

BJF

Interviewer: When and where were you born?

BJF: I was born March, 10 1927 in Waterloo, IA.

Interviewer: Waterloo.

BJF: Why did you say it like that, is that how I say it?

Interviewer: No, you did good, you did really good. What schools did you attend there?

BJF: I went to Grant Elementary then I went to East Junior High, which was seventh and eighth grade and is where city hall is now in Waterloo. Then I went to East High, that is where I graduated from.

Interviewer: What year did you graduate from East?

BJF: 1945. I'm an old lady.

Interviewer: So, I know that from there you would go on to college, you would go on to a historically black college.

BFJ: Yes. I went two years to college in Talladega, Alabama where they do the car racing. Named Talladega College it was one of those colleges that was started by the congregational church it was background. It is interesting because it had originally been before the civil war had been a private school for white boys who mostly came from wealthy families. And the oldest building had been the school Swain Hall. I can't think of what I want to say but anyways the groups that were formed that did a lot in terms of helping fix slaves and different churches took over schools or started schools for the ex-slaves so that is how Talladega began.

Interviewer: Tell me how you came to make a decision to go to Talladega, this HBCU.

BFJ: The Diehl Gallagher was making a swing through Iowa talking at different congregational churches, that is one of the things they did for fundraising in those days. And he came to Waterloo and I guess the pastor of the congregational church in Waterloo brought him up to there and his office and we met him. Daddy made sure that we met him. And he started sending material. My family was the oldest, my sister, trying to interest her into going to Talladega. And then one summer when we visiting my dad's mother and sisters in Austin, I guess it was Huston where NAACP was having its National Convention. So among the college chapters of the NAACP there was a group from Talladega and Marthan got to know them and hung around with them and she really kinda got interested in Talladega. And she decided that was where she would go. Daddy wanted us to go, by the way, to a historically black college. And we had sort of stared thinking about Fisk, you know but my family really got into Talladega. So went there,

she graduated two years before I did. And so when I graduated I went there. My family was supposed to go for two years and then go to University of Minnesota and get her degree in Journalism but then she got down there and she really liked it and she stayed and graduated from Talladega as a history major. And so I went down and I only went two years then I graduated from the University of Iowa.

Interviewer: Ok. So interesting experience for you there at Talladega.

BJF: Oh let me tell you it was the best experience I ever had. IT was the first time, despite what Alabama was like in those days. And those of you that know the pre-civil rights day and will comment on the things that would happen. It was like an oasis on that campus and the school did everything they could to make things easy. For example, when we were out at Christmas or at the end of the school year they would charter buses to take you, some of us had to catch our trains in Birmingham to Chicago and some in the Anniston and so on. They would have to charter buses so that we wouldn't have to ride Jim Crow on the public Buses.

Interviewer: Jim Crow?

BJF: Segregated. The other thing they did a majority of the students they had there were probably from the southern schools but they had a lot of kids that came from northern schools and a number of kids whose parents graduated from Talladega as a college. So they went, they deliberately kept white faculty. In fact, the president of the college was white, Dr. Byo. But they had a mixed faculty. Talladega at that time had a reputation of sending more kids on to medical school than any college in the United States. When you are talking about a college of three or four hundred students. Of course, many of them went to schools like Howard, Mahri and so on. But they put out a lot of doctors and dentists and teachers and they had a great music department.

Interviewer: These African American students were

BJF: They are African America. We did the two years that I was there at time some foreign students. They were mostly from Arabic countries. And we also had at that time we often had some meetings where white students would come to our campus to meet with people. But that was not looked upon too well by the clan and so forth. We once had the clan burning crosses on our campus. As I said, for some reason, I always felt really safe when I was on campus. Alan Clayton Powell's son went to Talladega, he was in the class behind me, Preston.

Interviewer: Ok. Good.

BJF: And the courses, you know, we learned so much from a broad perspective. Our textbook for sociology was, I'm trying to think, a Swedish sociologist, the book that he wrote, a two volume book that he wrote on sociology, but it focused on the sociology of racism and so on. That was our text book. We didn't use the traditional textbook that was

written by two men Auburn and Mincoft. Gosh, I can't remember the name of the Swedish sociology book, but the book is still worth reading it really is.

Interviewer: Ok. So now you would graduate from there.

BJF: No, I didn't graduate from there. I transferred.

Interviewer: Then you would go to the University of Iowa.

BJF: It was a drastic change. Drastic. Well, the change was first of all University of Iowa was a much larger school, predominantly white. I had a very difficult time making an adjustment to that campus. One of the reasons that I did not Iowa U when I first graduated was because they would not let Black students live in the dormitories. So my father said, No you are not going there. When, by the time I transferred there they had opened the dormitories to black students. So I lived in Courier Hall. But basically both the men and women's dorms to take black students you either needed to be a resident of Iowa or you had to be the child of someone who graduated from the university of Iowa. Ames, Iowa state University still wasn't letting black students stay in the dorm nor were they here.

Interviewer: At the University of Northern Iowa?

BJF: Yeah, which was then Iowa States Teacher College. So you had all those types of dynamics to deal with. Things for going to Talladega for me, it was the first time that on a continuing basis that I was around a lot of black folks, and educated black people. And, uh, I learned many things that have stood me in good stead, even though I didn't graduate from there when I meet people who went to school there it is still like I am considered part of the family.

Interviewer: Nice. I sitting here thinking that you had these wealth of experience that would shape the professional life.

BJF: Yeah. The only thing about it, it was a school where the academic demand was really, really tough. They expected you to do well and the faculty to not just to try and get by, but for you to learn something. They really mentored us, they saw us as their successors when we graduated. So they wanted us to be prepared to be the best we could. And you know, they didn't let you just slip by, at all. IN fact if you tried to do that you might just end up going home.

Interviewer: This sounds a lot like how what I hear about your father. I know that he had influenced you.

BJF: Not just my father my mother too, both of them went to college too you know.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your father he is a very interesting figure. Just briefly. Tell us about how growing up he might have influenced you.

BJF: He influenced all of us in a lot of ways. Daddy loved to travel and so we did a lot of traveling. He used to do things like have us keep diaries while we were traveling. And kinds of the things we went to besides former classmates and friends of his that were practicing laws or medicine in big cities we got to see a lot of things we wouldn't have just staying in Waterloo. We got to go to museums and books and science and art museums. I remember going to Chicago and couple of times going to broadcast or radio shows at WGN. I remember going to plays and musicals, you know and theaters. We to places like the World's Fairs when it was in New York City. We went to Richmond, Virginia. A lot of our trips were centered around his going to NAACP national meetings that were in different places. He saw to it that we were on college campuses of historically black colleges. So we met people that were college presidents and college professors. I can remember one year in Virginia we got to, my dad had always been very active in the NAACP. People like Thurgood Marshall and the former Supreme Court Justice from Baltimore, he died.

Interviewer: You got me. Tell me what was it like, do you remember the day you met Thurman Marshall?

BJF: Yeah. It was in Richmond, Virginia. I don't know because he was in Iowa several times. But the thing about him, his mother, I know something about her because his mother and Jean Morris in Des Moines, he husband published the Bystander there, were very close friends. Mrs. Morris was originally from Baltimore. I remember one of the things she used to do, cause he always had a good sense of humor and like to tease, and she would tell things like, "Thurgood remember I used to change your diapers." But he was he could he had a terrific sense of humor but he could be very serious and he was very serious about the civil rights. Walter White, Roy Wilkins, Mary McCloud Buffoon.

Interviewer: Oh ok. Roy Wilkins.

BJF: Well my dad knew Roy Wilkins when he was in St. Paul. His father was a minister and he was in St. Paul in high school and my dad ran along the railroad working when he was in medical school. So he had know Wilkins since he was very young.

Interviewer: Mary McCloud Buffoon.

BJF: When you went to the NAACP in those days those were the type of people involved. Remember the story about the two sisters who were elderly who had been teachers in New York?

Interviewer: Not that I remember.

BJF: They both have died now. Well they had a brother who was a lawyer that was very active in the NAACP and very handsome that I remember. But there were just all those different kinds of people that you got to meet. And I think that was very good for us, growing up in Waterloo where most black people worked at Rath's and Deeres. And they worked the hard jobs in the foundry and the kiln. It gave you a chance to see that there

were other things in this part of the world that you could do. Although you didn't often didn't meet people like that in Iowa doing those kinds of jobs.

Interviewer: And also you talk about that, you talk about your father's type of job. He was a professional.

BJF: He was a doctor.

Interviewer: He was a doctor, so you guess were really connected with the community.

BJF: Well, then there was Milton Fields who was an attorney here. And actually Fields had a lot to do with Daddy coming here to practice medicine when he finished schools. And one of the things, and I'll never forget this because Daddy didn't ever, is the fact that when he came here the Thornton, Dr. Thornton made sure that my joined the medical society and went to medical society meetings. Daddy was one the staff at St. Francis Hospital. I don't think he did much at Allen Hospital but he did at St. Francis. And so Dr. Thornton really paved the way for him.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your mother briefly and how she influenced you.

BJF: Well my mother was born in Des Moines. And her education was different. Her mother worked and at one time she was the wardrobe mistress for the Princess Theatre which was the reparatory theatre that traveled about six months a year. In those days there were a lot of things like that, so there were a lot of show business types of things and theatres to play in. And so some of that time my mother would be living with her mother in Sahdaya , Missouri. And so when she was in school in Sadaya she was in an all black school and when she was in school in Des Moines she went to a school that was predominantly white. Des Moines that was one community that for some reason, I don't know what, had a number of blacks there that were professional. I talked about Mrs. Morris. Her husband was a lawyer there. And he had been, when they trained the black army officers.

Interviewer: Ft. Des Moines.

BFJ: He was one of those people and he stayed in Des Moines after WWI was over. And there were people like the Riches, Dr. Riche was a dentist and the Scales, who was an MD. And so they had a sort of a bigger kind of Middle Class group of Blacks than Waterloo. Because Des Moines, didn't really have much industry. And then you have places like Younkers that was hiring blacks as crooks in stores and you didn't have that here.

Interviewer: Let me get to the next issue here.

BJF: My mother's mother had a college degree. She graduated from Flanders Smith in Little Rock, Arkansas. And she taught school for two years in Louisiana before she came back to Iowa, when she got back to Iowa she couldn't teach school here. Her sister taught

at a Junior College in Sadaya. She taught at the same junior college where Scott Joplin taught music. So she had a number of aunts that were teachers and she had an uncle that was funeral director in Sadaya So they were a moving up kind of family.

Interviewer: This is good. So you had all of these influences you would get that would help you to be a major impact in the community. Let's talk about the first professional job you would get.

BJF: Let me say that being a major influence, if I was, being involved in the community was something that I always expected that I should do because that is what my parents did. I was following their examples, you know, I think they would have been disappointed if I didn't do the thing they think you should do. They used to tell me, "If you think we did things for you that you don't owe us things, you have a debt you owe another generation."

Interviewer: Well, you paid it back.

BJF: Well, let me be honest with you. I am not, in a sense, not completely unselfish in doing those things because I have taken a lot of responsibilities on because I wanted to learn things. I would have no other way to learn and you can't learn everything in a book. If you want to gain wisdom you have to have some life experiences and you have to have contact of with people. Because that is how I think one learns wisdom, you don't learn wisdom from books you learn wisdom from life experiences.

Interviewer: Now, tell me about your first professional job. It was with the Girl Scouts.

BJF: Yeah. I was district advisor and counselor with the Girl Scouts. I got the job kind of as a flook because when I graduated from college I couldn't get a teaching job because my degree was in secondary education. And the secondary schools in Waterloo were not ready to hire a black person yet. I had a couple of jobs in traditionally southern segregated schools but they were not in my area. I majored in history and they were offering things in English. I had a friend who was an English teacher who graduated from here and when I saw what she did I knew that I had no business teaching English to nobody. Particularly when you come to dealing with literature because I'm not sure I could have handled it well. I like to read but I'm not sure that I could have gotten across to students what I would have like to get across. So one of my friends who graduated from here that had taught in Iowa for two year. She taught in Minona, which is very interesting. The first black teacher that I know them to have had there. She after two years she went to Des Moines and taught at Junior High and one of the people she rolled with was the twin sister of the woman who was the executive director of the Girl Scout council in Des Moines. And her twin sister did recruiting for the national office and waterloo had opening and so on . And she said, oh I know someone that should be contacted. And I was the person she was thinking of. And so she told her about me and the lady contacted me and sent me papers and I filled them out. And the next thing I knew I got a call from lady named Florence Spring her in Waterloo, who was executive director of the council of Girl Scouts. And I went into an interview and the chairman of

her personnel committee Elnor Crawford, who taught her at UNI and who had my sister Lee in Physical Education class and you know knew something about the family. So I had the interview and it was probably a week later that I heard that I had the job. So that is how that started. And I had never been a girl scout, although growing up we had gotten American Girl Magazine, which is one of their publications. But there wasn't a Girl Scouts council in Waterloo when I was growing up. There was in Cedar Falls but not in Waterloo. It was good choice for me because the executive director was willing to mentor me. And she taught me a lot of things. And I really learned a lot about how to be an administrator. She was a very good administrator. She taught me how to build budgets and many of those kinds of things. And I ended up in a couple of points, I don't know how it happened. I ended up when the Girl Scouts were doing two national training sessions in this region. One was in the arts and I was asked to be trainer on that. Then one was on day camping and I was asked to be trainer on that. And I got to know a couple of people at the national level that said why don't you apply for a national job. But I didn't want to work in one of those national jobs like training, which most of the blacks seemed to be doing. Because it meant that you lived on the road a lot, you did a lot of training. They had training states all over the United States. But I did learn a lot about working with volunteers, working with people, doing some planning and those kinds of things. I think that it was one of the best things that would prepare me for some of the jobs that would come later.

Interviewer: Ok. Let's talk about because from there, in fact you would be there for approximately ten years then you would move on. And you looked at the political arena briefly.

BJF: Yeah. I took a leave of absence and ran for the state legislature and lost.

Interviewer: Ok. This is good, this is important. You make this move. Tell me why did you make this move. Even though you lost, that's ok. What did you learn from that experience.

BJF: I made the move because once in a while you have to take chances. And I was at the point I had been very involved in politics, particularly on the local state level. State democrat. I think it was the time that we really began talking with people I worked with in the black community that we really needed to give black people a reason to vote. And so we need to have candidates, black people running as candidates. And so I was willing to do it and I was probably was one of the less offensive people to the white people in the party who backed me so I ran. And I did learn some things. I lost. I lost the elections but I didn't lose by the experience. I think that I learned a lot of practical politics and I got to know a lot of people. And after the election I went back to work at the Girl Scout Council. But the person that had been the executive director when I started had gone on to Wyoming to be the executive director of the council. I got the feeling when I came back that the staff was not exactly happy to see me. And so they had a new ED and she was not very nice so I let her know how I felt about what was going on. And in a few minutes she put on her coat and left the office. Later I found out that she had gone upstairs to talk to Elnor Crawford who was the chair of the personnel committee. Which

was really a mistake because Elnor was glad that I was back. But at that point I decided that I was going to look for another job. I wasn't going to stay there. None of the other staff, the professional staff was speaking to me really. So I started applying for jobs and I finally got a job when they started homemaker/home service office under family services. I went there. And I worked there for about two years because OEO decided that they weren't going to fund those problems any more they should come from the department of health. At the same time an opening came from the Head Start program, who was located from Black Hawk County and Exceptional persons was the delegate agency for Head Start. So, I had got to know some of the staff there. And one of them said, you know why don't you apply for this job. So I applied for the job as director of education. And so that is what I did and I stayed there for two years. Before I did that I knew that eventually I wanted to go to graduate school because I wanted to get and MSW.

Interviewer: You're getting ahead of me. This is good because you are talking about your position. You would run for a political position because you clearly felt that there was a need. And you felt that there was a way to fulfill it by running.

BJF: Well, that I could try to. One of the things I learned was that I did not like running for positions that were that you ran by party, you had to be a member. I hated campaigning. I really did. It is good to know what you don't want to do. I couldn't see myself getting elected to a term that I would be spending that two years campaigning for the next election.

Interviewer: So you know that you don't want to be a politician.

BJF: Well not in that way. There are other ways that you can deal with politics and I did them other ways. I was stayed involved and went to caucuses and county district and state conventions. I even went to one national convention when they had an interim convention. I worked for some candidates in terms of writing, you know working on issues they would use in their speeches. The behind the scenes work was really what I like best.

Interviewer: From doing this, from campaigning, this experience, this endeavor you would go on and be director of homemaker plan.

BFJ: Well, I had gone back to Girl Scouts when that came open. And I knew the executive director of Family Services, it was under family services. And we had a little group that we used to eat, take coffee breaks together and my mother had been on the family service at one time. So I had know him a long time. So I kind of felt like I got an invitation to try out for the job of directing the homemaker/home health aid plan.

Interviewer: Give me one example from working that position of directory homemaker plan. What one thing did you gain from that position.

BJF: One of the first things they had to do was to recruit people to be trained homemaker/home health aids. So that was one of the things. Then there was a written

grant that they set out the purpose of the plan and so on. But I also had to develop some places that once they were trained they could work. You know, so I talked to people in the medical society. My brother in law was practicing here then, Warren Nash. And at first it basically had to people that somehow the homemakers could be paid because health insurance didn't cover it. I went to Cedar Rapids and talked to the people at Family Services there because they had a homemaker program. But some of their thing were covered by certain kinds of insurances. But I got a lot of help from the executive director there that was doing it. And I know her brother in law that was a doctor in Cedar Rapids that told me the kinds of occasions that he got homemakers for patients and so on. So I had kind of an idea of what I was getting into but I only did it for two years.

Interviewer: Right. Then you would go on to graduate school and get your MSW at the University of Kansas.

BJF: Yes. I trying to think, he's dead. A guy that was here, Virgil Carr, had a MSW. And Virgil was doing work as a consultant with head start programs. And my boss had an MSW and that kind of got me interested in what was going on. And I was not interested in working in the agency where you worked with people. I was really interested in community organization. That was what I really wanted to do. And Virgil could understand. Virgil had gotten his MSW from Washington University in St. Louis. But he had contacts because KU had the contract to provide a lot of consultant services to Head Start Programs. He said you ought to apply there and he told me what the dean was doing and the new faculty. They had robbed faculty from all over the United States. He said you should apply there I think you would like what Arthur Cats, that was the dean's name, is doing. I did apply and I got accepted and I was very happy that I went there. I had thought about University of Michigan or Collagen in Masschutes but I couldn't afford private schools and the living you know. So anyhow I went to KU and they were using Systems Theory, for the theoretical background for social work. And that really hit me right. I was interested in getting into the psycho therapy situations.

Interviewer: You wanted in organizations and work in the community.

BJF: Well no even working with people you can look at individual as a system. And you can look at whether the person is a closed system or an open system. We are made up of systems you talk about your blood system, your neurological system and so on. And the whole thing was hard at first for me to apply the systems thing to what humans did. Because the words they used I was used to hearing my brother use making speakers and making music and stuff. In put and out put and that kind of stuff. After three semesters of taking classes with system theories the light finally came on and I began to see. And it made me see the world very differently than I had before. It made it possible to sit down and talk with people in an interdisplarinare way because you don't put the onus on individual human beings. You look at how human being operate within a system and what happens and how sometimes systems sometimes keep people from fulfilling what they want to do. So I've kept it. I know you talk about ecosystems, same thing, everything has influence on something else. So I really like systems theory.

Interviewer: No this is good. Because you would come away with this knowledge and you would bring it back to the Waterloo community. And you would apply it in a number of different ways. Let's talk about you are back, you've got the degree, you are back Waterloo and you would take on a position as a executive coordinator for the Waterloo Consortium. Let's talk specifically about your role with desegregation and role with that.

Interviewer: This is good so you would come back with this wealth of knowledge, how to work with people and all that. And that you would come back to Waterloo and you would apply this knowledge and these skills in different ways within the community and be very effective.

BJF: You have to know that I was not doing this alone. And originally this group included people Pete Middleton, Jim, No it is very important. I don't want people to think that I was up there doing these things by myself.

Interviewer: I know that and they know that.

BJF: Not some of the people that see that will know it.

Interviewer: Well what we are going to do you are going to get a chance to briefly mention those people and say thank you for your support.

BJF: It wasn't support, we were working together, it was a collaborative venture.

Interviewer: But you are the highlight though.

BJF: Ok but I have to talk about how I honestly did it. Ok. I think that's important. Too many people get out there by themselves and then they don't have enough people to keep them honest, you know. That collaboration to me is very important and I would recommend to everybody.

Interviewer: But what you have to understand is that you were selected for this video series for a reason. Ok For a reason is that you deliver and people all across the state of Iowa know BJ Ferguson, they know you, they know Betty Jean Ferguson. And they know you for what you have done and for what you accomplished. Now, of course there are a lot of things we can't get done without the support of people. And you have done that clearly. Follow me all right.

BJF: I will still disagree with you but ok.

Interviewer: Work with me.

BJF: The people

Interviewer: I will tell you what I will rephrase the comment and the question I won't make you the focus because you don't want that do you?

BJF: I don't want people to think that I did this all on my own. I had some partners and folks that I worked with and people that taught me some things. I grew up in a very bourgeois home. I was working with people, some of whom had been street people and had more sense of what was going on. We'd go to meeting and they would catch people's body language and immediately know what was going on. I had to have a session afterwards to figure out what had been asked. And that is what I'm trying to say, we were a team. We each had different expertise and different things. They taught me just as much as maybe I taught them.

Interviewer: Now so you come back, you have this degree. You have this education, you come back to the Waterloo community and you use this degree to get things done. Let's talk about your work experience with your tenure at the human rights office.

BJF: Ok. Human rights was a grant agency for a grant from the title seven emergency school aid act. To work with, to have programs to work with the community to help in the school desegregation process in the school in Waterloo. That is really what it was. And so my role was mostly administrative and interpretative and really watching and making sure the programs were doing what they were supposed to do. Ok so that's what it was. The background of what it was doing was working with schools. So there was an educational concept. Some of the things for example, the staff and teachers and principals and teachers aids and so on that the schools would need to in order to make the desegregation program work. And for the kids to have the successful experience in the schools and their parents. And so that is what is really about. I had always, you know I had a BA degree in education, in secondary education. My mother had been teaching at this time when I came back she was retired. My best friend at the time, Billy Evans, was a teacher and then a principal in Des Moines. Particularly when my mother and Evans got together there was a lot of discussion about education and different things they were trying out in their schools. And I knew how important the involvement of parents was. And parents had to feel welcome in the schools. Back in those days parents were not that welcomed in the schools. Teachers and principals thought they knew it all. Now they are trying to back peddle and get parents involved. In those days, they really weren't interested. And nobody talked about getting parents involved except for PTA when I was taking my education courses. The thing that taught me a lot about using and working with volunteers was Girl Scouting. And figuring out what volunteers needed. So I think all those things came together. And we began looking at the community and things that needed to be done. And out of some of those things that I was involved in, and not by myself, was the whole thing of bringing black student to the university of Northern Iowa as well as to the lab school. Of starting UNI Q at Waterloo to have classes that people could go to in their community. And we got that from a good friend of mine, Lawrence Howard, who was working with the University of Pittsburgh. The Lawrence group was out of Des Moines and I grew up with him, one of my sisters old boyfriends. So you know I really began to realize because of my background and my training in community organization. You have to work with what people themselves, the people that are going to

be affected, see as the problem. You start with what they see has a problem. I may have some ideas. But I don't see imposing myself on their things. Because once they feel success at doing something things they might then go on to another thing. And once you've been successful at doing some thing if at some time you are trying something and it doesn't work you don't the tendency is not to sit back and say I can't do it, the tendency is to reflect and say what other way can I make this happen. And so those are the things that really helped me in the doing the things I did. I was lucky that I had a lot of disability. Being a black person in Iowa. Where white people don't always know black people. It is easy to be remembered if you are consistent and you do the things you say you are going to do. And if maybe you have a little smarts and little ideas about doing things, you get asked to do things. And I always took things that I really cared about deeply. I never took things to do just for the sake of having something to do. I had enough other things to do. But if it was something that I was very passionate about I would say yes. And so areas, like education, community organization, how to get people involved... TURN TAPE OVER

In the political structure. Those were things that I was passionate about. And those kinds of things came very natural for me. And it was great to meet a lot of people that were willing to put up with me.

Interviewer: Ok. This is appropriate for you. You are working for the Human Rights Commission for Waterloo.

BJF: Yeah, and I don't see, I have a difficult time understanding people that have no passions about anything and things that will affect other people. But I have visions in terms in what I see is the best thing to do. And I get real passion about stuff and that is really what makes me do what I do.

Interviewer: This is good. This is a very very important role here. Working for the human Rights office here in Waterloo. What were the things at that office in that position.

BJF: That position, they were the grantee agency. I was talking about the things with the emergency school aid thing which had to do with helping various people in the community work deal with and accept and work well in the newly desegregated schools. I became director of the commission later but I wasn't director then I was administrator for that program.

Interviewer: Let's talk about how you would move on to the next level. You would be director.

BJF: Well the director left and I applied for the job and I got it. One of the things that had happened as I was doing my fieldwork in graduate school was I was working with the Leavenworth Commission that was working with no paid staff and I was trying to demonstrate what a paid staff person could do with a commission. And one of the things that you have to understand that all of my life because my parents I have been interested in human rights. All of my life. There were things that Daddy and Mother said the swing

show. We couldn't be in the swing show at East High because they had segregated acts. Blacks had a separate act. NAACP conventions and get together, family get together with family and friends, these were things you would talk about. WE always took the Pittsburgh Courier and Chicago Defender and Iowa Bystander. And so I read all the stuff and I met people that were doing things. So it was just something that I felt was my responsibility as a human being here on earth. And its not just what happened to people here in the United State but I get concerned about people who's rights are not treated properly anywhere in the world. My feeling is that if they can ever do it to somebody else they can do it to me. As a history major, I'm very conscience of the, particularly in the United States, of the constitution what the constitutional rights are. What are responsibilities as citizens are as well as our rights. It is like being an employee. If you work under a union contract or you work under personnel policies you not only need to know what your rights are you need to know what obligations are. Because I feel very strongly about that because all of this is the same thing.

Interviewer: This is very good .You are doing a great. I know that you would retire from that position. You would spend the rest of your professional life as the director. From that position what was probably the biggest challenge or what kept you busy the most.

BJF: Well, really trying to keep the relationships between various community groups and individuals going. So that is one thing. The other thing is the ordinance that we had when I started there was really out of date and it limited what we could do. And you know the law keeps changing and they kept adding things like discrimination on basis of sex and gender and discrimination basis of age. And originally those were not on our ordinance. And finally we had a mayor that came to a workshop that we had in Des Moines and he got the message. And finally, when he was mayor we were able to get the ordinance updated so that it matched the state ordinance. Which meant that if people came in with a complaint for some things that our ordinance didn't cover we would have to refer it on to the Iowa Civil Right Commission because we didn't have the legal jurisdiction to handle those things. When the ordinance changed we had the legal jurisdiction to handle them. Although we never handled complaints against the city because that is who hired us and who paid our money. So those automatically went to the state commission. And it also began that the local commissions and the state commission started an organization that we had regular meetings. And tried to work to help one another and then there was a Midwest group too that we met with. Then there were two national groups. The interesting thing is that if you didn't have a problem with something before you had a meeting by the time you had the next meeting it might have emerged. For example, and this is something that might still be going on is the whole thing in terms of sexual discrimination. Particularly with women who are maybe single mothers and don't have a lot of money are being sexually harassed by landlords. You know, so you keep watching to see what kinds of things are happening. It got to the point that discrimination was more subtle in ways than it had been instead of very open. Although I get the feeling although I'm not involved in it, that things are becoming more open. You know, and you begin to look at some of the things that happen in terms of and make comparisons in terms of what happens to women. I look now at the kinds of discrimination that are being faced by people that are Mexican American and that are Asian. And particularly, from the Muslim

nations and they are learning kind of what it was like for things for us. Sometimes we do not recognize differences in treatment. And some of that is sometimes because we do not have experiences to see how it is treated. Our biggest complaints were always in employment. Because employment gets at whether you can have place to live and have food and have clothing on your back. Housing, people didn't really fight that very much. And but they really would when it was employment discrimination. When they felt that they were being discriminated against for not being hired or how they were treated as an employee or something they would file a complaint. It was kind of interesting too when the federal government decided to get serious about housing discrimination. Some things begin to change in terms of housing. But some of that had to do with the kinds of jobs and the incomes of what people had. I tend to see what is going on now is kind of a backsliding. If we are not careful, if we are not aware as African Americans what is being done to us and to people that are maybe in some ways maybe in the same boat that we are. You know we could lose some of the things.

Interviewer: So the progress is not as fixed.

BJF: That's right. One of the things that we have to learn is that nothing stays here forever. You have to fight for things you have to stay on top of things that are going on. And but you know you don't want to be oppressed or be a victim but you don't be victimizing or oppressing people either. There is sometimes a fine line between those things. To me that makes a great difference. To some people that will not matter. But it means a great deal to me.

Interviewer: What type of grievances

BJF: they weren't grievances they were complaints. The greatest number were in employment. Either not being hired for a job or being fired in a discriminatory manner. OR sometimes you might not be fired directly but they might do things to make you want to quit. One thing that people didn't realize is that sometimes people came and would file a complaint that they were being discriminated against. And then you would get into what was going on and you felt that they were not good employees, they were not coming in to work on time. So you did some education with people about that. They didn't realize that we could get into employee records

Interviewer: Weasel. Fraudulent complaints.

BJF: You have to have something other than he said, she said. You have to have documentation of some sort. A lot of people who had some things happening to them and they were not ready to file. I would tell them why don't you keep a diary. Why don't you keep a diary about what was done or what was said. Put the date if there were any witnesses in the area. Write their names You keep a diary. Because the courts will look at that as really being documentation of what has happened to you. And it works. I know my sister had a problem with an agency in Burlington, Iowa where she was working. And I told her this is what you do. And she started doing it. And the guy that was the head of

the agency that was really treating her badly and got fired. So you need to have a paper train and you need to document stuff.

Interviewer: Now from working there, while you were working these jobs professionally on the same time you were sitting on boards.

BJF: I was doing a lot of volunteer stuff in the community but they were all related.

Interviewer: I know that you were working with the KKBG. The black radio station in Waterloo. Also you were on the Lily Ferguson Child Development Board.

BJF: The Waterloo school board for twelve years.

Interviewer: You were on the IPTV

BJF: Still am. I was the first black and the first woman to sit on the state judicial nomination commission. And that's the group that recommend attorneys for appointments for the state supreme court and the state appellant court. That was while I was working that that happened.

Interviewer: Let's talk about specifically the Lily Ferguson one. That is interesting because that sensor is named after your mother is that correct.

BJF. Yes. It is a really complicated story. It started under the family services. I was on the family services board. In fact, I know that at one point I was director of the family services board. When there were some problems between the agency and the Lily Ferguson board and what eventually happened the people that were on the board, we took over the agreement between family services and the board that we would become the owners of the child development center and the policy makers for it. And that is what happened. I, after that happened, they had an open house on Sunday, it was in August, I will never forget. And people could come in and they had names of three women that people who came there could vote to name the center after. One was Mrs. Fuller Law. One was Dorothy Tary. And my mother. Most of the people voted for my mother. That is how it became the Lily Ferguson Child Development Center. But it I had great niece and a great nephew that were children there. And I have seen some really good staff and some really good things happen. And it was very interesting. Tragically, as a society we do not really but a lot of emphasis on what we need to do with early childhood. And the things of the brain development, synapses and what happens in the child's first three years of life that are very important. Kids need experiences that help them develop language and thought processes before they start school. And a lot of times parents don't realize that they are kids first teachers. Whether that is for good or for ill. I guess what bothers me is that as a nation we really don't really put any good emphasis on what needs to happen to kids in the early development stages. And we don't see that sometimes that parents get the kind of help they need. It is interesting you know how much you have to go to school to do but to get married and have kids and raised them you don't have to have any education for that. I have to say this not only effects some poor people but it effects a lot

of people in different economic ranges. And I think that the most thing that I see that happens that has happened to change what happens in child rearing is that most kids from very small families. And they don't come from a family, for example, I had a sister who is fourteen years younger than I am and my brother is ten years younger. I had a lot of opportunity to observe the things my parents did for them. That was training for me. And some kids don't get that, because there are two children and they are closer together in age. And they don't have that distance where they can look less competitively at what is happening with their brothers and sisters. And so I really think that's the whole thing of parents having mentors. And some parents don't have any mentor and some have mentors that give them bad advice. And so I think American Culture places no emphasis on children because they cost money, they don't make money. That's my opinion. If you look at what is done in other cultures and other countries much more is given to the whole thing of early childhood. Another thing that has happened is that things have changed so much is that we don't always agree on the same mores the same things that should happen. And it is not like you go to Japan where you have a society of people that are pretty much the same. And so you don't have a lot of differences. We have a lot of people that come here from other countries other cultures you know so sometimes there is a clash of things about things that need to happen. But anyways I just think that as a culture as a society we don't give parents as much help as they really need. That is all that I can say. I've never been a parent. But I have 27, 23 nieces and nephews and that many great nieces and nephews. And so those are my kids. All kids are my kids I tell everyone. Since I haven't given birth to any, all of them are mine.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your role in the Waterloo school board. This is important there are a lot of things that you would do there, starting on the board for the district.

BJF: Well I got on the school board because I saw a lot of things that I thought should happen that didn't happen while I was on the board. I was hoping I would get black parents interested enough to go to school. To visit to come to school board meetings. I wanted people to know that it was not just me, that I had some backing. And I felt that they could learn some things. I understand how black people feel about schools. They have had such negatives experiences with schools and sometime going to the school is like going to jail. And I understand that feelings. Then they tell you about their experiences and you understand the way they feel the way they do. For the most part of what I saw, white staff in the school didn't see that because they tend to think that black people don't care about their kids. And they also somehow have not been able to realize that some of the stuff you do as a parent takes a lot of physic energy and when you are using a lot of that just to survive and see that your kids have food and clothing and a place to live. There isn't much left for other things. And I don't know how you can get people to see and understand that. If they, well they may have experienced it but they see it as different. They don't see the similarities. They look through a telescope and they don't look at how a system affects people. But one thing that I have seen is that more and more black students are going to college from Waterloo. When they first put an effort on getting them to college if they applied for a job here they wouldn't hire them. I think about Maleta Carter. When she first graduated I thought, Oh God she'll make a great teacher. But at first they wouldn't hire her. She had to go someplace else before she could

come back. I see people who people who grew up in this community who have gone away to college and have been hired back here. I hope that continues. I hope that blacks that go to college in areas of education don't forget who they are. And don't start putting on black students what some of the white staff have done. Well, I have a theory about things and that is that all parents care about their children. Now how they show that caring, you know you may have a disagreement with or they may not have an example or something to tell them that is not the best way to show their caring. Try this, this may work a little better. And that is not to demean them because we all need to learn. Nobody is born knowing how to raise kids. You are lucky if you had parents that did a good job and you emulate what they did. And even they made mistakes because working people is one of the toughest things you can do. One of the things that we did, I don't know if they still, because I've been off the board for a while, I succeeded in getting the discipline policies changed because our kids were being throwing out of the school getting suspended left and right. And sometimes if their parents wouldn't come to a hearing when they were thinking about kicking them out and I wanted parents to be there. But parents were correct in why should I be there it won't change a thing. And they were right. It didn't. So what I started doing, I started when I would get to the hearing, when they would have a discipline hearing. I would call a friend of mine, who had been a teacher. She was working in the poverty program for attorneys, the legal aid office here. Virginia. I don't remember her last name. She had taught here. I give her the parents names. Will you call and ask if they would want you to represent them. So she started doing that. So when they caught what was going on they could give me enough information in advance for me. But I did save some kids.

Interviewer: Good strategy.

BJF: It gave a different tone to the hearings because she was an attorney and she had been a teacher. There is nothing that upsets white males as females that don't smile. Part of that is like animals that show their teeth to show that they are beneath that person. And that smiling is the same reaction. And that is one thing I learned in my business is to not smile. But anyway, Virginia did a great job. But I put a lot of emphasis on their continuing to try to hire minority faculty particularly black faculty. I had a friend who was assistant superintendent who was black in Cedar Rapids. And I was talking to him one time you know and the reports that they send in to the things the State Education requires. Don't you get copies of those things before they go. He said, Oh my God in Cedar Rapids they would never the board would have to approve them before they would ever send them to Des Moines. So I have a friend that is still in the DEO and at that time Jessie High who had been here was in the regional office in Kansas City. So I found out reports they had to send in to the State and Regional offices and I got copies. So when I would come in and ask about things and things they were saying and they were like, awhhhh. Of course I would already have the answers. That was my whole point. The one thing that I was really concerned about was the number of African American students and at that time we didn't have many Hispanic or students from Native American, but who were taking college credit courses. And even their parents didn't seem to realize that if by eighth and ninth grade, particularly ninth grade when the course you take count for college credit. It is just I wanted to make sure that the councilors or somebody was letting

them know that if you don't take Algebra, you don't take English, Geometry, you don't take a foreign language your chances of getting into college will be very small. That's another thing I think I did.

Interviewer: Let's just talk briefly about you working with the Iowa State Board of Regents.

BJF: One term. Six years.

Interviewer: Tell me again what it is that you gained from that or what you accomplished.

BJF: Well, I guess one of the things I gained from that I was very upset about the affirmative action programs that the universities have. And I found out the person in the regents office wasn't doing what he was supposed to be doing. So my friend, who was president at the time said I'll fix it up. So he set a study committee on affirmative action and made me chair and put the three regents that were most open about what I was talking about on the committee. So we did some pushing and got some things done. I think particularly IOU and Iowa State have done a good job, much better than UNI.

Interviewer: Ok. Let's talk about another board that you served on. That you are still servicing on. Your tenure with IPTV.

BJF: I went on the board in 1980 and I forgot what year in the eighties I began president on the board. I have been president for a long time. Thanks to Bobby Ray who was governor at the time. It is has probably one of the most enjoyable board experiences that I have had. Not that there haven't been glitches every once in a while. Basically, they have a really good staff and they have a staff that is willing to find ways to do things. I have been very conscience of the fact, and reminded them, for example in the childrens programming that not all the children they watch are not all white. And they need to make sure there is a mix of kids. And I think they do it now. I think they do it. And what they do for programming. So it is one of the things I am really proud of. And sometimes money keeps us from doing more. We are not a station that produces for the whole system. Most of the programs they do are made for Iowa and in Iowa but they do have a couple of programs that are shown are on the system. I learned a lot about electronic technology I never thought I'd know.

Interviewer: We have one last question that we need to talk about. The Iowa Women's Hall of fame. Lastly, you served on all these boards, tell me what was it like when you got the notice that you would be inducted into the Iowa Women's Hall of fame.

BJF: Well it was kind of a surprise. The person who recommended me, she was in the department of education. I had worked on the equity committee with her and so on. She wrote the letter. So when I got the letter that I was going to be appointed to that I was kind of astounded. I thought the first person in the family that would get that would be my sister Marthan. The reason I guess that I was astounded is because you don't do these things expected to get credit. If you are expecting to get credit for these things, forget

about it, you do these things because it is necessary. And that is kind of like the icing on the cake. But it was nice.

Interviewer: It was a pleasure talking to you.