



Joan Huyghue:  
WAACA Oral History

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Interviewer: Doug Shipman  
Transcriber: Betsy Kenneson  
Editor: Sulema DePeyster

This interview is part of a series conducted with former members of the Windsor Afro-American Civic Association. The content of this transcript has been edited for clarity purposes.



WINDSOR  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Doug Shipman:** This is Doug Shipman, Director of Windsor Historical Society, and I'm here today with Joan Huyghue, and we're conducting an oral history interview as part of the Windsor Afro American Civic Association oral history project. And before we get started, Joan, I'd just ask if you would give us your consent to have this interview conducted. And you can just say, "I, Joan Huyghue, give my consent to have this interview conducted."

**Joan Huyghue:** Yes, I, Joan Huyghue, give my consent to have this interview conducted.

**Doug Shipman:** Fantastic. Well, I'm excited to get started and you've told me a little bit about your life in our telephone conversations. So, why don't we just start from the beginning and if you'd like to just tell me a little bit about your background and where did you grow up and what was your early life like?

**Joan Huyghue:** Okay, I was born and raised in Hartford, Connecticut, and I grew up in the projects. [Our] family was the first one, when I was five years old, to move into our apartment in Bellevue Square, and I stayed there until I left to get married. [...] I had three children that were born in Hartford. We moved to Windsor in 1969 on Arrowbrook Road in Windsor and raised my children there for 20 years. Now I left Windsor for a short period; I went to California. Well, let me back up before I went to California. My ex-husband [W. Bruce Huyghue] was on the board of education and the town council in the late [19]70's to early [19]80's and at that time with his activities and all the things we were involved in, WAACA had been formed. But we had too many activities with his involvement of working in the town to join WAACA, so I never joined WAACA. And [19]89, we moved to California. We had always wanted to live there. My son went to [graduate] school [at] Stanford University. [I] had two sisters there, so the children had all gone to college. So we moved to California and I had planned on living there for some time, but things didn't go as planned. [Even] though I had two sisters, they worked all the time, and you know in your in your 50's you just don't start a forming friends. [...] I moved back to Windsor where I knew I had plenty of family and friends in the Hartford area. So 1992, I moved back and I joined WAACA and became involved. WAACA wanted to be sure that our organization was involved in everything that went on in town. So do you want me to tell you the things we were involved in?

**Doug Shipman:** Well, I'd love to go back just a little bit, if you wouldn't mind, to your growing up in Hartford, and tell me a little bit about what street did you live on and what school did you go to? What was that like?

**Joan Huyghue:** I'm 82 years old, you know, memory's not that great. [laughing] Well yeah, I went to the local grammar school, [00:05:00] Arsenal School. I went to Northeast Junior High, then on to Weaver High School and graduated in 1956. I didn't go on to college because at that time, my parents didn't have the funds to send me to college. So I got a job at the SNET Telephone Company [Southern New England Telephone] and while I was in high school, my senior year, worked with the telephone company. And [then] I got married in 1958 and the children were born; in 1959 a son, 1960 a daughter, in 1961 another son. [For] 20 years, we lived in Windsor. My daughter [Vallerie Hugyhue], in 1978, her senior year in high school, one of the town officials asked if we could enter her in the Shad Derby [Pageant] because they had they

Shad Derby Queen going on with the Shad Derby. We said yes and we let her be in the Shad Derby. [...] She was Shad Derby Queen in 1978 [and went to Providence College after high school]. We were still involved in politics. My youngest son, Michael, was very active in sports. He played football, basketball, baseball, and he was very good in sports. He went on to Cornell and played sports there but not professional; he didn't play professional. And the oldest boy, he went to Loomis Chaffee School. He was the only one that went to a private school, and he was interested in music and academics there, did very well, straight A student. And he formed a band [and] he went on to Amherst and then to Stanford for his masters.

**Joan Huyghue:** Michael went to Cornell. [He] graduated from Cornell and then he went to Michigan Law School, and he is now a lawyer and he's been involved with sports since he was eight years old. So, he's always had jobs pertaining to sports. He worked with the Jacksonville Jaguars. He was in charge of senior football operations, and he's had several other jobs with the NFL, not playing sports, but in [football operations]. Now he has his own organization where he hires football players, tennis [players]. He's still in Jacksonville, [married], and I have three lovely grandchildren. [00:10:00] He has his own organization where he hires some football players, golf [and tennis players]. Golf is one of the big things he's interested in. [He] teaches law at Cornell [University]. [In 2015, he was a Windsor High School Athletic Hall of Fame Inductee] My grandson is a college student at Cornell. The other two were just working. They're doing okay but they've had different jobs. But nothing significant that I want to share.

**Doug Shipman:** Tell me again your daughter's name?

**Joan Huyghue:** Vallerie. V-A-L-L-E-R-I-E. And she was the Shad Derby Queen in 1978.

**Doug Shipman:** Shad Derby Queen, and where is she now?

**Joan Huyghue:** She lives in New York. She [worked as an administrative assistant and also elderly care]. She comes [to visit] at least twice a month. I live in Ellington. I moved here in 2013.

**Doug Shipman:** Very good, and your oldest son's name?

**Joan Huyghue:** Daniel.

**Doug Shipman:** Daniel. Okay, I got Michael. I just didn't get the other two.

**Joan Huyghue:** He lives in California, and he's had several jobs in [investment banking] and anything to do with business.

**Doug Shipman:** Oh, that's wonderful. And before we go on to the WAACA, could you tell me a little bit about your parents? Were they from Hartford originally?

**Joan Huyghue:** My mom, believe it or not, was born in Hartford. She was born in 1919. She passed away in 2008 and my dad died early at the age of 66, and he came from Florida [at] three years. His family came to Hartford, and he lived the rest of his life in Hartford.

**Doug Shipman:** And what were your mother and dad's names?

**Joan Huyghue:** My mom's name is Lillian Lee. That's my maiden name, L-E-E. And my father's name is Weaver, W-E-A-V-E-R Lee, and he came from a family of like 11 children and only two girls are left living, 92 and 95 [years old].

**Doug Shipman:** Do you see them? Those would be your aunts.

**Joan Huyghue:** One of them lived in Bloomfield and she just recently lost her daughter. She had six children. She moved to Florida with one of her daughters who had just bought a big, beautiful house. She was going to live with her for [an] amount of time and her daughter became ill and she passed away last week. She was only 67 going on 68. She had retired, bought this beautiful home. She brought her mom [my Aunt Rose] there to live with her and unfortunately, we lost her a couple weeks ago. And so my aunt is going to come back to Bloomfield where she raised her children, and her son kept the house where she raised their children in Bloomfield and she plans on living there because she couldn't stay [in Florida].

**Doug Shipman:** It seems like it's always good to come home after things like that.

**Joan Huyghue:** And I lost [00:15:00] two of my siblings last year. The youngest girl, 73, her esophagus collapsed, and she was sick for two years. She had three children. They took very good care of her, but she passed away last November, and I had one other sibling, my brother Carleton. He passed away [in 2014] from lung cancer. It's four of us left, three girls [and] one boy.

**Doug Shipman:** So you were one of six children originally?

**Joan Huyghue:** I was number two. [Two of my siblings are in nursing homes]. Their children were unable to care for them so they're doing good.

**Doug Shipman:** Oh that's good. [...] Joan, tell me again what year were you born?

**Joan Huyghue:** 1938. I'll be 83 in October.

**Doug Shipman:** Fantastic. Well, would you like to talk a little bit about WAACA now?

**Joan Huyghue:** Right.

**Doug Shipman:** We'll fast forward from your childhood to Windsor.

**Joan Huyghue:** Right. So, like I said, I joined WAACA in 1992. I needed something to keep me busy and seeing that I was single again, I joined. WAACA wanted Windsor to know that WAACA would participate in all of the things that took place in Windsor. So some of the events were Shad Derby Day. We volunteered. We got a table set up and I think we had between 15 to 20 members, maybe more, but there were only certain ones that would work. And you know how it is when you're in a group; certain ones will volunteer their time. So anyway, we set up a table and we sold the Jamaican beef patties and Hawaiian bread. I think we did that for two years. And I guess drinks to go along with it and that was nice. We also participated in Northwest Park. When they had Halloween Night, we would help out and I think we had a table and we would pass out whatever kind of Halloween candy at Northwest Park. One year, Halloween was at Windsor High School. We had a table, dressed up with Halloween attire and candy and different

things. The kids came through and we passed out the candy and whatever else we had on the table. And we also worked in the gym. I remember we played bowling. We would do activities with the kids [00:20:00] [on] Halloween night.

**Joan Huyghue:** So another time at the Northwest Park, we had the [Northwest Park Country Fair]. We again set up a table and we had donuts, coffee, different kinds of food, and we took turns. You know, each member would be there for a couple hours, two, three hours, sometimes longer. Those are the kinds of things we participated in for the town. Now getting back to Shad Derby, during that period of time when Shad Derby was going on, our organization gave [two] scholarships to a high school senior. Didn't matter what their race was or whatever. It was open to all seniors. They had to write an essay, I don't remember how many words, telling about their plans for college, what they were doing at high school, what they participated in. If we had enough money in our treasury, we gave them, whoever won, at first it was \$500. Then it was cut down to one scholarship because we didn't have enough money in our treasury. But the way we got our money, our dues were \$15 a year [and we also had fundraisers]. And then selling anything else that we sold. And I guess we had a grant. Florence [Barlow] would know more about that, our organization. But mainly I remember the money came from dues that everybody paid.

**Joan Huyghue:** I took over the treasurer's job for two years, and my job was to collect dues. We had meetings once a month. I would collect the dues and if anybody had spent their personal money out of their own pocket for some event that we had, they would give me a voucher with the amount they spent and I would reimburse them. I guess the president and vice president had to sign for this. [...] Whatever was left would be deposited into our account in a bank. So I did that for two years and I gave a report [at] our monthly meetings. I would give a report on how much was in the treasury, in the bank. I'd give a written report, passed it out, and how much we spent and how much was left. That's why, some years, we couldn't give two scholarships. We didn't have enough money. But we did, at first, give two scholarships to someone that won with the essay.

**Doug Shipman:** Sorry, do you have any copies of any of those reports?

**Joan Huyghue:** I don't. I don't have any copies. I passed it on. I think Joyace [Peoples] took over. Florence would know. I'm sure Florence must have copies of some of the treasurer's report because I took it over from Vivian Cicero and [Joyace] took it over after me. [00:25:00] Florence would have that information.

**Doug Shipman:** And so how long were you involved in WAACA?

**Joan Huyghue:** Until it ended. I am not sure what year it was, but I know I was a member for at least four years. And then people moved out of town. We didn't have enough volunteers to join so it just became evident that we weren't going to be able to continue. We needed workers [and volunteers to work at events] and it was always the same ones that would come out and give up their time. So I would say I was in it for four years, maybe, but it could have been longer. But I was [a member] when [WAACA] dissolved.

**Doug Shipman:** And was WAACA involved in politics in any way?

**Joan Huyghue:** I don't think we were allowed to be political. We did have members that had been elected [to political offices like] the Board of Education [and town council]. Tim [Curtis] was on the town council, the Board of Education. But I don't think we were allowed to play a political role in town. Florence would have all that information. Florence knows everything. [laughing]

**Doug Shipman:** Oh, right.

**Joan Huyghue:** [Joyace] took over the treasurer's duties [after me]. I held [the office] for two years and then she took it over.

**Doug Shipman:** Very good, and are you still friends with some of the people that you served with in WAACA?

**Joan Huyghue:** Yes. You know it's hard now with the pandemic. You don't get to go anywhere or be with people. I have kept up with Florence and Vivian before she passed. And Joyace, I've talked to her a couple times but people have moved. There are not too many members left in town. That's the problem. They've moved away [and] you just lose touch. I would ask Florence and Vivian every year, "Have you talked to this one, have you talked to that one?" because everybody moved out of town.

**Doug Shipman:** Yeah, I think Florence told us much the same thing and she gave us a nice list of people that of course included you as well and Iva Allison.

**Joan Huyghue:** I don't think there's too many people left that were in WAACA that live in Windsor. And we had nice dinners. We always had fundraisers. That was another way we would have money for our treasury. And we'd have a dinner. They were mostly fundraisers and we had dinners where that was when the new officers would be sworn in. So it's a couple times a year, maybe more. And I recall the dinners we had. That was just for us and years ago, we had dances. One of the fundraisers was a New Year's Eve dance. I forgot what it cost to attend, but it was things like that. The fundraisers would give us the money in our coffer or whatever. But like I said, the main thing we wanted to make sure we participated in whatever [00:30:00] was going on in town. And the only two I remember was Shad Derby and Northwest Park [Country Fair]. There were more but [I don't remember]. I didn't participate in joining a lot of other things. WAACA was one of the main groups that I joined because I was still working.

**Doug Shipman:** So I did have a chance to interview Tim Curtis.

**Joan Huyghue:** Tim Curtis. He held a political office.

**Doug Shipman:** Yes.

**Joan Huyghue:** The town Board of Education. I think it was town council. [Tim Curtis served as a member of the Windsor Board of Education and later, served as a member of the Windsor Town Council.]

**Doug Shipman:** And he mentioned that there was actually a white gentleman that wanted to join WAACA. Do you remember anything about that?

**Joan Huyghue:** No. [I] think we had a minister that was a member. Florence would know his name. And another one, I think his name was [Jim Mason]. I know we had at least two members that were white in our group.

**Doug Shipman:** And how did people feel about having white people join the group?

**Joan Huyghue:** We had open arms. We welcomed everybody. You didn't have to be African American to join WAACA. We welcomed anyone in town that wanted to be in the group.

**Doug Shipman:** Well, that's great. Tim had said similar things, but he said there was someone.

**Joan Huyghue:** [Jim Mason] was the Caucasian member that we had. And the minister, I can't remember what that minister's name was [James Silver was the minister at Poquonock Community Church], but Jim was very active. Like I said, the things that we participated in, we always had to get the members to come out and help with setting up the tables and taking down the tables. And when we were selling the beef patties as Shad Derby, we had we had to go buy them because they had to be warm. So we knew a local beef patty place. Someone would go and get them. Then we had to try to keep them warm. We needed a lot of volunteers [for] Shad Derby.

**Doug Shipman:** Who was responsible for recruiting the volunteers?

**Joan Huyghue:** Well, we asked at our meetings. We let everybody know whether they were there or not [and] sent letters to let them know what we were going to participate in and the dates. And of course, we asked everybody to please come out and help. But mainly we needed men because setting up the tables and you've got to get there early before the parade starts. So when we didn't have the strong men that moved out of town, it was hard to volunteer to do that kind of thing where setting up tables and things. But we did the best we could. [We] took turns handling the money, handling the food. But mainly we needed men to help with the lifting and those kinds of things. And when they moved, we didn't have anybody to take their place.

**Doug Shipman:** So as you think about your years with WAACA and even what you saw of WAACA before you moved to California and came back, what are you most proud of [00:35:00] of WAACA? What accomplishments did they do that you felt were really good?

**Joan Huyghue:** I was very proud from the day even before I joined. But like I said, in the early days when it was active, I was helping my husband with his political career. And we didn't join because we had enough to do with him being on the Board of Education and then the town council. But I was always proud of WAACA and the things they did, especially the scholarships and participating in town, very proud of them. Any activity that they had, like I said. I know when I came back, that's when they had the big dance for New Year's Eve. But I was very proud of all of the activities that WAACA participated in. And from the time I joined, I did whatever I could to help out.

**Doug Shipman:** Do you think it would be possible to start an organization like WAACA again?

**Joan Huyghue:** I'm sure that Florence is in different organizations. But to try it again, everybody's older now, and I don't think you would get the participation because all the people that we knew are all [older]. I'm in my eighties and I just don't know if the younger people have that interest. I really can't say. But I know the people in their late seventies or eighties are not able to have an organization like that because it requires work. [laughing] If you know any younger people that might want to start that, it would be nice. But me not living in Windsor, I can't tell you of anybody that I know, younger people, that would be interested. So many people have moved away.

**Doug Shipman:** Well Joan, this has been great and I think you had a lot more to share with me than you originally thought, maybe, which I really appreciate.

**Joan Huyghue:** Probably. I had jotted down a couple of things. [...]

**Doug Shipman:** That's just fine. It's nice to get a full understanding of, like I say, the whole person, you know? What was your early life like and what was it like growing up, where did you grow up and why did you come to Windsor? I've asked you a lot of questions and I wondered is there anything that you would like to share that you feel is important to say before we end the interview?

**Joan Huyghue:** I just want to say that I love Windsor, my family loves Windsor. My kids had so many friends in Windsor, and it was just a good place to raise your children. We loved the schools and all the different things that went on in town. The main reason we moved to Windsor was because of what we had heard about the [great] schools, and we fully enjoyed the 20 years that we lived in Windsor and my children did too. It's a good place to live.

**Doug Shipman:** Well, thank you, and it sounds like they're living very interesting and fulfilling lives in each of their respective ways. So you got them off to a great start.

**Joan Huyghue:** [...] [00:40:00] Michael [was] asked to speak to at the baseball [rewards night]. My son Michael has come back and talked to athletes about what he's doing. He's come back to a couple of dinners when being asked from the baseball coach. My daughter [Vallerie] talked to her best friend, Dawn Spring, and when she was Shad Derby Queen in [19]78, she told Dawn [to] get a sponsor and join the Shad Derby Pageant. The next year, [19]79, her best friend Dawn Spring became the Shad Derby Queen. It was funny.

**Doug Shipman:** So she coached her along a little bit on how to do it.

**Joan Huyghue:** The very next year, her best friend, Dawn Spring, was the Shad Queen.

**Doug Shipman:** That's great.

**Joan Huyghue:** After they went off to school and everything, there was nothing else that they participated in. Windsor is a good place to live, and our family thoroughly enjoyed living in Windsor.

**Doug Shipman:** I'm curious. You said you now live in Ellington, right?

**Joan Huyghue:** Right, right. I have an apartment.



**Doug Shipman:** Oh, okay, and why did you move from Windsor to Ellington?

**Joan Huyghue:** Well, I wanted to stay in Windsor. I couldn't find a decent rent. [...] I wanted a first floor, so I have a two-bedroom, a very nice apartment here. I don't belong to any organizations in Ellington but it's a nice [place to live].

**Doug Shipman:** Good, good. Well, it sounds like you still stay very connected to people in Windsor; relatives and friends.

**Joan Huyghue:** My two nieces and their families still live in Windsor, and I have friends in Bloomfield, so I go to Bloomfield twice a month. [...] [00:45:00]

**Doug Shipman:** Well, maybe someday there'll be a chance to come back to Windsor.

**Joan Huyghue:** [Only if I could find a decent first floor rental apartment].

**Doug Shipman:** [...] Well Joan, I sure appreciate you taking time. I know you were reluctant initially and I'm so glad you did decide to share your story and your involvement in WAACA with us. And what we will do is after the interview, we will we have a way of transcribing this into written form. And so it'll take us several weeks to do that. But I will send you the transcript so you can look at it and you have a chance to edit that a little bit if you want to [make changes]. So you have a chance to do that, and then it will become part of our historical record here at Windsor Historical Society. And we will probably do an exhibit down the road about WAACA and the people involved and some of the things that you all did. And we'll definitely keep you informed about what happens with all that and hope that I'll get to meet you in person sometime in the not too distant future.

**Joan Huyghue:** All right, thank you for the interview.

**Doug Huyghue:** Well, thank you Joan so much. I look forward to seeing you in person soon.

**Joan Huyghue:** Thank you. Bye.

**Doug Shipman:** Bye-bye.