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Shirley Ann Williams and Joseph L. Williams Jr. – Part 1

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Kelly Johnson:

Okay. It is Friday, October 1st, 2021. My name is Kelly Johnson and in collaboration with some colleagues, I am doing oral history interviews as a part of a national park service grant on civil rights history in Appalachia. And today I am here with Mr and Mrs. Williams, and I'm going to let them introduce yourselves.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Hello, my name is Shirley Ann Williams. I was born and raised Island Kentucky. My mother died when she was 34 and I was 14 and there were eight of us, four boys and four girls. And my dad raised us the best he could. We all turned out fabulous. And now, since I married my Joseph, it'll be 57 years in January. We have four children, three girls, and one boy. 17 grandkids, four foster and eight great grandkids. And I would just love one day to have everyone together and take a beautiful picture. So I hope that would happen soon.

Kelly Johnson:

Well, we'll make sure they all hear this so they know.

Joseph L. Williams:

Right, right, exactly.

Kelly Johnson:

Do you mind telling us your birthdate?

Shirley Ann Williams:

My birthdate is November the 10th, 1944. I graduated from Blancho High school, Island Kentucky. I have a two-year degree from Marshall University with information technology. But I did my internship under miss Sutherland, who was the former girls basketball coach.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh, okay.

Shirley Ann Williams:

She wanted to hire me, but my husband said, no, I want you to stay home, so you could travel with me and do this and do that.

Joseph L. Williams:

[inaudible 00:02:04] she'd have no income now.

Kelly Johnson:

Well, let's cut to Mr. Williams. Will you introduce yourself and give us some of your background?

Joseph L. Williams:

I'm Joseph L. Williams Jr. I was born March the 25th, 1945 in Boone County, Madison West Virginia. I graduated from Scott High School in 1963 and I came to Huntington to attend Marshall. But my

childhood, as I look back, I probably wouldn't want to do it any other way or have it any other way. We were very economically deprived. There was no doubt about that, but I had a loving mother and father. I made good grades in school. I was I think number 10 in my class of 143 or four in high school. And I played in the band. I was a head drummer for Scott high school. And overall, and we're talking about even before integration, we all rode the same school buses. We went to different schools.

Joseph L. Williams:

But after the Brown versus Board of Education in 1954, if I'm not mistaken Boone County, and I have to give credit to Boone County, began to integrate its school in Madison, not throughout the county. And because I remember I was at Carver Grade High school, was a combination grade high school. And some of the seniors or upperclassmen, at noon they would go to Scott High school for shop, and some of the other things that they didn't offer at Carver high school. And then it must have been in 1955, I know we had a substitute teacher who was white. And that was really something.

Joseph L. Williams:

And then in 19... I think in 1956 in the sixth grade, the schools were integrated in Madison. Now I lived about six, seven miles from Madison. Now, Vann school was only five and a half miles away, but it was not integrated so we went to Madison. And I remember we were always told that we had secondhand books and so forth, which is true. But after about three or four days, I remember saying to myself as a child, "Hey, these white kids don't have anything on me." And maybe that came from... Especially my mother was very proud, and we knew the history of our family. Part of the loss and gore of Guyana. We traced the Gores all the way back to, well, my great, great grandfather who was a slave owner. My great great-grandfather was a slave owner, but he had 20 kids.

Joseph L. Williams:

He had about 12 or 13 about slave women. And then he married this, his white wife. They said she was in the family way and he was forced to marry her. And so I mean, and we go all the way back even to Al Gore, because some of the Gores settled in Virginia, some went to Tennessee. So we go way back. So we were always very proud of who we were, who we are. And that came basically from my mother.

Joseph L. Williams:

My dad grew up in Richmond, Virginia. And at that time, the south was not a place for many black people. But my mother was always, she was very proud. My grandfather, he owned the first grocery store up there. He taught school and he used to teach both the black and white children. And I know one person said, "No, that wasn't allowed." Well, it was allowed. Number one, we were akin to most of them, although neither side admitted it. And number two, if you want your children to learn, to read and write, and the only teacher is a person of color, that's... And they said, "Well, that wasn't allowed." Well, I'm the color I am. Because a lot of things that supposedly weren't allowed evidently happened.

Kelly Johnson:

Right.

Joseph L. Williams:

but-

Kelly Johnson:

So that was in Virginia or in West Virginia?

Joseph L. Williams:

West Virginia.

Kelly Johnson:

That was in West Virginia.

Joseph L. Williams:

West Virginia, yeah. My father grew up in Richmond, Virginia. And by the way, Richmond, Virginia has really changed quite a bit. I was president with a small bank down there and... But as I remember, yeah, we had some of our problems and maybe calling each other names sometime. But as I look back, we have some true friendships that have lasted throughout the years. And from time to time, we'll go back and we are very fond of Boone County. We, in the new hospital, my wife, my brother purchased a room in honor of mom and dad-

Kelly Johnson:

Oh wonderful.

Joseph L. Williams:

... and the rest of us. So we purchased a reception area at the new Boone Medical Center. But as I look back, yes, we were, I guess, discriminated against in a certain manner, but that was the way it was. And although we all went to the same... rode the same school buses and things that I've said, but I don't remember any real, real problem-

Kelly Johnson:

Real issues in Boone, yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

... in Boone county, there were. In fact, after I left Boone county and came to Huntington, I think about... They had several marriages and all of them were biracial marriages, or interracial marriages or whatever you say. In fact, when we had a black person to marry another black person, it's... Now this is what they claimed, that there was a celebration in south Madison. Whether that's true or not, but it was... And maybe it's because most of them were coal miners and so forth. And there was some wealthy people like Ellis and the Haddads who started Hex Department store and so forth. But I remember, like I said, we weren't very economically enhanced, but people would go across and buy a cup of sugar, or a flower and so forth.

Joseph L. Williams:

And there were very few people of color up in that part of Boone County. So as I look back, I'm kind of glad we grew up where we did. I wish our kids had had that other, than I wish they had more economically than we did. Because I remember sometimes shoes and, you know, you wear them

together or put cardboard in and it rains. And then they FLA and you're trying to walk and instead of walking, you're kind of slides, but you don't want that tongue flapping.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Or you walk backwards, like I used to do.

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah.

Kelly Johnson:

So you went to segregated schools the whole time you were all kindergarten through high school or?

Joseph L. Williams:

No.

Kelly Johnson:

No?

Joseph L. Williams:

No. My first year was Douglas grade school. It was two roomed school, and it taught the first and second grade. And Mrs. Daisy Smooth, who lives here in Huntington, she was a principal. Then they built or added to the, I guess high school and it became Carver Grade/High School. The second through the fifth, but then they all black school. And then from the sixth grade, with sixth, seventh, eighth, I was in Madison Grade school. It was integrated. And then nine through 12th at Scott High school, which was also integrated.

Kelly Johnson:

And then Paul Blazer was integrated?

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah.

Kelly Johnson:

Paul Blazer-

Shirley Ann Williams:

But before the integration, I attended Booker Tea, Washington elementary and high school. And there were white schools, maybe four blocks away from where I lived, and I would have to walk 30 blocks to my school, which I didn't. You never thought anything of it.

Kelly Johnson:

Yeah. That's just what you did.

Joseph L. Williams:

That's just the way it was.

Kelly Johnson:

Yeah.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Yeah, just the way it was. But we had excellent teachers. Excellent teachers. I wish they were here again to help teach. And I wish they would teach black history in schools. I really do because a lot of our people don't even know anything, especially the younger ones.

Kelly Johnson:

Well, hopefully these kind of things, these interviews will help do that and help teach some of that history.

Joseph L. Williams:

And many of our white, I'll say, brothers and sisters, that's what they're fighting against now. They don't want the truth to be known. They don't want their offspring to know exactly what has happened in this country, and how it came to be. How it was built to a great extent by people of color and free of charge. Not intentionally, but-

Kelly Johnson:

Yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

... [inaudible 00:11:40].

Kelly Johnson:

I'm going to skip all these other things that I was going to ask, because I do know we have other oral histories with you all with your history. I want to jump right into what you were leading towards, the history that we want to talk about today. Civil rights. The Civil Rights era in this area. So when did you all come from Ashland and Boone and make it to Huntington?

Shirley Ann Williams:

Well, after I graduated from Paul Blazer, I decided, well, I'm going to go to Huntington and live with my aunt and uncle. So I asked them and they said, "Yeah." And I did go to Douglas and for a part of my school year after my mother died.

Kelly Johnson:

Douglass High school?

Shirley Ann Williams:

Yeah. And the teachers there were excellent too. But-

Kelly Johnson:

And what year was that? When you came to Huntington.

Shirley Ann Williams:

That was in 1960.

Kelly Johnson:

1960?

Shirley Ann Williams:

Mm-hmm. But that's why I'm doing African American historical albums today so that our kids, grandkids and great grandkids and other people could look at the albums and see what our history is all about. I don't think I could have lived in that era. I would've been dead because I wouldn't have taken any crap [inaudible 00:13:11].

Kelly Johnson:

I understand. I'm trying [inaudible 00:13:13].

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah, you got that right.

Shirley Ann Williams:

But we're blessed to be alive. But I often think about our ancestors and what they had to endure. People just don't know half the history now.

Joseph L. Williams:

And it was different depending on what part of the country you in, because the book doctor of Heathrow fame the third, and it's not only about Huntington create a lot of it. It's about West Virginia and the type of discrimination in Huntington. So evidently in most cases it wasn't as brutal as it was in some parts of the country, especially the south. As long as you stayed in your place and they decided what your place was, then you were okay. But I came, when I graduated from high school, I made good grades. I had four scholarships offer.

Joseph L. Williams:

One was West Virginia university, one with West Virginia State now university, Marshall University and some out of state college. And I can't remember what it was. And one reason I came to Huntington was a lot of my classmates were coming, came to Huntington. But also we didn't have any transportation and so forth. Now, and I had a cousin, Kenny Powell, who was a barber here. And he lived in Huntington and I used to stay with him when I'd come to Huntington for the band festival. And by the way, back then most of the black students, I guess they stayed in people's homes because downtown Huntington hotels were still very much segregated. I didn't know. I would've been standing in a hotel anyway, if I had to pay for it. I'd have camped on the old by river or something [inaudible 00:15:07].

Joseph L. Williams:

But that's one of the reason I came to Huntington, and I wanted to be a lawyer. But I had a education scholarship and I thought maybe I was really good in math and mathematics and so forth, except calculus. It kicked my tail. I got a B in calculus and he had to have given it to me because believe me-

Kelly Johnson:

I'm sure you earned it.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

But I'll be truthful with you. Huntington was so different from even Boone County. It was definitely very much segregated, and I really didn't do very well in the school my first two years. In fact, I went a couple years. I dropped out of school and didn't make good grades.

Kelly Johnson:

At Marshall, you mean?

Joseph L. Williams:

At Marshall, yeah. I mean it was just different. I remember one of the first things when they used to draw a line down the campus and they had old south weekend. And evidently that was a big thing in Huntington.

Kelly Johnson:

Interesting. And what years were these that we're talking? Just for context for the-

Joseph L. Williams:

Well, I think it stopped in 1963 because that's when Phil Carter and the CIP group, and I was young and naive even hadn't experienced what they had. But I remember that we said no, no more. And if I'm not mistaken, it ended in 1963, maybe '64. I'm thinking it was 1963 when they said, "Nah, we aren't..." And-

Kelly Johnson:

I've never heard of that. No what was it? What did they call it?

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah. Old south weekend.

Kelly Johnson:

Old south weekend.

Joseph L. Williams:

And they would, the KAs, which Kappa Alpha was the, I call it the Confederate fraternity. They would draw a line down the campus. And I guess one side was south and one was... I don't all I know.

Kelly Johnson:

Interesting.

Joseph L. Williams:

You need to have Phil Carter about it-

Kelly Johnson:

I definitely... Yeah, he's on my list of people. Most definitely. He's just hard to catch, so yeah.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Oh no.

Joseph L. Williams:

And I would talk to Michael Gray and he did-

Kelly Johnson:

Yeah. I'm going to talk to him too.

Joseph L. Williams:

... and he could remember that. But that, if I'm not mistaken, I'll say we basically was CIP and field court, put an into that in 1963, I believe. It could have been '64, but I don't remember. And we used to have a... At the Marshall, it was called something else. It wasn't a Memorial center. We'd have a dancing on Wednesday night. And Shirley said, "The only thing I could do was to chop chop. I could do chop off pretty good." And I asked her to dance. Now I don't really remember asking her to dance. She said I did she. She remembers.

Shirley Ann Williams:

You did.

Joseph L. Williams:

And then down at SS Kresge, I remember this pretty girl and I didn't realize she was stalking me.

Shirley Ann Williams:

I was stalking him.

Joseph L. Williams:

But-

Shirley Ann Williams:

I was coming home from work one day, and I had to take a bus from the work down, down, and then downtown to where I was living. Every day I see this handsome guy walking down 4th avenue.

Joseph L. Williams:

I was going to work.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Something said, "Woman, get off the bus and see where he's going." So I'll follow him into Prestleys. I looked at him, he looked at me. Then I ran into him again at that social over at Marshall. And we both were friends with Porky McDowell.

Joseph L. Williams:

James McDowell.

Shirley Ann Williams:

... and I said-

Joseph L. Williams:

He died.

Shirley Ann Williams:

... "Porky." I said, "My girlfriend's having a house party next weekend. Bring him along." So he did. And then Joe introduced... Porky introduced us. Joe bent over, kissed my hand. Me and my girlfriends about to pass out.

Joseph L. Williams:

They had never met a gentleman before, evidently.

Kelly Johnson:

Okay.

Shirley Ann Williams:

So after that-

Joseph L. Williams:

But anyway, like I said, some of my friends, several of us, we came to Huntington. And I remember one thing, and I mentioned that it was in something that, we were still pretty close friends. So we were in the band together. We were in the honor society and all that. And so we kind of hang out together and so forth. We went to a cafe right below Howard Boulevard, and it was two white girls and my friend Richard Lambert myself. When we went in to get a ice cream or something, I forgot what it was. And I mean, we're always somewhat naive as to Huntington versus Boone county. Not that we...

Joseph L. Williams:

I mean, Boone county of all places I guess were segregated, but I didn't have money. I didn't go to some of the things. And we were there, and another friend of mine, Richard Abbott, I'll never... In fact Richard Abbott and I, we tapped for 10th place in our graduation, but I think he became a member of the KA. But he came over to our table and said, "You all better leave, there's going be some trouble." So we-

Kelly Johnson:

So this is the white guy?

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah.

Kelly Johnson:

Okay.

Joseph L. Williams:

He came over. And I mean, maybe we heard the running itself. Well, I mean, we were naive, really. And so we got up and left. Well, I think no one said anything from that point on the type of relationship we had had all through high school, even... Well, mostly through high school and so forth. We knew it was never going to be the same, and it was kind of a bitter pill. And then I tried to get a job in Huntington. I couldn't get a job. Looked like just like when I was up in Boone county, they used to have summer work. And by time I found out about it, and didn't have a car. I remember one, and every guy hired, but two of us didn't get hired. But same thing in Huntington.

Joseph L. Williams:

But then I... Mrs. Spencer. Now the house across the street there we just sold it. That belonged to me. That Susan Spencer, she was a school teacher. And then we bought this house from her when she moved to be with her daughters. But I went to work for Mr. Owen Pleasant who had a janitorial service. And Mr. Pleasant was a very intelligent person, but he only went to sixth or eighth grade, just like my mom only went to eighth grade because there was no black high school in Boone county. And she was the baby, and they didn't want her to leave. But Mr. Pleasant kind of took me under his wing. Mr. And Mrs. Pleasant and they became almost like an aunts and uncle, and almost like grandparents before they died. And I worked with him off and off for 20 some years.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

Helping him and so forth. I mean, I had the other job that I'd help him. Because just like now we have go out every evening, clean offices, and most time it was a part-time job for other people. So they felt free to call and say, "I can't come in today." Well you still had to do the work. So instead of getting home at 10:30 or 11:00, we'd get home at midnight because you still had to go and do those things. But then-

Kelly Johnson:

So it was hard for black people to find jobs in Huntington in the '60s?

Joseph L. Williams:

I'd say yes. It depends on what type of job you're looking for. But if it was a white color job, white collar job, I imagine it was very, very difficult. But the people of color had its own community. I mean, I

remember when eighth avenue and Hal Greer, and he used to have dances that... What was that? On 10th avenue had the.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Oh American Legion.

Joseph L. Williams:

American Legion. I mean it was a close knit community, and most of the teachers and professional people lived in the community. I think Herb Henderson, one of the first that moved out on LR fifth street. So you had those people to serve as role models for the young people coming along. But my brothers and I, we had played golf at... Used to caddy, not play golf, at a golf course up in Boone county was sand and greens. So we all fell in love with golf. And it's real, it's been very good to us, but we couldn't play. It was only one course that would allow people of color to play. And it was out in Knob Hill. It's no longer a golf course, it's a retirement community out there now. And-

Kelly Johnson:

That's in this area?

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah.

Kelly Johnson:

Okay.

Joseph L. Williams:

Well, in Barbersville.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh Barbers. Okay.

Joseph L. Williams:

Barbersville, but the other place we couldn't play-

Kelly Johnson:

Which is ironic, because they didn't want black people to live in Barbersville but there was a golf course where you could play golf. All right.

Joseph L. Williams:

But see a long time ago, I know one of my cousins, [inaudible 00:24:08] Harry, these wall street and them out, they were in Barbersville.

Kelly Johnson:

Roy Gwen's family lived in Barbersville too.

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah.

Kelly Johnson:

But my understanding, they were just a handful.

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah, right.

Kelly Johnson:

And then they had to take the bus in to go to Douglas, because there was no black school there.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Right.

Joseph L. Williams:

And you had a couple families down in West End that... I don't know where they went to school, but... But anyway, we decided after things began to open up and Riviera up on route two, in fact Shirley and I were members there for 20 some years. It's a golf course, but they have membership. But we decided to start a golf tournament. And the first year it was over in Chesapeake across the river, and... Oh well yeah, it would be across the river. And then we went to Sugarwood but we decided we don't want to call it a black golf tournament because that would turn a lot of people off. Even our people. So we named it, the Ebony Golf Classic. Now everybody knew about Ebony or Ebonite Boeing balls and so forth, so it didn't strike fear in them.

Joseph L. Williams:

And our thing was understanding brotherhood and spirit of competition among all people. It became extremely popular. We did it for 17 years.

Kelly Johnson:

And what year did you start the golf tournament? I forget.

Joseph L. Williams:

1971.

Kelly Johnson:

That's right. Okay.

Joseph L. Williams:

Through 1987. And I mean, it became very popular, even nationally. We had an article in... It wasn't Parade. It was something, a magazine. And we had people from Canada, Bermuda. And normally we'd have about 15 to 20 states and districts per year-

Kelly Johnson:

Oh wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

... represented.

Kelly Johnson:

It's big. Yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

And we brought in, you don't know some Chichi Rodriguez was-

Kelly Johnson:

I know. Yeah. I know that name.

Joseph L. Williams:

... [inaudible 00:26:01] and Jim Diatone, Lee Elder-

Kelly Johnson:

Oh wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

... and Tammy Green, white lady worked and played on the LPGA. She was our champion a couple times.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

And it was an integrated tournament. And we were very strict. Everybody treated the same, but you had to abide by the rules. You'd be surprised of how many people even... Most problem I had with people of color.

Kelly Johnson:

Interesting.

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah. Well I pay, we do so salsa. You aren't playing golf. [inaudible 00:26:33]. And it worked. We started a tournament for women, and it was kind of mixing of the races, and we'd always have two deputy sheriffs up there. I ain't fighting with nobody.

Kelly Johnson:

I know, that's right.

Joseph L. Williams:

But it became very popular. But we outgrew Huntington and I knew that we wanted to go to the next step, but... And we had sponsors like ASENSO and the paper company and Eco Alloy, and the guy who owned the, at that time, black guy owned the Kentucky Fried Chicken. But they'd give us 1000 or 2,500, but they'd give somebody else 5000 or 10,000, yeah. Well, are you going to... What can you say? You need-

Shirley Ann Williams:

[inaudible 00:27:25].

Joseph L. Williams:

So-

Kelly Johnson:

Those kind of things still happen today, and we know this.

Joseph L. Williams:

And we did... Shirley, she was really the backbone behind this tournament. She did all the back office, and she knew the players better than I did. She really did. And everything, we didn't have computers then. So we had everything, we had the index cards and so forth, worked out very well. But I remember one year and we were getting tired anyway, and she'd done so much typing she has a notch coming up on her finger. You remember that?

Shirley Ann Williams:

Mm-hmm.

Joseph L. Williams:

And I said to myself, "No more, no more." So we ended it in 1987.

Kelly Johnson:

Wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

And we had about \$10,000 left, and we gave it to various scholarships and we supported some local golf, black and white. It was always... It wasn't always just black. Black people ran it. There was no doubt about that. We leased the golf course. We leased it, and we made our own score cards with every golf class [inaudible 00:28:34]. But I just wanted... We wanted to prove to ourselves and the others that we could do things at least as good, but probably better. And we used to say, "We have one of the two top tournaments in the state of West Virginia." Now everybody... You could fight for that second place or what [inaudible 00:28:57]. And even today, of course the young people, you know it's been can't believe that 34 years since the last one.

Kelly Johnson:

Wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

But there were a lot of whites paid and they used to say, "Won't you have one more," but-

Kelly Johnson:

Maybe there needs to be one more.

Joseph L. Williams:

Well, but everything has a time and place.

Kelly Johnson:

Yeah.

Shirley Ann Williams:

I remember the tournament was so famous, this one guy sent his entry form in as a lady. So when he checked in-

Kelly Johnson:

To make sure he could get in?

Shirley Ann Williams:

... at registration, we said, "I'm sorry, you sent your registration in as a lady. We don't have room and it's in the rules. You just can't do it. But you can come to the general dance."

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah, we had-

Kelly Johnson:

Did he go? Did he come?

Shirley Ann Williams:

Mm-hmm.

Joseph L. Williams:

All the white people really enjoyed it. We'd bring a band in from Cincinnati, Columbus. I don't know how we did it. I'll be truthful with I really don't know how we did it.

Shirley Ann Williams:

And the Parliaments. Do you know the Parliament?

Kelly Johnson:

Were they local?

Shirley Ann Williams:

Yeah. Local.

Kelly Johnson:

Okay.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Now, we'd have them all. They were fabulous. Yeah. They were.

Kelly Johnson:

So that, you started that in 1971 and that goes along with our theme of the civil rights era. Were there things that... I mean, I know your love of golf and your love of your community or what inspired you. But were there other events that happened in Huntington that inspired you to do that type of work? Because for me that's civil rights work right there. You're bringing people together. Were there other events that... You mentioned CIP P and Phil Carter earlier. So were there other things that kind of pushed you that way or?

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah. Well, I guess growing up where I did and to an extent where she did, are slogan, I guess, we're promoting understanding brotherhood and spirited competition among all people. Understanding, oh yeah, brotherhood. Oh yeah. Spirit of competition. I mean I want to try to beat your tail when we're playing. By the time they got the that part [inaudible 00:31:08]. And also I may have been the first black to play in the West Virginia amateur tournament. I don't know. I shouldn't have been there for the... It's quite obvious that I probably wasn't up to par. Back then you could just turn it in your money. After a while you had to qualify. And I don't think I could have.

Kelly Johnson:

And that still goes on the West Virginia tournament. The amateur... Yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

State Am.

Kelly Johnson:

State Am.

Joseph L. Williams:

One of the biggest tournaments in the state. And I guess we just wanted to prove to people that not only what we could do, but that we could do as well as anyone else. And I really believed that. Now over the years, I'm probably I don't have as much... How should I put it? As much hope as I did then. Then I really believe you. Well, that one time I wanted to be president of the United States. And then-

Kelly Johnson:

I would've voted for you.

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah. Somewhere along the line I said, "That'll never happen." Well, it did happen.

Kelly Johnson:

It did happen.

Joseph L. Williams:

It did happen. Yeah. And then I went back to school and graduated in 1970. I have a degree in finance. I had 151 hours because I was going to be a teacher. And then I didn't want to be a teacher, so a guy taught me into going into financing. And so went my degree in finance. And I guess along the way of somebody, and Shirley you could try to get me to run the city council in 1980. I went and run for city council. I mean, I played golf. I had my buddies and [inaudible 00:33:01], and I said, "No." Run with Martha Wooder, and the other was... He died. I've forgotten his name.

Joseph L. Williams:

Dr. Wolf's father. He used to be head of Anderson Nuco, or whatever it was called back then. And they taught me into running. Well, I didn't think I could win. I mean, I didn't have any fancy posters. Richard Singer was a good friend of mine and that we made handmade posters and so forth. And it was that large. See, back then, although I represented Fairfield, part of Fairfield, east and west, and some out in the hill. The wisdom of the day that you couldn't be elected because you had to be elected citywide. Well, I'm the only one who beat the incumbent.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

And really a nice lady. Her husband that died, and they had put her in. Mrs. Johnson on... But she really was a nice lady. And so here I am, and one thing led to another and I... To tell the truth, even I told somebody the other day that George Malot was on council. Now on the third year I was supposed to be mayor, because then the council members determined who the mayor was going to be. Well, while I was out of town, they just decided, no, it's not going to be you. So what they were willing to do behind closed doors, they weren't willing to do in daylight.

Joseph L. Williams:

Now my friend, Allan Thacker, we're not as close as we used to be, but we were good friends. So soon as the nomination came up, he nominated me. And those cowards weren't able... They weren't willing to do in the light of day.

Kelly Johnson:

In the light day.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Whoa.

Joseph L. Williams:

And nobody said anything. And Allan said, that thought, I said, "I don't want it this way." And I said, "Well, because of personal reasons I decline." They nominated Roger Smith. Well, and then they nominated me to be assistant mayor, whatever it was. And then the next year, I really didn't want to be mayor. Dallas Stacker wanted to be mayor. He really did. But Jordan Malot made the comment, "I'm not sure Huntington's ready for a black mayor." He shouldn't have done that.

Kelly Johnson:

Nope.

Joseph L. Williams:

Because it's in the... If you archived in the paper, I said, "I've been here. I paid my dues. I played the rules. I haven't stabbed anybody in the back. And I expect to be the next mayor of Huntington."

Shirley Ann Williams:

That's right.

Kelly Johnson:

All right.

Joseph L. Williams:

And the vote was 6:0. Dr. Robert Alexander, who everybody thought was a great person and he did something. But he's one of those, in my opinion, one of those people I'll help you to a certain point. But if you think you're going to get to my level, that's always locked in. Because he didn't show up for the meeting.

Kelly Johnson:

Interesting.

Joseph L. Williams:

And then one time I had someone to read something for Dr. King's birthday. I asked him to do it. He did it. But if another Councilman told me, he said, "He really didn't want to do it, but then..." And then later on, I mean, when I see him, he want me to help him with his sons ran for something. I said, "Yeah, right."

Kelly Johnson:

Yeah, right.

Joseph L. Williams:

And then that led to one thing. And then I met people like Marshall [inaudible 00:36:33] and so forth. And he called me one day and said, "How would you like to help start a bank?" And I said, "Marshall, I mean, I don't have any money. How would... He said, "I'll let you have \$100,000." I said, "No." To myself, "No." So my family and I we started a little family investment group back in middle '80s. And so we bought \$50,000 worth of stock in First Century Bank.

Kelly Johnson:

Did you?

Joseph L. Williams:

And then after that he called me one day, "Joe, do me a favor." That's what Marshall always does. You got to know him. I mean, he could be very rough and gruff.

Kelly Johnson:

I've never met him. I've been in here 20 years, never met him.

Joseph L. Williams:

Well you good. And he always said, "Would you do me a favor?" I said, " [inaudible 00:37:20] What?" Well would you serve on the board of the bank in D.C.? And I said, "Marsh, are you sure? I don't know anything about bank. I mean, I've been board meeting. I said, "How long?" He said, "I don't know." Well, it turned out I was on the board from 19, I don't know, 99 until 2010 or '11.

Kelly Johnson:

Wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

And then for a while the head the audit committee. So I began to know a little bit about banking and all. And then they decided to buy Consolidated Bank of Trust in Richmond. Now Consolidated Bank of Trust was the first woman, first bank by a black woman named Maggie Leno Walker. Most people know about Madam CJ Walker, but she... And she served as the chairman and a president. And they combined two or three banks under the Consolidated Bank of Trust in 1903 of 1904. And so we bought that the Abigail Adams holding company bought that. And then I was appointed chairman of the board. Well, okay, no problem. I can deal with that.

Joseph L. Williams:

But then our president left suddenly. She got a job down at Mechanic Foreman, Foreman's Bank or something down in Raleigh or Doone. And I was drafted to be the president and CEO. So, I served in that position for about two and a half years. But then when everything hit in 2008 and nine. I mean bank, I mean in D.C., we probably made the mistake. We used to let people borrow money based on the completed project, not as is. But then when they failed to come through, then all at once we were underwater, and... Because we used to have participation on just so forth. And we sent several to them and only one of our might have gone bad. But they sent us whole bunch, a lot of them went bad.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

Well, when you participated, you're held responsible, but you don't have any control because the lead bank controls everything. So then they decided to make Consolidated Bank a branch. Because they sold

it to Premier Bank, which is headquartered right here in Huntington. Well, not anymore more. They were. A little building right up here on 29th street, you never know, they ran the whole operation-

Kelly Johnson:

Wow. I never knew that.

Joseph L. Williams:

... from Huntington. Bob Walker was the-

Kelly Johnson:

Huh? Interesting.

Joseph L. Williams:

... head of it. But they just sold it to People's Bank, called Fibo, it is a... And I decided, Shirley and I decided come back to West Virginia, but we loved Richmond. And it was really changing, but you had some people... Because I was on a lot... The board because I was a bank president, and you had some powerful white people who really wanted to change Richmond to a degree, I guess. They wanted it to be a destination city just like Atlanta or a Boston, or a New York or San Francisco. And of course back then it was 60% black. But now I think it's about 50-50.

Kelly Johnson:

Wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

But you still have a black mayor.

Kelly Johnson:

Because somebody says Richmond to me, I just think civil war. That's the first thing that... I don't think that's... Oh, I'm going to go spend my vacation there. So yeah, that's-

Joseph L. Williams:

I tell you it's real. That's where the president's moving.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh, okay.

Joseph L. Williams:

He and his wife, president Gilbert.

Kelly Johnson:

That's right.

Joseph L. Williams:

They're moving in Richmond.

Kelly Johnson:

I didn't know that until that thing, the other day. Well, and I feel like I'm getting off on a tangent. I'm going to circle back around because we are running out of time and I'm going to ask you right now if I can come back again, and... Because this is just... I could sit here and talk to you all forever. But when you were talking about being on city council and being mayor, it made me think of my question about voting. So voting. We know that there were a lot of places where our people were disenfranchised, still to this day-

Joseph L. Williams:

Right.

Kelly Johnson:

... and couldn't vote and can't vote. Was that the case in Huntington? Were there issues around being able to vote in Huntington?

Shirley Ann Williams:

I had no problem.

Kelly Johnson:

No problem.

Joseph L. Williams:

No. Now I'm talking about, since I've been here and so forth. The problem is getting a lot of our people-

Kelly Johnson:

To go vote.

Joseph L. Williams:

Right. To vote, to become registered and so forth. A lot of our people used to say, "I'm not going to vote." So I said, "Okay, fine." I said, "We're politicians, we want to pass laws. And whether you voted not you're going to abide by those laws or you're going to pay the price. Now, if you don't want to have anything to do with it, fine, okay with me. But if we tell you where you can cross the street, how fast you could drive-"

Shirley Ann Williams:

That's right.

Joseph L. Williams:

"... you better obey our laws. But you didn't have anything, you didn't want to have anything to do with it."

Kelly Johnson:

So do you feel like it was just a sense... And like I said, I'm speaking about the '60s and '70s, but all the time. Was there a sense our votes didn't matter? Or there was just, people were just apathetic, they just didn't care or?

Joseph L. Williams:

Well, I think a lot of people probably didn't think it mattered. Although Huntington had a greater minority population than it does now. And you had several people who were involved in politics and so forth, and the candidates would always come to them during election time and so forth. Dr. Wright, he was on city council and I got to give a lot of credit to Mrs. Gray, Munchie Gray, or Men of Justice and several other women. Women have always been, as far as I'm concerned, I always tell people, "If you want something done, you better have some women on that committee." And the men we just had to [inaudible 00:43:40].

Kelly Johnson:

Yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

I said, "We men we let our egos get in the way, and women may disagree, but they'll get the job done." So when we hit the plane crash, they went to council and said to try to heal the community and so forth. And I don't know all the details. Michael Gray probably can tell you more than that. But they appointed Dr. Ripe to city council. Now my brother, then there was a lot of animosity between the black fraternity KA Side and KA Order, which was this Confederate.

Kelly Johnson:

Okay.

Joseph L. Williams:

But they just didn't call it Confederate, but as far as I'm concerned-

Kelly Johnson:

But we all knew, yeah, everybody.

Joseph L. Williams:

And they had a fight after a... What do they call it? A mural? What are those games-

Kelly Johnson:

Intramural?

Joseph L. Williams:

Intramural game. And supposedly that was going to be... Now this is my brother. He can tell you. That was going to be a big fight that Saturday night when the plane crashed.

Kelly Johnson:

Interesting.

Joseph L. Williams:

And when the plane crashed that just, the community more, it came together. But had that not happened that may have been a lot of trouble-

Kelly Johnson:

Interesting.

Joseph L. Williams:

... in downtown Huntington around the campus. Now that's what I was told. But then I was married and we had four kids and so forth. I wasn't even-

Kelly Johnson:

You were doing, yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

So Huntington... And I have to give Steve Williams a lot of credit. Now, I don't know if you know the story between... Well, you heard what Steve said-

Kelly Johnson:

But tell it for the recording. Everybody, I think, needs to hear this story. And then we'll get the mayor Williams story side later.

Joseph L. Williams:

Well, our city manager, Wayne Bowers told me that he was going to go back to South Carolina. His wife wasn't really happy here. Now I was a mayor then, so he told me two weeks before he told anyone else.

Kelly Johnson:

And Wayne Bowers is?

Joseph L. Williams:

He was a city manager.

Kelly Johnson:

City manager. Okay.

Joseph L. Williams:

City Manager. To me, one best city manager we've ever had, very progressive type of person. So I'm saying, it was seven of us on council, but you had two or three that were... You always have. They were more or less on the side of former mayor of Jean Dean. And I'm saying to myself, "Now I need somebody that at least will listen to me." And I give Jean Dean a lot of credit for the Kinetic Park. She did a lot of things. I said, "Now," well, Steve had been the economic development up in Putnam county. So we had hired him, and I was kind of impressed with him, and so forth.

Joseph L. Williams:

So, I called him and said, "Steve, how would you like to become the..." It would've been interim city manager, because he was 27, 28, probably too young to know that he shouldn't say no. He'll tell you that. He jumped at it. Well, Roger Smith, I got to give Roger Smith a lot of credit. They wanted... How was this? Anyway, he owed me a vote, and it went back to when he became mayor, when I should have been mayor. And he owed me a vote. So the vote was four, three to make Steve the city manager.

Kelly Johnson:

Lucky Steve Williams. Yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

That's exactly while he was... Now he didn't know all behind the thing. I'm saying, "I need somebody at least will listen to me."

Kelly Johnson:

Yeah, exactly. And the rest is history, right?

Joseph L. Williams:

The rest is history.

Kelly Johnson:

That's wonderful.

Joseph L. Williams:

But for instance, there were five blacks on Toyo, on our committee searching for a new police chief.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh, wow.

Joseph L. Williams:

And the two top ones. One is black and one is white. And one of them from Huntington. He's a Lieutenant, and my only problem with that, I think he's a good guy.

Kelly Johnson:

Just remember this is being recorded, so-

Joseph L. Williams:

I think he's a good guy. I did have a question about going from Lieutenant jumping over all the other captains at so forth. And my problem with the black candidate. I don't know which one Steve's going to choose, it's either one. But Katt, not Huntington per se, but is the police force ready for a black police chief who have all you would want, worked all over the country, knows more about policing than probably any of them in Huntington. But would they try to undermine him? And I don't know. I hope that's not the case. But Steve, I got to give him credit. I think he's willing to say, "Hey-"

Kelly Johnson:

Well he appointed an openly gay woman, fire chief. And everybody was worried about that.

Joseph L. Williams:

No, no she-

Kelly Johnson:

Yeah. And she seems to be doing a good job.

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Yeah. She is.

Joseph L. Williams:

And he kind of took out [inaudible 00:49:04]-

Kelly Johnson:

I hope I didn't just out her. I think everybody knows she's gay. I hope I didn't just out her.

Joseph L. Williams:

I didn't. Not that it makes any... I mean, I really [inaudible 00:49:11]-

Kelly Johnson:

I might go back and take that part out.

Joseph L. Williams:

How little I know about... Now, Shirley knows a lot of people and you need to be doing more talking to me.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh, I'm coming back. I'm coming back. Yeah, I'll be back.

Joseph L. Williams:

Because she knows more, and what I get... No matter what I've tried to do, she's always been behind me. Even probably when she shouldn't have been. I mean really.

Kelly Johnson:

She's saying yeah to that. I'm going to just say that for the recording, she is shaking her head.

Joseph L. Williams:

I couldn't have asked for a better partner in life.

Shirley Ann Williams:

[inaudible 00:49:42].

Joseph L. Williams:

I really couldn't. I mean-

Kelly Johnson:

You two are definitely relationship goals. I mean, you just, the first time you meet... The first time I met you two together, you could tell how deep your love is for each other. How much you support each other. I mean, I don't know, I've only known you a few years, and I'm-

Shirley Ann Williams:

Right.

Kelly Johnson:

... of course as Rocky wrote, but you guys are just always happy to be with each other.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Yeah.

Kelly Johnson:

It's amazing.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Yeah.

Kelly Johnson:

It's just amazing.

Joseph L. Williams:

Yeah, I mean we-

Kelly Johnson:

You need to write a book. How to make it work.

Shirley Ann Williams:

That's right. [inaudible 00:50:17].

Kelly Johnson:

For 50 years.

Joseph L. Williams:

Sandra is trying to get me to write 10 or 12 pages about something, Sandra Clement.

Kelly Johnson:

Oh yeah.

Joseph L. Williams:

I don't know. I should take out writing away. I don't know what you [inaudible 00:50:24] and so forth.

Kelly Johnson:

I'll leave you a recorder and you can record it. Somebody else can type it up for you. Well, you know what I'm going to do now, since it's going on... We've been talking for about an hour. I'm going to go ahead and stop it now and then... But make sure that I can come back and follow up. I feel like we got a little bit off course, but it was all so good. And I didn't want to stop. And because you had told me some good stories about work before I had the recorder on. So yeah, we need to circle back around. But I'm going to go ahead and stop it for now. Do either of, one of you have final words you want to say for part one or no, just wait for part two?

Joseph L. Williams:

Well-

Shirley Ann Williams:

Black lives matter.

Kelly Johnson:

Thank you, ma'am. There you go. We're ending it on there. Nothing more to say.

Shirley Ann Williams:

That's right.

Joseph L. Williams:

But I think Huntington has come a long way. It really has.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Yeah it has.

Joseph L. Williams:

I think we lost some very important people in the plane crash. It still has a long way to go. I don't think economically that it's been willing to share all this goodies with the people of color. I can only speak about my business. I know there's three organizations that people think they should have, would've supported us. One was the Carper county board of education. One was Carper Hines Hospital, one more for university, and none of them have really been-

Kelly Johnson:

Supported a black owned business.

Joseph L. Williams:

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... of assistance, really? Yeah. At least-

Kelly Johnson:

Not you.

Joseph L. Williams:

... basic supply. I don't know about the others, but... And that's been somewhat of the disappointment. It really has been, but that's the way it is.

Kelly Johnson:

Well, thank you both so much for your time.

Shirley Ann Williams:

You're welcome.

Kelly Johnson:

And I'll be back very soon.

Shirley Ann Williams:

Okay. All right. Thank you.

Joseph L. Williams:

Bye-bye.