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Arthur "Billy" Leonard Pegram Jr.

Kelli Johnson

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Dr. Kelli Johnson:

It is July. I almost said January. It is July 19th, 2021.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

19th, 2021. There you go.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

... and we're in Huntington, West Virginia. This is Dr. Kelli Johnson. I'm doing oral history interviews as a part of the National Park Service grant to document the civil rights era in Huntington, West Virginia. So let's go ahead and get started. What's your full name?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Arthur Leonard Pegram Jr.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Can you spell that for us please?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

A-R-T-H-U-R, of course, you can use L or L-E-O-N-A-R-D. Pegram, P-E-G-R-A-M and of course, the J-R should stand for itself.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Why did your parents pick that name for you?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, actually it was my father Leonard Jr., named after him. My first name before that it went into records was named William. My mom named me after her favorite brother. Of course, my dad wasn't having it. He wanted me named after him. So but they changed the name but they kept the nickname for William, which was Billy. So my nickname is still Billy and my name is Arthur.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

What were your parent's names?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

My mom's name was Ardelia S. maiden name Smith Pegram and my father of course, SR. Arthur L. Pegram Sr.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I had four sisters, no brothers. Diane, Peewee, or shall I say, let's get the proper first name.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Thank you.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Patricia, Arthuria, Delphene, excuse me, and Donna.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Thank you. Where were you born?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I was born actually in Clifton Forge, Virginia. I've lived in Covington. There was a hospital in Covington but at that time, it didn't allow Blacks so we had to go to the only hospital in the region that allowed Blacks, which was the old C&O Hospital in Clifton Forge.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay, and when were you born? What's your birthday?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

1953, May the 8th.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

May the 8th. So what are some of your ... Well, you were born in Virginia, when did you make it to Huntington?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, a little bit after I was four years old. My parents moved too from Virginia because all my parent's siblings they went to Hampton through my mom. They wanted us to have a opportunity to go to college and other than high school, which was in Virginia that would accept Blacks was Marshall, so they moved up here. Of course, next to their friends that they grew up in Covington and also got married together. Then they lived next to each other.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, who were they?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

They were Dorothy and Robert Nallen.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay. So you moved up to Huntington when you were four?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Where did you go to school?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Lincoln Elementary, Lincoln Junior High and Huntington East High School.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

All right.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Of course, Marshall.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay, and then when did you graduate from high school?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

1971.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

1971.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I went to let's just say the part of Marshall, I call Vaseline College. I kind of slipped in through the back.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

I love that. So what are some of your earliest childhood memories?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, I can go back, as I was telling Marcie, I got a two memories of my dad. See, he was a paraplegic. He got hurt in a car accident three days after my third birthday.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I got two memories of my dad coming through the back door in the home we owned in Virginia and picking me up out of my carriage. But other than that, moving to the Huntington plain. Of course, the kids growing up and starting out. Of course, there was no preschool and things like that back in our day. You just jumped right into elementary. I can remember my first day.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

There's a friend, not a friend, shall I say acquaintance. Known him all through school. His name was Charlie Thompson. Maybe I shouldn't call his name but I can always remember this very vaguely. In the

first grade, which there were very few Blacks who went to Lincoln and Charlie Thompson came to me and said, "I don't like niggers." I looked at him and I said, "Well, we never used the term in my family."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I mean, really we never did and I said, I looked at him. He said, "Yeah. I'm talking to you." I said, "Who, me?" I looked at him, "Oh, well, I'm not a nigger." I wish I could have had a camera because the strangest look came upon his face that he was stuck. I walked off and I left him sitting there. I can remember growing up how he was around me. As far as, like I said, there wasn't that many Blacks who went to Lincoln Elementary. It was in a predominantly white area. Dealing with some really redneck, racist, bigots and nigger was a word they commonly used. Excuse me.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So where did you live at that time?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Actually, the address then was called Rear 26th Street. It's called Sara Court now but it was 1022 Rear 26th Street. It is now called 1022 Sara Court. It was off of 26th Street just a block above Lincoln Elementary and Junior High.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay, so that was what we call Fairfield East now. So what was it like when you were a child?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, honey. Well, we participated. Went to the First Baptist. My parents were members of First Baptist in Covington, so we moved up here. Of course, we went to First Baptist of Huntington. So we BYF, growing up with the church and things that was going on with the church that we participated in. Choir and all that stuff. Other than that, then basically church raising because living on the other end of where most of the Blacks lived at. So when we had to go, we didn't have the transportation of some middle-class families, which had cars.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Wherever we went, we walked. So to get to our Black area, we had to walk through a white area. Sometimes it wasn't a pleasant moment to walk through there because they were still I guess in the after-effects of the Civil War mentality. Jim Crow and segregation, separate but equal. But well, as well as we knew, it was separate and unequal. But just dealing with it. I was blessed in a lot of ways to deal with it in a ... I'm trying to think of the right words.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

In a way that kind of startled the bigots because when they'd say something, I would ask them a question. See, instead of them thinking that what they said would make me have a negative, invalid reaction, it was just the opposite. It really baffled them. After I learned, "Oh, so we can use, which I didn't know at the time, reverse psychology."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Because I was going to say, who taught you that skill?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

It was something that came natural. Well, I guess I'll put it this way, at that time. God takes care of baby's and fools so I was a baby. So now an old fool. I picked up. I'm always one to pick up on things quickly. That's why my wife gets on my case, especially when the kids are around. See, I'm the type of person you can show me once and I got it. I'm the type of person after I show you twice and you ain't got it, now, I'm very rude saying, "What is wrong with you?"

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

My wife over the decades, we've been married 41 years plus and saying that, "Billy, not everybody's like you." And I say, "Well, I don't see why." They say, well, which I do have and she says that she puts in a wealth of information. I thought, "Well, of what I think, is what I know is very little compared to what I know knowledge is or what exists in mankind." I have picked up on some things over my little 68 years of being on this planet. I'm thankful for it and some of my ways of using the knowledge was beneficiary. Some of it very foolish. As they say, you learn from your experience.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, you sure do. You sure do.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, I've hit that wall a couple times. Why won't that move? Yeah. A time when the wall didn't move so I just stepped around it.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

There you go. There you go. There you go. You mentioned your wife.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So you've been married for over 40 years.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

It's been 40-ish at that.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

What's your wife's name?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Tonda, Tondalynn.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

T-O-N-D-A?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes, Jordan.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

T-O-N-D-A-L-Y-N-N. But she said she don't like the whole name so she cut it down to Tonda.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay, I understand that. You have kids?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes. I have four animals.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Four ...

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Four animals that I love. Well, see, When I say that, a lot of people think about it negative. But they've got to realize we are a part of the animal kingdom.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

True. True, very true.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

So when I say that, I will deliberately do things like that and say things like that because it's just like I was telling you, well, I just didn't fall out of a pumpkin tree. A lot of people think, "Well, pumpkins don't grow on trees." So I'm throwing something there to see if your thinking.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Making somebody think. Making sure they're paying attention.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah, you got it. Little things I'll do like that and I'll see just what I ... And this is mine because when I was in ... I took psychology was my minor and the professor said, because of the way I would approach things and twist words around, actually getting the same answer. But if you're not listening, you'll give me a different answer because of the way I word it, which at one time I was good at. So we'd talk about just trying to understand and comprehend and deal with it. I learned dealing with the mind is better than dealing with the fists because a lot of times you get your butt whapped. The mind may tell you one thing, "Hands behind you." Oh, yeah. Anyway, I'm sorry.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, no. That's all right. No. You're fine. You're fine. So I'm going to go back to when you were a small child or younger child. What are some of the things that you enjoyed doing? What did you do in the neighborhood?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, I didn't have that much opportunity because growing up ... And I still am to a certain degree today and that's why my wife deals with me in a way. I've been a loner and I took to heart to what my grandfather and father said, "Men who travel the fastest or the farthest travels alone." Not that I just don't deal with people, which I do. But I find that sometimes it's best to really do a very real check on people because they have a tendency of falsifying themselves in front of you. Just too easy to get acquainted or to get close to you.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Most people are not honest at heart and to be honest at heart you got to be truthful. You got to understand the society that we live in doesn't really deal on truth and honesty. If you look at deception that we have within government, that we have within religion, that school teachers or what they call the educational system.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I call it the mis-educational system, that has plundered and ruined the mind of geniuses and made them total idiots. Done quite well job because it wasn't accidental. It is an approach to control and manipulate. To control and manipulate, like you said here, if I got your mind, your answers will follow. This is what they will use. I hate to say it like that but it's-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

No. That's what this is for. This is perfect.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Every now and then you got to slap me back in there because I'll go off on a tangent. Yes.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

I'll bring you right back around. I'll bring you right back around. Did you have role models as a child?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, my uncles. My father's friends because see, where we come from they basically all of them built everything they had. They owned their home, the business. They own their business, the buildings they had they worked out their own, they built. I used to watch and I was always in the way because being young it's ... I'm watching them when we moved up here like the shell that the house that my parents brought in the property. They put up the shell but everything interior, my father's uncles ... It's my uncles or father's brothers and my mom's brothers came up here and helped. Did a hell of a job.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I'm in the way, "Billy, would you get out of the way. Will you?" I'm just as signified, which as I'd gotten older it was a benefit to my father because my father used to call me Rockhead. The Rockhead and so after a while, when I see them do something, I'd say, "Why don't you do it like this?" Well, after a certain amount of time, he got to thinking about what I was saying and he'd say, "Rockhead, come here. How would you do this?" I'd say, "Well, Dad, I would do it like this." He'd say, "I'll try it that way." He came around that when there was a little problem, they'd call Rockhead.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Is that house still standing? Is it still there?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Property is still standing and my second oldest sister is living there now-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... because my oldest sister, she's a DR-MD special intern medicine can't get rid of, let go of that money because she's 73. She's still practicing medicine out in-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... California.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Of course, she's living that lifestyle so-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Good for her.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... and it ain't cheap.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Good for her. Yeah. I'm from California. I know, yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yeah. So and my second oldest sister, which got four degrees got more sense than probably got liver pills but dumb as a wedge. I love her and you got to understand, I'm not talking about her. I'm looking in the mirror as I say these things because we all got our faults but she's staying at our parent's home. Of course, my third oldest sister Delphene, she died in '94.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, I'm sorry.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

She had heart problem, valve. It was a bad valve they put in her heart-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Gosh.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... and shut down when she was sleeping. There's Donna, which lives up the street from me in my aunt and uncle's house which they left to us because we were actually the only, their kids. They never had any kids and Aunt Bit was my mom's sister but she was like a second mama so.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So were they in Virginia too and came up here?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, my aunt and uncle was from Virginia. They moved to New York and that's where they spend most of their time in Albany, New York.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Then when they retired, first they moved to Covington. Didn't like that. Then they moved to Chesapeake.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Ohio?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes, ma'am, right across the river and then they moved here in Huntington. They found a place they rented and then they bought the house, the first house that they ever owned in 1980.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, wow. Good for them.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yes. It was so sad because my Aunt Bit, like I said, she was like my second mama. She always wanted a deck on the back of that house. Me and my older sister, we'd come together. She'd say, "Well, one of us will buy the material. The other will pay for labor." I love my sister Diane. Don't get me wrong but she'll say a lot of things out of her mouth but it's just because she's living her lifestyle and she'll forget certain things she promises. So and my Aunt Bit came to me one day.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

She said, "Billy, I just got a Lowe's charge card of 1,500. Do you think that would be enough money to build a deck?" I said, "So I'll make a call for you." I did the measuring. I was drawing it up and all that. Showed her the material list. I told her about \$1,200 dollars. I think it was 1,221 was the price and I put it up for her. She lived six months before she passed.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, bless her heart but she got to enjoy it.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, she got-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

She got to enjoy it for six months.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes. What pissed me off was I was coming down the alley one day and she was sitting on the steps. Being actually like my mama and took me right. So I stopped, got out. Came and said, "Aunt Bit, what's wrong because you look kind of sad." She said, "Billy, I feel so bad." I said, "For what?" She said, "Because I wasn't able to pay you-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... for putting that deck up." because the guys that helped me, that came out of my pocket, which I didn't mind. And I told her, "Aunt Bit ..." See, you're about to get me in tears right now.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, I'm sorry.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I said, "Aunt Bit, for what you have done for us," because after our father got hurt, "and what you done for us helped the family." She always told mom that the family would never be without. She was a great woman. She really was.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

That's a beautiful story and I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring up the tears. I didn't mean to bring up the tears.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

That's good tears.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay, good. You need a minute or are you good?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

No. I'm good. I'm good.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay. Okay. So you said that your dad was injured in a car accident.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Sorry to talk about more sad stuff but-

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

That's things that happen. No, I know. Yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So what did your parents do when you were growing up? Did they work or?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, my mom was a nurse.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

She wanted to be a doctor but she got pregnant blah, blah, blah. Go, go, go and things goes on. My dad was a body and fender mechanic.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Of course, not only that, he was a master jackleg. When I say a master jackleg, he trained himself on electronics himself.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Became one of the best electronic technicians in this area. Well, all start off of all the Star Furniture, all the biggest companies of his time because of just his quality of workmanship and knowledge. But as far as what he could do, he could sew and I'm talking about seamstress. There's pictures that I can ... It's somewhere in one of these boxes of pictures that we have where he made the prom dresses for my two older sisters-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, my goodness.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... and everybody thought they were store-bought. Of course, I took some of his traits. I can sew. There's not too much I can't do. Like I tell people that actually what I can do and I say from the ground up. I don't do masonry work or pour footers. As far as shooting property lines, I've been trained in all that. Like I said, my father and grandfathers and some of the things they told me, "Learn all you can learn in life because you never know what you'll have to do." If you don't want to do it, you'll know if you're getting bamboozled or not.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yep. There you go. There you go. There you go.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

So I took it to heart and just recently in the last couple years me telling people years of telling, "Listen, I'm getting too old for this and there's going to come a day when I'm going to tell you, no." And my favorite saying, the shirt I haven't printed out yet but I want to print out and it says, the 19th and 20th letter of the alphabet, "N-O." So and they still, they laugh at you.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Right. You could sell those shirts.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

But the thing I was wanting is to put the 19th and 20th letter of the alphabet on the very back of it there, No. Oh, see, I was supposed to have done it years ago but I've got some shirts that I've been trying to sell. I haven't been. I ain't going to lie. I haven't been trying to sell because they haven't even got the trademark on them yet. I've got one that's got ... It's a warning sign and a danger sign. But the warning side is regular, "Police send you a warning, profile in progress." The other one is, there's a danger sign, "Police aren't any danger profile in progress." But on one side it's got a cop. On the other side it's got a Black guy with his hands up and he's shooting him.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Then on the back of it, it says, "Unjustifiable." And it's got the names of the people. Not all of them but the people who have been unjustifiably murdered. I could think of I've got all kinds of shirts. I've got of course, recreation, restitution and reconstruction. I called it, We Three Are One and that's what should be done towards Black people or people of color. See, I've got a little thing I never pushed to do, another business called unlimited imagination, where ideals begin with a dream. This idea I've got like for Dodge, D-O-D-G-E. It says, "Two ways you can use it. Drive on down and get elevated or drive on down and get excited."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

You know how you see the commercials on Dodge?

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

You should have gone into marketing.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, see my little business on the imagination, I've approached several businesses but see, I'm not a conglomerate.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I'm just a one-man show.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Then by my sound, of course, if you have any ears, you'll know that I'm Black. So I've done the thing for Timex, which they signed an agreement not to use it. But they were talking down to me because I had to explain to them this, "I'm Black, yes. I've got somewhat of an education. Yes, I can tell when you're talking down to me. I can tell when you're condescending, so please. Let's just get down on brass tacks as clear as day and talk to each other like we're human beings." In most cases they can't.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

They can't.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

See, they've been indoctrinated.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

But ideas I've got, I've got for Walmart. W-A-L-M-A-R-T. I got, "We all love that we are making America run thoroughly." And the song goes, I'm Walking on Sunshine. You got a little sign.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

So a person would be walking on that little thing (singing) ... and I sure feel good. Walmart.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

You missed your calling. You missed your calling.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, I got tons of them. I ain't lying to you. I done Timex. It takes a licking and keeps on ticking. Just ask Father Time. Imagine a billboard with a picture of Father Time and then next to him an hourglass, the old saying, takes a licking keeps on ticking add on to new, just ask Father Time. Commercial starts to make you feel quick as we're getting to this. As there where a guy is putting on his nice depictive watch, said, "Honey, I'm going to take the commuter bus because I've got a presentation to give." So he leaves early.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

So as he goes up to the stop, it's pulling off. He's yelling. Puts down the briefcase. Looks at his watch. He's pissed. Pulls of his watch and slams it to the ground. Looks back and sees that billboard. He looks at the billboard being kind of he says, "I guess you know what time it is." So the billboard comes to life. Father time goes and it looks like he's going to look at the hourglass. Flips back his robe and looks at his watch.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

It's a nice Timex.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

And the guy says, "Father Time, you're looking at a watch?" Father Time leans out of the billboard, "Not just a watch, a Timex."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

That's very nice.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah. But you could use it for Bulova or other ones but I just got tons of commercials, shirts. I'll put it this way, like most Black people do, procrastinate all the decade long.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Well, but I want to circle back around because you said you went to Marshall-

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

... so did you and all of your siblings, you all went to college?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

You all went to Marshall?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes, and Diane she wanted to go to West Virginia State to med school because she really liked that but they put her on a waiting list. But she got accepted in Meharry Medical in Nashville.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Then they called and said, "They got her off the waiting list. She's accepted at WVU." She said, "Never mind." because she went onto Meharry, although she'd have went to West Virginia U because I think she would have stayed here.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay. Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Even though it had been difficult, because most Black doctors that come here don't stay long. It's because of I'll tell it this way. If you want to know how Capitol Hill was, come to Huntington, West Virginia. It's a prototype. It is the makeup, the mentality, and working for the city, back in the '70s, and seeing the structure. And the attitudes, they're not that much different from Capitol Hill because I had kinfolks that tried to get me to be a pageboy up there once.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, interesting.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yeah. Very interesting. Found out they was all broke wrist and I just told them, "Well, it's not my cup of tea."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. That's not your thing.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

But that's what they call I guess with their color and the jobs they had in well, positions of Black authority. I gave them my thanks and appreciation but I wish I had the mentality, the foresight then. Then it might be-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. Hindsight's 20/20.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, no, no, no. Hindsight's 20/10, girl. It ain't 20/20. Like the song ... (singing) Oh, yes.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So you worked for the city?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I worked for the city for a little while. Due to its bigotry and racism they fired me three times. I got my job back and got tired of it. Left. Left while I was leaving them because, excuse me, some things had happened that was wrong in the police department.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So what did you do for the city? I don't remember.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, I was supposed to have been hired as a mechanic.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

But they hired me in and told me to wait for the position to occur. I had the NAACP at the time to help me to get in there. Well, I was in there in the parts' department. Then I went to the night watchman. Then night watchman, I went to janitor because I saw politics being played and even as a janitor I had supervisors. I worked under Don Black. Was kind of envious and threatened by me possibly taking his position because I was going to Marshall too.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Was he a white guy?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah. He was a white guy. Worked for him in equipment maintenance and operation. There was from every angle you could think they was throwing knives. I had been fortunate to the degree to comprehending and dealing with people that had the attack mode upon Black people that they couldn't control and manipulate mentally. Then when they talked too, they had to talk too, within reason because they saw that they were talking to somebody that had some not maybe education but some common sense to deal with them on any level.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

They don't like it when you can deal with them on any, their level and all level of things that they do and do it with a rational mind. Regardless of whatever. Well, nigger, when it comes out, then they try to provoke you and you don't get provoked. Then you address them, "That, that's a negative term and see, nigger doesn't have a color. It has a kind. I hope you're not that." and I'm saying something like that. Inside, you could see them get beet red. See, they're trying to get me upset and I'm just throwing it back on them, "If you want to stay in the kitchen I hope you can stand the heat." You know what I mean?

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

There you go.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Okay, so.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

You said that was in the '70s?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yes, ma'am. I left there in '74, '75.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Then I went to Connors Steel, Steel of West Virginia. Then from Steel ... Well, worked at, had other jobs, prior before them. Then I went to Ashland Oil. If had it to over, to do it again, I would have stayed at Connors Steel but I was young and foolish. Saw money and I saw the money, what I could be making at Ashland Oil. So I went there and over the decades right now, 32% of oil, chemicals, and petrol workers did not make it to retirement. I was up to retirement, it was three years. Most of the people that did not make it to retirement, 99% of them, it was because of cancer. Everything you work around petrol chemicals causes cancer, so.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So you left there till you left Ashland Oil?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

No, no, no.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So you stayed there and retired from there?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

When did you retire?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, in '99.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

'99.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Took early bow. Had to go. Had enough. They said, "Listen, we're going to go this. We're going to do that. We can use you." "Yeah, I know how I could use me too."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

On both contemplations, however you want to look at it.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay. So I'm going to turn it over to the civil rights era now.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Okay.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

... because we touched a little bit on it.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

I want to go back to that. So I'm just going to ask some questions-

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Go ahead. Go ahead.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

... to get you going.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Go ahead.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So what specific events do you remember in Huntington that had to do with civil rights?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Protestors, developments, the so-called riots, which was very-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

In Huntington?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah. The little get-together disturbance. I remember once, I was picking up my mom at the hospital. 13th Street and 6th Avenue. I can't think of the name of it now and there was a security guard. The car was broke down and he asked me to give him a ride home. No problem. He lived out by 16th Street before they changed it to Hal Greer and they was having a disturbance then at that particular time. But I had my little Cutlass two-door convertible with my red, black and green hood.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, that's great.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yeah. Everybody knew my vehicle. So as I'm riding through this neighborhood well, mom, she's in the back seat. The son of a bitch told me, "Never go down." They saw this guy with this uniform on, police uniform, which was a security uniform.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, uh-huh.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I was accused of riding a cop around. Well, because then these people told me they was coming after me because blah, blah, blah. So of course, I was never one to run from trouble. So I confronted the people and told them, "Listen, what you saw was a security guard at my mom's job that I was giving a ride home. So you're upset at the man but you're going to attack your own because of what you think and not really being sure."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Was it a white security guard?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah. He was a white security.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

There was Black people protesting?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes, yes.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Just for context.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Right, yes. So it was miscommunication through sight. Of course, then sometimes we jump without knowing the whole story.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

During that civil rights era, I could remember the White Pantry colored only. I could remember going to Keith-Albee who was only allowed upstairs. The Balcony where Blacks could go to. I can remember colored day and I'll tell you this too-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, because they had colored day at the-

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Camden Park.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Camden park, that's right.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

But here's what I like to say and I don't know the total just by my knowledge. Me, Butchie and Willard Redford were the only three Black Safety Patrol boys in Cabell County. They had a Safety Patrol day at Camden Park for the Cabell County-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Safety Patrol kids. Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, see being that we were Black and it was other than colored day-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:
So you couldn't go?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:
Oh, yes. We went.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:
You did?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:
Let me tell you, we were like the three amigos. Like Siamese twins, we were stuck together from the parents that took their kids there and was yelling at us, "Niggers what you doing here? You know this ain't your day to be there." If we all three could not get on one ride, we were not-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:
You didn't do it?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:
No. We didn't get on it because we did not leave one out and because of the verbal abuse that we was taking. I often thought about that and I thought, "Well, you know, something? I'm not saying it's true but from my knowledge and recognition, were we the ones of the first ones that went to Camden Park other than colored day?"

Dr. Kelli Johnson:
Not on colored day. What year was that?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:
Oh, when did I graduate? '65?

Dr. Kelli Johnson:
Wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:
'64, okay, '65, '66 ... Yeah, '65, '66 like that. '65, '66, were both two years in the fifth and sixth grade me and Butchie and Willard were in the Safety Patrol.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:
Yeah, wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:
Just seeing that and going to ... I'll tell you an example of bigotry in the time before then. Mrs. Dorothy. Marcia was talking about it. She showed me a picture of it. We had career day. Being one of the few black people, the only Black people at that time in the classroom that was asking, "Well, Arthur, what do

you want to be when you grow up?" And I said, "I want to be a doctor, lawyer, architect, and engineer." And the class went, "Ooh." Then Mrs. Dorothy got back and said, "Well, why don't you be a garbage collector like the rest of your people?" And the class broke out laughing. I mean, not being affected by stupidity.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I scratched my head. I raised my hand. Mrs. Dorothy said, "Well, what do you want now, Arthur?" I said, "Well, Mrs. Dorothy, if you look around, not all my people are garbage collectors." The class stopped laughing as fast as they started. She lost it. She beat this hand till literally it was black and blue and swollen. Well, they got into trouble because I ran into the principal. He accidentally bumped my books out of my hand so I was scared. Put the hand that she beat behind my back and I was trying to stack the books. Strewing them over there.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

He kept telling me, "Use your other hand." I said, "I can't." When he said, "Use the other hand." I broke out crying because I thought, "Oh, I'm getting another beating." But he grabs my hand. He looks at me and, "Oh, my God, what happened to you?" He took me to the office. Put ice on it. I explained to him. Well, the next day I come to the class, I didn't take this back to my house then told my parents because see, my father was in the hospital. He was in and out of the hospital all the time.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

See, it was enough stress at home and I tried not to bring it, even at that young age that stress. She took me out of my regular seat and put me in a dummy's corner. She never asked me another question. I never understood why but as I got older and I got to calculating things that happened, I'd say she got reprimanded. So this was her retaliation for being reprimanded for her own stupidity. That just shows you how people cannot accept the wrong that they do because we're not perfect. Accept it.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Nobody's perfect.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

But right, we're full of stupidity.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yep.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

We all have periods. Go ahead.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So do you remember, you talked about White Pantry and you talked about-

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

The 1,000.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

... the gathering.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Right, right.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So do you remember any other like boycotts of businesses or schools or?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yes.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

While I'm being the youngest and they want to keep me safe for being the only boy, my sisters tried. I tried to be out front. I'm looking at them like, "Because you're older don't mean you're ..."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Right, right.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I had my own grownup mind in a young body. I can remember the demonstrations that my sisters participated in. I'll go far back even during the '60s up to the '70s, the Marshall plane crash just before the plane crash the Black guys was about to boycott the football team because of how they were being treated.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, I never knew that.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Arthur Brown was saying that to them during a meeting they were having, during the Black-to-back students. It was called bust then.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

It still is. I think they still call it bust. Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Saying that the team they play that if they don't beat them they're going to die trying. It was something that was just said. Not taken literally. Well, literally it happened. They died in the plane crash.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Being that at my age, I'm saying height I was and build that I was in junior high, I kind of grew up stocky and hanging with these guys because I had the four sisters and they're all going to Marshall at that time. All the guys, they all congregated around my parent's house and associate with them. I used to enjoy my time in that youth. But seeing the bigots, the discrimination, the normal practices of the white society, as far as just being discriminatory, they called it came better after Jim Crow and after Brown versus the Board of Education.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

You can look at it to the day. It was like evolution. It hasn't, the substance hasn't changed, it's just covered the way it's presented. It looks more subtle. It's the same outcome. I don't have to lynch you but I can make you a slave to economics. I can control you through monetary value, so you got to look at how the system works and they work well.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So you see a lot of parallels between the civil rights era and now?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It hasn't stopped. The sad part about it is and being a human being. And I'm not prejudiced. I don't believe in racism because there's only one race, the human race. If you are racist, as what you dialogue it today, then you can bet you don't like yourself. If you don't like me, it's not because of being a part of humanity or the human race, it's because of the color of my skin. So then you have a psychological problem. You really don't know it as a sickness but it is, to not like a person for their color because then if I was blue like the sky or green like the ... Or now that I am brown like the dirt. Now if you got a problem with color, maybe you should check yourself you know what I mean? That's just a point where-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Very well-said.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... it's because it doesn't make any sense.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

But it's my point.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So you mentioned a little bit about your sisters and their involvement.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Is that how you got involved or you learned about things in the struggle?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, I learned about it. I had growing up, and you can look at the size and Marcia could tell you. Kooks like the Beaver boys, which is racist people in our area that didn't like Black people. Of course, that wasn't the word that they used.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

I never heard of them before.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, the Beaver boys. Do we know them quite well, don't we, Marcie?

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

The Beaver boys?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yeah.

Speaker 3:

Yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Is that like a family or that's what they called themselves?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

No. There was a group of redneck-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

B-E-A-V-E-R?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

I have never heard of them before.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

There was-

Speaker 3:

Williams, the guy you saw in-

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yeah. At that particular time, after dark, Black people did not go on upper side of 20th Street and white people did not come down there. Also, there is a wall that's on 14th Street. Fact, where the Boys' Club is and the track, 14th Street. On that back side, there's a wall that was built to seclude Black people from coming over into the neighborhood.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

I never knew that.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yes. Oh, honey. It's just a little sorrowness-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yes.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... of the snake's venom. That may not kill you quickly but it's-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

It'll slowly eat away at you.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So you mentioned earlier about the NAACP. They helped you out.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yes.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Do you remember anything about the NAACP during that civil rights era? Or any time?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, I mean there was a lot going on and I was kind of stupid in my own idea of thinking that what was the necessary, which it was even to today because I'm thinking that my favorite was, which I look at it more reasonable now of saying the national adventure of colored people. Well, see, my father would

say, "We're all people of color." So if I was to use the NAACP today, I would be more open and not be seclusive because when you say colored people, you understand the terminology-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... because being that we're all people of color. So how can we discriminate within the organization against colored people?

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. That was good. Understood.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So do you feel like they weren't effective, that they weren't doing it or?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

They were effective to a degree but they were handicapped because see, here when you go through the mis-educational system in manipulation of the mind to control and make them do what you want them to do-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Okay, yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... and it's regardless of how it might be right or wrong, you want to be right. The thing of it is that even though we may approach it in the mentality of righteousness, does the cause and effect produce that? In most cases it does. See, now, I don't want to get picky because I can. But it's just that's my outlook at looking at the situation because being that there's only one race of people, if we do not work collectively together for the whole, then we're working division among the many.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Understood.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

We're doing good with it.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Don't mind me. Don't mind my craziness.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

No. I mean, this is perfect. So do you feel like there were people in Huntington, in Fairfield who were leaders during the civil rights era that were trying to move it forward not just for Black people but for people or?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

No. They were just like most people of all colors that was trying to move their own agenda to status themselves and to see themselves ... I'll give you an example. Just like whenever problems arise, they want to go to our religious leaders because they know that, that's a foundation. Or what they put forth as the foundation because that way they can manipulate like they have manipulated over centuries through us through religion but anyway.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So did religion play a part in your life at that time? You mentioned you joined First Baptist-

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, it did. Oh, I was very strung out. I was hooked. I was in me all the religion up in me you can. I got sidetracked through a man that was a better businessman than he was a preacher, Tall Smith. I was a holy-roly and all that good stuff. Just bound to be, to wrap my life around Christ until he asked me to go to bed with Donna and Robin Scott because he wanted me to break them for him.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, my God.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

That's my reaction, honey.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

You know we're recording, right?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I kind of lost it. I kind of say, "What?" I'm loud. People were wondering, "What's wrong with him? He's going crazy talking to his preacher like that." But they wasn't in the room when he asked me to do that and after that ...

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

So I did the study on religion and what I found out is that the indoctrination that we have through all the different religions throughout the world all possessing to follow the will of the creator. I don't want to sound sexist because I can't go with the Father, the Son and all that stuff because being that I come from

a woman, I got a problem with that. So trying to sound sexist and say God is a male, I can't go along with that. So certain things that religion do produce and try to stand out I have a problem with because of its reality.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

So being that I don't know what that entity is that creator is made of but I'm sure he has the knowledge of all sexes, all things so to say that he's a man is sexist. And it should not be allowed even in religion like certain things that I think, my own interpretation, when it says, "Thou shalt not kill." Of the 33,000 so-called misinterpretations that's in the Bible, through certain religious and extra study long and far more than I have that I think it's, "Thou shalt not murder." Because why would He put such a thing in the Bible when He literally wiped out cities?

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Now, defense is, thou shalt not murder, take somebody's life but to defend yourself, He allowed David to defend himself. What did he do when he wiped out? Defended himself. He was doing God's will. So to say, "Thou shalt not kill." I think is a misinterpretation. I think it should say, "Thou shalt not murder." Of course, that's just my own belief.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. Well, you're a critical thinker and you question things. Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, that's what I was accused of all during school was, "Arthur, why can't you just accept and quit asking why?" I said, "Well, I ask why because I don't understand and you being the educator, I figure you should know it or teach me. If you don't know, just let me know that you don't know. Don't parade that you do when you don't."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, and people still have a problem with that.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, they still do.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So the civil rights movement in Huntington, so the things that we talked about here and in the country. How did that affect you in your life?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, it kind of just took over all view of trying to comprehend.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Like?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

People. So when I was telling you about the Beaver boys, how, excuse me, a good friend of my, which was white, Stewart Allen Jammin. He was telling me how the Beaver Boys was talking about planning to go beat up some niggers as they put it. And Stewart requested of him, "Well, when you're talking about niggers, what about Billy?" They would say, "Well, Billy's different." Of course, Stewart was a critical thinker too. He's long since passed and he said, "Well, but he's Black." He said, "But he's not like them." He'd come back and tell me.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

We were very open to each other and it got me to really to end up thinking, "What am I missing?" because I've been accused of certain things in school. Making Mr. Britton go crazy. He was our algebra II teacher because he'd be writing a equation up on the board and I'd be raising my hand. I'd tell him. He'd say, "What is it Arthur?" I said, "I know the answer." He said, "But I haven't finished the equation." I said, "I don't know why, Mr. Britton but I know the ..." He'd go, "What's the answer?" I'd tell him the answer. After he'd finished writing the equation he goes through all the procedure. Then he'd come after and look at me, "How do you know that?" I said, "I don't know."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

you just knew. You just knew.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Lord, I got in trouble. I got good in math. I didn't crack a book in math. Yeah. I was helping my sister in college physics and calculus because she couldn't understand it. She got a A-minus out of college and I was still in junior high. I got into trouble because I hit a principal-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Oh, Lord.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

... in high school. First day of high school and this will show you how they were. I flunked plane geometry not because I wasn't good at math. It's just at that time, the math teacher that flunked me was undercover with the principal. So our first day of class she said, "You're advised to go to the library." I said, "For what?" She goes, "You're going to flunk this class." I said, "Ms. Hirsch, flunk math? I ain't going to crack a book and I'm going to get a B, B-plus out of this. I ain't flunking." Well, I did. I flunked it. I got straight A's. Had to go to summer school all because as I found out later when it happened and what was going on.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

It's just you talk about being a critical thinker going back to what we were talking about, I analyze. They used to give me because I'd pass. As I've gotten older and went to the psych analyst they told me, "Billy,

you think too much. You got to ..." I'd say, "Well, I just ..." anything I analyze. Even just you. You're listening, your attitude. I don't have to look at you directly to see and I got good perception. I still do it. Just how was the action to reaction? Doing that is my analyzation of not people of color but just people.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Why did they? What made them? As I've gotten older, I haven't done nothing with it. I got a book I've been writing. Never finished because there's so much. There could be volumes upon volumes and it's called The Color of Black Rage, White Racism. It's a picture of my life and things that happened as I got older. It's things that was happening in my life. How society was accepting or not accepting.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

so I need to loan you one of these recorders. You record it and we'll just type it up.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Well, I'm going to tell you, I've got ... Ross Perot came up in '88, United We Stand.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I remember that's when I started the first book. I never did finish that one either. It was called Divided We Fall Together. It was-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

There you go, yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

It is coming from sex, to religion, color, all the division. The manipulation of that division to benefit that 1% that control everything because see, this is how they control everything is through division. So as long as they can get the dog chasing its tail and once you get the dog chasing its tail, you ain't got to whup up the dog no more. Then you have trained him well.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

What you're describing is now called critical race theory and it is-

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, really? Is that what it's called?

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. I have a book I'll loan you about it, yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Okay, well-

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

But a lot of what you've been talking about today makes me think about that. That's a very hot topic right now too.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, well, critical race theory is the same attitude that the bigots and the slave master and Willie Lynch has been doing to manipulate and control the masses of people. See, how they do it with people of color, all color is that they make the Black think and they make the white think. Not collectively together to benefit each other but to make sure to keep the separation separate. That is something in our life the movie Remember the Titans when that Black guy told the young guy that was on the team, "The truth is not in you."

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

See, if you're not willing to accept the truth to expose the lie, then you're a deception towards life. Then you are really destructive towards humanity for the benefit of the whole. I'm talking about on a global scale because we're all on this rock. You know what I mean? So it ain't about, "Oh, I'm going to the moon." I mean, right, go if you want to.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Like the moon race. Right. Okay. Well, let me bring it back right around because we're running low on time.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

I'm sorry.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

No, no. Don't be sorry. This has been wonderful. So the Civil Rights Act was signed in 1964.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

'65, '64, '65, right.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Okay.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So what-

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Benefit.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. What are your memories of that? Was there a benefit? Was there a change?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

The christening of LBJ's arm by Martin Luther King because they already had killed Medgar Evers and they killed Malcolm X. They didn't like meeting him like Martin Luther King was turning around to, to the masses. Not just to as we call it put it as they say, the race. The Black views. Malcolm X, when he went to make a comeback had a whole different attitude realizing people of all colors. Talking to Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, people of all colors. Here's the thing about that, even to today.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

You're not a threat if you go along with the system but when you disturb the egg carton, when you put out the truth, when you put all humanity together for all to think with one thought and the truth. And the truth because we are born inherent with the truth. When you start doing that, and that 1% see that and they can't get you with drugs. They can't get you with money. They can't get you with sex. They got the bullet. Yeah.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Right. There you go. There you go.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

So when I look at all that was going on through that time and that era. What I was trying to understand in my young mind is, "What's wrong with us?" I'm not looking when I say us, I mean humanity. I hate to sound sexist but it just sounds sexist when you say mankind.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Right.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

That's why I want to say humanity because even though it's got the man in it but I'll go with that so because being that ... I'll tell a woman because I'll talk stuff. If you don't like the guy you get Black ... You got yourself a blank because a high, you figure because I come from a woman. So you got to take a part of that. You know what I mean? It's like I've done a lot of women and got to talk the stuff. And I say, "Let me tell you something. It's your fault."

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

But with the difference it happened and going back to that era again, of what has really happened, was that total, that Willie Lynch. Read about Willie Lynch. When he was telling the slave masters how to control the Black society and it would last 400 years and beyond to make the light skins feel better than the dark skin. Make the straight hair feel better than the nappy hair. To keep the division going. To field slave feel less than the house nigger. Call it like I see it and we have a lot of house niggers today.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

And I call it wannabes. There's only thing that with the white man and I'm going to say it like this. I don't mean to sound racist in the terminologies used. Is because a wannabe is dangerous to the white man because he wants to be something he ain't. He will go through any means to make that what he wants

to be satisfy and like him. Make him acceptable and see, that's very dangerous because then like a man it goes to the point that if you're stupid and don't know it, you're dangerous.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Right.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

You know what I mean? But it seems that the wannabes was one who did Malcolm X, Farrakhan. I mean not Farrakhan. Believe before Farrakhan, it's I think had something to do with Malcolm X. Of course, J. Edgar Hoover was no joke. He said, "Anybody is anybody he wants paper on." That's why he was in the office, the first and longest director of the FBI because he had the papers on anybody that was anybody because if he still found issues, he'd crush you.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Right, and we've seen the proof.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

We've seen the proof. He took well. I tell you. But then in my life, I still ask the same question today, "Why?" Give me a logical reason, an expectation to make it sound sensible to my mind, which was born inherent with the truth and you're trying to corrupt through mis-education. Trying to corrupt through religion. Trying to corrupt through color. Trying to corrupt through sex, to see what is and what ain't. Don't put that veil over my eyes and not ask me to listen because I'm going to hear it whether I can see or not. But anyway, sorry.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Thank you. No. Don't be sorry. Thank you so much for this. Is there anything else that you wanted to add before I turn this off?

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, yeah. Listen, no. You don't want ... Listen, you ain't got enough batteries in that.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

So we'll just have to do round two then. All right.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Oh, let me tell you because I'm a realist. I love life. I have trying to dealt with myself with all my problems in the situations that I was given in society and all its problems. I wanted to say that I'm a realist and I'm a procrastinator. It's my worst habit. I know when they first told me that I could be a leader and I told them, "Well, be like a Malcolm X or Martin Luther King." I said, "Well, they ain't really, really great to look up to." They said, "Why?" I said, "They dead."

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Right.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

They was murdered. Do I want to stand in front of a bullet?" Then I told them, "I'm a chickenshit." You know why? I mean, I'm not ready to die, not that I want to get myself killed but you know something? I think and my biggest sin and I tell people, "If there is a entity, like I believe that there is, my biggest fault is that I know and I didn't do." That be the end of my conversation.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

Thank you very much, sir.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

You're welcome.

Dr. Kelli Johnson:

I appreciate you.

Arthur Leonard Jr.:

Okay.