



Marjorie James:
WAACA Oral History

March 27, 2021
Location: Virtual

Interviewer: Dr. Fiona Vernal
Transcriber: 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

Dr. Fiona Vernal: So, I will need you to say your name and that you consent to have this recording done. And then since we're in COVID, I will mail you the actual release forms for you to sign with the Windsor Historical Society.

Marjorie James: Oh okay, fine. Very good. My name is Marjorie James.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And that you consent to have this interview.

Marjorie James: Yes, and I consent to have this interview.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: All right and I will do my introduction at the top. This is Dr. Fiona Vernal from the University of Connecticut conducting an interview with Ms. Marjorie James on behalf of the Windsor Historical Society about the Windsor Afro American Civic Association. Thank you so much, Ms. James. I really appreciate it. It is March 27th. Do you think that we could start by having you tell me a little bit about your childhood and how you grew up and how you became who you are?

Marjorie James: Well, I'm originally from Cleveland, Ohio, and I had a very normal [childhood], growing up with my mother and my father. In fact, my parents were married for 59 years before my mother passed, and my father lived to be 102.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Oh, wow.

Marjorie James: And I've been here in Connecticut for 61 years.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: 61 years, wow. How old was your mother when she died?

Marjorie James: My mother was 88.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Okay, and where did they pass away?

Marjorie James: My father has been gone, oh my goodness. It's been, what, about 16 or 17 years now? My mother died in 1991.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Did they stay in Cleveland?

Marjorie James: Yes, my father came to Cleveland from Alabama when he was about 10. He came to Cleveland and my mother came probably in 1927 or 28. She came after her grandparents had passed, and then she came to Cleveland where quite a few of her first cousins were all there.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Was she coming from Alabama as well?

Marjorie James: No, no. My father is from Alabama and my mother is from Georgia.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Ah, Georgia. Okay. And you said your mother was following a bunch of first cousins?

Marjorie James: Yes, quite a few of her first cousins had already come to Cleveland. And then when one of her first cousins came back from Cleveland, my mother came back with her. So my mother stayed in Cleveland until she passed.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And how long did you stay in Cleveland?

Marjorie James: Well, I came here when I was 25 and now, I'll be 86 next month. [laughing]

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And can you tell me a little bit about what Cleveland was like for you? What kind of town was it?

Marjorie James: Well, in the district [00:05:00] that we lived in, we weren't the rich class of living or middle class, but we were a working-class family in the town. When we grew up, my mother and father were very strict. So my two brothers and I, we definitely had to be on our P's and Q's at all times.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And what did your parents do for a living?

Marjorie James: My mother was a domestic and my father worked for the Cleveland Graphite Bronze Company. In fact, he retired from there after 26 years.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: What kind of company is that?

Marjorie James: They made automobile parts, if I'm not mistaken, and bearings for automobile parts and probably for the airplanes.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And when you were growing up as a young girl, what did you want to be? What did you want to do?

Marjorie James: Oh, I think quite a few different things. Nursing. I guess that was one of the things. But I went to a commercial high school and that's what I wound up doing for my professional life, you know, working.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: What kind of job did you end up working?

Marjorie James: Well, when I came here to Hartford, [my] first job was for the city of Hartford, and I stayed there until I got married. And then when I got married, I stayed there until I became pregnant with my daughter. And then I stayed at home with her until she was about a year and a half. And then I went to work for Aetna. They had a mother shift and I worked at Aetna. And then when I became pregnant with my second child after four years there, I stayed home with him for a year and a half. And then I went to work for CBT, which was a bank that they had in Hartford. And then when I became pregnant with number three, I stayed home with him, and then I went to work back again at CBT, and I stayed with CBT for nine years. And then I went to work for the American Eagle Federal Credit Union, and I stayed there until I retired.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Thank you for that summary. Did you say that Aetna had a mother shift?

Marjorie James: Yes, that was when they were on Farmington Avenue. We worked from 6 to 10. And they had the old keypunch machines, so they don't have those anymore. [laughing] But that's what we used to do, and one of the girls, I'm still in contact with her for all these years. Well, that would be well over 50 years because it was before my second son was born.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: You said you're still in touch with one of the other girls that you worked with?

Marjorie James: Yes, she's in a convalescent hospital now, but that's where I met her all those years ago.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And can you tell me a little bit about what brought you to Hartford?

Marjorie James: Well, I was in between jobs when my cousin, who's husband was the pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church here in Hartford, came to Cleveland to see her sisters, which are my mother's first cousins. Then she said, "Why don't you come back?" And so I said, "Oh, okay," and I think my parents and my relatives, were quite surprised. And I did leave, and I came here to Hartford. And as I said before, I've now been here 61 years. So Hartford technically now is my home [00:10:00] because I only have just one brother that is still alive that's in Cleveland. So Hartford definitely is now my home.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Why did you say that your parents and your relatives were surprised?

Marjorie James: Well, I think by being the only girl, my mother and father, I guess, figured I would always stay in Cleveland and probably marry in Cleveland and be there because most of my cousins and relatives [stayed in Cleveland]. I and one other cousin are the only ones that I think ever left Cleveland. The rest of them all stayed in Cleveland.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Had you considered going back?

Marjorie James: No, no. If anything happens to me, everything will be done here.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Oh no, I meant after you were in Hartford for about a year or two. Were you thinking of going back?

Marjorie James: No, no, [laughing] because I got married. No, I got married and my husband went and said to me. I said, "Well, we could go to Cleveland." He said, "No, we're not going to Cleveland." He says, "If anything, we stay here," because he's from New York. So as I said, we wound up staying here. So this has been our home.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: I see. And you said your husband is from New York?

Marjorie James: Yes, he's from Poughkeepsie, New York.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: All right. And can you tell me a little bit about your impressions of Hartford when you came here first?

Marjorie James: Well, I found that the people were more friendlier than the ones in Cleveland. [laughing] I got along very well with most of the people that I met. In fact, one of the girls that I met, she was in my wedding and I was in her wedding. And as I said, I'll be married 60 years and so I've known her for 61 years now and we still speak to each other. So that has been very good.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And whereabouts in Hartford did you come?

Marjorie James: From Harper Street. My husband and I lived there until we bought our first home on Coventry Street, and then we bought in Windsor. About 52 years ago, we bought our first house in Windsor and then we've been in this one, I guess, going on about 34 years now.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: So the first street that you lived on in Hartford was which street again?

Marjorie James: That was Harper Street.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Was that an apartment?

Marjorie James: Yes, it was an apartment. Yes.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And then you moved to Coventry Street?

Marjorie James: Yes, that was our first home that we bought.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And then Windsor after that.

Marjorie James: Yes, that's correct. So I've owned two homes in Windsor since we bought the first one on Bloomfield Avenue. And then when they did the new development, which we're in now, we bought our home here. So I'm right around the corner from where I used to live.

[laughing]

Dr. Fiona Vernal: [laughing] And I know that you talked about your job specifically. Would you say overall that it was easy for Black men and women to get jobs at that time?

Marjorie James: Well yes, I was quite surprised when I came to Hartford of the women with very good paying jobs. And each job that I've had has been with women. All of a sudden, you see a group of women were able to have a very good job. So I was very well surprised at that because Cleveland I think years and years later finally caught up with [00:15:00] Connecticut in the job situation for women.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: All right. And then when you first came to Hartford, you said you stayed on Brown Street?

Marjorie James: Yes. In the South End, yes.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Who made that arrangement or how did that arrangement come about?

Marjorie James: Well, when I first came here, I was with my cousin and then we looked in the paper and saw that they had a room for a single person. I met Mrs. Anna Crosby, who had come to Connecticut I think in 1892, and she had raised her family here and her son and daughter-in-law stayed upstairs, and she stayed downstairs. I had a very nice room and that's where I stayed until I got married.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: What's Anna Crosby's ethnicity?

Marjorie James: Well, her father had been a slave, and she was the first one born free.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Oh, that's really interesting.

Marjorie James: Yeah, I think if you possibly can go back in some of the records, you'll see that the Crosby family was quite prominent here in Connecticut because when I first came to live with her, she was I think 85 at that time. Yeah, I think she was 85 and her grandchildren, the Petersons. I know her granddaughter loaned me her veil because she had gotten married the year

before me, and she was the first Black nurse, if I'm not mistaken, for Hartford Hospital. I think that's what her obituary said when she passed.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: What's the daughter's name? I can look up her obituary.

Marjorie James: Her name was Ann Jennings.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Ann Jennings is the one who loaned you her veil, right?

Marjorie James: Yes, and her grandmother is the one that I lived with the until I was married. [00:20:00] If I'm not mistaken, I think Ann passed maybe three or four years ago. It hasn't been that long. I would say about three or four years ago.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Okay. And you said that for Ms. Anna Cosby, her son and daughter-in-law lived upstairs?

Marjorie James: Yes, his name was Daniel Crosby. Let me see, what was his wife's name? Oh heck, I can't think of what her name is right now, but he was Daniel Crosby.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And have they passed away as well?

Marjorie James: Oh, yes. Oh, heavens yes. They would be well up in their 100s if they were alive. [laughing]

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Oh, I see. Okay. I wasn't sure.

Marjorie James: Because as you see, I'm going to be 86 and I was only in my 20s and they were up in their 50s at that time.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: They were up in their 50s at that time.

Marjorie James: Oh yes, because they were around my parents age at that time and, as I said, my father was born in 1902 and my mother 1903. So they were up in age themselves at that time.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And what year was this? What year did you come to Hartford?

Marjorie James: 1960.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: 1960, and how long did you live on Brown Street?

Marjorie James: I was there for about a year and a half.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Okay. And you'd found that in the paper and there for a year and a half, and then where did you go after that?

Marjorie James: Well, I got married, because I got married in 1961.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: 1961. How did you meet your husband?

Marjorie James: Oh, well I had gone to church and then I went to the Jamaican Club with a bunch of the girls and I was sitting there holding our pocketbooks and our coats, and my husband was standing up there looking at me. He said, "She acts like she don't belong here." [laughing]

So then he came over and he started talking to me and then I said, “Oh, we were getting ready to go.” He said, “Well, what is your telephone number?” And I happened to give him the correct telephone number and he called me the following day. And I guess 61-60 some odd years later, we’re married.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Is he Jamaican?

Marjorie James: Oh heavens no. My husband, as I told you, was from New York and his parents are from Virginia.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Oh okay, I wasn’t sure if there was a Jamaican connection there. [laughing]

Marjorie James: No, no. But you know the Jamaican club, quite a few Americans did go there, and I think they probably still do because their club at that time was very, very nice and I’m quite sure it probably still is because they have built a brand new one. Well, it’s not new now, but it was at that time on Main Street in Hartford. So I don’t know whether they still have that one or they have moved to somewhere else.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Yes, they still have that one. I’ve interviewed quite a few of the members there.

Marjorie James: Oh, good. Well, when we used to go to their dances, I know one of the girls from our church, I think her father was Jamaican and she had asked my husband to help her with her program. My husband did and told her what music to use and helped her with her speech and everything, and she wound up being the queen that year. So that’s quite a few years ago. I hadn’t thought about that in years.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: So would you say that you guys went to one or two events a year at the club or more frequently than that?

Marjorie James: No, I think after having the children, a couple of years we were invited because someone who was already there had an extra ticket and then we were invited to go there to the functions they have. I don’t know whether they still do the function or not, but they used to have a lovely function there when they selected whoever was the queen.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And what else did your social life consist of?

Marjorie James: Oh dear. Well, occasionally, as I said before, [00:25:00] we got chance to go to a dance and I always liked different plays, so we got chance to do that and then bringing up the children.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And can you talk to me a little bit about what buying a home was like?

Marjorie James: Oh well, you save your money and do prayers. [laughing] Yes, and in fact, I got someone right now working on my front steps because the winter did a job on those. As I said, it’s always something to do around the house. So as I said, I think I have enjoyed that my husband and I were able to have a chance to give our children a home that they were able to enjoy because my parents weren’t able to buy a home until I was 21. And how happy my two brothers and I were that we had my parents actually had a home where you didn’t have a landlord

or someone, and I was so glad that my husband and I were able to give our children a chance to have a home that they had a yard to play in and to ride their bikes and different things. So some of the things I didn't have because my parents lived in a rented house and some things the children just did not have. But as I said, we were able to give that to the children. So as I said, it's been a scuffle at times, but it's something that you never forget once you have owned a home and you say to yourself, "Well, at least it was worth the sacrifice."

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Was it easy to get the down payment at the time? Was it easy to get into a house?

Marjorie James: Well, with the first one, we worked and saved up the money for that down payment. And then when I sold one house, I put that money into that house. Then when we sold that house, I took the money out of that and to put into the next one. So I think the first one is definitely the hardest, and then once you do that, then you just take the money that you have invested into that house and put into your next one. And I'm quite sure the people who've gone on and bought more homes have probably done the same.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Did you experience any kind of racial discrimination in the buying process?

Marjorie James: No, I think I've been one of those probably one of the lucky ones. In each neighborhood that we have been in, they knew that we were coming because I guess each neighbor found out who the person had sold the house too. But as I said, my neighbors have been very nice, and now quite a few of them have all passed and new people are in the neighborhood now. So in fact, I think there's only two of the original, and my husband and I. Everybody else has either passed or moved on. In fact, we're all up in age because when we first moved here, all of us were about the same age. And now we are all the ones that are still here. The man that's our neighbor next door, he lost his wife. I think this is going to be the third year that she's been gone. And at the beginning of the street, they are still at their home, but I'm quite sure sooner or later they will be selling and probably moving into senior [housing] because the house is quite large. And so when you have gotten to be up in age, you say, "Oh my God, why did I buy this big house?"

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And so can you just tell me what it was like to be a homeowner? You bought first in Hartford, right?

Marjorie James: Yes.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Can you tell me about the difference between being a homeowner in Hartford versus being a homeowner in Windsor?

Marjorie James: Well, when we lived on Coventry Street, we had a Jewish family on one side and on the other side was a Black family. The Jewish family, when his mother passed, he sold the house. [00:30:00] And the Black family, we have remained family and close to them. They, in turn, when her husband wanted to retire, they moved to Florida. They had five children and they all moved to Florida and they finished raising their children there. In fact, his wife and I remained friends, talking on the telephone, and she passed quite a few years ago. He did call us I think at Christmas time, and we spoke to him. So we have remained friends with them and they

live in I think Port St. Lucie, Florida, and they've been there over 50 some odd years. They moved from Hartford to there.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Okay. Fort Saint Lucie. Okay. And then can you tell me about what was the neighborhood in Windsor like for the other house?

Marjorie James: Well, I'm quite sure it's the same as it is now there. We got to know the neighbor on either side of us. In fact, one of them was a teacher or professor, rather, at Central [Connecticut State University], and then the other person, I am trying to think did he work? Oh, I know his son worked at Pratt [& Whitney], but I don't know whether the father did or not. But when they decided to retire, they had I think come to Connecticut from like way out West or somewhere. But they finally did leave and went back out there. And one of their sons remained friends to my oldest son, and he did say that both the mother and father had passed. So the neighborhood when we were there, just about everyone that was there have all passed. So as I said, when age grows upon you, all of a sudden you see all your little friends and different ones that you've met have passed.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And can you tell me about your civic engagement with WAACA?

Marjorie James: There was a person who started WAACA [Willie Graham]. Years ago, I was in the grocery store, and she said to me, "Would you like to join our little group?" And I said, "Okay fine, let me know." So she called me up and I, in turn, went to the meetings and I liked the little group. It was something to do. We would have our meetings maybe once a month and we would all know what time. And I would rush home from work and make sure dinner is done and get in the car and drive there and we would have our meetings at the L.P. Wilson [Community Center]. We had our meetings at different other places and it's something that we all looked forward to. And then at Christmas, one of our Christmas parties would be at one of our homes. So that worked out very well. Then occasionally, we would have it at one of the small little restaurants that are here in Windsor and that worked out very well. We were hoping that more people would have joined where we could have kept the group up. But when we found out that we wound up cutting down to about maybe less than ten of us actually could come to our meetings and everything. So finally we disbanded the organization, but it was something to do. We worked with the Shad Derby group and everything, so that was really good. We looked forward to having our table and having a queen. So we have sponsored quite a few queens for the Shad Derby.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And at the grocery store, did you already know that the group existed or did you find out then?

Marjorie James: No, I had not heard about them. But then when you get your little bulletin, the ad from the grocery store, a lot of times I don't pay any attention to it. You read it and toss and keep on going. [laughing] And then when she mentioned it, then I said, "Oh, I think I did see something [00:35:00] about that." But after I did join, and then after being with the different things that the group would have, which we enjoyed because we would do the fair there at Northwest [Park]. We would do the coffee and I never knew how to make so much coffee in my whole life, but that worked out very well.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Can you tell me what you think? You said that you guys disbanded when fewer people were coming to the meetings. But by that point, were there not enough families in Windsor to recruit?

Marjorie James: No, there were plenty. But I don't know whether they were overly busy, or they just didn't want to join. And each time we would sponsor a queen, you would have thought maybe their parents would have joined our group. But no, they didn't. They didn't join our group. They did thank us very much for sponsoring their daughter. But as I said, we would ask different ones and they would say yes, they would come. I think they were just saying yes. "Okay, I'll say yes, but I don't have to report." But as I said, it was something because we kept up with all of whatever was happening in Windsor. We were able to talk and Florence [Barlow] or Vivian [Cicero] would be at the meetings. We knew when they would have the town meetings, so this way we kept up with what the news and what was happening in Windsor.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And what year did you join approximately?

Marjorie James: Oh dear. That, I don't remember.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Okay.

Marjorie James: I know I put in at least 12 years with them. May have been longer, but I know I did over 12 years with them.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Do you have any reflections on civic engagement in the Black community and how to keep that going?

Marjorie James: Well, now that I've reached the age that I am, I'd have to leave that up to the younger ones now. Because, as I said, to be able to drive or to go to the different things, you would have to take your time to do it. Right now, I've reached the age now that I think I'm too old to be doing all of that. And I don't drive any at night anymore, and my driving is only maybe to the store. I don't do any long-distance driving or anything. And so, as I said, all of a sudden when you get to a certain age, there's certain things you can do and certain things you say, "Well, I have to leave that to the younger people." But I think if another group would start, there are more Blacks that are here in Windsor now than there were when we started. So maybe they would be able to bring in their influence of finding out and being at the meetings and different things that they do have. But as right now, I'd have to leave all of that to the younger ones.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Did succession planning or recruitment come up as a specific thing that the organization should be doing besides maybe trying to pull in the parents of the girls who are being sponsored?

Marjorie James: Well, we tried to involve ourselves in everything that Windsor had at that time. So just about everything that came up in Windsor, we were in. So I'm quite sure that if another organization starts then they would have to also be involved in everything that Windsor has. [...] [00:40:00]

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And did you aspire to any leadership roles?

Marjorie James: One time I was the vice president of WAACA, and then I had to keep records of different things of part of the organization if one of the girls weren't there to take the records down. So I did a little bit of everything when someone wasn't there, and I was there. And a job that had to be done, I filled in for it.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Okay, and do you think that there is any difference in the time that you're moving to Windsor with your husband and your children? Do you think it's different for a different generation of Black women who would be moving to Windsor now with their family or they would have moved to Windsor 10 years ago with their family?

Marjorie James: I think there may be some differences because when my children were there, they were the only Black children in their classrooms. So I'm quite sure there has been a difference because my children have been out of the school system in Windsor well over 30 some odd years. So over the course of the years, different things have changed. But I would say that whether you're going to a Black school or white school, you do have different things that come up, which you deal with that. But otherwise, the children had white friends and when some of the Blacks came here, then they would have some Black friends. Things like that.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Did your children have any issues settling in in the beginning, being so few Black children in the schools?

Marjorie James: No, because I think when they started in kindergarten, they were all with the same children. And as they went from grade to grade, they were all with the same people all the time. So I'm quite sure the children knew who they were.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And did you become friends with a select few parents as the children are going from grade to grade?

Marjorie James: Well, since I worked [full-time], I didn't get chance to really meet a lot of the parents. Because when they were having their meetings during the day, I was at work. So that made a great difference between that. But with anything that they would send home and say, "Mrs. James, can you do this?", then I would try to make time for that. Take my time from work and ask to be there with them. And my oldest son worked with the little basketball group that they had for the 6th graders, and I don't know whether they still have that now or not. But anyway, they had a team in Maryland that they would go and visit, and next time that team would come here and visit. And each one of the parents, we all had one of the children here. They spent the night with our children. So that worked out very well. So, me and my son enjoyed that he got a chance to go to Maryland with the group.

Dr. Fiona Vernal

Right. Can you come back up a little bit and tell me why Windsor when you guys were looking for your next home? I was just thinking about some of the other suburbs [00:45:00] around like Bloomfield and Manchester, and I was wondering what made you guys choose Windsor?

Marjorie James: Well, my husband used to go right up the street from the Farmington River, not too far, and he would go fishing. My husband would love that. He was a great fisherman. He

loved to do that, and I guess he had come into Windsor. So when we were looking for home, he said, "The place where I go fishing at, let's go look." So we did, and the real estate person was showing us different homes here in Windsor. And then when we did decide to buy in Windsor because I had to get a larger house because we only had two bedrooms with a third child on the way. I said, "Oh, I think we need a larger home." And I had sold my home in Hartford, and I had to take the time. I said to him, "We haven't quite found our home." So that happened with the real estate lady. I said, "Well, what do you have?" So she said, "This house just came on the market." And so we came and we liked it and then we put an offer in. And so then when we got ready to go to our third home, which is the one we're in now, my husband liked this area when they were building the new homes here, and this is what we did. So that's why we just stayed here in Windsor.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Right, and how has the town changed between when you guys first moved there and now? What did you notice?

Marjorie James: Well, technically I would say that first on Bloomfield Avenue, I guess everyone that was there wanted to know who the people were that were moving into the neighborhood. But I think now that the people move in, they're not as close or wanting to know who their neighbors are.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Oh, okay. When you say they want to know the neighbors, do you mean are you guys having like a picnic or a block party or a housewarming?

Marjorie James: Oh no. I'm quite sure that the housewarmings that they do have are probably their own friends. They are not say inviting the people from the neighborhood or something.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Okay. So, what would you describe that as? Because it doesn't sound like they were more friendly. Were they more nosy?

Marjorie James: Well, I wouldn't say they're [nosy]. You see the people who live on your street and you'll see other people in the grocery store, but I think everybody really stayed to themselves. And say you hear of someone having a party, those are all the people that they know. It's not like people from the neighborhood. So it would be each one is technically staying to themselves.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And you said now when a neighbor moves in, nobody particularly cares to know who that person is?

Marjorie James: I think the people that are here now, when we first moved in, they used to have [something]. Not Goodwill. Oh heck, I can't think of what that group was. Someone would come and greet you saying glad that you'd moved into the neighborhood and tried to tell you where the different places are. But I don't know whether they do that now or not. But I don't think that you have that. Probably only the person that would live next door to you would probably come over to see you, but as far as the others, they would see you and wave as they see you and keep on going.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: I see. And then sometimes folks decide to head off to Florida or some other warmer place to retire. What keeps you in Windsor?

Marjorie James: Well, I particularly do not like going south and I'm from the north and I guess I will always be north. My husband, I guess if we were younger, he had probably wanted to move South but I told him. I said, "I don't go South." So then this is why we stayed here in this cold weather here in Connecticut.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: What's the reason why you wouldn't move South?

Marjorie James: No, I'm a Northerner and I'm going to be a Northerner and die a Northerner. [laughing] But, well, I say that, but I really was quite surprised. My son, my oldest son, when he retired from a state trooper for the state of Connecticut, he told us. He said when my grandson when he was five and he was getting ready to go into first grade, he says "We're either going to stay here or we're going to go to North Carolina." Then I found out quite a few of his classmates have all moved to North Carolina. They're all born here in Connecticut, and they all have moved to North Carolina. And my son said, "No Ma, I'm not coming back North. It's too cold up there." [laughing] So, as I said, for a person who had never gone South before until he was grown, that's where he and his wife [went]. Dallas [Marjorie's grandson] will be 25, so they've been there 20 some odd years and they'll be married 27 years this year.

Marjorie James: So I'm saying to myself for children born here in the North, and my son had never been South because my husband, all his relatives are all North. They have all come North, and all my relatives are in Cleveland. So they've been to New York and to Cleveland, but they had never been South. And I said to myself, I was quite surprised that that's where they went. And so they have enjoyed it, and my granddaughter was born there in North Carolina and she will be graduating high school in June. So we're looking forward to that and she has been accepted at UConn and at [UMass] Amherst. So I don't know which one of the schools she's going to select. So my son says, "Well, we got a few more applications coming in and you'll see which one she chooses to go to." And she'll probably be a Southerner coming North." [laughing]

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And so looking over the arc of your life, what would you tell your younger twenty-something self when you were in Cleveland?

Marjorie James: Oh, I don't know. As I said, my parents were strict so I wasn't able to do a lot of things that I'm quite sure the other girls got a chance to do. But as I said, I really appreciate the teachings that my parents did give me, and I think I've also brought those teachings to my children. So when you have three children that you've been quite proud of as I said, I thank my parents for what they did do for my two brothers and myself.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Where did your brothers end up?

Marjorie James: My two brothers? [00:55:00] My brother that's next to me, because I'm the oldest, is deceased, and my younger brother, he's retired now and they all stayed in Cleveland.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: All stayed in Cleveland. And did your parents ever visit Hartford?

Marjorie James: Yes. My mother and father never left Cleveland and when they found out I was going to get married, they came to see who I was going to marry. [laughing] And I was so surprised and when I went to work, I was telling them, I said, "My parents never leave Cleveland!" And my mother and my father, my uncle and one of my mother's cousins, all came. They all got in the car and came to Hartford, and my cousin that's here, she said, "They never leave Cleveland," [laughing] and we all smiled. So yes, and then my parents did get a chance to come to Hartford quite a few times. When my father got where he could not drive long distance, then my brother would bring him. And then after my mother had passed, when my father would come to see me, we'd fly him here and we'd pick him up at Bradley [International Airport]. And then when it's time for him to come back, I would let my brothers know we're taking him to the airport and he'll be there in about 2 hours and they'd pick him up there. My father never flew. And my mother, she would come and visit me, she would fly here. All of a sudden, my father said, "It's not too bad flying." [laughing] So I had to smile. I said, "Oh my goodness." But he enjoyed it until he wasn't able to do traveling anymore.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: When they came for the wedding, they came by car at that time or?

Marjorie James: My father sent my brother. My brother gave me away for the wedding, but they had come before the wedding and John's [Marjorie's husband] mother and father and aunts all came and they met my parents at that time. So that was good. And then one year when we went to Cleveland, John's father drove up and he went to Cleveland with us so that was good. They got chance to see my grandmother because my father's mother lived to be 104 when she passed, and everyone got a chance to see my side of the family, which was good.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: That sounds lovely. 104, what longevity.

Marjorie James: Oh well, let me tell you. My husband's mother just passed three years ago and she was 106. So I keep telling my children. I tell my children, "You guys are going to be here for a while." [laughing]

Dr. Fiona Vernal: In terms of sort of more Black families moving into Windsor, has that happened in the area where you live as well?

Marjorie James: Yes, we have more than when I first moved here because I think when I first moved here, we were the only Black family on this street. I think there's six Black families now on the street. But when we moved here, we were the only ones. There were another set of James's that lived on our street and they moved back to I think Georgia. I think that's where they went. They moved back, so then that left only us, and then after that, the other people have come in.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: And the other set of James's were a Black family, right?

Marjorie James: Yes, they were. Yes.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: But not related?

Marjorie James: Oh no. In fact, we got their mail and I'm going, "Who in the heck is another James?" Because when I first moved here in Windsor, I think we were the only James's here in

Windsor because when we looked in the telephone book, we were the only James's listed. So anyway, my husband got in the car and went down there and he met the other James's. [01:00:00] So that was good. And then I think it was Georgia that they moved back to, and they had two children. They all finished from the Windsor schools here.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Did you guys feel like you were pioneering in the neighborhood?

Marjorie James: I don't think so. I didn't feel like a pioneer when I was the only one on Bloomfield Avenue, so no.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Okay. Is it because that pressure was gone by that point?

Marjorie James: No, I think the people that were around us, two sets were schoolteachers here in Windsor. They were used to seeing Blacks, so after they got used to us. They said, "Oh, the James's," and kept right on going. But no, I would say we got along fairly well with every group that was there.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: How long did you stay in the first house again on Bloomfield Avenue?

Marjorie James: We were there for 16 years.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: 16 years, okay. In the 16 years that you were living there, how many of your neighbors' houses did you go into?

Marjorie James: I don't visit. I do not do that.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Oh, you never did that. Okay.

Marjorie James: The neighbor on the right, he would have a large picnic because he was a professor at Central. And at the end of the year, he would invite John and I. We were the only neighbors that he would invite. We would go over, he would have the large picnic type thing, and we would go there. And then the neighbor next door to us, he bought an organ, so my husband had to show him how to use it. But I was not one of the neighbors that every time you turn around, I was in your house. And I did not really want you in my house every time I turned around. So we would say hello and be polite to each other and go on our way.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Okay. And that's on both streets, right?

Marjorie James: Yes, I see the neighbors. I've been in the houses on both sides, but not with the new people that are in there, with the people that were there originally when we were here. But I did not stay in their house. Every time they turned around, they wouldn't see me. And every time I turned around, I did not see them, and I think this way you become very good friends when you do not stay in your neighbor's house.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Right. I actually meant what you were talking about just in terms of maybe a 4th of July picnic or other kinds of maybe summer picnics, barbeques, things like that.

Marjorie James: Yeah and sometimes when people have their picnic, maybe they just want the group that they had, which would have been say their cousins or their brothers or so. I mean a

group that you know. It wasn't a group that you were inviting outsiders because both sets of the people on either side have been here in my house and when I was having something where I was inviting a lot of different other people here. But normally, anything that I would have here would have been say for family and that's the only ones that I would have invited. And they had their things at their house where they would have their group or their family there.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: Well, thank you so much Mrs. James. I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me. [...] [01:05:00]

Marjorie James: Well, it was good talking to you.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: My students and I are going to work on transcribing the interview, and then that's what I'm going to be sending to you so that you can take a look at it and make sure I've gotten the information. Thank you so much. Take care.

Marjorie James: Okay, well it was good talking to you.

Dr. Fiona Vernal: It was lovely talking to you too. Bye-bye.

Marjorie James: Thank you. Bye-bye.