

Storer College Oral History Project
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (HAFE)
Interview with David Johnson by Elaine Eff
712 Peabody Street, Northwest, Washington, DC
April 23, 2014

EE: Today is April 23, 2014. This is Elaine Eff, and I am interviewing Mr. David Johnson of 712 Peabody Street, Northwest, Washington, DC, and we are going to talk about his years at Storer College for the National Park Service archive. So, Mr. Johnson, can you first tell me your name and when and where you were born?

[00:00:47.08] DJ: I'm David M. Johnson, and I was born in West Virginia, Isaban [spells], West Virginia. It was located on a high mountain. My father was a miner. He was working in the mines up there. What else do you want to know?

EE: Where is Isaban?

DJ: In West Virginia.

EE: Whereabouts?

DJ: In the southern part of West Virginia, near the Kentucky border, you might say.

EE: Well, tell me about your parents. You said your dad was a miner.

[00:01:31.26] DJ: My father was a miner, a coal miner, and my mother a schoolteacher. I didn't know too much about my life in Isaban because I was a baby when they took me away from there.

EE: Oh, and where did you go?

[00:01:52.24] DJ: I was about three years old then with my brother. I had a brother, and his name was Caliga [?] [00:01:58.06] Johnson. He was a year older than me, yes. So, my father got another job, I guess. We were still in West Virginia. We moved to Mt. Carbon [spells], West Virginia.

EE: And where was that located?

DJ: In West Virginia.

EE: Whereabouts from where you used to live?

[00:02:27.18] DJ: I guess you would say that's near the western part of West Virginia, close to the Ohio line, border. I don't know how long we were there, but it wasn't too long. My father received employment at a—see now, I was a baby, talking about it, this you understand. [laughs] That's how old I was at that time, but he worked at Powellton, West Virginia, and he ended up at Elkridge, West Virginia as a coal miner. At that time, my mother wasn't teaching school, but she did receive a

position in West Virginia, a schoolteacher in Kimberly, West Virginia, and that's where we settled. My father bought a house up there and settled us there at Kimberly, West Virginia.

EE: And how old were you when you moved to Kimberly?

[00:03:41.28] DJ: I guess I was about three or four years old then. Three or four years old at that time.

EE: So, your family was moving quite a bit while you were just an infant.

[00:03:51.06] DJ: That was the end of it then at that time. I don't know how often they moved before then. But, see, I was born in Isaban, June 27, 1928, and my brother was born on March 26, 19 and 27.

EE: So, your mother was a schoolteacher.

DJ: Yes.

EE: Was she trained? Did she go to college to become a schoolteacher?

[00:04:31.09] DJ: Yes. She went to West Virginia State, but she was teaching before she went to West Virginia State. She was trained at Storer College. She started at Storer College, and she received training to teach, at Storer College. She didn't have a, what do you say, a bachelor's degree in teaching. She didn't have that, but I guess she had a certificate for teaching, whatever it was, they allowed back in those days.

EE: So, how much time did she spend at Storer College?

[00:05:16.26] DJ: Storer College, it was a two-year college at that time. I guess, I think she went to high school there. She went to high school at first, I understand, at Storer College. There was a high school. She attended high school there, she and her family did. Her brothers and sisters and cousins attended school at Storer at that time. And then it was changed over to a two-year college. She took her first training in teaching at Storer for two years.

EE: So, did she talk about Storer College?

[00:06:08.26] DJ: Not much. She didn't talk about it until the time we go to college. Then she told me she wanted me to go to Storer. I didn't want to—I wanted to go to Howard.

EE: Where did you want to go?

[00:06:19.09] DJ: I wanted to go to Howard in Washington, DC, because I wanted to be a

doctor. So, she talked me into it, going to Storer. I wanted to go to college. I was afraid I wouldn't be going to school at all if I didn't go to Storer. There was a college in West Virginia, you know, I could go to school at West Virginia Tech. West Virginia State, she didn't say anything about West Virginia State, and I didn't even want to go to West Virginia State at that time. I decided to go to Storer College.

EE: Now, by the time you went to Storer College, it was no longer a two-year college.

[00:07:05.09] DJ: It was a four-year college at that time. She knew about that then. It had changed over since she left from there, you know, to West Virginia to teach. She taught school there. She taught at one place, and it was Meadow Bridge, West Virginia. She taught there, and then she didn't go back home. She went further down to Widen, West Virginia. My father was working in the mines in Widen, West Virginia when she met him. He told her he would be her protector because it was bad then there, and, of course, that's how they struck up the relationship there. Daddy and Mother got married in Charleston, West Virginia in 1924. I know that much. Then, of course, they had us. And now we're in Kimberly, West Virginia.

EE: Now, tell me about your education that prepared you to go to Storer.

[00:08:22.22] DJ: My mother was my first teacher. She taught me elementary grade, and she was teaching with Mr. Vaughan [spells]. He was the principal of the elementary school, Kimberly Elementary School, it was. It was a two-room school. Mr. Vaughan taught fifth to the eighth grade, and Mother taught the first to the fourth grade. So, she was my first teacher at that time.

EE: So, what do you remember about the two-room schoolhouse? Your mother was your teacher?

[00:09:13.12] DJ: Yes, she was my teacher. She taught me the first through the fourth grades. I must have done pretty good because she passed me on over to Mr. Vaughan. Mr. Vaughan was a strong teacher, a good teacher, too. My mother was a good teacher, too, because I did learn. [laughs] I learned how to read and how to do arithmetic, and that was very important. So, I thought I could do as I want to in my mother's classroom because I was her kid. I was running around through the classroom, walking around at will, [laughs] and then she grabbed me and make me sit down. So, I'd sit there for a while, and I tried to go again. Then she gave me a whooping. [laughs] Then I stayed in my seat after that.

[00:10:20.26] One time, I remember my grandmother, her mother, was visiting us in Kimberly. She had just whooped me, and I went home and told her mother, my grandmother about it. I said, "Your daughter whooped me today." She said, "She did?" "Yeah." She said, "Well, I'm going to say something to her about that," and she did. [laughs] My mother goes to her and [00:10:51.10] said, "Mama, he was running

around in the classroom. I can't let him do that. I told him to sit down, and he would not. I had to give him a whupping.” [laughs] So, my grandmother told me, she said, “Why do you say? Your mother, you behave yourself. You wouldn't behave at first. That's why you got your whupping.” [laughs]

[00:11:14.12] So, that was my life in my mother's classroom. She had us doing something all the time, and I was so glad I could read and I could do arithmetic. She always had plays there, and she always wanted to put me in the plays. I see now why she did, but I couldn't understand at first, you know? Why she wanted me to have a part in her plays that she had, you see. And she would give the play in the Kimberly school, but she always wanted to give the plays in the church, yeah. That was her place. She was a good Christian woman, a deaconette. My father was a deacon, and she was a deaconette.

EE: What church did you belong to?

[00:12:20.08] DJ: Kimberly First Baptist. It's about 108 years old, I think, now.

EE: Wow. So, tell me, where did you go to school after the eighth grade?

DJ: After the eighth grade, Kimberly, I mean Simmons High School. Simmons High School. It's not there now.

EE: Where was that located?

DJ: Montgomery, West Virginia.

EE: How do you spell “Simmons”?

DJ: About four miles from Kimberly [spells].

EE: And how do you spell “Simmons”?

DJ: Simmons [spells], Simmons High School.

EE: So, you said you wanted to be a doctor. Tell me about what were your dreams and how it is that you ended up choosing Storer.

[00:13:25.22] DJ: My brother died when he was about eleven years old, I think it was, and I was a year younger.

EE: What did he die of?

[00:13:38.11] DJ: I was impressed whenever the doctor would come to the house. I was impressed when he would come to see my brother and treat him, tend to him, and I always said I wanted to be a doctor. That's the reason why I had the desire to be

a doctor because of the doctor coming to the house to treat him. I kept that desire through high school and into college, even at Storer. And I find out that the science courses were very important, you see, and I was very much interested in biology. So, when I went to Storer College, I attempted to make an A in the course.

EE: So, tell me about your first memories of Storer. You must have gone for the first time just when you started. When was that? When did you go to Storer?

[00:14:58.29] DJ: I went to Storer in 1946, the fall of 1946. I was a freshman there. It was a small college. I was surprised that it was a small college. Maybe it was three hundred or some students or something like that at that school there. But I'm glad I got there when I got there because my uncle was the chef [laughs] at the college.

EE: The sheriff?

[00:15:37.29] DJ: Yeah, he was the chef at the college. I was surprised. Mother didn't know that, or she would have told me.

EE: What was his job?

DJ: He was the chef/cook.

EE: He was the chef?

DJ: He was the chef.

EE: What was his name?

[00:16:00.06] DJ: David Robinson. I remember David Robinson. He was my mother's oldest brother in the family. My mother, in the family, had eleven siblings, you might say.

EE: So, what did he cook? Where did he work?

DJ: He cooked all of the food, breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

EE: And in what building? Where was his kitchen?

DJ: I don't know. There was a building, but I don't know what the name of the building was.

EE: Do you remember where you went to eat every day?

[00:16:42.24] DJ: Yes. But I don't know the name of the hall, you see, and whether it had a name or not. I don't think it had a name, but I would have remembered the name.

It was a building. I don't know whether it was a part of Anthony Hall or what. In fact, I've forgotten the name of all of the halls.

EE: Do you remember where you lived? Did you live in a dormitory?

[00:17:08.06] DJ: [laughs] I've forgotten the name of the—you see, I was only up there for two years. I only attended Storer for two years. And the reason I didn't go all the way to Storer, I told you, I wanted to be a doctor. Somehow I received information that Storer was a Class C college, and I wouldn't be able to get into a medical school from a Class C college. That's the reason I didn't stay at Storer. I left Storer and went home to go to West Virginia State. Mother wasn't going to let me go to Washington, to Howard University.

EE: Where was West Virginia State located?

[00:18:05.01] DJ: It's an institute. Institute, West Virginia.

EE: So, that's where you graduated.

DJ: I graduated from there. I went to Storer for two years, and while I was at Storer, I enjoyed myself. I played football up there, and I seemed to have [inaudible] [00:18:32.01] up there as a football player at the time.

EE: Do you remember who you played?

[00:18:38.01] DJ: I received honors as a running back. It was part of the EIAC, the Eastern Intercollegiate Athletic Association. The Eastern Intercollegiate Athletic Association seemed to have its location in Norfolk, Virginia at the time.

EE: And what other colleges were in the league?

[00:19:22.28] DJ: Say that again?

EE: What other colleges did you play against?

DJ: Oh, Norfolk. It's Norfolk State now, but it was the Norfolk division of Virginia State, Fayetteville, Winston-Salem, Salisbury and all the little kids in North Carolina at the time, and Pennsylvania. I've forgotten the name of the school in Pennsylvania. At that time, those schools were Negro colleges, you understand. I've forgotten the name of the school in Pennsylvania, but we used to go to Pennsylvania to a school to play football there, and then Eastern shore, Salisbury, Maryland.

EE: How was your record? How did you play? Did you win many games?

[00:20:42.17] DJ: Not too many. [laughs] Not too many. We had a coach. I've forgotten his

name. Don't tell me what his name because I've forgotten what his name is. He wasn't a good coach. He didn't know too much about football. We used to know more about football than he did, but he was the coach, you see. So, we had to work with him. So, we won a few games, but we didn't win too many. We lost most of our games.

EE: Was the coach a white or a black man?

DJ: A black man, yeah.

EE: Did he teach also or did he just coach?

DJ: I don't know. He didn't teach in physical education because I didn't have a physical education class up there.

EE: Where did you play football?

[00:21:42.09] DJ: We played at a high school in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Yeah. On the Harpers Ferry football field, we played our games there. This is back in '46. Things weren't too good back in '46 for us, college-wise. We practiced in the front of the school. It's still there. It's a big area of the field, you might say, and we played there—and it sloped down, but we practiced football there.

EE: Where would that have been? In front of Anthony Hall?

[00:22:33.20] DJ: Yeah, in front of Anthony Hall, and dormitories were in the back of it, and the street run down that way. Anthony Hall, that's where the hall was.

EE: Did you live in Mosher Hall? That's your dormitory?

[00:22:54.10] DJ: Mosher. You know more about it than I do! [laughs] It was Mosher Hall. That's where we men had a dormitory.

EE: What was that like?

[00:23:10.07] DJ: It was good. They were good fellows, you know. There weren't any bad people. A lot of the men that were—not a lot, but some of the men were ministers-to-be on the staff. So, they were studying up there and hoping to become ministers. In fact, my dormitory mate was studying to be and became a minister. He taught school. When he finished at Storer, I understand he was at Andover Newton. Have you heard of Andover Newton, a seminary or a school around Boston, Massachusetts. He got a doctorate degree up there, and he taught there for years.

EE: Do you remember his name?

DJ: Oh yeah, Henry Brooks, Reverend Henry Brooks, Dr. Henry Brooks I guess you'd say his name. And he had a brother, too, who came—his brother went to school somewhere in the Midwest. I've forgotten the name of it. I don't know if his brother was interested in science or wasn't, but then his brother finally came to Storer. But when he came to Storer, I wasn't there. I had transferred from Storer to West Virginia State. But I did meet his brother. I was going to the reunion, and he was, too, and I met him that way, yeah. I've forgotten what his name was. He was a doctor, too. He had a mother in Virginia, Alexandria, Virginia, and she lived to be over a hundred years old. He would come down to the reunion for two or three days. Then he'd go on to Alexandria to see his mother. But she finally died, and when she died, maybe a year or two after that, he died. And his brother Henry had already died, you see.

EE: Very young. Oh, after she was a hundred years old.

[00:25:57.06] DJ: Yeah. Henry, he became such a great person. I would say that he was invited to Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia to speak there as a speaker. I don't know if it was a commencement or what it was, and he was invited down there to speak. I planned to go down there, too, but I didn't make it, just to meet up with him, you know, down there. I think he retired from Andover Newton, and he moved back to Pennsylvania. He lived in Pennsylvania with his brother. They lived in Pennsylvania at that time.

EE: Let's talk a little bit about you. You said you studied biology.

[00:27:00.06] DJ: Yeah, I was studying biology. I was determined to make a good grade in biology. Well, in all of my subjects for that matter, but particularly biology because I wanted to go to med school.

EE: Do you remember your teacher?

[00:27:18.14] DJ: Yes, I don't know if she's a doctor or not. Miss Watkins. I'm going to say Miss Watkins, but she probably was a doctor. She was tough.

EE: Now, was she white or black?

[00:27:33.08] DJ: She was black, and she taught biology. She gave us a final examination, and in that final examination, she covered the whole book. [laughs] And I studied the whole book. So, in her examination, I made an A. It was 99 and a half she gave me, and she told me she took a half off because I had something in there that—it was good, it was right though, but she said that she had took the half off. I couldn't make a 100 under her. [laughs] But afterward, whatever courses that she gave, I made an A on.

EE: Did you have a teacher named Miss Jemison? Do you remember her, a

biology teacher?

[00:28:38.22] DJ: That was her name.

EE: Oh, Miss Jemison.

DJ: Yeah, she got married. She was Miss. Watkins, and her name became Mrs. Jemison, yeah.

EE: Many people really liked her.

[00:28:54.22] DJ: Well, she was a good teacher. She was a good teacher. We learned from her, you see, but she was tough [laughs] as far as giving courses and everything. The lesson matter was good. It came from the book, you see.

EE: Did she encourage you to go to medical school?

[00:29:24.01] DJ: No. She didn't know I wanted to go to medical school, didn't anybody know that I wanted to go to medical school at that time.

EE: So, what happened?

[00:29:33.19] DJ: Well, I determined to go to medical school, even at West Virginia State. But there was one subject that I did not do too good in at Storer, and that changed my mind against Storer because the Dean at Storer was Dean Johnson, and he was my chemistry teacher, yeah. And he didn't give me a good grade in physics. Wait a minute. Was that chemistry? Yeah. He didn't give me a good grade in chemistry. I didn't take chemistry in high school. They did not offer the course in chemistry in high school. So, I thought that was the reason why I didn't make a good grade. I didn't know too much about chemistry at the time. Biology, I did, you see. I had a good teacher, but I found out she was a biology teacher. We didn't have a biology teacher at Simmons High School. But the way the lady taught it, I was able to learn, really. Her name was Porter, Elizabeth Porter.

EE: Was this at Storer or in high school?

[00:31:08.07] DJ: This was in high school. She was the substitute teacher, I found out, I understand. She taught biology. It may be that she liked biology or whatever, yeah.

EE: Now, when you were at Storer, were there any white students?

[00:31:24.01] DJ: No. There weren't any white students. In fact, there weren't any white students during the whole time I was in Storer, but we had white teachers though, Dr. Cunningham and this other one, Dr. Porter I believe his name was.

EE: What did Dr. Cunningham teach?

[00:31:51.01] DJ: Sociology, and we had a white president. No, he retired that year. '46, he retired, yeah.

EE: Who was the president when you were there?

DJ: What is his name? He taught for over thirty or forty years. He was there with my mother.

EE: Mr. McKinney?

[00:32:22.15] DJ: No, Dr. McKinney, he just started when I was there.

EE: He was the president when you got there.

DJ: He was the president, but there was a white man, McDonald, Dr. McDonald, if I'm not mistaken, Dr. McDonald, yeah. It was Dr. Henry T. McDonald or something like that. He was the president.

EE: He was the president when your mother was there?

DJ: Yeah.

EE: What years was your mother there?

[00:32:49.06] DJ: He was president up until 1946, and he retired in 1946. That's when Dr. McKinney became the president.

EE: Did you hear a lot of stories about President McDonald?

[00:33:07.25] DJ: Yeah. I understand he was a great president. All of them liked him. All the blacks liked him. I guess he was president for thirty or forty years, something like that.

EE: Did your mother ever talk about him?

DJ: Oh, yeah.

EE: What did she say about him?

[00:33:34.06] DJ: She liked him. All the blacks did. He treated the blacks well at that time.

EE: His wife was there, too, wasn't she?

DJ: Yeah, she was there, too, but they never said too much about her, just him.

EE: Do you remember any important people that came on to campus when you were there who gave lectures or visited?

[00:34:00.10] DJ: Nnamdi Azikiwe.

EE: Who was that?

DJ: He was a political man. He went to school at Storer, as I understand, and he was invited by Storer to speak at the commencement in 19 and 47. He came. He spoke for about ten minutes and then he left. [laughs]

EE: And what did he become?

00:34:29.00] DJ: Nnamdi Azikiwe, he became the president of Nigeria, if I'm not mistaken. He owned a newspaper called *The Zik*, I think it was.

EE: Was he in school with you? He wasn't in school with you.

[00:34:48.27] DJ: No, he wasn't with me. No, he finished. He wasn't the president of Nigeria, but he was an important political man in Nigeria. I don't know whether he was an ambassador or what he was at that time. But he came to Storer and spoke at that time during that particular period, yeah.

EE: Do you remember John Brown's Fort on the campus?

DJ: Oh, yes.

EE: Tell me about that.

[00:35:30.27] DJ: Well, it was a memorial for peace, you might say. We would go to visit it, you know, to check it. We were so glad to have it up at that time because I didn't know too much about John Brown then, but I knew that he had fought the federal government, and that he was also a supporter—he was interested in blacks being free from slavery, let me put it that way. I didn't know that he had taken the Fort, you know, attempted to take the Fort or the federal offices. It wasn't the fort.

EE: Right. The Armory, I think they called it, yeah.

DJ: Yeah, he was trying to take that with some of his people.

EE: You have to speak up.

[00:36:45.18] DJ: He was trying, he was trying to capture the, I guess, the Armory, yeah because they had ammunition in it, and he wanted to get the ammunition so he can fight a battle against whoever, I guess. It may have been the federal government, or it

could have been—there hadn't been a war yet. That's what started the war, the Civil War. He was against slavery at that time, and he knew Frederick Douglass. Frederick Douglass was a very good friend, Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist at that time. And I would say John Brown was one, an abolitionist, too, because John Brown came from St. Louis area, the Midwest area, all the way down to West Virginia. There's a good museum on John Brown at Harpers Ferry. I visited that. That's where I became really interested in John Brown. I understand what he had done for the blacks, to try to free the blacks. He lost his life as a result, he and his son, his son, too. And, of course, there were some blacks who were with him at that time, you see. So, that's all I can say about John Brown.

EE: So, how does it make you feel to be at a school in Harpers Ferry? What did that mean to you?

[00:38:56.17] DJ: Well, I feel good because I'm doing what my mother wanted me to do. My mother really wanted me to go to school there, and she went to school there. And her brothers and sisters and her cousin also went to school there. That was the opportunity for them at that time because there were no other opportunities for them to go to school. That was back in the 1890s, you might say.

EE: When did your mother graduate? Do you know what year?

DJ: She graduated in 1940.

EE: No, you graduated.

[00:39:42.11] DJ: She graduated from West Virginia State. She went to school at West Virginia State. She kept teaching and went to summer school.

EE: What years did she go to Storer? Do you remember? Do you know that?

DJ: No.

EE: Before you were born?

DJ: Oh, yeah.

EE: Long before you were born.

DJ: Before I was born, yes.

EE: So, tell me, did your mother come to visit you when you were at Storer College?

[00:40:07.20] DJ: Mother never came to visit me when I was at Storer College. My daddy did because I was playing football. He came to visit me then. But Mother stayed

home, teaching school. She hadn't got the time. [00:40:24.18] So, she never did come. Her sister, my Aunt Genevieve, she graduated from Storer College.

EE: Oh, her sister. What was your mother's maiden name?

[00:40:40.13] DJ: My mother's sister, she was a younger sister. She graduated from Storer College. She was teaching school in Virginia, and she would always come in on the weekend to take me from Storer, to her mother. My grandmother was living at that time.

EE: What was your mother's maiden name?

DJ: Robinson. Her name was Lelia Robinson. Lelia Bell Robinson.

EE: So, did you have places that you loved to be? Did you have a favorite place on the college campus?

[00:41:27.00] DJ: On campus? [laughs] Believe it or not, it's my dormitory. I'd did a lot of studying when I was there. I wanted to be a real good student, you understand. I was interested in trying to make As in everything I studied.

EE: What did your room look like?

[00:41:54.17] DJ: It was a normal room. Henry and I didn't do anything to try to make it elaborate, but we had a lot of students who'd come to visit with us. That was because they weren't impressed with me. I think they were impressed with Henry. They would talk to him, and I'd be studying my biology or something else.

EE: Did you have desks? What furniture was in the room?

[00:42:25.18] DJ: No, there wasn't—whatever the...

EE: Was there a desk? Just a desk and a bed? Did you have a desk to study at?

[00:42:36.00] DJ: No, I studied on my bed. We may have had a desk. I don't know if Henry used the desk.

EE: And what about the library? Did you use the library?

[00:42:50.27] DJ: Very seldom. Very seldom. We had a library, but very seldom. I did all my studying. I read my book in my room.

EE: And what did you do on weekends?

DJ: I would visit my grandmother. As I say, my aunt would come down. She graduated from West Virginia State—I mean, Storer College. She would come

down and pick me up.

EE: Where did she live?

[00:43:24.28] DJ: On a Friday. She lived with her mother.

EE: Where?

DJ: It was called Martinsburg, but it really was Douglas Grove, West Virginia in the country. Douglas Grove, West Virginia, about four miles from Martinsburg, West Virginia.

EE: So, did you have much of a social life? Was there much mixing between girls and boys, men and women?

[00:43:53.24] DJ: I had a social life, you might say, but it wasn't with the girls, you understand. As I said, the fellows would come into the room to talk. I would talk with them sometimes, but most of the time, I wasn't too talkative. Understand. I was study conscious at that time, you see, because I knew I was in college, and I wanted to make good.

EE: Were there any rules or an honor code that you remember? I mean, were there people who drank or gambled?

[00:44:29.16] DJ: No, there was no gambling. The Storer College was a religious centered school from a Northern Baptist convention that run around Connecticut, Boston, New York, and New Hampshire. That was a religious school, and they wanted to establish Storer College down there back in those days. John Storer, I think, was the one who—he contributed ten thousand dollars, if I'm not mistaken, ten thousand dollars to start the school. Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money today, but it was a whole lot of money back then, you see, to start a school.

EE: Do you remember going to religious services? Did you go to church on campus?

[00:45:39.17] DJ: Oh, we went to church? Oh, yes, we were required to go to church back then. That was a part of the school rules. And we wanted to go to church there. Dean Kelly who was the minister and would speak to us. He was a teacher there, too, Dean Kelly was. I think his name was James Kelly, if I'm not mistaken.

EE: What did Dean Kelly teach?

[00:46:15.17] DJ: Well, he taught me public speaking.

EE: Now, was he white?

[00:46:20.18] DJ: No, he was black. He was the dean of the school. Dean Johnson, he was the dean of, I guess you said, it had to do with education, you understand. But Dean Kelly was the dean of men back then at the school. And Dean Jacobs, there was a Dean Jacobs who was the dean for women.

EE: That was a woman?

[00:47:05.14] DJ: Yes, she was a woman, and she was black. I always thought [00:47:12.00] there were two—there were two, as I recall. There were only two white teachers there, and when I spoke to you about, Mr. Cunningham and Mr. Porter. I think his name is Dr. Porter, if I'm not mistaken.

EE: What did he teach?

[00:47:39.15] DJ: I really didn't know because I never did—oh, yeah, there was a doctor there, a white doctor. He was a German. Dr. Walach [spells]. [Actual name is Wallace, Richard A.]

EE: What did he teach?

DJ: He taught German. He was my German teacher, yeah. Dr. Porter, he leaned toward history. He was a history teacher, if I'm not mistaken, but I didn't take history there.

EE: You didn't take history your first two years of college?

[00:48:23.24] DJ: I didn't take history at all in college. I took it in high school.

EE: Because you were trying to go premed?

DJ: That's right. That's what it was. And I took premed at West Virginia State, too. So, I wasn't required to take history.

EE: Did you ever go into Harpers Ferry or Bolivar?

[00:49:07.16] DJ: Never did. I stayed at school campus about all the time. I think because it was too hilly. [laughs]

EE: Too hilly. What about in the winter?

DJ: The mountains. Too slopey. I'd put it that way.

EE: It's pretty hilly.

DJ: So, I just stayed on the campus all the time, yeah. The only time I left was when I went to, my aunt would come in and pick me up and take me to Douglas

Grove to see my Grandma and eat the delicious food she was cooking up.

EE: What did she cook up?

[00:49:51.08] DJ: Oh, she cooked a lot of food. [laughs] Chicken, fried chicken, and beef, roast beef and all of that, and good pies and cakes. She was a great cook.

EE: Did you ever go over to Jefferson Rock? Did you ever go down to the rivers?

[00:50:15.04] DJ: No. I didn't like the river, Miss Elaine. The only thing I liked about water was washing and bathing, that's all, and cleaning up. But so far as going down and swimming and anything and fishing, I didn't do that. But I have done some fishing lately though with my church on the Chesapeake Bay.

EE: On a boat.

DJ: Yeah. I got seasick. [laughs] It was in the Atlantic Ocean. I was in the army, you see, and, yeah, the Atlantic Ocean, I got seasick, and I stayed seasick all the way over, ten days over to England.

EE: So, when were you in the army?

[00:51:05.29] DJ: In Germany.

EE: In what years?

DJ: In Germany, in '51, '52. As soon as I graduated from West Virginia State.

EE: Right. So, tell me what happened to your dreams of a career in medicine?

[00:51:24.18] DJ: Well, I can't hear too well. And my mother and dad had never told me that. I never thought anything was wrong with my hearing, although my father did, when I was a high school student in West Virginia, Montgomery, West Virginia, he would take me—he did take me to Charleston concerning my hearing, you understand. And, of course, as I say, I never thought I could—you know, my hearing was bad. I didn't think a thing was wrong with that. But the doctor told my daddy that he didn't think that, what's it called? A hearing aid. A hearing aid would help me in hearing because I had nerve type hearing.

EE: How old were you?

[00:52:24.27] DJ: At that time, maybe fifteen or sixteen years old. I had been in the hospital a while at that time. But I didn't know that I was hearing impaired. Let's put it that way because nerve type, according to my mother—I did ask her one time about my hearing, but she told me. She said “When I was a baby, the doctor gave me a pill. It was a big pill, and she didn't want to give it to me, but she gave it to me

anyway, and it took my hearing away, and it took my speech away.” She said, “I couldn't hear for a while, and I couldn't talk well.” She think it came from that pill. She said finally my hearing came back-- partially. And my talk, I have difficulty talking most all of the time. In fact, I have difficulty, I talk through my nose now, you know. You see. But I do talk much better than when I was young [00:54:05.14].

EE: So, how did that affect going to medical school, your medical career?

[00:54:06.12] DJ: Well, I didn't know a thing about that then. I thought then my hearing, I came to realize that I did have a defect in hearing. I, at George Washington University, on the GI Bill, I did think about being a doctor. Yes. But I noticed when I would take classes at George Washington with those doctors and all, I started thinking then. I couldn't hear the teacher, what he was saying, you see. And I said, “Well, maybe this is not for me.” I had just married my wife, too. I don't think I told her about my hearing. I didn't tell her that I was thinking about dropping out. So, I stayed there for a while, and I took this course under another doctor. He was white, and he didn't say anything to me about my hearing, but he said something to me about my marriage. He said, “Now, Johnson, you've got a kid.” I had one baby, and I had gone to that school. He said, “You've got one kid.” He said, “Now, if you get another kid, you're going to have to get out of school.” He said, “You want to be a doctor?” I said, “Yes.” “You can't have any more children.” [laughs] That's what he told me. “You can't have any more children, not right now, because you're going to school.” [inaudible] [00:56:05.24] I had another kid, and I told him about it. He said, “You're going to have to drop out of school. I said, “You're right.” That's the reason why I dropped out. I decided that I could do something else. I could be something else other than being a doctor.

[00:56:23.29] But I didn't want to be a teacher. Do you know what I mean? I didn't want to be a teacher at all. But I ended up doing substitute teaching, yeah. I became a substitute teacher, and I decided then that—I didn't decide at that time, but I had a cousin who lives here in Washington, and he was a mail carrier. He carried the mail. I didn't want to be a mail carrier, to carry mail, but I did want to work in the post office. So, before I left home in Kimberly, there was a good friend of ours who was telling me, “I'm thinking about staying home. Teach school here at home.” But then I kept, I had a desire to come to Washington and go to Howard University and med school, which is—I'd been to the army and back then, you see.

[00:57:35.08] So, I left Kimberly. This friend, speaking about this friend, his name is Moyer [spells]. Mr. Moyer. I'll never forget him. He said, “Man, you're not going to stay in college are you, there is nothing down here but the mine.” He said, “They're about to close down. Certainly you don't want to go in the mine.” I said, “No, I don't want to go in the mine.” He said, “Then why don't you go to Washington? A big place, a city like that, they have the post office there, government in Washington, DC, and apply for a position down there.”

[00:58:23.10] That's what he was telling me. He was an educated man. He said, "That's what I would do if I were you." I told him, "Yes, sir." I did leave Kimberly and came to Washington I did want to come to Washington because I know of my cousin working in the post office there, but I didn't have a relationship with him. I didn't make any contact with him until I got to Washington. And then I had another cousin, too. I had about two cousins down there at this time. That's one reason I came, but I didn't make any contact with him. My mother told me [laughs], "Don't have too much to do with them." She just wanted me to be by myself.

[00:59:12.17] And my cousin, I had a cousin living in Charles Town, West Virginia.

EE: Okay. You're going to have to tell me what career, what you did after you left GW. What kind of work did you do?

[00:59:32.20] DJ: I was an insurance agent when I first came here. And then after working as an insurance agent, I became a circulation manager for Afro-American Newspaper Company. I was the circulation manager for them for about ten years. And during that time, I decided I wanted to go to the post office. I took the examination for the post office, and I passed. And they called me, and that's when I came to the post office.

[01:00:28.22] But before that, I had passed as a—I think I might have been a chemistry employee. I'll put it that way. I don't know what I'd be doing in there because I never did go.

EE: Okay. So, the only teaching you did was substitute teaching.

[01:00:51.27] DJ: Substitute teaching that's all. Because I worked in the post office, and I was in the post office for about maybe five or six years. I liked what I was doing in the post office. I said, "No, I'm not going..." I didn't want to teach. I didn't like teaching.

[01:01:13.00] But, before I was working in the post office, there was a friend of mine who was telling me he was doing substitute teaching, and, therefore, I became interested. And I said I could do substitute teaching at and stay at the post office. That's what I did. I did substitute teaching. I did that for forty years. I did substitute teaching for forty years, and I worked in the post office for forty-two years.

EE: Great. So, you retired from the post office.

[01:01:45.10] DJ: And I retired from the post office. With substitute teaching, there's no retirement situation there.

EE: That's great, that's wonderful. So, you did enjoy it.

DJ: I have six children.

EE: You had how many?

[01:01:59.09] DJ: I had six children. My wife didn't work. To keep her from working, I had to get the other job so that she'd stay home and take care of the kids.

EE: So, you worked nights at the post office?

[01:02:08.11] DJ: I worked nights at the post office from ten thirty to seven, and the work I was doing wasn't too hard. So, let's see, after, I think, 1983, I became a supervisor, a regular supervisor, but I started supervising in 1970.

EE: Right.

[01:02:42.10] DJ: So that was—so, I had been in the post office about twenty-five years. I wasn't about to give up anything.

EE: I hear you. I want to get us back to Storer College though. I want to go back to Storer. I want to know what you think about Storer College now being the headquarters for the National Park Service.

[01:03:11.10] DJ: Well, I was very much concerned when Storer closed.

EE: Tell me about that.

[01:03:16.11] DJ: You understand, West Virginia State, the state of West Virginia wanted Storer College when I was down there, you understand. When I was down there, the state of West Virginia wanted Storer College, but they didn't want to give them much money, you see. So, Northern Baptist wouldn't allow them to have it. They wouldn't allow you at that time. This report, I was told. I don't know too much about it, whether it's true or not. But the Northern Baptist Convention wanted to keep Storer, and they were financing it. And West Virginia, because of West Virginia State, they lost interest in it.

[01:04:04.27] So, when they closed, West Virginia State, it was discrimination at West Virginia State College at that time, so far as blacks and whites were concerned. So, when I went to college, discrimination was ended. Let's say when discrimination was ended at West Virginia. West Virginia, the state of West Virginia did not become interested in Storer. I don't know whether Storer contacted the state of West Virginia about the loss of funds and everything and the Northern Baptist Convention got away from it, but because of the freedom that blacks had to go to the Union school and they didn't want to go there, you see. And as a result of that, the Northern—they called it the Northern Baptist Convention—decided to cancel, you might say, their fund.

EE: Right.

[01:05:39.02] DJ: And, as a result, the fact of canceling the fund, then Storer College did not have any finances to operate on. I'm thinking that they did contact West Virginia State about that, the State of West Virginia, but they weren't interested in helping them. I think they were telling them to marriage with the Shepherd State College. It wasn't a state college, but Shepherd College, and I don't know what happened there, but Shepherd College accepted the, what would you say, the businesses, you might say, but they did not want to take in the school. They did not merge with the school.

EE: So, how did you feel when you heard it was closing?

[01:06:46.05] DJ: Well, see, I was at West Virginia State when it happened.

EE: No, you weren't.

DJ: I wasn't at Storer.

EE: 1955.

DJ: In 1955, I was out of school then.

EE: Right.

[01:06:58.08] DJ: Yeah, in 1955, I was out of school. In fact, I wasn't even going down to West Virginia to Storer College, not to the reunion for that matter.

EE: When did you start going to the reunions?

[01:07:12.13] DJ: When I came to Washington, DC. I missed some of my friends, you know, and I was going to school—who was going to school at the time when I was at Storer. They kept asking me to come with them because they were going to start a Storer College reunion.

EE: Do you remember when that was?

[01:07:36.12] DJ: Charles Gaines [01:07:39.01] was one of the main ones, Charles Gaines. He lived here in Washington, DC, and he contacted all the students, all the Storer students they could, you know. So, that's how I became affiliated with the graduated students at Storer. I did not graduate from there. I tell my story. I didn't graduate with Storer. I graduated from State. See, that didn't make any difference. You're still a part of Storer. I said okay, and I tell [?] [01:08:24.11] about my mother when she goes there. I had a cousin who was going to school, Cousin Violet. She attended the reunion at that time, the Storer College reunion.

EE: What's her name?

DJ: Violet [spells] Arter [spells].

EE: Is she still alive?

DJ: No, no, she's dead. She died. She's been dead. She came out with my mother then.

EE: So, tell me what you think the biggest lesson that you learned from Storer College would be?

[01:09:11.07] DJ: The biggest lesson? Well, I was disciplined when I came to Storer, as you might notice. I told you I studied most of the time. So, I had been disciplined very well by my parents, and Simmons was a good school. Simmons High School was a good school. I received my discipline from them. My coach named Coach Robert Harris [01:09:47.25], he impressed me a lot.

EE: At high school.

DJ: Yeah.

EE: Right. But what about Storer? What was the lesson—I mean, were there things that you say, “I owe that to Storer College”?

[01:09:59.29] DJ: I said, at Storer, being well disciplined at Storer, I was able to see whatever discipline they, you know, had up there, and it didn't bother me, you understand, because I was a part of it anyway before I came to Storer. That's what I'm saying.

EE: Right.

DJ: So, whatever rules and regulations they had, I accepted it because I really—I was really a part of that in high school.

EE: Well, I'm going to end this interview, but I want to make sure that there's nothing else about Storer College that you want to tell me or that I've forgotten to ask you about. You know, anything about your—

01:10:51.07] DJ: Well, I played football there. I mean, I think I told you that.

EE: You did tell me that.

DJ: I played football for two years there.

EE: What was your happiest moment there? Do you remember anything that gave

you great pleasure?

[01:11:06.04] DJ: [laughs] My happiest moment was, I'd say football and science. Able to make a good grade in science, because, I'd say, I [inaudible] [01:11:24.24] in being a doctor.

EE: Right. Well, this is great. Just if you close your eyes and think about Storer right now, and we think about what it looked like, just tell me how you remember it when you were there in the 1940s.

[01:11:46.04] DJ: The only thing I remember about college that I can remember about Storer is I played football there, yeah. I was able to play football, and I played it for two years, and I excelled at it, I'd say. I was one of the best, [inaudible] [01:12:17.18], one of the best football players at that time. [laughs]

EE: Do you remember homecoming those years?

DJ: They called it homecoming, but I didn't know what it was. [laughs] We didn't have much. We didn't have much, Miss Elaine. I don't even think the fellows [01:12:44.10] even thought about there being a homecoming then. My dad, he came down. He came down to see me play football one time, and he did see me play. He offered me a coat if I made a touchdown.

EE: Did you make one?

[01:13:00.27] DJ: Yes, I did.

EE: Did you get that coat?

DJ: But I had to tell my quarterback first. I said, "Look, my dad is down here." I said, "He tell me he's going to buy me a new coat if I made a touchdown." I said, "Man, I've never made a touchdown before." I never made a touchdown before. And so the quarterback, his name was Guy Napa [?]-not Guy Napa, Paul Napa [?] [01:13:25.20].

EE: Paul.

DJ: I'll never forget him, yeah, Paul, and Paul said okay. And he kept giving the ball to me, and I made a touchdown, and we beat that team. We beat that team. That was—I can't recall their name. I think one team was Winston-Salem, but I'm not so sure.

EE: That's great. Good for you. Did you get the coat?

[01:13:54.15] DJ: But, anyway, I did make that touchdown, and I hurried off the field to tell my dad. [laughs] And he bought me a beautiful coat, yeah, yeah, he did. He was

visiting my grandmother, my mother's mother, his mother-in-law. He was visiting Grandma at the time at Douglas Grove. He'd come up, you know, for his vacation, and he'd go hunting. He'd be hunting. I don't know where he did the hunting. He'd go at night, you see. And I was so glad about that, but I didn't know I'd make a touchdown. I didn't think that fella would give me the ball until I could make a touchdown. But he did, he gave it to me, and then he blocked for me. [laughs] I guess I did it about three times and made a touchdown. It was almost dark at that time when we were playing the game. I've forgotten the name of the team. I think it was Winston-Salem.

EE: Well, that's a great memory for us to end this conversation on. If you think of anything else you want to tell me, you know where I live, and I'd be happy to talk to you again. So, I just want to thank you.

[01:15:17.03] DJ: Well, I was glad that I was able to sing. I like to sing.

EE: Oh, you sang.

DJ: We had a good music director named Mr. Piersall [?] [01:15:33.25]. I remember him. Mr. Piersall was his name, yeah.

EE: Tell me who did you sing with? Did you sing with the choir?

DJ: It was the choir.

EE: Did you sing with the glee club?

DJ: It was the choir, yeah.

EE: And tell me where did you sing? Did you sing only on campus or did you travel?

[01:15:53.13] DJ: We stayed on the campus. We would have a concert. We gave concerts on the campus, yes. We'd go visiting, too. We would visit all the [inaudible] that could make a contribution to Storer College [01:16:14.18]—New Hampshire, Connecticut. We stayed at Yale University one night, you know, and sang there. New York, New York City. We'd sing there. We came all the way down to Charleston, West Virginia and sang a concert there. Then we'd stop by Clifton Forge, Virginia [01:16:49.26], but we didn't get to sing there at that church down there. Something happened, and we didn't get to make it. We went to the Eastern shore, too.

EE: And what did you sing? What kind of places did you go to? Did you go to churches or did you go to schools?

DJ: Churches. It was churches, yeah.

EE: And what kind of songs? What was your favorite song?

[01:17:30.02] DJ: [laughs] I can't recall what my favorite song was, but I think it was an Easter song, "He Was Wounded." I used to like that. His name was Oscar Villa [?] [01:17:41.12], a big, heavyset fellow. He sang tenor. I can hear him singing, "He was wounded for our transgressions." I did like that part. I think that was one of my favorite songs. I don't know the name of it.

EE: And what did you sing, what part did you sing?

DJ: Whatever it was [01:18:07.23], the bass part. Yeah, I was the bass. I sang the bass, the baritone and bass part.

EE: Well, you had a pretty good two years. You were a pretty busy guy.

[01:18:21.08] DJ: Yeah. Maybe I was. [laughs]

EE: You must have been traveling an awful lot if you were traveling for football and traveling for the choir.

DJ: Yeah. We did a lot of traveling during that time. Just the Northern Baptist Convention paid for it. High expenses, you know, coming up that way, you see.

EE: Who did?

[01:18:49.14] DJ: I said the Northern Baptist Convention. The Northern Baptist Convention is the one that sponsored Storer, you know, all during the time I was there, yeah.

EE: Well, this is great. This is good. Do you got another song you want to sing? Do you want to sing us out of this interview, sing me a song that you sang?

DJ: What now?

EE: Do you want to sing me a song?

[01:19:12.17] DJ: No, I can't sing. [laughs]

EE: All right.

DJ: I never did any solo parts.

EE: Any what parts?

DJ: Solo. I never was a soloist. I just was an accompanist, you know, whatever.

EE: It sounds like you were a team player all the way.

DJ: Yes, that's right.

EE: This is great. Well, I'm going to say thank you, and I really appreciate your taking the time and sharing all of these wonderful memories.

DJ: I hope I was a help. I didn't think I could be of much help.

EE: I think you were a great help, and I think you're more of a help as we talk. So, if you think of other things, write them down, and we can always talk again. So, thank you so much.

DJ: Okay. Alright, then, Miss Elaine. [01:20:03.11] Call me any time. [laughs]

EE: Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

[01:20:07.23] [End of File]