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Sandra Clements

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Kelli Johnson: This is Kelli Johnson. I'm doing an oral history interview with Sandra Clements as part of the National Park Service Civil Rights in Appalachia grant program. I had done a interview with Sandra Clements about her childhood and growing up and living in Huntington, West Virginia. So that is also available.

Sandra, will you tell me your full name and your birthdate?

Sandra Clements: My name is Sandra Clements, and I was born May 7th of 1949.

Kelli Johnson: Is there anything that you want to talk about about your childhood as it led up to the Civil Rights Era that we're going to be talking about?

Sandra Clements: I was talking with a group of my friends the other day, and all of us lived in this community that I was bound between 14th Street and Halgrid Boulevard, 8th Avenue and 10th Avenue. We all grew up together. We didn't have a clue that we were poor. We all shared the same experiences except that me and my friend, Tina Williams, who's now Brewer, went to Catholic school at St. Peter Claver. So we felt other people in the community, particularly young folks, felt that we were better than they were and were not invited to do lots of the things that they did. Going to Catholic school, the Catholic Church had taken a stand, unbeknownst to us, that they were going to support the Civil Rights Movement. There was no discussion about civil rights in elementary school, junior high school. At 9th grade, I went to St. Joe, and I remember in 12th grade we had a nun come and she would play, and How Much Does It Take.

Kelli Johnson: Oh, (singing) something.

Sandra Clements: Mm-hmm.

Kelli Johnson: Yeah. That one. Yeah.

Sandra Clements: So, she would play that every time for the religion class, and then we would discuss it. I'm the only Black person sitting in the class. So I'm not discussing anything. I'm not letting these white folks jump all over me. I'm not having to explain to them why I don't understand what this song actually means nor do I really care. So the whole Civil Rights Movement, my father and my mother decided to send us to Catholic school because my mother had a very, very negative experience in her elementary and high school years here. They lived right across the street. My aunt convinced my dad to send us to school here. So, we went to school.

We had, at the time that I started school, I think Father Par was here, but Father Demestru came, and Father Demestru was instrumental in growing this church. Father Demestru had been in a concentration camp.

Kelli Johnson: Oh, wow.

Sandra Clements: And understood what it was like to be hated by people who didn't even know you. He spent his whole time here getting Black people involved in the Catholic Church and was instrumental in finding jobs for those Black people in the community. So for that, he will always have a dear place in my heart. But my father's parents were mulattoes. His father was. His father and his mother looked like they were white. So there was never any discussion about race in our house. My mother, on the other end, was very dark skinned. So no name calling, no nothing. Even though I had five brothers and sisters and we were all different shades, and I am the lightest of all of them. So, we didn't discuss color. That didn't even occur in our house.

My father worked for the government. So when I was getting ready to go to Marshall, my father made it very clear that I was not to get involved with Phil Carter and the Civil Rights Movement. He said, "Just don't go anywhere near him. I don't want you to be involved. And if you are, I'm going to put you out of the house." I'm like, "Where am I supposed to go if you put me out of the house?" Nada. Nada. So I stayed on the fringes, and I didn't realize until later, and Phil actually explained it to me that everybody who worked for the federal government signed something saying that their family would not be a part of any of those, and that if they were, they would lose their job. My father never said that.

Kelli Johnson: Interesting.

Sandra Clements: My father set the rules and my mother carried them out. My mother was not exactly the most congenial: "Your father said..." So, "Your father said..." So all through high school, never, no involvement with the civil rights things at all.

Kelli Johnson: Other than what was going on at the school, like the conversations you had at the school. Okay.

Sandra Clements: Which didn't go any further than anything. Because how do you discuss something when it doesn't touch your life? So, we were not involved. Only on the fringes. Even after I went to Marshall and Phil was heavy into getting students out to be involved in the marches and things... Not Sandra.

Kelli Johnson: Not Sandra.

Sandra Clements: At that point, I was working for the post office also. I don't remember signing anything that I could not be involved in the civil rights activities, but I may have. You know, you sign all those papers and you don't know. I was at home watching when... My names are all screwed up. The guy who shot John F. Kennedy.

Kelli Johnson: Oswald.

Sandra Clements: Oswald.

Kelli Johnson: I was watching television when Oswald was shot.

Sandra Clements: Wow.

Kelli Johnson: For me at that time, television was not real. So my father comes home, and I said, "Daddy, they just shot somebody." So he stops. And the television played for the whole time, every day of... was shot. I can't even grasp what's going on. This whole sense of is this really real? What's going on here? How do you shoot the president of the United States? And how do you kill the person who supposedly shot them? Then being the curious person I'm going... Okay, there's something. We're never going to hear the truth. We're not going to hear it. And then I remember the night that Martin Luther King was shot, springtime, was raining here.

It was April 4th, 1968. My first birthday.

Sandra Clements: Comes on the news... We're sitting up in the family room and I am petrified. I don't know... to kill the president is a whole other thing. The president is not on my level. Being young, I don't know what the backlash was that for me, nor could I realize what that was. But the night that Martin Luther King was shot, I'm like, "I don't think I can go out of here and go to school tomorrow. I don't know what's going to happen." I was a skinny, little frail kid. Never been in a fight, never been a part of what happens if people confront you. So I was scared.

So, I got up the next morning and there was no discussion in our house at all. None whatsoever. "Okay. What do I do here?" So it was like another day. I went off to Marshall and sat there and, like, "Okay. I don't know." It was almost like I lived on the fringes of things. The student group on campus, which was led by Phil and some other people, always needed money. They were always getting arrested and had to get out to jail or something. [inaudible] Paul and I had some very heavy discussions, I'm a frail little kid. I can't fight. I don't had the verbal verbiage that he does, just stayed away from him.

So he approaches me one day and he says, "Okay, Smith, why don't we see your face out there?" I said, "Because my father says I can't." "You do everything your father tells you to do?" "Yes. Yes, sir."

Kelli Johnson: Yeah. Yeah.

Sandra Clements: But at that time I was working at the post office and I said, "But if you need money, I would gladly give you money." "What do we need your money for if you can't come out here and march with us?" "I can't do it. I'm not going to do it." So we had a whole verbal thing about that.

Kelli Johnson: Well, he's very imposing. He's very tall. He's got a booming voice. Yeah. I can't only imagine being...

Sandra Clements: 5.

Kelli Johnson: Because I'm sure he was the same. Yeah.

Sandra Clements: 5' 9", [inaudible].

Kelli Johnson: [inaudible] nothing.

Sandra Clements: ... 10 pounds.

Kelli Johnson: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Sandra Clements: And embarrassing me in front of everybody else. So I just kind of stayed away from it. But I am always a curious person. What's going on? What's happening? Watching the news. But only in terms of how people are treated, how you can't move from one place to another, how you can't get what you want to have because of the color of your skin. It was only when I joined a book club and we were reading. The book club decided we were going to read Black authors.

Kelli Johnson: When was this?

Sandra Clements: This was probably... Oh, this was late... Probably in the 2000s, somewhere over there.

Kelli Johnson: Oh, okay.

Sandra Clements: That's when the idea of color actually struck me. I'm reading and somebody said, "Well, he was caramel brown and he was mocha." I'm going, "What does that mean? Mocha?" I don't describe people in those terms. I describe people in terms of how they react to me. I don't care what color they are. How do they react to me? I remember when I started at Marshall, I was the director of disability services. The very first week that I'm there, a student who is a wheelchair user, who has cerebral palsy is in the hallway on his way to my office. He doesn't know who I am, except that the woman out front said, "You're looking for the Black lady."

So when I passed him in the hallway, he says, "I'm looking for... Oh, the Black lady." "That would be me. What can I do for you?" So we chit-chatted for a minute and we instantly clashed with each other. He said to me, "I'm going get my rights the same way that you got your rights." It was just after the passage of ADA. I wanted to say, "Good luck with that, brother." But I didn't. For some reason, many people felt that Black people are just crying in the wind. "You have what you want. You got that, da, da, da. So what else do you want from us?" We don't have 40 acres and a mule. What would I do with 40 acres and a mule, anyway? Not wanting to ever talk about how people actually feel.

I had a phone call during COVID from one of my high school classmates. The year before that, we had our 50th class reunion. There were four of us in the class, four Black people in class. Only two of us keep in contact. So we had decided not to go because when we had gone to the 20th reunion, it was like, "Oh, that's Gloria." Gloria wasn't there. I actually had on somebody else's badge and they didn't realize that that was not me.

So, the 50th reunion comes. So, Tina and I have decided that we're not going to go, and we're not going to respond. But I'm still reading all the emails. The emails go well, "Sandra and Tina and Paul and Gloria are all dead." I called Tina and I said, "Tina, I'm going to respond." Tina's husband was reading the email. "I'm going to respond." And you know I'm going to name names and get down. I had already done it before she responded. So my comment was, "We were invisible at St. Joe. We were not a force to be reckoned with. You wouldn't recognize us. We didn't do anything. But to say that we are dead is not right either. Our experience at St. Joe was not the same as your experience." And the people who have the reunion or the doctors and lawyers' kids and everything.

I said, "You know what it's like to be invisible? To be at the state capital, and that one of my former classmates, year ahead of me, but we all knew each other doesn't even recognize me? Comments to everybody else who went to St. Joe; I'm not mentioned. Do you know what it's like to see your classmates on the weekend and them not be able to speak to you or refuse to speak to you? You have no idea. And now why would we want to come back and socialize and act like it didn't happen?" I recounted incident that happened. The response back was. "Why is she still holding on to things that are 50 years old and probably didn't even happen?" So I'm like, "I'm never going to deal with this group again." So they're having them.

Kelli Johnson: So, you go to school. You go to St. Joe. They get together and sing these happy songs and say they're all for civil rights.

Sandra Clements: Who sings those happy songs? I'm not singing those happy songs. I don't know that... I was telling my classmate when we were talking a couple years ago, he said, "Well, I passed through," he called it, "16th Street every morning from my house on the way to St. Joe." He said, "I never thought about the people who lived there. I never thought about what happened," even though the mother of one of my classmates was actually their housekeeper, "and never thought about it." He said, "So sending out..." So now he's going to play white guilt. "I'm working with a group of people who were wrongly prosecuted, da, da, da, da. What do you think?" He sent me this book. This book had been written by a priest and he's working with a group of people in California who have been released from prison. So, he actually mocks them. He takes them to places without preparing them for what they're going to see in the encounter. And I'm livid.

He said, "What did you think of the book?" "We need to have a discussion about this because it doesn't matter what nationality it is, as long as they are people of color, you're talking about me. Any of these instances are my instances and my history, my background." He said, "I never even thought about that, Sandy." I said, "I'm sure that you probably didn't." He didn't. Nope.

Kelli Johnson: What beautiful privilege to not have to think about that.

Sandra Clements: And so... I don't know, but...

Kelli Johnson: Was there a difference between... Because you said you had Father Demestru here and he was informed. He did know what he was talking about. So you would go to school all through the week and then you would come here on Sunday or Saturday night.

Sandra Clements: Sunday.

Kelli Johnson: Sunday, and go to church. And it was different. Like, was the...

Sandra Clements: Most of the people who went to St. Peter Claver were Black, although there were some white people who came, but the diocese said, "You cannot become a member of St. Peter Claver Church because it is a mission for Black people." So white people were supposed to not be able to join the church here, not until maybe the '60s or '70s. our church records don't indicate that, that the priests here, the house that my mom and dad lived in, white gentlemen lived in, and he was baptized in the church here. Only because I know what his name was that I know, but I could look at the church records. The priest baptized many people, many white people here, but could not carry them on the role as Black people.

Kelli Johnson: As a church member.

Sandra Clements: So in the '70s, when father Patrick McDonough came and Father Pat was a very... He was a number one hippie, but he believed and had a harder goal for people. Horrible administrator. But lots of things were happening in the church. He was on the edge of, "Let's all be together. Let's all do these things together." So he baptized. Somebody came to the church and said, "I need a record of my child's baptism." I look in the records and there's no record. So, I ran into Father sometime later and I said, "Father, you remember so-and-so?" "Yeah, yeah." There was a whole group of Earth people who lived outside the city. They would come to church and some of their friends. Because of Father's gentle nature, before that, if you had meat on Friday, you're going to go to hell. Father changed that. I didn't get married in the Church. My kids were not baptized in the Church until Father Patrick McDonough came.

So I'm coming out of Rite Aid one day and he says, "So Sandy, when are you coming back to church?" I said, "Oh, Father, it's complicated." "It's not complicated. Have you killed anybody recently? Come to confession. Let me get

the kids baptized." So he actually brought me back to the church with my kids to have them baptized. He did not see color. But Father was unorthodox. The Church doesn't like people to be unorthodox and not under their thumb. So they moved him in 10 years.

But there were white people coming to the church all the time. They actually kept the church going, that they were giving money. Black people didn't have jobs. Except for those people, like Father Demestru was instrumental, opened those doors to get them in to get a job and to buy a house and all those things. But there were always white people. But never joining the church, baptized in the church in full membership until the diocese said that they could do that. So now we have a contingency of folks who are actually nomads. I give them that term because they've been to all the other churches in Huntington. They are a group of people who don't get along with authority, who want to do their own thing. So-

Kelli Johnson: They're just seeking. They're trying to find what they're trying to find.

Sandra Clements: But they want what they want.

Kelli Johnson: Oh, okay.

Sandra Clements: So they had been at Sacred Heart, or Our Lady Fatima, the Newman Center, and ended up at the Newman Center. The Newman Center is designed for students. So they kind of take over the Newman Center. "We're going to do this. We're going to do that." The bishop literally put the out. "You will not come back to this mission anymore. You will find another parish."

Kelli Johnson: Oh, wow.

Sandra Clements: So they came here. They went everywhere. But when they come here, Father Labinuz Ubbas is here. Father's an African who believes in let's just baptize everybody and everybody's great. So they came here, and they've been here probably 15 years now. But they are people who... They don't all get along together. But when they came here, there's one lady who I think is on the autism spectrum. They said she would be their leader, that she would speak for them. This lady is not a team player. Is all about I, I, I, and I know more than the Catholic Church does. I know the rules and regulations, I do. I will tell you what you need to do. Well, we've been clashing ever since she was here. Some days I fight, some days I don't. She made me so mad. One day, I thought I'm going to take her in the kitchen and thump her head on the floors and kill her.

Kelli Johnson: That's why I stay on your good side.

Sandra Clements: I've never hit anybody... Well, I won't say that.

Kelli Johnson: It's being recorded.

Sandra Clements: I've never hurt anybody intentionally. But there's still that feeling that Black people cannot govern themselves. Black people don't know. Black people are uneducated, so we still need to lead them. As our church Black membership gets smaller and smaller and older and older, we stopped fighting, that when I was a teenager, and we had parish meetings under Father Demestru. My father would sit next to me and he'd say, "You're not going to speak. You're not going to say anything." So, "Okay." I'm living in my dad's house.

Then one time Father asked me a question directly, and so my father did not stop me from speaking. I said, "Father, you need to listen to the young voices in your church. And I think women ought to be priests." As I dealt with the city of Huntington, when Brandi Jacobs-Jones was elected council person, running with her was Joe Williamson, Little Joe. I'm on the background, never been involved in politics. I want to know what's going on in the community, but I'm not a politician at that point. "I'm not sure I'm ever going to be a politician anyway." But somebody who has to be looking out for the rights of people, and that doesn't make you a politician.

Kelli Johnson: Yeah. That is the opposite sometimes.

Sandra Clements: [inaudible] really. So when Brandi stepped down, I'm reading a newspaper, and I thought, "You know, maybe, Sandra it's time for you to step up. You know the issues in the community. So it's time you step up." So I talked to my mom and my sister and I say, "I think I'm going to apply." My mother goes, "Nope, you don't need to be in politics. Those people are ruthless. You don't know. You can't fight. You don't know how to do that." I'm like, "Mama, you've taught me how to fight."

Kelli Johnson: I was going to say, you are one of the toughest people I know.

Sandra Clements: My mother taught me to be feisty. My mother actually... I've said this before. My mother was not a gentle person, and I cry. And when I get mad, I cry.

Kelli Johnson: Me too.

Sandra Clements: She would say, "Here you are, crying again, little baby..." I'm going, "I'm not going to do that anymore." I still cry when I get mad. But not for people to see. So when I came to the seat, when I came, and I was appointed to the seat, there were maybe seven or eight other people.

Kelli Johnson: In what year was that? That was-

Sandra Clements: That was 19...

Kelli Johnson: '90 something.

Sandra Clements: 7... [inaudible]

Kelli Johnson: It was probably in the '90s though, wasn't it?

Sandra Clements: Yeah. It was in the '90s.

Kelli Johnson: Because I want to say, because I moved to the area in '97. So I want to say it was around that time or a little later.

Sandra Clements: Somewhere.

Kelli Johnson: Okay.

Sandra Clements: No. 2007.

Kelli Johnson: They can look it up.

Sandra Clements: Okay. That's awful. I don't even remember the date. But I was appointed to the seat and the seat was only going to run from October to December the next year. So that meant that I had to run in the next election. Then I took the seat and somebody says, "No, you're going to run for this position." I think Paul Farrell was the chair at that point. He said, "First of all, direct all your questions to the chair, and you don't have to answer that, Ms. Clements, if you don't want to." And I said, "Mr. Chair, I'll be happy to answer that. I don't have a clue. Depends on how these people treat me on whether or not I'll come back." So the guy who asked the question kind of looked... I'm like, "I'm not afraid to tell you how I feel. What do I have to lose?"

But I wanted that seat, Kelli, because of the attitude that people have about Black people, that we are yellors and screamers and we wear all this hair and stuff. I'm like, "There are intelligent Black people, and you need to recognize that. I'm never going to yell and scream and do all this stuff in council." But I'm always going to work and partner with and network with people who can help the community. The community's always first. So when you take that attitude, people kind of let you slide, which I learned in high school, that I'm the only one in the advanced courses going to college, although they didn't want that. I do what I'm doing. Maneuvering. So the same policy, I served on all these committees, one, because I wanted to know what they were doing. In particular, what are you doing for Fairfield? What are you doing for women? What are you doing for children across the board? And then what are you doing in Fairfield?

Had this conversation with the guy who's the local regional guy for Catholic Charities. He said to me a couple years ago, "Do you support Catholic Charities?" "No." "Why not?" "They've not done anything for Fairfield. Why should I support them? Why should I give them my money?" "Well, what do you mean?" "Do they ever give money to Ebenezer? Did they support our community garden? Do they support A.D. Lewis? Do they support families?" And I know that they don't. So now he's on this mission to...

Kelli Johnson: Get you to like him.

Sandra Clements: To support Catholic Charities. Yeah. He didn't care if I like him or not. So... I don't want to put it on record, but-

Kelli Johnson: We can talk about that later.

Sandra Clements: But again, it's that attitude that you have to take care of you. Let me identify what my needs are and ask you for assistance. If you can't, I'm going to go on. There are some negative things that are always said about Catholic Charities. Then there's this overarching thing, Kelli, that we'll give you the scrubs. We'll give you what's leftover because that's all you deserve. There's a little box on 9th Avenue, about 8th Street that has... You can put canned goods and things in for the community. So for a while, I was going there taking things. Then I'm fine tuned. If you're on the street, you don't need a can that needs a can opener. It has a pull. You need some spoons and [inaudible]. So I'm there one day. It's hot. I open the box, and it's full of stuff. And I'm like, "Okay." As I look closer, the cans are rusted.

Kelli Johnson: "Oh, God."

Sandra Clements: There are bugs on the cans. I'm furious. I'm taking all that stuff. Go back to the car, get a box, put that stuff in the box. And I'm furious. Wipe the thing out, put in new stuff. I come back to the church and I'm raging. I said, "Jim, how dare somebody put that stuff in a box for people? Do you not care about people? What were they going to do with that crap? Take it around to Speedway and put it into garbage?" That's what I did. So you care nothing. You don't care about people because if you did, you would not put that stuff in the box. "Oh, Sandy..." There's no excuse for that. They probably took it out of the basement. I don't know what. But no disregard for people. We get the hand-me-downs, recently... And poor Maria. She [inaudible]

Kelli Johnson: Maria's the director of the A.D. Lewis...

Sandra Clements: A.D. Lewis Center. Yes.

Kelli Johnson: Community Center. Yeah.

Sandra Clements: So Maria gets lots of stuff. I was over there one day and somebody had brought a whole truckload and stuff. I don't know where it came from. I'm like, "These are going in the trash. Trash. Pure and simple. Why do you bring it here to us like we have no dignity?" And then they got mad when we throw it away. I'm like, "You didn't give us anything proper to start with."

Kelli Johnson: Right.

Sandra Clements: And...

Kelli Johnson: So. Okay. Well, I was going to ask though, because we talked a little bit about... Like, you mentioned Phil Carter and some of the work that he did and some of the things like the Catholic Church was very... Well, not very. In certain different ways, interested in civil rights, in the things that happened in Huntington and now fast forward to now. So did the Civil Rights Era have any impact at all? I mean, what did it do for here in Fairfield? That's a big question. But...

Sandra Clements: But I think when the news media decided to show people, young people getting hosed in the South, that opened the whole door to what is actually happening. It exposed how people were treated, how they're not treated. So that led to the passage of the Civil Rights Movement. I think across the board, that made it better, that people began to look at why do people feel this way? Why are people treated this way? And that kind of trickles down. So you begin to see people on the local level say, "Well, what's happening over in Fairfield?" But again, we are treated with that we're stupid and we need to take care of them. Part of my reason for sitting on city council is to bring that to light, that there are intelligent people can talk. Brandi would've been wonderful if she stayed in that position longer.

As I look at the history, many of the people who serve on council from the Black community were ministers, and ministers are on a whole other different class. But is there a regular, everyday person who can. But before I even went that way, Kelli, I'd served on many, many, many boards in the city. Not necessarily in Fairfield. I'm thinking, "Why am I sitting on this board? I don't know who these people are?" But I'm sitting on that board for a purpose. I want you to know that there are intelligent Black people. There are needs, and this organization needs to meet those needs.

So when I come to city council, people who've known me from those committees know that I'm here and they trust me, or they know that they can approach me. Approachable is more than anything else. So you begin to change the face of what Black people, who Black people are and what they need, and then how do we address those needs? But we are still lacking in terms of leadership. How do we train the next group of people who will take over?

I'm speaking week before last at the building and zoning commission, and they want to put a structure here. I have no objection to finally something coming to Fairfield. We need some economic development here. And I'm speaking. Before that meeting, some comment had been made that there's no Black leadership in Fairfield. They can't get their act together. They'll opposed to everything. They can't even agree on anything. They never come up with any ideas. So I was saying to some other folks that I think should be the future, who are now, and should be the future leaders of the community. "You need to step up. I'm the old guard. You bring out the old guard when you want somebody sitting in the back going, 'Yes, yes, yes. Go on.' But my time is up. You need to step up. And so I will help you with that process."

Let's talk about training some other young people to move the community forward because when I'm gone, and they had five minutes to ask, just there and gone, whatever. But what we lack is training young people to move into leadership positions across the board. So that's where we are now. I think none of that would've been possible without the Civil Rights Movement, that incrementally, I don't know, maybe about 10, 50, 50, 60, more years. We will see the long-term effect of that.

But one of the things that I realized when I went to work at Marshall as the director of disability services, is that there's a rise and fall. Sometimes you're at the top. When I went to work at Marshall in the 1990s, persons with disabilities were at the top. Women had been at the top before that. So when you're at the top, you take all that you can possibly get because you're not going to be there long. But you've got to take other people along with you so that they support you. So when they go down, you rising up with something else and you're bringing all these other people along.

So, I don't think that we've gotten that wave going yet. I remember going to a presentation on campus. It was Hispanic week or something. So they're going to do a presentation and talk. I walk in the door. One of my students is sitting at the door because he's obligated to go. So, I'm sitting there and after the thing, he comes up and he says, "I didn't know that you were Spanish." I said, "I'm not." "Then what are you doing here?" I said-

Kelli Johnson: Learning.

Sandra Clements: ... "I wanted to see what was going on." He said, "That's interesting." You're at a university. Expose yourself [inaudible]. But people don't feel comfortable getting out of that little box yet. They really don't. And so I don't know.

Kelli Johnson: I just like to listen to you talk because your stories are wonderful. Okay. So we've been talking for over 30 minutes, and I don't like them to go on too much longer because-

Sandra Clements: Sure. It's your time.

Kelli Johnson: ... overwhelming for people. So final thoughts on '60s and '70s in Huntington or in Fairfield neighborhood of Huntington. What are your final thoughts on that Civil Rights Era era? And then I have a follow-up question. So I want to focus on that. Even the '50s, '60s, and '70s in Fairfield.

Sandra Clements: I'm on the fringes looking in, but I think that there was an awakening and a feeling that we could all join together and make things happen, and then bring everybody else along who wanted to come. But there was a core group of people led by Bunchie Gray and her group, the NAACP, were very powerful in terms of gathering people together, giving them a voice, and making them see that they could make things different. I think that that was very important. I was

not old enough to be a part of that. Still living in my parents' house with my father saying no.

Kelli Johnson: And your parents were not involved.

Sandra Clements: No. My parents were not involved. Again, because of... But my mother had a circle of friends. My mother grew up here in Huntington. So even though the circle of friends were not there, they interacted with other people who were in that circle. Nobody in my family went to DC in 1968, '63, but we all watched it on television. My father made sure that we were up to date on what was happening. He expected us to watch the evening news every night with him. And we did. There was no discussion about that afterwards, but he wanted you to have knowledge about what's going on. My father never talked to us about how we should feel about things. He said, "I'm sending you to school to get an education. I expect you to make your own decisions." My mother, on the other hand, was not [inaudible] it's different when you live at home with your parents.

Kelli Johnson: No, I understand.

Sandra Clements: Even when I got married in the '70s, my husband was not involved or active in all of those. He had a sense of paranoia, that people didn't like him. And...

Kelli Johnson: So he just towed the line because he didn't want to..

Sandra Clements: But aggressive with that. I saw parts of him that I thought, "I don't know..." I'm glad we're away from that. But there was this deep-seated hate, and I don't know what he hates. That can be dangerous. And it can be very... that a mother cannot let her kids be instilled with that, that there are ways to solve issues. There are a way to talk about things and to solve them and not carry around all that hate and let it build because it's going to explode and you're going to get hurt.

Kelli Johnson: Yeah.

Sandra Clements: Well...

Kelli Johnson: Okay. So we touched on a little bit... So, the things that happen nationally and locally during the Civil Rights Era, you touched on a little bit. But how do you think they informed what Huntington and Fairfield is today?

Sandra Clements: That's a hard question, Kelli, because I don't see much movement today. Movement in simple things, that people can't come together to voice their concerns and their needs and even simple ones. The pool at A.D. Lewis didn't open last summer. When I asked Maria why it didn't, she said the decision was made back in February not to buy chlorine for the pool. I'm like, "Okay..." But that decision was not shared with the community. So people were saying, "Why didn't the pool open? All the other pools opened, and we're not open." Any

other place, there would've been an uprising. "Why is our pool not open? Why, da, da, da, da, da, da." And even this year, pool's not open yet. No group of people going to the mayor, marching on city hall, standing on Hal Greir, saying, "Our pool's not open!" There's a sense of apathy.

Kelli Johnson: It's interesting because I feel there's a lot of complaining on Facebook. A lot of faceless safety from behind the computer. There's that. But I don't see...

Sandra Clements: Action.

Kelli Johnson: Yeah. Someone asked me the other day about there's all these houses. Huntington has a land bank, and you can purchase houses fairly inexpensively. Somebody asked me, "Well, why don't they come here and teach us how to use that?" And I said, "Well, I'll talk to some people." But I know for a fact we've done that. So yeah. So, that's why I ask. It seems like there were some people... From just living here for a while and talking to people, there are people who take action. In the '60s and '70s, there were people who took action. There were some very strong-minded people here who did a lot of great things. If people talk all the time about what a wonderful community this was and how it was together and all that kind of stuff, so that's why I asked your...

Sandra Clements: Which is not true.

Kelli Johnson: Ah. Okay. Well, there's that.

Sandra Clements: I think the legacy...

Kelli Johnson: Hindsight's always 20/20, right?

Sandra Clements: The legacy is what the leader did to form the next leadership group. So even though people were visible, active, they did not train the next group of people to take over. What has happened in our community is that my children, who should be taking over... I should be sitting on the front porch and going, "What happened at the meeting tonight? Tell me about it." I am at the meeting and I shouldn't be. I have not been able to bring forth the next group. And I'm complaining about the group before me that they didn't do. I've not been able to bring the group behind me. We have lost that sense of community. We've lost a sense of trust. We are so mired in what supposedly we lost, that we can't move forward, that when integration happened and segregation and supposedly died, we dispersed. And we had cars.

So, now I can go buy groceries from-

Kelli Johnson: Kroger.

Sandra Clements: ... B&B and Kroger. I don't have to go buy that second rate, nasty stuff from the corner store. On the outside, people say, "We have a great community here. We

could go buy groceries." They weren't the best groceries in the world. We had our own little school. Wasn't the best school. We had some darn good teachers. And those teachers were lost when they went to the public school system. Many of them did not get hired in positions where they could make a difference. The children who went to school, died. They died. They were not given nourishment. I went to Catholic school here. I never knew that Carnegie Wissom was from Huntington until my godmother moved to Colorado and started sending me all this stuff. And I'm going, "Who was this Carnegie Wissom person?" I'm talking to my mother. And she said, "He was a mean old man." My mother was, "He was a... [inaudible]." Or her friends were talking about it. But that kind of...

But the people who would come after me are gone. So now how do we reach the folks over here who are lost? I was talking to Theresa Johnson who's our current council person. She's had a series of meetings where people get together. She tells them what's going on in the community. I said to her, "Are they going to be able to ask questions?" "No, I don't want to hear it." And I said, "But Theresa, people have to voice their frustration. They have to talk about what happened. And you need to hear that, because in order for you to move that group forward, you have to hear what their complaint is. You can't go back and fix it, and you can say, 'Okay, we're going to spend five minutes talking about that.' And there's some old people can talk like I do... '1953, [inaudible].'"

That was great. So what are we doing today in 2022? And that's the part that's missing. People have to walk through that. They have to process that in order to get there. That's why we're going to bring in the young people, that when old folks have their time to talk, young folks need to be listening. Where can we go with this in order to move forward? So that part is actually missing for us right now.

Kelli Johnson: Do you have any final thoughts that you want to add?

Sandra Clements: I want to thank you, Kelli, for doing this, giving me a chance to talk.

Kelli Johnson: I always appreciate it. Then I always think I really need to come back and talk to you. Just talk to you.

Sandra Clements: Sure. Anytime.

Kelli Johnson: And then you are so busy and I don't know what I do with my time, but it seems to be gone. So...

Sandra Clements: It's always gone.

Kelli Johnson: But yeah.

Sandra Clements: We get caught up-

Kelli Johnson: But thank you.

Sandra Clements: ... in all these other things. So, I don't know.

Kelli Johnson: I appreciate this. I like doing your interviews because you don't need prompts. Some people are so nervous about talking, so I'm like, "Da, da, da, da, da." You know, I'm asking these questions. So it's always worth it.

Sandra Clements: Have you [inaudible] Mr. Mike does the videos, the people from the...

Kelli Johnson: Uh-uh.

Sandra Clements: You know, Mr. Michael Crawford.

Kelli Johnson: Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Sandra Clements: So he came to interview me one day at the office, and he had his own list of questions and he handed it to me. I went... "Ask your questions." And he said, "You don't need to see them ahead of time?" "No, I'm good. You're going to ask the same question anybody else is going to ask. And so let's just roll on with it." It just goes so much easier if you're just talking instead of...

Kelli Johnson: It's funny because my aunt was nervous and then once we started talking, she was fine. But younger people... Well, younger. So under 60. Those are the ones that are just like... They're just so nervous about it. I was like, "Did we train you guys?" I mean, is that how we all... Did we learn to be nervous when somebody puts a recorder in front of us?

Sandra Clements: We've never taught them how to be at ease. Young folks today have never been in a leadership position. When we were younger, not only whether you went to this church or whatever, but there were always groups. Particularly in the church that you belonged to the choir, you belonged to the youth group. And within those groups, the structure of leadership happened. Somebody had a president and a treasurer and a secretary, and that doesn't happen today. People, young folks have never been in a group to come up with a group effort that was successful. Maybe that's where we start. Maybe we start with the groups again.

I was in Brownies for hot minute. I belonged to a teenage group. That turned me off of groups really, really quickly because there was a bunch of women, young girls and they had no constraint of what they said to people. I'm coming from Catholic school, going, "What the heck? We don't talk about that now. I don't do that." I remember sitting with a group of women, and I stay away from... I am uncomfortable with personal things. I don't talk with people about my personal life or my relationships because that's none of their business. So the conversation actually disintegrates to that. One lady says, "Well, I'm a vanilla."

Because I don't want to be embarrassed, I don't ask what vanilla means. I'm like... So [inaudible]

Kelli Johnson: I have an idea of what she meant by that.

Sandra Clements: I have an idea, too. [inaudible] I'm like... "So Sandy, what are you?" "I'm..."

Kelli Johnson: Not even...

Sandra Clements: ... "into politics." I didn't know what they were asking about. Finally, they all laugh, and I'm going, "What are you talking about?" "Oh, we're not going with that discussion." No, it's none of your business. I don't talk about that. I might be Rocky Road. [inaudible].

Kelli Johnson: I think that's the perfect place to end it. Thank you, Sandra.