the fields. He did things like picking cotton, he ran what they called the— Oh, like churning. It was something like—

Redman: Like a cotton gin?

01-00:06:49  
Jefferson: Yeah.

Redman: Sure. Yeah, yeah.

01-00:06:52  
Jefferson: Yeah. Yeah. So the stories around there. And the only time that we would bring them up is when he would take us back to Arkansas.

Redman: I see, okay.

01-00:07:01  
Jefferson: And that's what's more clear to me.

Redman: Sure. So you did occasionally go back with him?

01-00:07:05  
Jefferson: Oh, yeah, yeah. That was one of the things of growing up. Grandfather loved to drive. He would always drive back to Arkansas. So we would go back and we would sit up and they would churn butter. I remember churning butter, milking cows. I remember having to use an outhouse. Grandfather warned me about the outhouse.

Redman: So from your perspective, and I'm sure other kids in your generation in Richmond, you grew up with these houses now with electricity and running water and things like that.

01-00:07:29  
Jefferson: Yes. Yes.

Redman: But in Arkansas, when you visited, I assume there were still some places that maybe didn't have quite as advanced infrastructure.

01-00:07:49  
Jefferson: They were not advanced at all.

Redman: Okay.

01-00:07:51  
Jefferson: It was my grandfather's sister. She was in this home that had the cows, and I remember taking a bath in a big tub. That was in the mid-sixties, right. But however, the homes that Grandfather built out here— 610 Chesley was the home that I remember, that no longer is there. Shield-Reid Park is there now, in North Richmond.

Redman: I see.

01-00:08:17  
Jefferson:

This house had a basement. Every home on the block had a basement. Also this house had one bathroom, and the bathroom was in the back. So therefore, the bedrooms were all in the front. I remember for convenience, they had at that time, what were called pee pots. The pot was actually set on the side of the bed.

Redman: Wow!

01-00:08:43  
Jefferson:

Yeah, pee pots. So I remember it was one of my chores or duties to make sure the pee pot is clean. Hexol, which I use to this day—

Redman: Okay, to clean everything, yeah.

01-00:08:52  
Jefferson:

You dilute it a little bit with water; I set it on the side. So those two things: make sure the pee pot was there and the spittoon.

Redman: Okay. Can you explain, for those who might not know what a spittoon is, what's a spittoon?

01-00:09:04  
Jefferson:

Oh. Can I show you?

Redman: Well, maybe tell me about it and then we'll look at it in a little bit.

01-00:09:08  
Jefferson:

Okay. Well, I have a spittoon. It was my grandmother's original spittoon. My grandmother passed away in 1977, and my grandfather passed away in 2005, at the age of 101. So a lot of things, a lot of memoir things that we managed to keep.

Redman: Sure. But they'd use that to spit in.

01-00:09:27  
Jefferson:

The spittoon was for snuff. My grandfather dipped Garrett's Snuff. My grandmother dipped Garrett's snuff.

Redman: Really? Okay.

01-00:09:34  
Jefferson:

Yes. Bitter snuff, at that, the white label. I keep it over there. As a little—

Redman: A little memento.

01-00:09:40  
Jefferson:

I have a little a can, yeah, a little memento.

Redman: Okay, so that was one of their habits.

01-00:09:44  
Jefferson:

That was their habit, yes. And they would actually put snuff under their lip, between their lip and teeth. So you would know that you had a spittoon in the house, which was a pan, a copper pan, a pot that you spit in.

Redman: This is a little bit of a different tack, but was your grandfather happy to be in California?

01-00:10:08  
Jefferson:

Oh, he *loved* California. Oh, *yeah!*

Redman: Yeah.

01-00:10:12  
Jefferson:

Grandfather *loved* California. His thing was, shoot, I wouldn't go back to Arkansas if someone paid me.

Redman: Okay, so those visits, that must've been a pretty clear difference.

01-00:10:23  
Jefferson:

That was what you had to do. You had to go back and see your family.

Redman: And how about for you, then, as a young girl, growing up and seeing that generational difference, and then also the geographical difference, from what life was like for African Americans in the South, versus what life was like for African Americans in California? Can you talk about that awareness?

01-00:10:47  
Jefferson:

For me, being able to travel to the South and come back to California allowed me to appreciate California and appreciate the laws, to know my rights. I constantly carry a title—even to this day, I keep a constitution, US Constitution in my purse. The reason, I tend to be an outspoken person. So I learned that how I carry myself and how I present myself or what I might say here in California, I can't do it there. But as a young person, I didn't know that. 2004's the last time I visited Arkansas. Actually went to the hot springs and got some spring water, and I brought the spring water back to my grandfather. Brought him back some spring water from Hot Springs, and I brought it back to my aunt and uncle.

Redman: Was there a moment when that occurred to you, that some of the things that you could do and say in California, where you could speak your mind, maybe, to a more open extent, that that wasn't possible in the South? Did someone say something, or was there sort of a turning point?

01-00:11:57  
Jefferson:

It was not so much of a turning point; it was called when you teach your child. That was what was taught to us, as all the kids. We knew that.

Redman: So maybe on the car ride to Arkansas or something, it would be explained to you that there would be certain differences.

01-00:12:19

Jefferson: I'm going to put it like this. Grandfather, literally, he loved to drive. Sometimes fast. His thing was, if you're ever stopped by a police officer, you just be quiet. They would do all the talking—they, meaning the adults—would do all the talking. I'd just basically observe. That was something that I had no problem doing. I was a great observer. I stayed in the company of older people. I didn't too much hang out with my peers.

Redman: Can you talk a little bit about your earliest memories, then, in Richmond? And we'll get into a little bit, if you'd like, your earliest memories of school, and we can get into if you recall starting off at the Richmond childcare center, the Maritime Center.

01-00:13:17

Jefferson: Maritime Nystrom School, that's how I know of it. Maritime, I remember the hallway when you enter. Soon as you enter, there's a certain aroma, a smell. It was that of the Malt-O-Meal.

Redman: Is that right? The Malt-O-Meal?

01-00:13:35

Jefferson: Malt-O-Meal.

Redman: For breakfast.

01-00:13:37

Jefferson: For breakfast. Malt-O-Meal. And I remember tomato juice and pineapple juice. No milk. I don't remember milk. I think there was something about the dairy products that was somewhat limited.

Redman: Interesting. Okay.

01-00:13:53

Jefferson: I only remember what stood out to me. But I'm a milk lover. I remember that is where I acquired my taste for tomato juice.

Redman: Interesting.

01-00:14:03

Jefferson: And Malt-O-Meal, I could not find Malt-O-Meal today. And I tried to, going to the stores. Malt-O-Meal is not there.

Redman: So tomato juice, just an example—this is interesting—so that might not have been something that your parents enjoyed or had at home, but that was something you saw at school for the first time.

01-00:14:24  
Jefferson:

At school, at school.

Redman:

That's very interesting.

01-00:14:26  
Jefferson:

I remember tomato juice.

Redman:

So let's talk a little bit about, if it's all right, everyday life and routine in those ages. So you had guessed for us, in your pre-interview— And I understand that these memories are hard to pin down on some details; that's fine. But you think you were probably about ages five, six and seven, between about 1963 to 1965?

01-00:14:52  
Jefferson:

Okay. I was born in '57. Okay? So born in '57, so 1961, my father passed away. My father, Hosie Galloway, he passed away. So after '61, that is when I started attending the Maritime Nystrom School.

Redman:

Were you living with your mother, then, at that time?

01-00:15:19  
Jefferson:

I was living with my mom, yes. In 1961, at that time, it was a total of my oldest brother; myself; my next brother, Hosie; and my brother Xavier.

Redman:

So when your father died, was that a bit of a shock to your mother?

01-00:15:41  
Jefferson:

I'll put it like this. My mom very seldom would discuss the whole event. All I can do is remember, because he was in the military. He collapsed in Hong Kong, if I'm not mistaken, the way how it was explained. When he passed away, he was at the military base. My mom did not want to go and view. They had to have the next of kin to—

Redman:

View the body or confirm the body.

01-00:16:15  
Jefferson:

—confirm the body. So my grandfather and everybody else had to. The way I was told, either she stayed in the car or stayed; didn't want to go in to see him.

Redman:

That was too emotional.

01-00:16:28  
Jefferson:

Yeah, very emotional for her. I even remember the services, in 1961.

Redman:

Interesting.

01-00:16:33  
Jefferson:

As a child. They had him in a sealed kind of a casket. I remember my mom sitting on the bench of the church and she had on all black and had a black

veil. The image of her, it stood out, to whereas I never forgot it. Well, I *had* forgot the image of that. And the last time that I remember that image, next time until now that it came up again, is when I saw Coretta Scott King.

Redman: Is that right?

01-00:17:06

Jefferson: Because she had on the same type of black veil, draped.

Redman: And that reminded you of your mother.

01-00:17:11

Jefferson: And that reminded me of my mom.

Redman: Tell me, were you aware that your dad was in the military, at a young age?

01-00:17:17

Jefferson: Yes. Yes.

Redman: So was he in the Navy or the Army or—

01-00:17:21

Jefferson: Actually, he was a TA in the US Navy. Then he was a Merchant Seaman.

Redman: Okay. So that's what brought him overseas.

01-00:17:33

Jefferson: Correct.

Redman: So then at the actual services, then, you recall that sort of vague memory.

01-00:17:41

Jefferson: Yeah. I remember that, I remember the flag being given to my mom, and I remember my twin aunts, they were carrying on. I remember being picked up so I could see him in the casket. Other than that, that's it.

Redman: That's it.

01-00:17:59

Jefferson: That's it.

Redman: That's it. Now, things, I imagine, were very trying for your family after that. Can you explain, for someone who didn't live through that, how that might've been a challenge for a young mom with several children, in Richmond, African American, in the sixties? Explain for someone, what that must've been like.

01-00:18:25  
Jefferson: What it was, was the real concept of how it takes a community to raise a child. Or a village, community, whatever. From what I understand, it was a community. Community-slash-church.

Redman: Sure.

01-00:18:42  
Jefferson: All I know is family.

Redman: Can you talk about what church your—

01-00:18:47  
Jefferson: Oh. The church in my youth was North Richmond Missionary Baptist Church, 1427 Filbert Street, in Richmond, California.

Redman: So how was the church important, then, in your lives, once your father passed away?

01-00:19:01  
Jefferson: Let me tell you this. My grandfather made it very clear that because of my father's passing— Had it been *him* passing, that my father, along with my uncle, would assume the responsibility of the family. So the pastor of my church, Reverend C.W. Newsome, made it clear to me that he had made a promise to my father to take care of his children. So that told me right off the top, that everyone was in this together.

Redman: Was that a big moment for you, as a small child, to hear that someone had made this promise to your dad? That seems like a powerful thing, potentially.

01-00:19:51  
Jefferson: All of those things *then*, I didn't—

Redman: It kind of blurs together?

01-00:19:55  
Jefferson: I didn't understand that to be powerful. I thought that's the way it's supposed to be.

Redman: I see. Okay, yeah.

01-00:20:00  
Jefferson: It wasn't until I grew up, that I found out that I was very privileged, in a sense, to be under that type of dome or connected. To me, that's my royalty.

Redman: I see.

01-00:20:16  
Jefferson: That's part of my legacy, what my legacy is. I'm part of this legacy, a great legacy.

Redman: So the pastor— Did you say Pastor Newsome?

01-00:20:25  
Jefferson:

Reverend C.W. Newsome.

Redman: Can you talk about then, just a little, how that relationship then continued with your family? Over the next few years, did you guys continue with the church and that? So that served as a good point.

01-00:20:38  
Jefferson:

Yes. When I say in the church, we actually worked in the church. Sunday school, sing in the choir, Baptist Training Union—everything—vacation Bible school. If I wasn't at church, I was at school. If I wasn't at school, I was at church.

Redman: And as a young kid, did you connect with that?

01-00:21:06  
Jefferson:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Redman: Okay. So that was an important part of your life.

01-00:21:09  
Jefferson:

I was baptized at the age of thirteen. Reverend C.W. Newsome baptized me. I had the—how can I say?—divine intervention at that time, for what I know it as a child. I knew that God had covered my life and was preparing me for something greater than who I am.

Redman: Can you talk for me a bit about, in your early recollections of those days—I'm curious about what everyday life might have been like. So on a Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday, you'd wake up in the morning and it would be— You have a pretty good gaggle of kids there, and your mom. Tell me about what an average day would be like.

01-00:22:00  
Jefferson:

Well, here was our average day, if you want to say average. My mom was working. Okay. And shortly after my father passed away, my mom remarried. She remarried and she was working, at that time, in the liquor store. Bill's Liquor. She was working at Bill's Liquor. And Mom always kept housekeepers. We had housekeepers. And our housekeepers were women who would clean the house and babysit and prepare the evening meal. Mommy'll leave out instructions, this and that, but Mommy would actually cook. She insisted on doing her own cooking.

Redman: I see.

01-00:22:47  
Jefferson:

So she would cook. So basically, what the babysitter or housekeeper—her name was Mrs. McCary—what Mrs. McCary would do is, after Mommy

would leave for work, we would already be up, Mommy'd have our lunches prepared. Very seldom did we ever have to prepare our lunches. If we did, it would always be something that we wanted. Right? So therefore, never. I remember Spam, Spam meat. Spam, peaches. Mommy would have peaches.

Redman: Another thing I was going to ask was, the different types of things you grew up eating. I'm wondering if maybe you can talk a little bit about your mom's style of cooking.

01-00:23:23  
Jefferson:

Oh, yeah.

Redman: She was a cook.

01-00:23:36  
Jefferson:

She cooked like she was cooking for an army. You had seven children. Was a total of seven of us.

Redman: Wow!

01-00:23:44  
Jefferson:

Right? And my oldest brother, who at that time was a teenager, he was a student at Salesian High School. So Mom's thing was, she would cook— And this is really crazy. We would have maybe about at that time, eight chickens. They'd be whole chickens, right? And then before she was working at the liquor store, she had the grocery store. She and my grandfather, they ran the grocery store, and my uncle. They helped run the grocery store. I remember the meat market. So all fresh meat, lunch meats, all of that. It was not hard alcohol, it was all wine and beer. Beer and wine.

Redman: Oh, interesting.

01-00:24:33  
Jefferson:

Yes, during that time.

Redman: So even when she worked at the liquor store, she didn't drink hard alcohol.

01-00:24:39  
Jefferson:

No. No.

Redman: It's interesting that you guys would have wine at home. I'm wondering if the California wine—

01-00:24:49  
Jefferson:

It was Mogen David.

Redman: Oh, interesting.

01-00:24:51  
Jefferson:

Morgan[sic] David. I remember Morgan David.

Redman: There you go. Okay. Oh, interesting.

01-00:24:54  
Jefferson:

Right, right. Right, yeah, Morgan David. She worked in the liquor store before— excuse me, after the grocery stores.

Redman: Okay. Okay. Let's talk about going to school each morning. How would you get to school each morning?

01-00:25:17  
Jefferson:

During that time, I had to be dropped off by my mom. So my mom would drop me off at school.

Redman: And I understand that when each child was dropped off at the school, that they would get a quick inspection from the morning teacher, it was called. So this was one of the teachers, would make sure every child wasn't sick, or if they were sick, would send them home, and that everything was okay. Do you remember arriving at school?

01-00:25:43  
Jefferson:

Well, what I remember, arriving to school at that time, as soon as you would enter, your parents would have to sign you in. The sign-ins, you stand there. So you would go and you would leave from there. You sign in there and then your parents would walk you down to the door of your classroom. So that's how it was. Now, the nurse at that time was in a totally different office, had a little separate office. So I never would see the nurse. So as far as that part of being screened by a nurse or something first, I never knew of that.

Redman: You don't know about that.

01-00:26:14  
Jefferson:

No. No.

Redman: Can you talk about the backgrounds of the other kids and school and what you remember, then, about the other children at the school? I understand that you are either *the* first or one of the first African American students to attend the school. I wonder if that's something that occurred to you at the time.

01-00:26:42  
Jefferson:

What I used to always would say, I would say that I have been white-orientated. I base that upon being raised around white people. And yes, I had white friends. But I wasn't aware of the problem, or if it was a problem, right? In other words, it was like I had this pure innocence. Right? And it wasn't until maybe third grade that I realized that something is different here. But my parents would always instill in me that you're privileged, in order to do this.

Redman: In order to go to school—

01-00:27:28  
Jefferson: To go to that school. But I didn't know what that meant.

Redman: Interesting.

01-00:27:24  
Jefferson: I didn't know what it meant.

Redman: That's really interesting.

01-00:27:35  
Jefferson: I remember having my dolls. I had a doll who was my same height, and I had a white one and a black one. Two dolls. Right? Because I was the only girl for about five years.

Redman: Oh, wow, yeah. So this was a big thing in your world at that age.

01-00:27:57  
Jefferson: Yeah, that was a big thing.

Redman: Yeah, that's really interesting. One of the things we talk a lot about when we talk about these schools, were art programs.

01-00:28:09  
Jefferson: Oh, yeah.

Redman: Things like finger painting and learning how to paint and things like that, and music. Do you have any recollections of learning art or music at the school?

01-00:28:21  
Jefferson: I have recollections of recitals, of reading books and understanding the books and wanting to be the characters of the books. I remember so clearly, see Dick run. Run, Dick. Run, Jane. I remember those. But also it was a thing of blocks, putting things together, making things fit. As far as arts and crafts, I vaguely remember—and I only say vaguely because it wasn't until—I used yarn. I used to use some yarn and take the yarn and glue it to a picture, form a picture. You trace out something, and object, and then you glue yarn there.

Redman: And that project stood out for you, okay.

01-00:29:14  
Jefferson: And that project stood out for me, because I attempted to do it again and send it in to *Captain Satellite*.

Redman: What was *Captain Satellite*?

01-00:29:22  
Jefferson: It was a children's show. Used to be in KTVU, Channel 2. *Captain Satellite*, along with *Miss Romper Room*, *Mary Ann Romper Room*. There were two shows.

Redman: So this would be kid's shows that you'd watch.

01-00:29:35  
Jefferson:

Kid shows, that's right, that you would watch.

Redman: Okay. That's pretty incredible.

01-00:29:38  
Jefferson:

Right, right. Along with *Captain Kangaroo*.

Redman: Along with *Captain Kangaroo*. What music, in these days? Was a radio present in your house, growing up?

01-00:29:52  
Jefferson:

In my house, there was lots of music. My mom loved music. She was very good, as far as making sure she had LPs. We had all of the electronics you could think of back then. The turntable, she had to have her stereo system. She was pretty much on her music; she loved her music. So a lot of R and B, the blues, and spirituals, lots of spirituals. My grandmother had me in the various choirs. My grandmother was part of a gospel choir at church.

Redman: So it seems like there is not only a musical tradition, in terms of performance, but that you guys also listened to music quite a bit at home.

01-00:30:38  
Jefferson:

Yeah. And the kids used to put on shows for the adults.

Redman: Oh, really? Okay.

01-00:30:42  
Jefferson:

Yeah, yeah. Put on shows and have all the— It was like a thing, every Friday. Friday or Saturday, the adults would come over to our house. At this time, see, we had moved right across the street from Maritime. So we lived in the house. At that time, our family had the largest house in the family, two-story home. So they would come over and the kids would put on a performance for all the adults. We would do anywhere from the Supremes to the Temptations. We would do acrobats, rolling over hop scotch. Just whatever, entertaining.

Redman: Sure. It was just a good family moment.

01-00:31:21  
Jefferson:

A good family moment.

Redman: Oh, my next question— That was a good story; I got a little caught up in thinking about you guys dancing to the Supremes. Oh, right. I wanted to ask about how your siblings were doing in school in those days.

01-00:31:36  
Jefferson:

Oh, my God. Let's see. They were doing very well. My brother Hosie, who passed away in 1989, he had this photographic memory. He could sit out and

play music. He was very good, instrumental-wise. He was a vocalist. He was an actor-entertainer when he passed. He did quite a few plays, *Little Shop of Horrors* to *Dreamgirls*. So at a very young age. He was two years younger than me; he was born in '59. They used to call us Peat and Repeat. But he was also very talented, when it comes to memorization. He could quote any script from the *Dark Shadows*. He used to love *Dark Shadows*.

Redman: Wow. So it seems like this brother in particular, but maybe your other siblings too, had a pretty big influence on you.

01-00:32:40  
Jefferson:

Yeah. Yeah.

Redman: Remind me again how old you were, in terms of the seven.

01-00:32:46  
Jefferson:

Okay. I was number two.

Redman: You were number two.

01-00:32:48  
Jefferson:

My oldest brother is Stan Brown. He did very well in school. He went on to become a professional football player and he played for the Cleveland Browns during that time. Let's see. My brother Hosie, like I said, he passed away. He was [an] actor-entertainer. My brother Xavier, he was born in 1960. He was born a year before my father passed. He was in the military; he's retired now. He also attended Maritime, too. He is doing very well. Iraq guy, so what can you say about that?

Redman: Wow. Yeah, yeah. It's really interesting that you guys did so well, in terms of your education, and I'm fascinated by that. Can you talk about some of the building blocks and your parents' ideas about the building blocks of education? Things like, See Stan run.

01-00:33:49  
Jefferson:

Yes. Well, let me share this with you. As far as the building blocks, it was the means of putting things together and making them work. Or taking something that's nothing, and making something out of it. Using your imagination, your creativity, around doing some things. My mom, even to this day— She'll be eighty-three, and she still likes picking up old sofas and recovering them and something like that. And pretty much all of her kids learned to do the same thing.

Redman: So often I ask people about, in terms of the influences that the family has, I ask people about the Great Depression, which was, of course, such a hard time for everybody, and it instills certain values in a lot of families.

01-00:34:39  
Jefferson:

Right, right.

Redman: But it seems like your family not only would've been affected by the Great Depression, it was also this movement out to California. Then I'm also curious about World War II. Can you talk about how family talked about the Great Depression and World War II?

01-00:34:58

Jefferson: Okay, the first one. Mommy was born in 1929. My mom was born in 1929. Now, Grandfather would speak about how he literally had to pull everybody together. My grandmother had brothers; Grandfather had brothers. So instead of them all trying to go alone— And that's why I learned this thing about, no man is an island. That's something that was taught. Because in other words, you can't do it by yourself. Together, just think of what you'll have. And like uncle used to say all the time, "You stick with me. Listen, I'll teach you to take care, not so much of yourself, but everybody else around you; and learn to do something that— Cater to people to do something they don't want to do for themselves."

Redman: So that sort of lesson came out of the Depression. What about World War II? Did your family ever talk about the war?

01-00:36:03

Jefferson: Uncle {Leroy?} didn't talk too much about the war. I remember him saying, "picking up dead bodies." That's what he used to have to do. And he had a technique around that, because he said he learned that when he used to do the cows. Cows would die and the dead cows— or cows that would get sick, he would mend them back to get healthy and then sell the cow. Right? And he found himself during the war, collecting up the dead bodies. Because during that time, I guess there was a thing about the race, where they—

Redman: Sure, segregated military.

01-00:36:36

Jefferson: Yes. And they couldn't tend to their own bodies. They had to take care of their own black fallen bodies.

Redman: Wow.

01-00:36:44

Jefferson: So I remember that part. But other than that, he didn't speak too much about— None other than when he came out here to Richmond, and how he used to work for— He was one of the first city workers. He used to sweep the streets here in Richmond, when they didn't have sidewalks, so it was dirt. He told me, he said he remembered a man spat on the ground and told him to clean it up. White man spat on the ground, told him to clean it up. He said he wouldn't clean it up and he said from that day on, he never worked for anybody else.

Redman: Interesting.

01-00:37:15

Jefferson: He started being his own employee, employer.

Redman:

The next question I wanted to ask, that's actually a really great segue. Because as you're coming of age, a lot of really important changes are happening in the African American community.

01-00:37:33

Jefferson: Right.

Redman:

A lot of really important ideas are coming out. By this time, by the time you were a young girl, Rosa Parks had already become a national figure; Martin Luther King was already a national figure. Did your parents ever talk to you about influential, big-name people in the Civil Rights Movement, the way— Now we have Black History Month.

01-00:38:00

Jefferson: I met Rosa Parks.

Redman:

You met Rosa Parks?

01-00:38:01

Jefferson: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. What happened was, one of my cousins, he was a promoter, a promoter here in Richmond, and he brought Rosa Parks out here one year.

Redman:

Is that right? Wow.

01-00:38:15

Jefferson: And it's during the same time he had a limousine service. So I helped escort Rosa Parks in the limousine.

Redman:

That's pretty amazing. That's pretty amazing.

01-00:38:24

Jefferson: Yeah. Yeah, I met her.

Redman:

So obviously, these became important figures in your life, when you came of age. I'm wondering if, when you were a young girl, did people start talking to you about this? You'd mentioned that you really only became aware of certain racial difference or ideas or the way racial difference was thought of in those days, by third grade. So maybe you didn't know the Civil Rights Movement and what that means, or how that is explained to a young African American girl.

01-00:39:01

Jefferson: I really started becoming active, and what I want to say, active around civil rights, is when I was in— Actually, I was thirteen years old and I had to recite the Gettysburg Address. And it was out of this reciting of the Gettysburg

Address, I started reading, started doing a lot of history and what have you, research. So it was on.

Redman: And that really opened your eyes, okay.

01-00:39:33

Jefferson: That opened me up. I became this little activist.

Redman: There you go. Okay. So I wanted to ask, actually, about fire drills at the Maritime— So do you remember fire drills?

01-00:39:46

Jefferson: I remember fire drills. Our fire drills, we had to go outside on the back of the school, go in the back, and we had to march. We had to march. It was nothing whereas we had a real fire drill. To me, it was more like a demonstration or a show.

Redman: Okay. What can you tell me about the teachers? What do you remember about the teachers?

01-00:40:10

Jefferson: Yes. Now, this is what I'm trying to remember. Her name was either Cullpepper— Miss Cullpepper. She was black, short, firm, and fair. I remember this woman. She used to wear nylons, and she tied them in a little knot underneath her kneecap, and they stopped right there. We didn't have L'eggs then. We had just nylons, right?

Redman: Nylons, okay.

01-00:40:42

Jefferson: Instead of hers hooking up, she would tie them down underneath.

Redman: What a little detail. Oh, that's interesting.

01-00:40:48

Jefferson: I remember that. And I remember her wool skirt. It was brown. That's it. I wish I could find that woman, or either if she was even still alive. I remember when they reopened Maritime, I went in. They were building and they were like, we don't know who's going to be here. I took pictures and everything of it, because I was like, wow, maybe this is the opportunity I can find out some things.

Redman: Right, yeah, yeah. Reconnect, yeah.

01-00:41:16

Jefferson: But I don't know if— I'm thinking, I hope that's her name, Cullpepper.

Redman: Okay, okay. I'll see if I can—

01-00:41:23  
Jefferson: If you could find anything like that.

Redman: Yeah. What do you remember about the other students?

01-00:41:27  
Jefferson: I remember my siblings.

Redman: So how many siblings would've been in Maritime at the same time, when you were there?

01-00:41:37  
Jefferson: When I was there, it was a total of— Let's see. Hosie and myself, that's two. He's deceased. Then my other little— So it was a total of four.

Redman: Wow. Okay.

01-00:41:50  
Jefferson: Well, when I got ready to go to Nystrom School—because I attended the school, Nystrom School, for first grade, which was right behind Maritime—so by that time, it was all four of us were there.

Redman: Wow. So that must've been quite a show in the morning, of this whole big family going to the school. But also pretty fun.

01-00:42:10  
Jefferson: Yeah. Yeah. It was fun. And then, too we became part of the furniture. It was like, oh, those are Ruthie's children.

Redman: Right, okay. You were there and kind of a staple.

01-00:42:23  
Jefferson: Yeah. And my mom was always known by her first name, Miss Ruthie.

Redman: Miss Ruthie, okay. Okay.

01-00:42:30  
Jefferson: Or by my grandfather's name, Mr. Linsy.

Redman: Often I go into interviews and I'm asking people about years and years and years and years of their lives. I'm asking you today about really, three years of your life, between the ages of five and seven. I'm wondering, as far as looking back on that age in your life, by way of sort of wrapping this up, I'm wondering if you could tell me what you think that those years and the Maritime school mean to you now in your life, thinking back on it.

01-00:43:05  
Jefferson: Let me say it like this. Let me think how to put this.

Redman: That's fine.

01-00:43:21

Jefferson:

It reminds me of how important it is to know where you come from. It's very important, because I have a foundation. I have something that I can share with my grandchildren. I have something I can share with the community. This is what worked for us when we were young, so this is what I know is going to work for you. And I'm not speaking of trying to privatize the ideal around only for special people. But at that time, the school was open for the Southside, for Richmond, for the community. That's what it was for. And we bloomed. Everybody that came up out of there was someone we can look or maybe point our finger to. And speaking of more recent, because from there, we left and went to the other school, which was Mount Olive Lutheran School. People like our councilman, John Ziesenhenne, the Livingstons—all of them went to that school. So it's like the children are actually being nurtured, all the way up. It's like these are our kids. I felt as though that was something very special. All the kids knew that they belonged to somebody.

Redman:

Right. Now, what were the challenges—

01-00:44:43

Jefferson:

I think that's important.

Redman:

—on the other hand? So those are some of the good aspects of the community of Richmond coming together. What are the challenges that they faced? And I'm thinking in particular of so many economic challenges that were facing this community, and violence and drugs, in the seventies and eighties.

01-00:45:05

Jefferson:

Okay. Let me tell you this. That's another thing, too that my parents did very good, is they buffered me, buffered us from that negative scene. In North Richmond, I witnessed two people in a car. They both were dead. It was like a love affair. The guy shoots his girlfriend and shoots himself.

Redman:

I see.

01-00:45:35

Jefferson:

Suicide thing, right? So I witnessed that, meaning that it happened on the street, two blocks up. Right?

Redman:

A traumatic thing.

01-00:46:41

Jefferson:

Yeah. That was a trip to me. And I knew the family and everything like this.

Redman:

Wow.

01-00:45:47

Jefferson:

And I was like, oh, wow.

Redman:

But your parents tried to shield you from that.

01-00:45:51

Jefferson:

But as far as the whole drug scene and everything that came up, I was shielded from that. Naturally, I had relatives that were substance abusers. Right? {I know that?} off the top, I had one. He was a heroin addict. But I never knew it. And I used to see him and I never knew. The family would never know. They never treated him any differently.

Redman:

As someone with siblings in that era, and then also being African American in this era, I'm wondering if you can compare for me a little, what young African American men and women were going through, boys and girls in that age. Were they going through different things? Or do you think their challenges were pretty in common? Do you feel like your brothers faced different things, or you as girls faced different things?

01-00:46:48

Jefferson:

We, meaning all of my siblings, did not face what the young people are facing today. Meaning we had a totally different safety net, support system. It was like the responsibility of everybody in the neighborhood to take care of us. Right? Because like I said, the grocery store was down the street. And Miss {Hannigan?} was one of the housekeepers, and she would get frustrated with the kids. Sometimes we would just run her crazy. So across the street— Or Miss {Mitty?} next door, she would call Mom or give her a report. Just things like that. You don't have that nowadays, so I can't— Everybody in the neighborhood knew everyone. You knew who, what, when and where. And everyone that came up out of the neighborhood, it was that of a means of they got to where they were at because of the neighborhood. Does that make sense?

Redman:

Yes, it does. I wonder to what extent the neighborhood closeness and the community was forged out of either the move from the South that so many African Americans took out to California, or do you think that the war played a big role in the formation of this community? There's also a post-war civil rights awakening, I think, in the African American community.

01-00:48:30

Jefferson:

It was. It was, it was. I think what was important, it seemed like to me, that my elders knew their place. So by understanding and knowing your place is one thing; now, when you try to go against the grind or— Maybe that makes it bad for everybody. So I think by knowing your place and keeping your place, really stood out. But here's the thing. My grandfather, he could talk to anybody, regardless of their color. You hear what I'm saying? And he was a very fair man. Right? He had a relationship with his son-in-law, my uncle, Uncle {Leroy?}, who— I believe Uncle {Leroy?} could have been the governor of California. Just his wherewithal, just his interaction with people. He knew how to do {something about?} everything. Well-made businessman. He and my grandfather were like two peas in a pod, right?

Redman:

Interesting.

01-00:49:40

Jefferson:

I remember one summer— Every summer, kids would get off. We had to sell watermelons. Right? I had the song down pat and everything. You sit on the back of the truck—big old Ford truck, I'll never forget, in my grandfather's truck—and he would take all his tools and everything out of it, and they would put hay. They would drive somewhere down and put hay on there and come back with a whole bunch of watermelons. Then they would go around and sell the watermelons.

Redman:

So I'm sorry. You said you remember the song. What song would you sing?

01-00:50:10

Jefferson:

Watermelons, watermelons. Nice and fine, straight from the vine. Sweet, juicy w-a-a-a-termelons.

Redman:

That's great! And you were pretty successful, then, in being able to sell watermelons around town?

01-00:50:23

Jefferson:

Well, yeah. I think that's where I got my little edge around being a salesperson. I could sell you—

Redman:

Right, yeah. So I want to ask one last question. I know I've said it in summary, but is there anything else that you'd like to add about the Maritime Center and what your memories are of growing up in Richmond?

01-00:50:46

Jefferson:

I remember another thing about the Maritime Center, is how it kept the children safe. I felt safe. I felt like this was my locker. I remember when you walk in, you walk in and over to your left was the lockers. This is my locker and this is my bed. Which it was really a partitioned— They had these little cot things and a little partition. And nap time. I pretty much was able to run things.

Redman:

Okay, yeah. So you had your own little world, as a kid.

01-00:51:24

Jefferson:

Yes. That's right. I had a tricycle there that I used to ride. I remember having a photograph of me on a tricycle in the backyard at Maritime. They said that they don't know what happened to all of that, because they did have a photographer who took pictures, back in that time. I suggested maybe they should check with the Richmond Museum, because the Richmond Museum has lots of things there. I was able to find some things.

Redman:

With that, I'd like to say thank you so much for sitting down with me today.

01-00:51:59

Jefferson:

Okay.