

**JOHN DAVIS**  
**The Horseshoe Café – Suffolk, VA**

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Date: July 23, 2014  
Location: Mr. Davis' home, Suffolk, VA  
Interviewer: Sara Wood  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
Length: One hour, forty-nine minutes  
Project: Tidewater VA Yock

00:00:00

**Sara Wood:** One, two, one, two, one, two, hello, hello, hello. One, two, one, two, one, two—hello, hello, hello. One, two, one, two—hello, hello, hello.

00:00:23

All right, could I have you do me a favor Mr. Davis? I'm sorry to ask you. Can I have you turn the music off?

00:00:34

**John Davis:** I'm sorry.

00:00:34

**SW:** No, no, no, I always feel bad asking people to rearrange their lives. It makes it a lot easier to edit it later down the road.

00:00:44

**JD:** Yeah. Okay. Yeah, I'm sorry. I had it on my mind, too but—. I had some problems in the thunderstorm and knocked out some—had a power surge and so I had to run a cable from across here over into the kitchen. But I still have power now, I still have power but some—some of the—the power, the—what do you call it—the plugs knocked out. So that's why you see the—.

00:01:21

**SW:** Okay.

00:01:22

**JD:** But anyway and you can still hook that up if you want to hook it to—.

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**SW:** You know I should be good.

00:01:28

**JD:** Some electricity?

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**SW:** I have some batteries and they usually last for a while, so—

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**JD:** Okay, yeah 'cause it will still hook up here if you need to—

00:01:37

**SW:** Okay, I brought my plug just in case. I always bring it.

00:01:39

**JD:** Okay, yeah. Where would you prefer sitting here or—I can sit here?

00:01:47

**SW:** Let's see, how about—how about do you want to sit there and I'll pull up a chair next to you. Will that work? Are you comfortable there?

00:01:54

**JD:** However you want to—do you prefer to sit in this type chair?

00:01:58

**SW:** Yeah, I want you to be comfortable.

00:02:02

**JD:** Oh I'll be comfortable, I'm at home, yeah okay.

00:02:07

**SW:** And I'm going to grab my notebook just in case. I have just a handful of questions and what I'd like to do is talk to you and ask you some questions that we talked about on the phone. And then if I can take some pictures, I brought my camera. I like to take a portrait of the person I interview and also I know you talked about—I don't know if you have any photographs—

00:02:30

**JD:** Well I did have a whole bunch of them but they disappeared. I only have her picture of here now.

00:02:38

**SW:** Is that your mother?

00:02:39

**JD:** That's my mother yes.

00:02:41

**SW:** I was going to ask you that. She's beautiful.

00:02:43

**JD:** Yeah, she—and she always cut her hair. Her hair went way down her back. And she started—'til I was a kid, I said, 'Mom why don't you let your hair grow you know?' But all them people from her side of the family, they were Native American and their hair grew—the women, their hair grew long. Her mother's hair was way down, way down and my grandmother—great-grandmother, you know her mother cut all the girls' hair 'cause their hair was too long you know. But my mom, she—she always cut hair, being up here and people didn't know her very well.

00:03:22

**SW:** Now did she grow up—I'll ask you that on tape but she—she grew up here in Suffolk?

00:03:26

**JD:** No, she came here in [19]'36, yeah, somewhere around '36, '35 or '36 yeah because I was born in '36. I was born here.

00:03:42

**SW:** You were born here.

00:03:49

**JD:** And this is the front of—

**00:03:52**

**SW:** Oh yeah, I have a question for you Mr. Davis. Is it a horseshoe—on the side of the building and on the sign which I love the sign. It's a good sign. Is it—is it one word when you—when you spell it or is it horse and then shoe?

**00:04:05**

**JD:** One word, it should be one word.

**00:04:07**

**SW:** One word, but I love that sign.

**00:04:09**

**JD:** That's the electric sign up here.

**00:04:10**

**SW:** I love that sign.

**00:04:11**

**JD:** And someone stole the—

**00:04:13**

**SW:** The horseshoe?

**00:04:15**

**JD:** Yeah, the horseshoe was heavy. That thing probably weighed about 300 and was solid and someone, you know being the building is closed and what people is doing is going around collecting iron and stuff and going and—.

**00:04:32**

**SW:** That's sad.

**00:04:32**

**JD:** Because any place has yet to be recognized. You know I'm sure—

**00:04:40**

**SW:** That's really sad.

**00:04:45**

**JD:** Anyway yeah, but—inside the door.

**00:04:53**

**SW:** Oh wow, and that's you?

**00:04:55**

**JD:** Yes.

**00:05:01**

**SW:** Yeah, when was this taken? Was this recently?

00:05:04

**JD:** That was taken in [19]'99, 2000—back in '99 that was taken.

00:05:13

**SW:** Wow.

00:05:18

**JD:** I got a whole bunch of pictures because I take pictures—I think some of the kids took some of them and relatives. We have a large family.

00:05:36

**SW:** Well do you mind if we get started if I start asking you some questions?

00:05:40

**JD:** Sure, let me get my years straight and all. Let's see, I was—she came here when the parents bombed Pearl Harbor. I had that in the paper part. I'll probably have to mail it to you and it's a newspaper clipping you know and—and had that picture on there and but—it was also a book from the NAACP meeting we had and they wanted to give her an award. You know so they gave her an award and I gave it to her chef-cook.

00:06:13

**SW:** And who is that?



00:06:15

**JD:** Miss—we call her Florida but it's Bernice [Cofield].

00:06:20

**SW:** I just saw Bernice this morning.

00:06:22

**JD:** Oh you just saw her?

00:06:22

**SW:** I actually—this is how I found out about your mother. I went down to Tabernacle Christian—

00:06:28

**JD:** Tabernacle, yes they hired her because—because of her job. She's working with my mom. And she's doing a great thing there with their [*Laughs*]—oh, so you saw that cafeteria and—?

00:06:40

**SW:** Yeah.

00:06:40

**JD:** Right, she's in charge of it.

00:06:43

**SW:** I went and took their portraits, her and a woman named Mrs. Mary Whitley.

00:06:47

**JD:** Okay.

00:06:49

**SW:** But Florida—that was her nickname and she told me all about your mother. And so they had said that she had passed on. And I found Andrena [Dimitrijevic] your daughter.

00:07:01

**JD:** Yes, my youngest daughter, right.

00:07:02

**SW:** She had written to the paper. I think some woman here did a story about the yock fundraiser and your mother wasn't mentioned so Andrena, I found her comment and so I tried tracking her down.

00:07:14

**JD:** Yeah. [*Laughs*]

00:07:16

**SW:** It's sort of like detective work.

00:07:17

**JD:** And but because the—you know people they knew of my mom but at the same time, I shouldn't say they gave Bernice credit but she's the now-person, you know. Like preacher last

Sunday here at the ceremony saying then and—and—and now is now. But so she's the person that's making the yock, when they you know advertise in the paper yock sale at the church. 'Oh Bernice is cooking. I won't buy any from anyone else.' That's what people are saying, it's true. And they go there and you know get their dozen boxes or whatever. **[Laughs]** Yeah, yeah she—she took care of my mom. She was very, very—she jumped on because she said, 'John you say you're coming back to Suffolk when you retire from the government. And you can open up and continue.' But what happened to the restaurant, it started, the real wall started decaying and I would say it was split left and right because when it was built it was built on the ground more than a beam like it should have and it's three stories. You probably saw it from the front and rear.

**00:08:45**

So actually being that in that sense the city told me they would have to tear it down if I didn't fix it and they went in with their estimate, \$400,000 to—. I said, 'Well I'm sorry, I can't do that. Can you hold on?' Maybe I can get you know some people to go in with me and maybe all the church—because every church around here had a year. They had gone in, it was on the book for a year in advance for their banquets. And they were more like you know fighting for their banquets.

**00:09:27**

So like that, so anyway what I'm saying is that I tried to get the church to help out because they—you know and they knew Florida and my mom had deceased and Florida took care of things, you know everything about it.

**00:09:42**

So that's what happened. I couldn't get any backup on it, I couldn't get enough. So I sold it for a little of nothing because the city told me that if I didn't get it done within a certain period of time they would have to tear it down all the way and they would charge me with that and I'd have to pay for that. I said, 'Well gee, you know that's almost like a catch 22. What's going on,' you know? So those buildings actually, the ones you see the vacant spots up there in the fairgrounds, the buildings burned down for whatever reason because you know—. And then so I said, 'Well I can't do that you know. I don't have that type of money to pay you know for—.' Anyway I sold it for a little or nothing and the people gypped me out in the law firm. You know they didn't make the payments and got away with murder. But I'm still working on it. I have a couple lawyers working on it now, attorneys you know.

**00:10:48**

So anyway what I'm saying is that the people knew Bernice and they knew she was the cook and so forth. But actually my mom, I would say produced many cooks. People come up to me and say, 'You know I worked in there when you were up in Washington working with the government. You were up there working in the White House and your mom is down here working hard in the restaurant,' you know. I said, 'Well maybe I should come back.' But she was married you know and I didn't want to come back and intervene with you know her and her husband or whatever, you know. I know that destroys marriages sometimes when the kids come back home and they have a scene you know, so—. I stayed over there working with the— working with the Secret Service.

00:11:33

So at the same time when I returned I said, ‘Wait a minute, let me sell my condo and come back home. This house is empty,’ you know. The best thing to do is come back home and live in the house and sell my condo and get rid of everything up there. That was very expensive living in Washington you probably know. So I’m here relaxing and sitting on the front porch, you know and relaxing, I’m an old man now so you know I would say an old man. So many people say, ‘No, you’re sixty.’ I said, ‘No, that’s twenty years further than that.’

00:12:13

Anyway but I’m not a cook. I cook for myself. I mean you know I keep from starving but—but I—when I was raised up in there I didn’t learn to cook ‘cause she had experts, the chef-cook you know people that you know—. What I did was wash dishes you know and **[Laughs]** made yock you know and that was easy for me and worked in the stock you know whatever and stuff like that.

00:12:50

But I left—there was a cousin when I left here, my first cousin from one of my mom’s sisters. He helped out and he went through college and he left when he finished college. He went up to Jersey you know to work his job. So he left Suffolk also you know. So but my mom, there were always people looking for jobs and she helped you know—taught them the work. In fact, one lady when I returned, I talked to—I went down to speak to a friend of mine. He worked in the funeral home where we had some stocks, so I passed by there and talked to him. And he said, ‘Hey, look, John go across the street. There’s a place called Feather & Fins. There’s a lady in there I want you to see.’ He said, ‘My wife,’ — well they’re divorced now. And I said, I’m

thinking why, you know he said—. So I went over there and spoke to her and he asked me. You know lots of people wanted to see me after I arrived back in Suffolk anyway.

**00:14:01**

And she talked to me and she said, ‘Look, you know I started out in the restaurant. Remember me?’ I said, ‘Yes, you started out as a waitress I remember.’ So she rose up to be a chef-cook and she left there and she opened this restaurant down here Feather & Fin. I don’t know if she opened it or she became manager. But she said, ‘Your mom really helped me and she helped lots of people in restaurant business here.’ Yeah, but she also helped people—people who worked for her. She sent some of their kids to college and helped them out and people in the hospital. They were ill and couldn’t pay their bill, you know she would go and visit and be in the Eastern Star and belonged to fourteen organizations you know—you know like that. So the East Coast was—East Coast Black Women Business Association, yeah, she made tops in that a couple years and she was very popular you know. I’m very proud of my mom and I really miss her.

**00:15:10**

But like I said she would pay people’s bills in the hospitals ‘cause she had a nursing license also. We went to New York and when I was about eleven, twelve, we left here. Left my stepfather in charge you know and she left him—we left [*Laughs*]. So I went to New York school and North Carolina and bounced around you know ‘cause she’s going to college. She got her degree in nursing and everything and she loved that job. And had to fluctuate a little bit but she loved that job so greatly that lots of people died in her arms. You know and she was doing her job, you know she like—. And people, the family of some of these families that she took care

of in the hospital they saw what she was doing but they would give her money and jewelry and she said, 'No. This is my job.' She would give it back to them, you know so she wasn't about that.

**00:16:18**

So then my stepfather died and we returned here and she took over the restaurant again with the intentions of returning back to the operating table and everything she was doing— surgery. But she stayed here and kept her license up, you know kept going and taking courses and whatever. So she also persuaded people to go into nursing, some of her friends. And she was that type of person, you know. She said, 'Well God you know helped me you know with the business and produced money so I'm going to help people.' And that's the type person she was, yeah.

**00:16:59**

But anyway I saw this lady at the Feather & Fin and I said wait a minute. You know I said this is great. You know you're you know giving people jobs now. So but that's my mom.

**00:17:15**

**SW:** Mr. Davis I'm wondering if we could back up just a bit. I just want to introduce us for the tape so we know who is talking here for the record. This is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's July 23, 2014 and I'm sitting here in the home of Mr. John Davis and we're in Suffolk, Virginia. And I'm going to go ahead Mr. Davis and have you back up and will you introduce yourself and say hello and tell me who you are and where we are?

**00:17:39**

**JD:** Okay, I'm the son of Mrs. Perry Jane Davis, owner, previous owner of the Horseshoe Restaurant. They call it here in Suffolk Horseshoe Café you know, double name there. And my name is John Davis as I said.

**00:18:04**

And so I remember the Horseshoe. She—during the time of the bombing of Pearl Harbor that's when the Japanese owned another building called the Horseshoe and they ran, you know ran from whatever, pursuing them, they were afraid you know 'cause they were Japanese and Pearl Harbor had just gotten bombed.

**00:18:32**

And I said it was a family but I found out two weeks ago that this one guy, one Japanese man [Tsujiro Miyazaki], he fell in love with this black woman [Leathia Boone] and they ran the Horseshoe and they had a son. I just found it. I thought it was a whole Japanese family. But at the same time they had it in the paper, the Suffolk paper [*Suffolk News-Herald*] also, someone [Dennis Edwards] wrote the story on that part. And he ran and his son and wife couldn't get in touch with him but he kept writing and when the letters stopped they think he got killed or shipped back to Japan. They don't know exactly what happened.

**00:19:18**

So then the building was up for auction. That's when my mom got the building, her and her husband. You know at that time and at the time I was in North Carolina with my grandmother being raised you know and starting school, you know a little first-grader and stuff like that you know. So anyway I came back and returned here in the fourth grade and saw what was going on. And the place was always busy, always crowded, always crowded. And by the



way, at that time yock was all the way up to [19] '54 when I left from high school going to the military and the government, yock—some people call it yock-a-mein, but it was fifty cents a box or fifty cents a bowl if you eat in the place. And the price now is seven or eight dollars, you know. It was a good—it was a good dish. I liked it myself. **[Laughs]**

**00:20:26**

And I go down to buy it when Florida has it for sale. I buy it from the church. But the ingredients in it you know—well actually let me back up on a part that there are two other restaurants you know when I was in high school and they sold yock. But they didn't prepare it properly and it was mushy. They didn't know how to get the mushiness out. They went out of business.

**00:20:54**

**SW:** Do you remember the names of the restaurants?

**00:20:58**

**JD:** Well one was—its name is—it's after the name of the lady that—that opened it. It was a lady and her daughter. I'm trying to think, I can't think of her name now. My mind went blank on that part.

**00:21:15**

**SW:** I'm not trying to stump you.

00:21:15

**JD:** No, that's okay. *[Laughs]* But you know being an old man now you know it's easy to get stumped. But I'm trying to think of the name but I can't think of it now. They did quite well. It's also a seafood restaurant but their yock was no good.

00:21:34

**SW:** Was it a black-owned business or was the family—?

00:21:35

**JD:** Yes, it was a black-owned business. That's when the—the area, they call it fairgrounds—very crowded every night and now it's empty day and night. You know the business moved up by Wal-Mart now and all around every place you know. Well and there's a theater up there, pool halls, and other restaurants, you know they did quite well. And it was a teenage place, ice cream place, where you go in and you know supposedly dance, play the jukebox and order ice cream and you know—you know the stuff in the movies way back, but you know—. We had everything here, it was really nice. It was you know—. It was a—and you'd be surprised, I mean I'll jump off again and say there was several doctors here and Planters—Planters Peanut Company was in full bloom, so we had people from all over the country, migrants come here working. There were other places, the basket company and places I can't even name. And now they're not existent now you see, so that's—these were our customers you know coming in day and night getting their orders, you know ordering and lunch for the factory people working—Planters was very popular and it's still popular now. But it's a computerized place now.

00:23:07

But anyway that's—sorry, that's when I came up and went to school and saw what was going on you know as a little kid. But that's how she got the place, you know—acquired and very—. At that time she was only twenty-three, yeah. And she had a beauty parlor and which three of her sisters came up from North Carolina and worked in there and so she knew how to make money. She was—and they went to high school and finished and went off to college into their career. And my mom was a great—she was a—she was a person who knew how to you know—how to handle business but—yeah.

00:24:00

**SW:** Can I ask you a couple questions about that? I'm wondering if you could tell me, you said she didn't grow up here. Where is she from and what did she tell you about growing up?

00:24:09

**JD:** Oh she grew up, she was born in Sanford, North Carolina. And her father who was my grandfather owned a large farm and there were four brothers and I would say seven sisters. So those farmers had kids you know, somebody had to work it. **[Laughs]** Anyway, she finished high school and her first year of college and she said, 'No, I'm not going to stay on the farm. You know I'm going to college, put myself through college and have a business,' and that's exactly what she did. She came to Suffolk because my older aunt, her older sister were—she lived here with her husband and he was in the navy so that's why she came up and stayed with them a year you know and she got her own house and got on her feet. She was only twenty-three, yeah so I mean she left at eighteen. She left there at—nineteen she was in—was it Central College there near Fort Bragg you know or near in there. The farm was near Fort Bragg, North Carolina. And I loved that area. She sent me back you know to live with my grandmother so I could learn to eat

all the food and you know [*Laughs*]*—off the farm and in fact, now capitalize on that part, it's no food I—I can't eat or don't eat. I even like okra. [*Laughs*]*

**00:25:44**

But I would see them butcher animals for—‘cause the farmer has his own you know produce there, you know everything they raised for the families. So I saw where that would happen and the peeling of apples and fruits and making of jelly and jam and all that stuff I learned that there, but that's where she was raised up. So being that she was a country girl and she came here, she really knew how to cook and what to cook. She made her own barbecue like the North Carolina barbecue near here. It's a big sell in North Carolina. She made her own and that was a big sell. Everything was a big sell. She had a huge menu out there. And yeah, and like I said she would stay there in the restaurant overnight, many nights making her personalized potato salad, coleslaw, barbecue and put it in these glass jars, the wide-mouthed gallon jars, yeah. And she would stay there all night you know just doing personal and peoples were—people were crazy about her cooking, you know.

**00:27:06**

She didn't trust—I said, ‘Mom teach me all this.’ She said, ‘No, you'll never learn how to make it like—.’ She made her own pickled beets, you know opened the can and drained off and sliced pickles you know. She made her own—endless—endless you know food I could name that she made. And by the time I left, came to—went to the government and military she had cut her—cut her menu in half and it was still a lot of food you know.

00:27:48

**SW:** Why did she cut it in half?

00:27:50

**JD:** Because it was—there were—it was too much, too many things on the menu. Okay like breakfast, breakfast had cheese and eggs, sausage and eggs, bologna and eggs, steak and eggs, and everything you had for dinner, it was eggs—so for breakfast. So she cut in half and stopped selling bologna and stopped selling the vegetable dinners, you know and I can just go on and on. And her steak was very popular because she sold it very cheap. Even in [19]’99 when she passed and the Horseshoe stopped operating, her steak dinner was only two dollars, just about two dollars. And people come in and said, “Look, I’ve been up to DC, I’ve been to New York, or all over the country and steak dinners are ten dollars. Why do you sell yours so cheap?” And her comment was that the people here are low-paid and you know low-paid and she—when she’d buy her meats she wouldn’t sell them to make a great profit. You know and that kept the place crowded all the time. Yeah, she wasn’t for a great profit, but yet still she made out pretty good, pretty well you know.

00:29:22

**SW:** I’m wondering, so she started out here. She came up here and she started to—she had her own place. She did hair you said?

00:29:30

**JD:** Yes, she did hair in her home. She made the house a [*Laughs*] beauty parlor from her house. I mean she was a businesswoman. And like I said she called up three of her sisters in

North Carolina and they came up and helped in the—they called it beauty parlor then. Now you call it—what do you call it now?

**00:29:53**

**SW:** I guess, do people say salon a lot?

**00:29:54**

**JD:** Salon now, right, so yeah. And my father at that time, he said, “Wait a minute. This is in the house, you know I have to smell the hair. You got to get rid of this place.” *[Laughs]* So yeah, she—she did, you know and carried it someplace else. And my aunts operated it. And then she came full bloom into the restaurant, they both were, yeah.

**00:30:20**

Yeah, I had some pictures of her and the staff starting out but someone—I carried them to—to one of these guys. He was an elder person and um, and his kids were there and they were, ‘Oh, this is dad in the Horseshoe when it first opened.’ You know the whole staff, eighty-by-ten picture—and someone took the picture. This is two years ago and I never knew who took the picture. Someone stole it because their dad was in the picture. But my dad and mom was in there, you know and I’m still after them begging would you please find out who took the picture and make copies you know. But anyway outside that part yeah, she was a businesswoman, yeah.

00:31:12

**SW:** So why—why did she decide to open the restaurant? I’m—you know you explained where—how the restaurant started with the—the Japanese gentleman. Do you know his name by the way?

00:31:25

**JD:** No, I did have the newspaper article—his name. But I either misplaced the article or misplaced the paper ‘cause I was saving it for you and the word yock wasn’t yock when he ran it. He spelled it y-a-k, something like that. And but up on the side of the building it had a large—side of the building was painted, the whole side had ‘Yock for Sale.’ See and but—and it could have been I hate to say—I don’t know, it could have his been his pronunciation you know y-a-k in the newspaper there. But yeah, she—go ahead.

00:32:14

**SW:** No, I wonder what—why did she decide to take the restaurant. I mean that seems—I mean you said she’s a businesswoman but that sounds like a big responsibility.

00:32:22

**JD:** Right, well she was a country woman. And my father at that time had—he was—his family—his father had one of the largest grocery stores here in Suffolk on County Street and houses and he was in business like that. And his—some of his family I think his uncles or cousin, I weren't really in touch with them that much—that well, so they owned corner candy stores and they sold little groceries and stuff. They were businesspeople. So she joined in with he and that’s

how they both you know—. And he was a great cook also. He would come into—he would go to the restaurant four o'clock in the morning and open.

00:33:16

**SW:** Your father would?

00:33:16

**JD:** Yeah, he would open four o'clock in the morning because people going to work for breakfast, like I said it was a great migration of people from the South you know and from the Islands. They would come up and work for Planters Peanuts and the basket company you see. So they had to be fed, so morning, noon, and night, so—. [*Laughs*]

00:33:45

**SW:** Mr. Davis two questions for you just to back up. What was your father's name and your grandfather's name and what was the name of the—the grocery store?

00:33:54

**JD:** Oh it was—my father's name was Joseph Davis and his father's name were—was Joe—Joe Davis. Everyone back in that time knew—they would order from his grocery stores and he had like four or five bicycles. It was a grocery bicycle with a large basket in front. I don't know if you ever seen one of them with a tiny wheel to—or space for the basket and a large one. So when school is out the school boys would come there and carry groceries to these people's houses you know, you know at that time. And yeah, he had one—one of the larger grocery stores on County Street, County Street and Madison Avenue on that corner, yeah.



00:34:44

**SW:** Do you know—do you remember the name of the grocery store?

00:34:47

**JD:** No, it—just his name. I don't think it really had a name. I'm sorry, Charlie Davis—Charlie Davis Grocery Store. That was the name—his name, Charlie Davis, sorry.

00:34:59

**SW:** Your grandfather?

00:35:00

**JD:** My grandfather, right. And so—so that was the name of the grocery store. With not having a name on it, everyone knew that was his you know. And he would answer the phone and take all these orders, so he had to hire a secretary to answer the phone to take orders. You know that's how popular it was. So my father left there, he was helping his father and merged in with my mom to get the—the restaurant. And I'm sure he got help from his father and from his uncles that ran the other stores 'cause that happened very suddenly you know. But it was very profitable also.

00:35:43

**SW:** I'm wondering, I know you told me this on the phone but for the tape do you remember the year that your—your mother opened the restaurant?

00:35:52

**JD:** It was a year—it had to be a year—close to a year after Pearl Harbor was bombed and that was in—what year was that?

00:36:04

**SW:** Forty-four, forty-five [1945].

00:36:05

**JD:** Forty-four or forty-five yes at that time, right. And the dishes were all there. They just had to order food and stock the stockroom and—and everything was there. All they had to do was go through the dishes, wash the dishes, wash the place down you know and close it a little bit and just like that it was open. You know it was just—it was no big deal you know. People needed jobs, so they had no problem with waitresses, no problems. They just had to work and be kind to people and they trained a lot. If they didn't work properly you would tell them to go home and you would call them when they—when you need them. You never fire anyone, you say, 'Go home. When I need you I'll call you.' [*Laughs*] Yeah but—yeah they ran a very good business. And hey, I'll put this part in. Me, as a kid in elementary school, fifth—fourth, fifth grade I'd walk behind the counter and my buddies would come in. 'Oh yeah, he—he can walk behind the counter. Let me see you—' they sold ice cream at that time. My mom got rid of it 'cause it held up you know the dinner orders. 'Let me see you get a candy bar. You know I bet you can't get a'—I'd reach over in the candy stack and take a candy bar and open it up and start eating it. Oh, you know can I have one? Yeah, if you got five cents, you know. [*Laughs*] Yeah, it was—it was really something for me you know as a kid, you know. I'm very proud—proud you know.

00:37:49

Until one day I took a cigar and I didn't know my father saw me [*Laughs*], at that time I was about twelve and I went out to the car and opened the door, closed the door, smoking a cigar and he came out there and leaned against the door. [*Laughs*] And then he finally opened it and he said, 'Look.' He said, 'You can smoke that cigar 'til it's finished and now when it's finished then I'll open the door and let you out.' [*Laughs*] So I'm a non-smoker. Yeah, I'm a non-smoker now.

00:38:25

**SW:** Did you get sick?

00:38:27

**JD:** Oh yes, yeah, yeah, very sick. We had a lot of fun together. He was a great guy. He was a great guy. And that—I liked the way he did that you know. He didn't give me a beating or punishment except for, 'Close the door.' He said, 'Finish smoking that cigar.' [*Laughs*] Yeah, that was the type of guy he was so yeah.

00:38:52

**SW:** Um—

00:38:54

**JD:** But—

00:38:54

**SW:** Sorry, go ahead Mr. Davis. I just—I have a few more questions. Is that all right with you?

00:38:59

**JD:** Yeah.

00:39:01

**SW:** I'm wondering, I mean what—what are some more—. You know you're talking about some of the memories you have from your parents and the restaurant. What do you think having that restaurant meant for the community? You know it's when you're talking about your parents and being there but what do you think that—. I mean I've heard about this restaurant from everyone I've talked to here and everyone talks about it with love.

00:39:24

**JD:** Yeah, it—what it meant to the community was jobs and food. The proper food that the people wanted you know they would let my parents know what—what they wanted you know. And—and they would put it on the menu and fix you know—and like I said they were lots of migrant workers, so you know that was only—not the only place they could eat. There were people selling food from their houses and stuff but this way the men and women could go home wherever they lived and come out shirt and tie on, stand on the corner and had a place to eat you know. It was very—you know they liked—they were crazy about the restaurant. So they would go down the other place, the beer hall or wherever and have a beer and go to the movie, get out of the movie and they had the movie crowd come in there and it was—it was really something you know yeah.

**00:40:31**

**SW:** I'm wondering, I mean I'm thinking of the time that your mother took the restaurant. That was the mid-[19]'40s. I'm wondering what Suffolk was like in terms of segregation if there weren't—this was a place that African Americans could go and—and enjoy a meal whereas in other places I wonder if—if that wasn't allowed.

**00:40:52**

**JD:** Oh well, yeah my parents they didn't look at that. I remember the chief of police would bring his family there. And some Caucasian ministers would bring their family there and eat and some people did complain and said, 'Look. We can't go to their restaurant and eat and why do you let them?' My parents said, 'Look, this is a business. You know and integration is coming, you know it's coming. Whenever it comes you know it's going to come. So we don't hold back from—we don't hold people—stop people from eating here because of that you know. And we don't want anyone coming in you know talking to them and saying hey what are you doing here or anything you know.' And they respected that you know.

**00:41:45**

Now when they left the smaller restaurant and she got the larger one, the one now it was once a hardware store and it was huge. So sorry, she made um banquet rooms. You'd walk in and pictures that are missing—like this picture. When you walked in the door this is the counter made like a horseshoe you know. And—and it was made like a horseshoe. You can't see it on this picture, the whole thing, and it came—come around this way and there were stools. People could eat from the stools. And across a little bit were the booths and tables. Okay, now back up another part. This wall there was a door further down and if you didn't know it you wouldn't

know you could go through that door and it was a banquet room with a piano and a stage you know like that.

00:42:55

And on this side was a fiberglass folding curtain and you could separate this side from the—the people eating on the stool and the booths. And you could have a banquet in there also. And she had about two 100 gallon aquariums. I have only a thirty-five gallon aquarium. And she had all these big fish in there and she decorated quite well, except for one guy came in and wanted to give the fish a drink, you know. **[Laughs]** And we never knew who he was but we heard the voice say, ‘Hey, give the fish a drink.’ Anyway you know but that aquarium in the banquet room, you know is pretty good atmosphere and she had plants and things in there. She really, really decorated yeah. And her office was almost as large as this living room here and she had a one-way mirror where she could look through and see how the people are doing in the kitchen and the banquet room and the—the restaurant part. And the help didn’t know it was a one-way mirror. You know they’d never go in her office. She wouldn’t allow them to go in her—so she could go in there and do her paperwork or whatever—rest. She could open a couch up to a bed, queen size couch up to a bed and—yeah a queen size bed and that’s where she would stay overnight. And making her potato salad and cutting up meats, chopping what you call it, the steaks, seasoning and well, she would do that herself because the cooks you know make sure that the cooks gave the equal amount of meat—food to the customers. So she would weigh them also you know and make sure that—but they were large steaks. She would season them you know and beat on them. I said beat on them on the table and put wax paper between them and stack them in the freezer, so if someone would order a steak dinner all the cook had to do was go in the freezer and take it out you know and cook it.

**00:45:21**

And he didn't have to do any seasoning and stuff, so she did all the work. She was very busy like that. And the liver and onion dinner, the liver dinner, she sold most of that. She would take the veins out and freeze the dinners, I mean freeze the liver and the cook—and the liver didn't curl up you know. You cook it with veins in it, it's hard to chew. So she personalized everything, so being a country girl you know that's what made her very popular with her way she cooked you know.

**00:46:01**

**SW:** I know you mentioned this on the phone but I wanted to ask you this for the tape Mr. Davis. How did she learn how to make yock? Was she already making it or did she learn—?

**00:46:11**

**JD:** Oh okay, now the way I gather is that this Japanese family, their son [Raymond Harold Boone] stayed behind. He was on that picture that disappeared. And he died about a year and a half ago, almost two years ago, very old man. But he showed them—showed my mom and dad the yock and where he would buy the noodles in Norfolk. This one place where they could buy the noodles and other people were trying to start the yock business and they went to the wrong place, you know. And so and he showed them how you know you put the seasoning in and whatever and how much and the different meats, pork, beef, or chicken you know and you would cook that meat especially for the yock and cut it in you know chips, you know to season it.

00:47:16

And maybe I wouldn't talk too much, I would give the secret out [laughs]. But anyway he was a professional in that end and he taught them and—but as you know now it's 2014, almost '15 and it's still very popular yeah. Well my daughter found out, I didn't—I didn't know. She's always on the Facebook, internet, and so she saw that someone had called Ms. Bernice, who we call Florida, “the Yock Woman.” So my daughter is the type person, you know I can't say she gets angry very quickly but she will correct anyone right on the spot. So that's where you saw that she called the paper up and said, ‘Wait a minute, no. Ms. Bernice is not the yock woman. My *grandmother* is the yock woman.’ So that's—[Laughs]—that's how that started, yeah.

00:48:21

So I went—I'm in touch with Bernice and I call her and talk to her and my kids talk to her and her kids, you know two daughters. And her son just deceased about a couple months ago. I didn't know it because I didn't know his last name. He was one before the daughters and she was married again and I knew her married name but I didn't know his. Anyway I talked to her and told the family you know regret knowing you know we didn't know. Otherwise we would have all been there, you know—you know comfort you know. But yeah, she was a great person—she's still part of the family. Yeah, she is. But I remember she lived out in Factory Street and on the very cold days I don't know how she got to work but my mom told her you know hey you can have a car. So my mom gave her a car. I think it was a Pontiac so she could drive that to work and wouldn't have to catch a taxi or the bus wouldn't have a way you know, so rain or weather or whatever. So she was happy that they gave her a car. You know like I said, they always helped people out. You know but—



00:49:44

**SW:** How many—how many employees did your mother—did your parents have at that restaurant at one time?

00:49:49

**JD:** Well in the kitchen there were approximately with the chef-cook there were—it was another cook and a cook's helper and that's three and the waitresses, there were always normally two waitress and when special days come up, holidays, there were three waitress. So and they had each waitress, sometimes there were two waitress on each cash register until they corrected that and gave each one their own cash register and they could check periodically you know and keep them honest, so—. But yeah, on the average two waitress per shift you know.

00:50:40

And I remember one day it was Thanksgiving and my last year of high school. No one came to work. I think—I don't know why they think the place was closed. The cooks didn't show up. My mom had to cook the turkeys. Well she was there the night before anyway cooking turkeys you know herself. She didn't put that responsibility, she wanted them basted and special. Anyway the short order cooks didn't show up Thanksgiving. The waitress didn't show up. So school was out and they put that on me—she put that on me **[Laughs]** so I was running up and down the aisle ordering Thanksgiving dinners and whatever and everything. And it was a busy day, but I'll tell you, I never seen so much money rang up by me. You know I think I rang up more money on the cash register than the waitresses had you know.

00:51:38

But that was a good experience you know. But—

00:51:42

**SW:** How old were you? Do you remember?

00:51:44

**JD:** Coming through high school and at that time it was my last year of high school and I was seventeen going on eighteen. And well I have to tell you that it's not a secret, the girls said, 'Oh no wonder you can't carry us to the movie because you're always working in the restaurant.'

**[Laughs]** I said, 'Well look, I'm not,' you know—and I played football and ran track. But mom gave me time for that. But I couldn't be out there singing doo-wop with the boys on the corner you know. That was doing nothing when I could be working in the Horseshoe in the stockroom, hey peeling potatoes, whatever the cook needed, the gallon cans or whatever opened, opened and do things for the short order cook. I was busy like that. It paid off because you know I learned the restaurant business but like I say, I couldn't cook. No, mom said, 'No. I have cooks to do that. **[Laughs]** You keep check on the waitresses. You know you sit out there and make sure they ring up all the orders.' So I could sit on the stool or in a booth where I could see them. Most people did that you know. See what they brought out and I'd figure up in my head how much the food ordered and the money collected. I could just figure out everything you know including the tea—round about price.

**00:53:17**

Now see the price would go up on the cash register and I'm thinking, 'Wait a minute. No, that whole order that was about \$35—\$45, not \$10. So what happened to the rest of the money?' I said, 'Mom, call up.' Okay she'd come in and check the register and the waitress okay. Now they were mostly good but you know honest—mostly honest but money you know—you know gets to anyone just about. So she said, 'Wait a minute, what are you doing with \$50 in your pocket?' You know the thing is that the waitress they weren't supposed to have any money over \$5 when they come to work. And mom would check that in an envelope and seal it and they'd put their name on it and she'd put it in the safe. So that would keep them honest. But when they checked the register you know they'd see that you know they're dishonest at certain times, you know. So that was my job, too you know.

**00:54:25**

But —

**00:54:25**

**SW:** So when you graduated from high school did you ever think that you would—I mean did you want to stay here and keep helping with the restaurant? I mean you—I wanted to ask you a little bit about your background 'cause you were in DC for a long time.

**00:54:39**

**JD:** Yeah, well actually my intentions were to go to the military. That was close to the tail-end of the Korean War and here I'm a rough athlete and I wanted to be a soldier, be trained as a soldier and I wanted to go in for three years, come out and continue college 'cause I had some

scholarships came to me and my idea was to use the VA [Veterans Administration] money you know to go to college. Mom had money saved up and she said, 'Look, I have money saved up in the credit union for you to go to college. You don't have to worry about the military to send you.' I said, 'Well mom, you can save—keep that money 'cause the military will send me to college you know and we don't have to worry about that.' And scholarships will crack it came out at some of these universities but you know the thing is that I went to school, some college courses about close to two years, close about two years in the military but that was pretty rough, working and going to school at nights.

**00:55:49**

So instead when I first got out I got married, supposed to be in love and her home is in Baltimore at that time, my ex-wife. So she said, "Look, I've been following you around in the military. What about giving me a break, too?" I said, "Okay." So that's when I left here. Well I was helping mom in the restaurant you know after I retired, but at the same time I got a job at the naval base as a police officer and detective. So after working three years she said, 'Yeah, I need to go home also.' So I resigned and went to Washington and that's when all the agencies wanted me. They were more like the FBI called me and the Secret Service, the airport police, the—all those agencies, US Marshal, they all called me and I had to make my choice 'cause I needed a job in a hurry. But at the same time that was at the end of my military career but at the beginning, like I went back in you know to—'cause I had gotten married, and she didn't like the area. She was a big city girl, see. So and I had a son, so I honored her in that way you know. Instead of staying here in the country and keeping her here, yeah, I said, 'Okay. Now I'm going to take you out. I'm going to take you back—back home,' so that was you know that's what I did.

**00:57:29**

And I went up and worked at the Pentagon and the—as a military man wearing civilian clothes. They put me in a position of Sky Marshal and I did some of everything, things that you wouldn't think a military man would do, you know issued me civilian clothes. You know that was—that was a lot of fun to me, you know. I went overseas to Thailand and Japan, Korea, Philippines, Germany, France, and some of the jobs I had they would send me downtown to the tailor shop and measure me up in silk suits. And I said, 'Wait a minute, am in the military or what?' So you can see you know I stayed in there. So I said, 'When I get out then I'll be helping my mom then. I'm having fun playing civilian in the military,' you know. So but at the last five years, they told me they needed—a CIA, I didn't know I was working for the CIA for a long time working with crypto and stuff, you know top secret stuff. I didn't know that—who I was working for. I knew I was in the military.

**00:58:49**

So then they needed investigators, black investigators, so they came to me and said, 'Wait a minute. You have a squeaky'—what do you call it a, 'squeaky background. You don't have anything—we can't find anything on you.'

**00:59:11**

**SW:** Like a squeaky clean background?

**00:59:12**

**JD:** Squeaky clean, right, that was it. So they put in the job—on the job training in Germany, special agent and I came to the States and went to school and we lived in Georgia a little bit. And

so I bounced around different jobs you know. I was an undercover agent and everything so that's how I got in the Secret Service because of my background in the military.

**00:59:39**

**SW:** And what's the timeframe here Mr. Davis? Was this like the [19]'70s, '80s?

**00:59:44**

**JD:** Right, I retired in '75 from the Military, from '54 to '75, twenty-one years.

**00:59:52**

**SW:** So wow. I mean I don't want to ask you things that you can't tell me but I mean that was—that particular period that seemed like a tumultuous period in the country and in other parts of the world. Did it feel like that to you or did you just—?

**01:00:07**

**JD:** Oh it was—I just felt like I had a job to do and it was so many things to do and a lot of stuff I—I can't even talk about you know. I signed the paper that I never would talk about these things. You know it would always be you know secret but is that what you're talking about?

**01:00:31**

**SW:** Yeah, I just—I know there are probably things you can't talk about and I don't want—but I'm just trying to get a sense of what the timeframe was like and what the country was feeling?

01:00:41

**JD:** Oh from [19]'54 end of June '54 until right April '75 yeah, so everything that was happening—lots of things that happened I was involved with in a way you know but—. Not as far as you know in the government making decisions, you know just working for the government, you know whatever they needed done and that's all I can say.

01:01:14

**SW:** Well I heard you mention the Secret Service earlier and I thought I don't know that I've never met anyone who is the Secret Service, so it's such a rare thing.

01:01:24

**JD:** Well that's—well I became accustomed to it while working there. It was like—like I'd go outside here and rake up my leaves. To me it was you know just something you know I just got used to it, you know like in the military doing the same thing but I started when I was working here I would go back to the Naval Base working police and detective at the Naval Base. They needed two people when President Nixon came through from the Naval Base Police. They'd choose two people and I was one. And we would go up on the building with binoculars and make sure the security is good when they'd get off the plane. And we'd have a Special Agent with us from the Secret Service. And which they didn't know the base, you know so and we did whatever they needed done.

01:02:18

So after I quit there and I went to Washington I said, 'Well I can get a job up here,' or whatever. So that's what I did, you know guarding the president, foreign presidents, dictators,

everyone—anyone in charge of a country and their people you know, and the people who are running for president, you know that's on the team. We had many teams—you know people running for president so yeah I'm all over the country and all over other countries, wherever they would go you know. And we had—like I say, we had visiting presidents and dictators and you know people from you know—. So I had to be with them, even they are the enemy and when I say enemy you know—you know we still had to make sure that they were protected, you know as long as they were in the United States. If they came here for the hospital, lots would come here for Walter Reed, Bethesda Naval Hospital and Providence Hospital and we had motorcades protecting them you know. They didn't just come in and—'cause their men didn't know the country and didn't know you know—. So we had motorcade brigade in front of the—you know the—the motorcades and stuff.

**01:03:42**

And all I did was just make sure that on my part you know things were safe for you know whoever you know. And they would stay—live in hotels with their families. We had a post on their floor you know making sure that no one stopped on the elevator or doing an illegal visit you know whatever, you know. And it was a few things I—you know I'll stop right there talking about but it was—it was kind of boring to me. *[Laughs]*

**01:04:15**

**SW:** It was boring? That doesn't sound boring.



01:04:18

**JD:** It was—it was boring because in the movies, things happen but for my job I'm glad nothing happened. We kept things—we had of course intelligence outfit that was knew was happening before we even arrived you know and they were taking care of things, so there was no gun-shooting itself except for one, you hear about when President Reagan got shot. I was on my way to work that day and I got on my—my phone and it said—excuse me, it said, 'Report to headquarters. Don't go and change shifts,' you know so that was it, yeah. So I didn't work that day during that. I did something else. So that was the biggest action I was involved with and not exactly directly involved. That was really something. And my family saw a black agent at—when he covered President Reagan he pulled his gun and he was looking around [*Laughs*] and my family thought that was me. I got phone calls—phone calls, my father called me up you know. 'Hey, I saw you on TV.' I said, 'No, that wasn't me. That wasn't.' But like I said it was a boring job but it was a good job. It was a good job.

01:05:34

And then Carter, President Carter I started out with and then it was Reagan and then the two Bush(es) and then Clinton and you know so that was—that was it. I said, 'Hey, look, you know I'm getting old now. It's time for the young guys,' you know. But it was kind of—it wasn't boring when I started out 'cause I had to go up on top of the main treasury which is next door to the White House, you know it's connected you know and go up on the roof with binoculars and look across at the hotel and make sure no one raised their window you know. And President Carter was safe while he was jogging around the lawn and stuff, his wife, and daughter so that became boring. But I did my job you know. [*Laughs*] Yeah, yeah that was it.

01:06:30

**SW:** So what was it like for you to come back here after that career?

01:06:35

**JD:** Oh it was—I came back home where everyone knew me, you see so that was—that was good instead of going to another place where somewhere no one knew me and then all of the sudden said, ‘Oh you were in the Secret Service,’ you know and think that you know I’m working undercover or something. You know it’s no telling, so many people are crooked—politicians and as well as street people, so you know but—but here people know me and you know—. Like in church, this one lady always comes up to me behind me and whispers in my ear [sings the first line to “Secret Agent Man”] ‘Secret Agent man,’ **[Laughs]** and a couple of guys that usher with me, ‘Hey top cop,’ you know and stuff like that. **[Laughs]** But these people know me you know so you know—. And like yesterday I was shopping in this store and this minister from another church, top minister, I told him I said, ‘Hey you have to keep your voice down and stop saying that.’ He says—he hollered, ‘Hey FBI man what are you doing?’ **[Laughs]** So that’s—that’s part of my life here.

01:07:49

But—but oh as you see up on the counter [*refers to many badges lining the shelf behind and above where Mr. Davis is sitting*], some of my badges, yeah from the military, Special Agent badge and from the Secret Service and from another agency you know. They put them in plastic you know when you retire and leave and whatever yeah. There’s some of my—some of my trophies there, some other ones they got broke up and track trophies, football trophies you know

and stuff like that. So it's time to take them down now and put them in a—in a box you know.

**[Laughs]**

**01:08:24**

**SW:** But why?

**01:08:25**

**JD:** Because well this is a bachelor quarters but it's getting to be too much bachelor quarters. It doesn't have the woman touch. See there's a trophy or plaque up there on the wall from the Secret Service and I have lots of other plaques and certificates. I can't start this place out being a—a trophy room you see. **[Laughs]** So yeah, so like I said I have to take some of this—I really would take some of this stuff down and take most of it down and probably leave one badge up there or something like that and one trophy you know.

**01:09:05**

Yeah, it's been fun yeah. Yeah, I'm seventy-eight now.

**01:09:09**

**SW:** So you're seventy-eight?

**01:09:10**

**JD:** Yeah seventy-eight, so—

**01:09:13**

**SW:** You do not look seventy-eight.

01:09:14

**JD:** That's what people say. I say oh, I tell them—I tell women I say, 'Stop flirting,' you know. **[Laughs]** Yeah, seventy-eight, yeah so I still go out in the morning and walk with my weights and stuff. I got some of the people I met here that I—I met that I saw that I knew, they look so old. I mean I said, 'John do you look like some of these guys or what?' You know he said, 'No, you're John. You're supposed to look old like me guys tell me,' you know. I mean not really bragging but that's the actual truth you know. And so many people are dying around me, younger than myself and my age and most people appear to be in the seventy-fives and sixties and fifties. I say, 'Gee what's going on? You know why are so many people out of shape?' But like that room in there *[points to a bedroom across from the living where we are seated]* that was my mom's bedroom. I have clothes hanging up there a lot and I have lots of exercise gear you know. And in the winter when it's cold I can go in there and exercise. I have all types of exercise gear. And but we have another place, a very modern place here, it was the old East Suffolk School. I don't know if you—had you gone in there?

01:10:43

**SW:** I haven't been inside.

01:10:44

**JD:** They have some beautiful new exercise gear, stuff that I didn't see in Washington and the Air Force gym. When I was up there I would go to the Air Force like four and five in the morning and I'd be so happy exercising. I'd be leaving about eight, nine o'clock you know and come home and take a shower and go out to the pancake place and get breakfast or whatever. But

I would exercise a lot and that's—I felt that was you know essential. That was something I had to do to keep myself in shape you know. Tried to anyway, you know. But yeah, what—what—?

01:11:26

**SW:** Well I wanted to ask you—I wanted to ask you, so you learned to make—you said you make yock sometimes. Did your mother—I'm assuming your mother taught you, is that—?

01:11:35

**JD:** Yes, yes.

01:11:36

**SW:** Do you remember her teaching you how to make yock?

01:11:38

**JD:** Oh yes, yeah it was—it was natural. It was you know she ran me through it once or twice and it was—and I would see the help, the cook's helpers making it also and sometimes the waitress—we taught the waitress in case that we get too busy and we had the amount of waitresses we need and a waitress would be designated to come back because it was I mean I had to cook it continually and would run out and couldn't cook it fast enough—people ordering you know by the boxes you know.

01:12:16

Yeah, it was-s-it was a steady thing you know. And I have to add this part in there: Friday nights where people would party a lot and I wouldn't say drink a lot but party a lot [*Laughs*] and

they would order yock and they—we had red pepper. You sprinkle the red pepper, they liked the red pepper, the vinegar—I'll stop right there. Anyway and this would help them on their, you know aftermath you know. Yeah, but yeah I remember my mom showing me and yeah—and I taught quite a few people too, also, uh-hm. Yeah, it was something cooking it in a pot that was large enough to I mean—that was exercise also these large pots on the stove, from the pot over to the sink and run the hot water off, yeah. And I'll stop on that part. I won't say what else.

**[Laughs]** But a few things that are not really secrets but it's very important to make it right you know. I went through all that.

**01:13:31**

And I had a cousin that come here, one of my mom's sister's boys and excuse me—my aunt died and he came up from North Carolina to live with us. He wanted to be with me and we had so many relatives. So I taught him you know the art you know, yock, washing dishes and pots and pans. So when I left in see—when I left he was about three grades behind me, almost four—about that area. So he took over when I left you know so—. And he lived here with my mom you know so—. Yeah, so I had a backup. **[Laughs]** Yeah.

**01:14:15**

**SW:** And so your mother—did your mother live in this house like is this your family house here?

**01:14:22**

**JD:** We had three houses. This is the last house she lived in. She built a house about—about two—two and a half miles and that was too far for her so she rented that out. That was a

beautiful house. And so this is closer, the closest—closer that she could acquire land that's you know in a neighborhood that's you know a quiet neighborhood and where she could buy the land and build you know. And she would walk to work, you know walk from here to the Horseshoe. And I said mom, 'Why are you walking,' you know? 'Oh well I have to get my exercise,' you know. Yeah, and she didn't buy a car until she had the—the garage in the back of the house, the rear of the house—built. I said, 'Mom, why don't you get a car, you know? She said, 'You don't buy a car until you have a garage.' So I said, 'What?' **[Laughs]**

**01:15:26**

Anyway yeah, she was a businesswoman you know, great ideas and taught me great—you know. But yeah, this house—the last house she lived in uh-hm. And when she was sick she had Alzheimer's and then after a couple of years she had cancer, ovarian cancer and I paid two women to live with her to take care of her, two women. They were—they were great, they were great you know. And I would come down and then I started coming down while she was sick every other weekend or a little more you know. And an uncle, he's deceased now in Portsmouth, he was in the Navy, retired from the Navy, one of my mom's younger brothers, he would come over here. He started staying here and you know and buying food for the ladies and making sure that you know things are going right while I was in Washington and I give him lots of credit for that. You know so he came here and lived. And there's lots of room, it's three bedrooms downstairs, three bedrooms upstairs. And the bedroom upstairs is small, she wanted them for her grandkids you know when they come to visit. They were her—they were their rooms, so—.

01:16:57

And yeah, it—it just is her and her grandkids—they disappeared, yeah but hmm. See that picture to the right? [*Refers to a photograph sitting along a window sill.*]

01:17:14

**SW:** With the medal on it?

01:17:17

**JD:** Yes, uh-huh. That was when I was in the first-grade.

01:17:20

**SW:** Is that you?

01:17:21

**JD:** Yes, in the first grade, I was in a play, so my grandmother made that uniform and she—I had the part of an Army Soldier. I'll fight on the line. It ended up being that way. Another guy said I'm a Sailor and I fight on the sea. Another guys said I'm a Marine and I fight on land, sea, and in the air. And another guy—you know like that, so that was—I was in the uniform, yeah.

01:17:49

**SW:** I'll have to snap a picture of that before I go if that's okay with you?

01:17:54

**JD:** Yeah.



**01:17:55**

**SW:** Mr. Davis I just have two more questions for you. Are you still good? I know I've taken up—

**01:18:01**

**JD:** Yeah, oh that's all right.

**01:18:04**

**SW:** But I'm wondering—I'm wondering just a couple things. What does it mean to you, I mean your mother learned this recipe from the gentleman who she got the restaurant from and it—I don't know, you know there's—there's on one answer to this but I'm just wondering. This started as a dish that's predominantly you know a lot of the Chinese Americans make it and then you're talking about the Japanese fellow and it became a traditional dish in the African American neighborhoods here.

**01:18:33**

**JD:** Right, yeah.

**01:18:34**

**SW:** Do you think your mother was instrumental in that you know learning from the guy who had the Horseshoe before her?

01:18:40

**JD:** As far as the yock-a-mein yeah. Yes, she learned from his son because when she acquired the Horseshoe and hired him to stay there you know ‘cause the business had to start going right you know and lots of customers—although at that time people knew him, and that’s the thing to do is you know to keep the business going is to hire someone that knows the business you know.

01:19:09

But he weren’t—he weren’t one of the chef-cooks though. See he was you know a short order cook and cook you know and help out and you know he—like I say he helped out you know.

01:19:28

**SW:** Do you still make yock at home or do you mostly buy it now?

01:19:31

**JD:** No, I—I make Oodles of Noodles. *[Laughs]* And I treat it like yock. I chip up my chicken or whatever and put in with the Oodles of Noodles and I season it like yock. But I make spaghetti sometimes, yeah. As you see on that jar, *[refers to a jar of dry noodles in a jar in his kitchen]* right uh-hm, yeah I make my own yock, yeah.

01:19:58

**SW:** Were the church fund-raisers happening when your mother had the Horseshoe or is that something that sort of caught on later after your mom was making it at the Horseshoe do you remember?

01:20:06

**JD:** Oh which—what was that?

01:20:09

**SW:** Because I—well something I learned in talking to people here you know especially Mary and—and Bernice is that they're—the yock fund-raisers are really big in the churches here. But I wonder if that was something that happened after your mother had the restaurant or—?

01:20:22

**JD:** Yes, after she—after she—I would say after she deceased you know because when she was alive people tried it and—sorry.

01:20:38

**SW:** I'll pause.

*[I pause the recording because Mr. Davis' neighbor knocked on the door to use his phone. There were bad storms the day before, and the power went out.]*

01:20:39

**JD:** Oh yeah, the yock people tried making yock you know like some people tried to sell things—fish dinners and things from their home but they could never you know people—you know wouldn't buy it. They had to come to the Horseshoe. So you know that's—but after like I said my mom deceased and Bernice, the church, they hired Bernice right off the bat. And they had these yock sales on Saturdays and whatever day you know was convenient you know for people. And that's when—and they would print it in the paper, *Yock Sale at Tabernacle Church*,

*Bernice in charge*, you know and [**Laughs**]—. I think the phone company made good business from it, too because they'd get phone calls and they would deliver. They have—they have something good going.

**01:21:42**

And—and I look at that like that's good. I mean you know I'm not jealous of that you know. It's helping the church and it's helping the community and helping her. You see so yeah, it started mostly—mainly when my mom you know deceased, yeah.

**01:22:05**

**SW:** And she—did—did she work up until the time or did she shell the restaurant? I mean I'm wondering if she was working when she was sick.

**01:22:13**

**JD:** No, no, she didn't. I—when I came down I—I'm the only child so I got all her properties and the restaurant—excuse me, but like I say, I—the license is still there, but my name wasn't on it. So and when I tried to get the license in my name the city inspectors come in and there's always something needing to be done you know. So but at the same time while I'm trying to get people to get the—you know get it set up like I wanted it, same time I rented it out to this—to a man he said he was going to run it—and he's going to do—help me do the work that the city said needs done—the firewalls and whatever you know.

01:23:17

So anyway he didn't do this you know, he didn't do what you know—and he didn't do the—the leak—the ceiling started leaking. Mom had it fixed before and the people you know were like they didn't do half the work like they should have and it started leaking. So that had to be fixed. The roof had needed a new roof again, you know. And in fact, now the people owning it now they haven't opened it up but this roof is done a different way. They have an expert up there and you know and one thing, too I'm looking at I rented out this place to this guy for two years. And he really didn't need the restaurant. He wanted to change it to a club. You see when he changed it he fired the cooks which was a very popular guy, you know and he changed it to a club. And people were calling me up saying, 'John, what's going on up there now? Is it a club?' I said, 'No, it's—I didn't mean for it to be a club. The guy rented it to be a restaurant.' So I got a call from a police investigator. And he said, 'John you better get down here or you're going to lose your place. We're going to arrest this guy 'cause he has illegal situations going on and people are blaming you saying that you're running it.'

01:24:51

So I came down and got with the sheriff and Virginia investigators and he disappeared. You see so I didn't—I didn't have time to open it because I didn't have my own license you know as far as you know for rent. Like I said, and the place would start—not that it's actually falling apart but it needed you know renovation. And before my mom died, she said, 'John this place is going to be yours. Anything you need done I can get it done.' See, she had the money to do what you know—and she thought she had. But what happened was I wanted a second floor—. *[Mr. Davis' neighbor comes in and asks to use the phone again.]* I'm sorry.

01:25:47

**SW:** I feel bad. I wish I could help her out somehow.

01:25:52

**JD:** What was the question you asked me?

01:25:54

**SW:** Oh you were just talking about—you just were talking about—

01:25:57

**JD:** Having the place opened, yeah.

01:25:59

**SW:** And your mother said that she had—

01:26:00

**JD:** Right, yeah my idea was to—now the second floor, you seen how large the building was.

The second floor and the third floor is clear and there's an elevator in there. It's actually a freight elevator. And it's a wide step going up you know. Okay, so my idea is to have banquets in there like church banquets, large, huge banquets on the whole floor, family reunions, you know things like that, school reunions, class reunions and that would have been perfect had I gotten it started. And the third floor, also the same, we'd be having reunions on each floor. The third floor and or the second floor either one, see all that.

01:26:58

So then also um, that was the main thing I was looking at. But like I say, I couldn't get it started 'cause I couldn't get the money to get everything done. So next door is another building connected with the Horseshoe and it was actually over one of the banquet rooms which the second floor was like bed and breakfast place but it was—it was four rooms rented out. Each room was as large as downstairs in this house, gigantic room, full baths and full kitchen connected to it you know. And each four rooms, so that was good too but I couldn't get that started because of you know—. So I lost out, so—. And the rear of the Horseshoe had steps, new set of steps going to—leading into the bed and breakfast, the rental place. And I thought about once, 'Hey, I could live up there and sell the house you know.' **[Laughs]** But you know and so that didn't work out because not keeping—not holding onto the building as I should.

01:28:24

But also one church told me they would like to have the top floor if I kept the building. They would like to have the top floor and they would do the renovation you know. And I said, 'Wow, that would be great, you know. They'd do the renovation themselves,' and whatever you know. So I had lots of you know good ideas and offers you know so but it didn't work out. So I said, 'Well I guess it's not for me. It might happen in the future,' you know. But yeah, I couldn't get it started you know because as I had told you that you know she had lots of money missing you know and it—we're trying to find out where that went to. And so yeah, she had the money to renovate it but I don't know what happened to it.

01:29:26

**SW:** What year did the restaurant actually close? Was it [19]'99 you said?

**01:29:31**

**JD:** Actually in [19]'99, no, um, '99, 2002 it actually stopped—everything ceased. I had to cut the power off and everything you know 'cause I saw that I couldn't get it renovated and the city was on me you know to—to do certain things you know. But yeah, that was—this was about 2002, 2001—2002. It was about that time yeah.

**01:30:07**

**SW:** And you said—okay so the location that the Horseshoe Café is now that was a hardware store, but where was the first? Was it just down the street, the first—?

**01:30:17**

**JD:** Yes, it was as you see the driveway between the buildings right down the street, I think on the front it had Bill's Café, or the name of another person that had rented that place, you know and they were doing well. What's the name of the place? This one guy was a chef-cook for my mom. He had opened it and ran everything and they were doing quite well. But the person that he had rented it from—rented the building from they kept wanting more money 'cause he was doing better and better and they wouldn't let him do you know—. So yeah, that was the old Horseshoe.

**01:31:06**

Let me see what's the number—thirty-four, I can't think of the number of the address but it's—you can easily see it, yeah. I could go out there with you and point it out you know and different things you know.



01:31:22

**SW:** Mr. Davis I don't have any more questions for you. Is there anything else you want to add that you think is important for people to know about your mother or the Horseshoe?

01:31:31

**JD:** No, just I can just say she was a great woman and everyone loved her. And well not only the Horseshoe, she taught piano lessons. She had a grand piano in here sitting here and all the kids in the neighborhood and her friends' kids wanted to learn piano lessons and she taught. And I have one cousin, he plays for the orchestra for what's this country—the city name, Lisbon, Portugal. He's in the Portuguese Orchestra. Another cousin he played lead guitar for Bob Marley. And two or three other cousins they're up in the music like that and one young lady she was—she became head of music in the schools in Richmond. She taught in Richmond. She was one of her best friend's daughters. And there were you know numerous kids that became great you know—I would say great because I didn't learn. I wanted a football in my hand or a baseball or basketball because [*Laughs*] to put it on the human spot, lots of men that played pianos when I was growing up they held their wrists like that. You understand what I mean so I didn't want to hold my wrist like that so—. [*Laughs*] So I had to be a rough sportsman. The boys were waiting on the front porch for me to come out and play so now I wish I had—I'm very sorry I didn't learn myself. I'm very sorry now.

01:33:14

I had an uncle, my mom's youngest brother and he's the only one alive from her—from her brothers and sisters now, he could play a piano from—with his hands behind his back and he went through Howard University on a music scholarship. He ended up being a fighter pilot.

Yeah, but yeah and after he—he still plays a little bit even though he has Alzheimer’s now. He still can play the piano a little bit.

**01:33:44**

But I would say the community and the people they—like that I would say they were crazy about her you know really. She was a great woman and not because she was my mom but you know she was a great woman anyway.

**01:33:59**

**SW:** Who taught her to play the piano?

**01:34:01**

**JD:** Oh all her brothers and sisters, four brothers and six other sisters they—their mother had a piano in North Carolina in the—in one of the rooms or in the hallway, wherever and they all learned because they were all church people and you know. So my grandfather was well involved in the church. Everyone had to learn at that time, you know so—. Yeah uh-hm—

**01:34:35**

**SW:** And Mr. Davis you told me your father’s parents’ names. I’m wondering could you tell me the names of your mother’s parents?

01:34:41

**JD:** My mother's parents were Charlie Cameron—I'm sorry, that's my father's father was Charlie. My mother's father was Archie Cameron and mother was Pearly Judd Cameron, and Judd was the Indian tribe she belonged to in North Carolina.

01:35:09

**SW:** Which tribe do you know?

01:35:11

**JD:** Um, I know I lived with my great-grandmother and she told me a lot of it but right now I—I have to call up some of my cousins 'cause they have family reunions and I only went to one family reunion. Call up and find out about more in that area 'cause I lived with—mostly with my mom's people—I mean with my mom's father's people, you know like that. But I'll find out you know what the tribe was.

01:35:41

**SW:** And Mr. Davis I'm wondering—I know when we first sat down I didn't have the tape recorder going but could you tell the story about her hair, about—?

01:35:50

**JD:** Oh yeah, mama always had—she had long hair and her sisters had long hair [*phone Rings and I pause the recording until it stops*] and—he lives in Northern Suffolk, Portsmouth side. He's a retired police officer for Portsmouth and it's really a sad situation. He was a police officer for twenty-six years and now he has MS. He can barely walk.

**01:36:23**

**SW:** How long has he had it for?

**01:36:24**

**JD:** About approximately five years. He is working undercover and he was chasing this criminal in the outer portion—he hit the highway. He called for backup, two state police cars took chase behind he and he—in other words, when he pulled up alongside the car he was doing 130 miles an hour. He forced the guy off the road and into the bushes and the guy got out and my son got out of his car you know to give command for the guy to halt and whatever. He fell down. He didn't have any feelings. And the guy came over and tried to take his weapon and the state police came up just in time and carried him to the hospital and they found out that when he gets excited the MS would come down. You know so you know he had to move into headquarters and get off the situation where he'd get excited you know and so—. That was him there, we keep in touch a lot you know dad and son, you know but—yeah but it makes me cry. You know he can barely walk. And he's denying his condition. He doesn't want to believe it you know.

**01:37:49**

**SW:** I'm really sorry to hear that. I—I have one of my friends was diagnosed with MS on her 27<sup>th</sup> birthday. But I've learned there's—five years is a short time. It's just so unique how on some people it will hit right away and some people will have it twenty years without—. I'm sorry to hear that.

**01:38:09**

**JD:** Yeah, I know some people that has it and had it before he was—he found out he had it and they're in chairs, motorized chairs now. Family friend of mine, her son has it. But he's a body builder. He and his best friends are body builders and he dances all these new dances. He teaches dancing. You see the guy, he's muscle-bound and but he goes to Richmond for his—whatever his diagnosis is, whatever his medicine—up in Richmond. So I got him to talk to my son but my son didn't seem pleased because he was looking at this guy, he is muscle-bound, body builder and my son he keeps going down. He's getting a needle and sometimes I didn't know—he skipped the needle 'cause he said, 'Dad I feel like a pin cushion and this week I'm not going to take the needle.' But the doctor told him, said, 'Look if you don't you know it's going to take a little away from you and you can't bounce back.' So right now he's in bad shape, yeah.

**01:39:30**

**SW:** I'm sorry to hear that.

**01:39:32**

**JD:** Yeah, he said dad here I worked twenty-six years on the force and I planned to have a nice time you know with his two sons and daughter and grandson, you know and family and whatever and he said, 'I can't—and I can't have a good time now,' you know. So yeah—yeah he had to let his family—he had to let his house—yeah. But they have great neighbors, great neighbors. They're all school teachers, retired or retired—except for next door.

**01:40:19**

**SW:** Okay.

01:40:19

**JD:** We're having an article about you this month, so—yeah. It's here.

01:40:29

**SW:** Oh Mr. Davis would you mind reading it for the tape? Would you mind?

01:40:32

**JD:** I'll give you the copy.

01:40:33

**SW:** Can you read a little bit for the tape?

01:40:35

**JD:** Oh okay.

01:40:36

**SW:** I mean I would love a copy but I also love to get people—I'm going to set your book right here.

*[Mr. Davis reads from an interview with him from his church newsletter]*

01:40:42

**JD:** Okay, hmm. Okay this is from *The Heartbeat*, a testimonial. Okay, this is from one of our head deacons. He's ex-Chief of Police in Suffolk. It's from Deacon William A. Freeman. He interviewed me. So he says that *Mr. John Davis is a seventy-eight year-old member of East End*

*Baptist Church.* My mom actually carried me there when I was a baby. I remember sitting on the seat and my little white shoes wouldn't reach the end of the seat so I knew I was—had to be about one year-old. **[Laughs]**

**01:41:26**

So he—he said okay, now on and off my travel away from Suffolk I always came back to the church and visited and now I'm rejoined. So that's why he says a seventy-eight year-old member.

**01:41:43**

*Member of East End Baptist Church who gave his life to Jesus Christ at the age of twelve, I was baptized at that time and—and John was born and raised in Suffolk, attending and graduating from Booker T. Washington High School in June [19] '54. He ran track and played football during the school years that I was there and came back from New York.*

**01:42:20**

*Okay, his summers were spent on the family farm—family farm in Sanford, North Carolina. The family farm consists of growing tobacco and corn along with attending a large area of land for gardening. John said the work was very hard but that was the way it was then. But also he didn't put the part in there that I really loved that part, getting dirty and my cousin told me—my cousins there told me I was crazy but they had—they lived there it seemed like. I wanted to get into the dirt and you know sweat. Okay, he also put John joined the United States Army not long after graduating and receiving training as a military police officer assigned to the Harbor Patrol Division. He spent eighteen months in Korea and left the Army after three years*

*at first. In John's mind his Military experience was over. But not for Uncle Sam. After some encouragement he re-enlisted and began a twenty-one-year career which proved to be challenging and rewarding serving his country.*

**01:43:50**

*John began serving his country while assigned to the Pentagon and Army Intelligence. A large portion of his assignments were still classified to this day, however some of his duties were within the cryptographic area of the government.*

**01:44:15**

*He was—here he was afforded the—okay he was afforded the opportunity to travel to Korea, Vietnam, Germany, the Philippines, Thailand, during his honorable career, but actually that's what he had, but I went to many more countries that he didn't know of. Okay, John attended Ebenezer AME Church in Washington, DC and Maryland while working for the government. He was an active member on the usher board and also served in the security team for the church. In fact, the pastor wanted me for his personal security, okay but I declined and had another guy assigned to it.*

**01:45:18**

*John's motto in life has been do unto others as you would have them do unto you. John returned to Suffolk in 2010 and immediately reunited with his East End Baptist Church roots. He is active in the choir, usher ministry, and is willing to assist any ministry and need of assistance.*



01:45:53

*Okay, I asked John what advice would he give out—give to our young people. He replied honor and obey your mother and father. You can't go wrong. Proverbs 3:1 and 2 says my son do not forget my teaching but keep my commands—keep my commands in your heart for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. God has afforded John the rare opportunity to proudly serve his country in a capability of new—a few could ever imagine. Though it is all he ever forgot God's teaching, though in all he never forgot God's teaching, Psalm 1:2 but his delight is in the Lord—the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. Will you submit to Jesus in regard to elevate your circumstances? John Davis did. What about you? And that's the way—that was okay.*

01:47:24

**SW:** Thank you, Mr. Davis.

01:47:27

**JD:** All right but that kind of gets to me, you know. **[Laughs]** *[Mr. Davis points back up to the trophies, and he gets up to pick it up.]* That's one of my trophies from my church and I left up in Washington and Maryland gave me before I left. I say trophies but it's something they gave me on my living day, uh-hm.

01:47:49

**SW:** Wow, that's beautiful. You know what Mr. Davis? Can we—can I leave this—I would like to take—I'd like to wrap up the tape and maybe take some portraits of you holding this. Would that be all right with you?

01:47:59

**JD:** Oh sure, let me get rid of these tears in my eyes here.

01:48:03

**SW:** We'll give you a second. Is there anything else that you—? I think that we've covered a lot here and so but if there's anything else you—do you want to—?

01:48:12

**JD:** Oh no, no, I—I don't want to. No, I'm not sticking my chest out but you know this actual thing that happened and you can't—you know you can't deny it you know. But that's all, no.

01:48:26

**SW:** And I just need to ask you—I forgot to ask you this at the beginning—could you give me your birth date for the record Mr. Davis?

01:48:33

**JD:** Oh January 31, 1936.

01:48:36

**SW:** I'm going to stop rolling for a little bit and take some pictures, is that okay with you?

01:48:43

**JD:** Oh sure, sure.

**01:48:45**

**SW:** Okay, formal end here, so thank you for your time Mr. Davis.

**01:48:49**

**JD:** Oh you're welcome.

**01:48:53**

**[End John Davis Interview]**