

CJ:

Hello, my name is Chelsey Jewett and I am here interviewing Jack Hardy on June 9 2021, on behalf of the oral history project that is being done through the Seymour Library and Cayuga Museum in partnership with the New York Heritage site, and the New York Heritage project. Hello, Jack, how are you today?

JH:

Good. I'm fine. Chelsey, how are you?

CJ:

I am doing pretty good. So the first question that I would like to ask you is when and where were you born?

JH:

I was born in Auburn, New York, at Mercy Hospital, which is now called Mercy Apartments. It's right up the street from where I live. And yeah, well, was right here in Auburn.

CJ:

So tell me a little bit about your family. How was your family growing up?

JH:

Well, I don't know if you know this or not, but I live in the house that I grew up in. The house has been in my family since 1905. And I, you know, I, I obviously went away for school, for graduate school, undergraduate school, graduate school, and after a career in with Colgate Palmolive I moved back to Auburn when I retired.

CJ:

Okay, that's really cool. Um, do you have any siblings?

JH:

I have one brother who passed away three years ago.

CJ:

How was it like growing up with your brother?

JH:

It was, it was good, it was, you know, it was always that sibling rivalry. There was always a little competition between us, not too much, though. I mean, growing up in the same household completely different personalities.

CJ:

Okay. Um, so what did your parents do for a living?

JH:

Okay, my father was Auburn's first African American firefighter. He returned back to Auburn after World War Two. He joined the Auburn Fire Department in July of 1947. And retired in 1977, after a 30 year career. My mother was one of the, during World War Two, my mother was a director of the Booker T. Washington Community Center. And then she had a career in social work with the city of Auburn and Cayuga County, I believe until 1978, 1979.

CJ:

Okay, that's really cool. So in your family, did you have any traditions that you remember growing up that were really unique to your family?

JH:

Well, one is during Christmas, Christmas is like one of my favorite holidays. We would either, depending on my dad's shift at the fire department, they usually work three days on three days off. So it was almost every other year, we would either open our gifts on Christmas Eve, if he had to go to work on Christmas Day. Or we could open them up on Christmas Day, you know if he had worked the day before or had the day off. Yeah, I guess that would be one of them. We always used to like, other ones would just be family, family get togethers on holidays, Thanksgiving would either be here or at relative's house in Ithaca or Rochester. Barbecues here, things like that, normal.

CJ:

Okay, okay. So did your family follow a particular religion?

JH:

They were, my family, Presbyterian.

CJ:

Do you still follow that religion?

JH:

Yes, I do. I am a member of Westminster Presbyterian Church. I probably don't go to church as much as my mother and father would like me to. But I do help the church with their live stream based, their live stream broadcasts of their services on Sunday.

CJ:

Okay, that's nice. So changing topics a little bit, what was school like for you growing up?

JH:

School was Genesee Street Elementary School, which is literally a five minute walk from this house. And West, let me see, after elementary school, it would have been West High School, which became a middle school and is now West Middle Apartments. I was in the last graduating class from West High School, which is the class of 1970. Going to school was good. It was you

know, obviously, part of growing up. Education was always ,education was always a big, was always a big deal in this house.

CJ:

Okay, okay. That makes sense. So while you're in school, as a teenager, did you have a job?

JH:

Yes, I worked for several places. Let's see. I most when I was first started working on my own, it was just mowing neighbors' lawns. You know, up and down the street, a couple of friends of the family, things like that. I worked at Shawn Bowlers Florists, Dunning Avenue. I worked at Auburn Pants Factory, which is a men's clothing store that's no longer in Auburn. I also worked at, oh, I worked for New York State Gas and Electric while I was going to community college. Right here in Auburn.

CJ:

Okay, okay. That's cool. So when you were growing up, was there any popular books, movies, or music that you, stuck out to you particularly from your childhood?

JH:

Oh, growing up, I would say my teenage years would have been the most influential as far as music. My favorite guitarist of all time, and still to this day is Jimi Hendrix. I listened to a lot of r&b, James Brown, Temptations, Stylistics, The Delfonics The Old Days, you know, all the old school, all the old school music. I'm a big fan of blues, John Lee Hooker, Buddy Guy, Eric Clapton, BB King. You know, a lot of rock and roll music, obviously from the 70s, growing up in the 70s, and going to college in the 70s. So, you know, very varied music background. Both my parents were a little bit more conservative in their music taste. However, they did like the blues, they liked big band dance music, which was, which was great. They both played the piano. Much to, I'm sure, they're not liking, I tried to learn how to play guitar. Never did. But, you know, it's just one of those things. You know, maybe that was part of my rebelling against like, them, you know, who knows? But it was fun. Yeah.

CJ:

Okay, so how was it growing up in Auburn as a child?

JH:

Small, um, small town. This neighborhood, empty of a lot of homes now and some of the big families, but growing up was, growing up was great. You know, you could like leave the house, in the morning. Your mother might say, in the summers, mother would say, you know, when the streetlights come on, is when you have to be back home. Multicultural neighborhood, I mean, still, the names in this neighborhood. I mean, we have all of the, we have all of the African American representation; Richardsons, McLeods, my family, the Hardys to the Spinellis, Zelehowskys, the Quills. I mean, it's, it's always been you know, it's always been a lot of fun. We never, we never worried about not going to the center, never worried about not having a playground. And there were playgrounds throughout the city, I mean, growing up in Auburn. It

was a small town. We went on family vacations like most families did during that time period. And, you know, so it was, I'd say it was a pretty well, well-rounded childhood. I mean, I consider myself pretty lucky having grown up with the parents that I did. You know, I don't, no complaints.

CJ:

That's very fair. So you mentioned that you went to college. Can you just say again, the colleges that you went to, and what you went for?

JH:

Oh, absolutely.

CJ:

And that experience for you.

JH:

The first college I went to was Auburn Community College, which is now Cayuga Community College. Liberal arts program, two years. Then I transferred to Ithaca College, where I majored in English to teach and I minored in communications. And when I graduated from Ithaca College, I taught at the George Jr. Republic for a couple of years. I came back to Auburn and taught at Auburn High School just for I think about a year and a half. Went to graduate school, and in New York, at New York University. And I switched my majors around so that I could get my permanent teaching credentials in English. And I majored in communication. And I decided to stay in New York at that time, and I ended up having a career with Colgate Palmolive.

CJ :

Okay, so what is your favorite thing about living in Cayuga County or specifically Auburn, and what would have to be your least favorite thing?

JH:

Okay, my favorite is having the opportunity to move back and own the house that I grew up in. That's absolutely my my favorite. I enjoy all four seasons. Living in Cayuga County affords you Lake Country. It affords you music. You know, it's, it's nice. It's not as crowded. I have friends down in New York City, New Jersey area where I used to live. They're always saying when are you coming back down here? And I say you guys have to come back, you have to come to upstate New York and experience upstate New York. Maybe the least, least favorite thing about living in Cayuga County, I don't know if there is. Maybe it's the winters? I don't, maybe they're starting to get to me a little bit as I get older. But like, I still wouldn't give it up for anything.

CJ:

That's very fair. It does get a little cold.

JH:

Yeah, it does get a little chilly up here. Yeah, and I can't enjoy my, I can't enjoy my cars, you know, in the winter, as much as I do in the spring, summer, and fall.

CJ:

Yeah, that's very fair. So if you have any advice for any children growing up in Auburn currently, or just like any advice for anybody, what would that be?

JH :

Well, my advice would be to kids, and I often say this because I speak to groups of students. I've spoken to groups of students at the Booker T. Washington Community Center, I've spoken to groups of students at BOCES in my capacity as chairman of the Auburn Civil Service Commission. And one thing I always tell them, one of the first things, is if you get the chance to experience life, outside of Auburn, for, for a little while, whether it's college, whether it's to work somewhere. Whatever, bring your, bring your ideas back to this small town, because Auburn can always, Auburn can always use new ideas. So that's that's one of the, I'd say that's my biggest, that's my biggest, my biggest like about speaking to, you know, make the opportunities happen, you know, come back, bring new blood back to this back to this historic town.

CJ :

Yes, that makes a lot of sense. So you mentioned that you are on the board of the Auburn Civil Service Commission.

JH:

Yes, I'm the Chairman

CJ:

What is that? Can you explain that experience and how it is being the Chairman of that commission?

JH:

Okay. I've been a chairman now, I've been on the Civil Service Commission, oh, probably for 11 or 12 years. And basically, what the Civil Service Commission does, it helps people, young people, older people, find employment within city government or city services. Whether it's a clerk at City Hall, in the fire department, in the police department, in the Department of Public Works, in the Auburn school district offices. It's like, I always, I always like to say you could start out, you could start out as a laborer just mowing the grass in one of the parks and I tell the students, working for the city of Auburn, but what you're doing is, you're starting off paying into a retirement system, number one. You get benefits, number two. I say once you're in the Auburn system, let's say you're just working this job for the summer, and you're gonna go back to school. When you come back next year, chances are the City of Auburn's gonna hire you back for that position. Because you have, you have experience with the City of Auburn. You can move around, once you're in the civil service, in the civil service system, you can move from working for the Department of Public Works into a clerk or at one of the water filtration plants. So I mean, it's or, you know, in the, in the, you know, in a clerk's office, in the treasurer's office, I mean, there's, I just think that there's plenty of opportunities that go missed, that get missed, you know, as far as employment.

CJ:

Okay, that's super cool. So, moving towards more recent times, and the coronavirus pandemic. I just was curious on how the pandemic has affected you, individually.

JH:

Oh, well, I stayed, basically, I stayed healthy, you follow the rules. I've been vaccinated. It affected my, it affected my freelance business. I used to be able to get hired out as a crew member for college commencements, for video projection, for video camera work, for audio work prior to, prior to the COVID pandemic happening. And it would be, it, it helped me I mean, you stayed, you basically wanted to always amend or stay by the rules. What have I done? I mean, last year, I refinished both the porches on this house. You know, you just, I've read more, I mean, I, you know, it sort of isolated you from your friends and going out but you know, you could become more tech savvy, if you wanted to. You could keep your group of friends small. I just really enjoy that we're starting to get out of this a lot more. To enjoy the outdoors. Yeah.

CJ:

Yeah, that makes sense, that makes sense. Is there anything that you miss, about life prior to the pandemic, such as not having to wear a mask all the time, or just being able to talk in person rather than virtually?

JH:

Oh, yeah, well, having meetings I mean, being involved with the city of Auburn and on several boards and, and other other opportunities, like going to car shows. Seeing things become uncanceled prior to the pandemic stuff is, is great. I mean, that's, you know, let's open it back up again. But, you know, it's, it's just, I did find a lot of time to, you know, like I said, just to read you, you know, you try, to work on my, I have two cars, two Mustangs. You know, so it's nice to be able to go out with friends. Uh, even if we just go car cruising and stuff like that. I mean, you know, it just seems to be just nice to get back to normal.

CJ:

That's very fair. That's very fair. So is there anything else that you would like to mention in this interview that I have not asked before we wrap it up?

JH:

No, not, not right now. I mean, if you do need any more information on me or my family or anything, please feel free to, to call I mean, or reach out, you know, through an email or something. But right now, I don't have any questions for you.

CJ :

Okay, well, thank you very much for letting me interview you.

JH:

Absolutely.

CJ:

I very much enjoyed hearing about all the very interesting information about your life.