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### Joe Nathan Cleckly, Jr.

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Tiffany:

Today's December 8th, 2022. And I'm Tiffany. I'm here with Joe Klinkley. Well, I call him Joe Klinkley and Dr. Kelly Johnson from Marshall. And we are conducting an oral history interview as a part of the National Service of African American History in Appalachia grant program focusing on civil rights history. So Joe, I want to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. First, what I need you to do is state your full name.

Joe:

Joe Nathan Cleckley Jr.

Tiffany:

And your birthday?

Joe:

January 23rd 1958.

Tiffany:

And where were you born?

Joe:

Huntington, West Virginia. Cabell Huntington Hospital.

Tiffany:

All right. So first, what I want you to do is just tell me a little bit about your family.

Joe:

My family came from, the Cleckley side came from Newberry, South Carolina. My grandmother was the first black minister of Huntington and a lot of her siblings was Dr. Cleckley O'Marshall. My cousin, Frank Cleckley was Supreme Court Justice of West Virginia. My...

Tiffany:

Betty. Who is Betty?

Joe:

Betty Cleckley. She's my aunt.

Tiffany:

Your auntie, okay.

Joe:

Yeah, she's Dr. [inaudible 00:01:09]. And my mom was the first black to work at the Calvert County Circuit Clerk's Office and then in the end she became deputy clerk down there. My aunt on my mom's side, the Crawford side, was Tina Crawford and she was the first black to work for the Department of

Motor Vehicles. Connie Crawford, she started the Ebenezer Methodist Daycare. She was over the daycare over there and my uncle Gus Cleckley. Him and Phil Carter was the ones who helped blacks being able to go into Bailey's Cafeteria where they had rioted down there in 1968., I do believe. They got it so that blacks could go down to Bailey's Cafeteria. So they went to jail, protested that and went to jail for that.

Tiffany:

Okay. Now tell me a little bit about your childhood growing up.

Joe:

My childhood, it was a bunch of love there and it was something like being born on 8th Avenue or 17th Street. Everybody in the neighborhood I respected and everybody if I got in trouble, they'd whip me and send me home and get another one...

Tiffany:

Somebody else's parents would whip you?

Joe:

Yes, it was always where everybody in that family, it was a lot of elders. But we respected them and they'd watched over us.

Tiffany:

It was truly a village.

Joe:

Truly. Yes, it sure was.

Tiffany:

Okay. All right. So now the civil rights era was the '50s, '60s and '70s. Do you have any recollection from this time period?

Joe:

Basically when I was 10 years old, I remember my uncle Gus, him and Phil Carter, as I mentioned earlier, rioting going there. Protested down to Bailey's Cafeteria down in Huntington in order for blacks to be able to go into the restaurants and dine there. And that's one thing I remember about civil rights.

Tiffany:

Okay.

Joe:

Through my uncle.

Tiffany:

Okay. Do you remember the first time you voted?

Joe:

I want to say back in '76. Right out of high school.

Tiffany:

All right. And do you remember anybody organizing around voting when you were voting?

Joe:

The ones that I can remember is the main one I can remember. And he was president of the NAACP Corps and Bonnie worked with him, was Phil Carter, he was very good at trying to get blacks to vote and everything. So Phil Carter was a big thing, even though he wasn't from Huntington, he still did the groundwork for a lot of things going on in Huntington.

Tiffany:

Okay. Okay.

Joe:

Professor Phil Carter.

Tiffany:

All right. Yeah. So what other events do you remember happening regarding civil rights in and around town, other than the city?

Joe:

It wasn't really that much. I remember coming up that were going through the Boys Club where they would have little black history things about civil rights and they would educate us on that. And I also remember my aunt Bonita Crawford on my mom's side and my Uncle Frank, who became Supreme Court Justice, talking about where they were the first blacks in 1962 to go to Huntington High.

Tiffany:

So they did...

Joe:

They were one of the first ones to go down there.

Tiffany:

Okay. And now do you remember boycotts other than that of school bus, transportation, schools, businesses?

Joe:

No. I do remember going downtown to a place to eat when I was a young kid with my great-grandmother. And it was only a certain part of that restaurant that we could actually sit down and eat at. Yeah.

Tiffany:

You don't remember what restaurant that was?

Joe:

No, because it's not down there. I want to say McCoy, it was part of one of the big department stores on Third Avenue.

Tiffany:

Okay.

Joe:

But we had couldn't, because I'm getting ready to sit down and they said no, we can't sit there, we've got to go over here. So that was when they say, "Oh, it's like that."

Tiffany:

So in the community, other than Phil Carter, do you remember anybody else that was important?

Joe:

Well, yeah, Pete Goodson.

Tiffany:

Okay.

Joe:

Pete Goodson was the main man around here because he always had something for blacks to do, we could stay in our area and have little things for us. So Pete Goods was a big inspiration for me coming up.

Tiffany:

Okay. Now, do you remember any national black figures at the time? Anybody...

Joe:

Where I was going to church and everything, one I remember is Dr. Dorsey. Dr. Dorsey, and he was the National Baptist President of the National Baptist Convention.

Tiffany:

Okay. Now, how did the Civil Rights Movement affect your life?

Joe:

Being young, it just... My area was where, because the way I was raised with respect to everything, it was just like I could see prejudice and everything and all that. And I would see where we go here and they go there and they were treated differently in schools and everything. But I don't know about how back in my days before that, how it been. But I did see a lot of it.

Tiffany:

Did the teachers treat you any differently?

Joe:

Some did, but I went to Oli, which was predominantly black and it was a lot different. And I noticed it when...

Tiffany:

That was a middle school though, wasn't it?

Joe:

Yeah. And I did notice when I got to Hunting High how everything changed if you was black and you didn't have money in the Booster Club, something like that. You didn't get to play basketball even though you might be the best player there but they had a little Booster Club and the people came to see their kids play. So they wasn't about winning no championship, it's about the color of your skin and the money. It's basically money.

Tiffany:

Okay.

Joe:

Yeah, it was a big thing.

Tiffany:

Okay. So do you remember anybody fighting against segregation back then, other than Phil Carter and your uncle? Do you remember anybody else fighting segregation to make sure that everybody is treated the same?

Joe:

Not really.

Tiffany:

Okay. Do you remember the women? The women involved in any of the movements, any siblings?

Joe:

Well, I would say one of them I've got to mention would be my grandmother Cleckley her name was Reverend Ellen Cleckley. She was in there because she was one of the first black women ministers in Huntington. And I noticed how she did a lot because she came from Mayberry, South Carolina, where there was a lot of prejudice down there. And she instilled in us that you have to go to school to get an education because blacks are treated... You want to be treated with respect, you've got to have education.

Tiffany:

That's how teach my kids, man. I tell them that all the time. You've got to be on the same playing level with everybody else. Okay. So what roles did the churches play in...

Joe:

Oh, they played a big role.

Tiffany:

Did they?

Joe:

Because I'm a member of Calgary and I think predominantly I kept Reverend Walker's there. Predominantly the black neighborhood, Reverend Walker baptized everybody and it was just something about him that he treated... He looked after the young people. He wanted us young people so we was always going to Columbus, different places, doing church things for the youth. He was about his youth and now these days, it seemed like they forgot about the youth. But when I was coming up, the churches was lonely. Mainly trying to bring the youth up because we are the next generation to be the ones.

Tiffany:

Yeah.

Joe:

They got away from that a lot.

Tiffany:

You've got to fix the credit, and you trying to fix things, you got to make sure the ones that are going to be there to fix things are going to be able to...

Joe:

They got away from it.

Tiffany:

Yeah. Now, do you remember the NAACP and who belonged to it back then?

Joe:

I think I had, it was an issue that I think I had it with NAACP because I had that thing where if you wasn't going to college or something like that NAACP wouldn't do anything for you. NAACP, I know it's about national advancement of colored people, but if you wasn't trying to go to school or anything, further your education, they didn't have nothing to do with you.

Tiffany:

Oh, wow.

Joe:

They wouldn't go to bat for you. You had to be somebody going to school for that.

Tiffany:

[inaudible 00:09:08] people involved in NAACP?

Joe:

The main one I remember is Phil Carter. He wasn't like that but I noticed that if you wasn't in school, if you had something happen to you legally or something like that, you want the NAACP to back you. It's like if you wasn't going to try to advance in school or like that, they didn't want to have anything to do you. They wouldn't go to bat for you.

Tiffany:

Okay. Now, if you could go back to the '60s, is there anything that you would do differently regarding your actions towards civil rights?

Joe:

I think I would've got more involved with them and the most thing, I think a lot of civil rights activists too. It was all actually, now to the day that it was about schooling and that was the key thing. But we had this thing about if you didn't have money, couldn't get a school and all that. It's changed now, but I think a lot of it, they were about school. That's how you got here.

Tiffany:

It was almost a status thing.

Joe:

Yes.

Tiffany:

Okay.

Joe:

Yes.

Tiffany:

Do you remember... No, you probably wouldn't remember the Civil Rights Act being signed into law because it... Yeah. All right. Is there anything else you want to share with me?

Joe:

No. Just let us know now. Appreciate what Marshall's doing and it is about education. If you want to get anywhere in this life, you have to have education.

Tiffany:

It really is.

Joe:

Yeah.



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Tiffany:

Well, thank you Joe.

Joe:

No problem.

Tiffany:

Have a good one.