

CJ:

Hello, my name is Chelsey Jewett, and I am here with Paris Price on behalf of the Seymour Library and the Cayuga Museum and their work with the New York Heritage project on the Oral History Project. Hello, Paris. How are you today?

PP:

I'm doing well. How are you?

CJ:

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

PP:

I was born in Syracuse, New York in 1964.

CJ:

Okay, um, can you tell me a little bit about your family? Um, did you have any siblings?

PP:

Yes, I am the youngest of a family of eight and we all were raised right here in Syracuse, New York, and most of us still reside in Syracuse. We are a large family. Right now that family of eight came from a family of one, my mom was an only child. However, my father was from a large family of 18, so we have this mix here.

CJ:

Okay, okay. Um, so can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your siblings growing up.

PP:

My relationship with my siblings was interesting. Being the youngest, I would always want to hang out and do the things, of course, that a younger child would, would do with their siblings. And often times, the older siblings didn't want you hanging with them. There's kind of a, there's kind of a gap from the oldest, my oldest sister is 12 years older than me, and my youngest sibling to me is two years, but it's a boy. So there was this, kind of like I want to hang out with, with those closest to me, but they're older. So there was always this, this thing about them, not letting the youngest hang out with them. But other than that, it was great growing up in a large family, where we oftentimes would, during the holidays, and even still, we would get together and enjoy each other's company.

CJ:

That's really fantastic. So can you talk a little bit about your relationship with your parents growing up?

PP:

Well, with my mom, it's a very close relationship. She passed away about six years ago. Unfortunately, with my father, he had completed suicide when my mom was pregnant with me. So there was a lot of trauma in our family at a very young age, which I think also brought us closer together.

CJ:

Um, so did you have any special or unique family traditions you remember growing up that was unique to your family?

PP:

We did. One of one of the things we always did and I thought was unique to my family, but we always got Christmas pajamas. And I always thought that was unique to my family, but come to find out that a lot of families did that. One of the other traditions we had was during the Christmas holiday we would as a large family of eight, we would always before we went to bed, we would lay down under the tree and we would sing Christmas carols together. We had a lot of great singers in my family. So we would always have great harmony when we sing together.

CJ:

That's wonderful. So can you describe what it was like in your neighborhood where you grew up?

PP:

In my neighborhood it was a very family oriented neighborhood. A lot of younger children grew up in our neighborhood so we grew up together, we played together, especially in the summertime we were always in the street. I come from that generation of the kids were out in the summertime as soon as they were able to leave the house, you know, right after eating breakfast hurriedly, and then we would head out and then we would run back home for a quick lunch before we ran back out to play. And it was always make sure you were in the house before the streetlights got on.

CJ:

Okay, okay. Um, so my next question is growing up, did your family follow any particular religion and then as a result, do you still follow that religion now?

PP:

Well as a family of eight, growing up, we were from the Episcopal Church. Our church was Grace Episcopal Church, which I was baptized in, but shortly after I was born, we stopped attending church and I do believe it had something to do with that trauma that happened to our, to our family, as my father completed suicide. Our whole family stopped attending church. I then did not attend church as growing up. One of the things that drew me back to church was one of my older sisters, her family, her married, her husband's family, they were very devout and they had a family church, which my sister joined. And she then brought me back into the church, and I don't believe that I would be a pastor now if it had not been for her reintroducing me to The Lord.

CJ:

That's very beautiful. So going back to your childhood a little bit, what was school like for you growing up?

PP:

Oh, school, school. Like I said, we grew up in a very large neighborhood where there were a lot of kids my age. So we would all walk to school together. There were, of course, the different age groups, but there were kids in all of the majority of the age groups. So there were always kids walking this direction to go to the elementary school, or the junior high school or the high school. And so growing up in that community, it was nice to have friends from the neighborhood that you went to school with. And growing up, growing up in a community school, it was nice as well, because we always had, we had an ingrown camaraderie, for lack of a better word. And there was always a sense of community in the school. And it was also a mixed school, it was a school that had people from every diff..every ethnicity in that school, so it was very multicultural. It was a place where teachers would teach you about Judaism, or you'd have a teacher who would share their their Italian culture with you or, or Hungarian culture with you. So it was a school that really presented well across all cultures, and really was willing to allow the teachers that latitude to share their culture.

CJ:

Okay, okay. Did you have any hobbies or special interests in school?

PP:

When I was young in school, I wanted to be a school teacher. And I wanted to be a school teacher because I wanted the summers off, okay. So that was my, my sole focus. And then other than that, no, I at one point, of course, kids go through different phases where they want to, to do something different in their life, because they find that

attractive, but for the most part, my goal was to be a school teacher, which, oddly enough, changed as I grew, and then kind of came full circle in teaching ministry.

CJ:

Okay, okay. Um, did you have any jobs in school like in your teenage years?

PP:

I did. I did. Um, in the city of Syracuse, there were a lot of programs for young kids to have summer jobs. And so at the age of 14, as soon as I can get my workers permit, I don't know if they still do that now, but kids were able to get their workers permit at the age of 14. So I got mine, and actually, I was an older 14 year old because I turned 14 the winter before. So when I was, as soon as I was able to get the working permit, I went to work. And they had, their job placement for teenagers in the summer was usually, um, it was usually programs run through the schools. So there was a school called Central Tech and they would have summer job placement programs, in which they would actually teach you so you can, you can go and learn about nursing and be a candy striper or, or, like, learning about cars and things like that and, and doing mechanical work as your job as learning about mechanical work. And so I chose to be a beautician at that time, that was one phase in which I changed what I wanted to do. And so I chose to go to work and learn about being a beautician. And I quickly realized that I didn't like it, but it was a summer job that I enjoyed.

As I became an older teenager, I then worked for a substance abuse facility. And I worked in their dietary department for actually, I think, from the age of 15, until I was like, I worked it through college. And so I think till I was like, 21 I think, I worked that job. And that was working in the dietary department. This facility was set up to have kind of like a more of a dining experience for their patients. And so we actually served dinner to the patients in there as they came into, like, kind of a restaurant style setting. And so that was interesting. And it kind of even shifted my desire away from teaching toward one of the helping ministries. I wanted to then become a counselor, and I actually got my undergrad in Psychology.

CJ:

Okay, okay. Um, can you talk to me a little bit more about your college experience? How was that for you?

PP:

For me being, I went to college here locally. And so I went to school for that helping ministry. I wanted to, to work in the nursing field. And so my, my first two years of college, it was in learning about nursing assistance, and that came directly from my

experience working in that mental health facility. And actually, I forgot, I did transfer from dietary into one of the units, and was a peer counselor for one of the substance abuse units, and so my focus and kind of turn from that of teaching to that of help ministries and in the mental health field.

And so, I only went to school for two years and got an associate's degree. And then I did not go back to school to get my undergrad degree, until...what, 20-25 years later. And so I ultimately in 2016, got my undergraduate degree in Psychology.

CJ:

Okay, okay. So after you got your degree, what kind of jobs do you hold after that?

PP:

So while, while working that I was I was married and raising a family. And so during the time between getting my Associates degree and my Bachelor's degree, I worked in the healthcare field, I was assistant director in that field and also worked as a union representative representing the the local union members in our office. And during that time, also, I kind of switched to being a union organizer and, and working in that field as well, as well as working in the medical field in the medical office, insurance environment, and became a supervisor in that environment. And so again, it was not until I kind of, my kids got a little older that I went back to school. And again, having that desire for helping ministry, then went back and got my Bachelor's degree in Psychology. Now when I did that, actually that school experience was online. I took online courses because again, I was raising a family.

CJ:

Okay, okay, that makes sense. So you were born in Syracuse, but you do a lot of work in Auburn if I am correct. What is that like? Like what is the experience of working in Auburn?

PP:

So I am actually the pastor of the Harriet Tubman Memorial AME Zion Church. I was assigned to pastor in Auburn in 2020, during the midst of a pandemic. And working in that community at that time, was a time in which, you know, we really didn't get to really go out and move around a lot. And so working in the Cayuga County and Auburn community was really done during the time of COVID, done basically by Zoom. It is right now that we are now really being released from some of the boundaries and bounds of the pandemic and being allowed to go outside more freely, that I'm learning more about the Auburn community. I am currently now working closely with within the community working with the with the Cayuga County Heritage Center as a board member, and also

working with the Cayuga County Tourism Department as a board member. And as a board member, I am working with them with the Harriet Tubman Bicentennial Celebration that will begin in 2022.

CJ:

Okay, that's really great, wow. Um, so what would you say is your favorite thing about working with the Harriet Tubman Church? And what is something that's probably the most difficult thing about working in a community like that?

PP:

So working in the AME, Zion Church, AME Zion Church is a historic church that was founded in 1797 in New York State. It is a church that was founded on the Methodist religion out of a need for the descendants of African slaves to find their own means of expression in the Methodist denomination. And at the time the church was formed, they were not allowed to freely, freely worship with the white parishioners. There was this great, a lot of people think of, you know, the racism and segregationism as being a Southern issue. But it was not. It was very much prevalent in the Northern societies and communities of faith in particular. And so the African American parishioners of the John Street Methodist Church, were called to the ministry themselves. They were called to pastor, they were called to teach, and called to share in ministry, but they were not allowed to be in leadership in the ministry. And so they formed their own denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. And they began to worship in New York City, and then many other churches were spread across New York State, and we now have 12 Episcopal districts from the Bahamas to throughout the United States and even into England and into Africa, into Kenya and into Zaire.

CJ:

Okay, okay. Um, so, what is something about Cayuga County that you feel like it's important for the future to know and remember,

PP:

As a pastor in and especially a pastor of the Harriet Tubman Memorial Church, having and sharing the message of Harriet Tubman of freedom, and of the AME Zion Freedom Church is very important. We are still living in times of great racism in which the equity and justice is not afforded to African American people. And so, living in Auburn, we still see areas of racism, classism, and division amongst us people. And so for me, it's very important that the legacy of Harriet Tubman continue, that we continue to help those that have been marginalized and undervalued, find their voice, and find their place within the city. Not to say that there are not opportunities for African Americans in Auburn. There are. But it is still necessary for the church of Harriet Tubman, the church

that she actually called her home church for over 50 years, that this church still have a place in the community that bore her, her name and that her family settled into. And we continue to stand up for freedom and freedom of education, freedom of religion, freedom to live and have our place in the community.

And one of the other things that we really would like to see in our community is equality in the workplace, as far as business in the community. There are not a lot of African American businesses that have a place in the community and that are thriving and as a business owner, my husband and I own our own business in Syracuse, New York, the Right Price Companies Incorporated. We are very passionate about seeing small businesses thrive, especially minority businesses. So part of the reason why I joined the Tourism Board and the Equal Rights Commission, and I sought them out to be a part of them was that I want to see more participation and access for small business, particularly African American businesses. And I see that as part of my calling, my godly calling, to make sure that there is equality, not just for justice and for children in education, but also that African Americans received their share of business in a thriving economy that, in particular, has a great foundation in the name of Harriet Tubman and in her legacy.

CJ:

That's very, very fair. Um, so going off of that, do you feel like there is a way for our education system to better improve the teaching of the history of minority groups within Cayuga County?

PP:

Absolutely, absolutely. Um in Cayuga County and across the United States, in general. I see that there is great inequity, but also great, great, um not speaking of the history and the foundation of African Americans toward their participation, and their vital, the vital work that they did in forming many of the communities. The AME Zion Church was very instrumental in making sure that members, its church members not only had liberty and rights within their community, but the AME Zion Church has always been in the forefront of making sure that there were job placement opportunities and equity, from education, to then fair work workplaces for African Americans. And I do see that as our continued focus in goal, in Cayuga and in Auburn.

CJ:

So if you could have any advice for any minority children growing up in Cayuga County or just kind of in general in the United States, what would your advice be?

PP:

My advice would be to really focus upon education, in finding out early on, what your, what your desire is, what your purpose is, what, what excites you, because there are so many job opportunities that have not even been created yet. So, and I know as my daughter is an educator, and she always says that, you know, a school education the way it has been practiced for a couple decades now is that the focus is to have children always go to college to get the job in order to be a productive citizen of the city in which you live. But I think more so that our young people ought to find out what their passion is, because their passion may not always be served by just going to getting a high school degree, getting a college degree and then going to work for someone else. Our young people need to explore their passion and what their God given gifts have been, are, and that, in that they may be the one that will discover a new, a new business, something new, that will bring jobs and focus at...greater jobs and focus in the community in which they've chosen to live. It's not just enough to get that high school or college degree, and then to go to work for someone else, especially as a business owner of 20 years, we see the opportunity and the creation of many businesses, now that especially minority people are able to create, and that those businesses are often very successful if you're able to position yourself for growth.

A lot of young entrepreneurs and young people looking to go into business, they have to make sure that they have that financial background as well. So I would say that any young person who is going to college, you may not want to, you may want to just get take the classes to get the degree of your focus. But I suggest that you also take some sort of course that would give you accounts payable background and a financial background so that when you do go out, even if you work for someone else, that you are able to have the understanding of how to manage your money. I think it's very important for young people to learn how to manage their money for the short term, but especially for the long term, whether they go to work for someone or they create their own job in their own business to be able to handle their money properly.

CJ:

That's very fair. So to go, kind of off topic, I would like to focus. Now I have a couple of questions about the coronavirus pandemic and how it has affected you. And so the first question is just how has that affected your personal life?

PP:

My husband and I, we were empty nesters. Our youngest daughter is 27 years old. So we were kind of at the stage where we were empty nesters. But when the pandemic came, my youngest daughter was working in Brooklyn, and she wanted to be close to family. So she actually came back home and worked from home for about six months.

My elderly mother in-law came and lived with us. So we went from being empty nesters to living together with family once again.

And so also in that we then kind of circled around each other in our family focus and looking at what is the most important thing in it. And it was reinstated, and we were reminded that family was the most important thing during this time of pandemic. And in my extended family, my siblings, we also really reconnected with each other in a greater way by setting up Zoom calls and setting up times where we would play games together via Zoom and, and would really connect closer to each other.

As far as a pastor in ministry, it was a time in which we were no longer able to be in the church building, and so we had to find ways of ministering and ways in which we were no longer able to touch each other directly. And so we had to really stand firm on our background of Methodism, which was the class system where we had to reach out to our members and rely upon each other to reach out to each other and, and different church members. It wasn't a situation where the pastor could always reach out to each church member. We had to rely on the congregation even more than we did before to make sure that there were members in our congregation, elderly members, especially that were able to access Zoom and able to access these, these media outlets that they haven't been part of before, and they never desired to use. So we had to make sure that all of our members had access to media in a way that was sustainable to them and that didn't allow them to feel the isolating factors that were in place during this pandemic.

Also, we had to, I then changed church in the midst of the pandemic. I was pastoring in Ithaca, New York and then, in 2020, I became the pastor in Auburn, New York at the Harriet Tubman Memorial Church. And so there was a new set of, of congregants that I had to reach out to and establish a relationship with. And so during this pandemic, it was very important to be focused on individuals and being able to minister to them in their needs. And as well, when this past year when the vaccines came out, there were many of my family members and parishioners that it was very hard to get an appointment in the early months of this year, to be able to get the vaccine. And so it was very important to me to make sure that everyone who wanted to in my personal family and as my parishioners that they were able to have access to get a vaccine.

And so that drove me to create a task force in Auburn and Cayuga County of the churches in the area, as well as City and County officials, health officials, and City and local groups such as the NAACP, and the Equal Rights Group that we would come together and form this taskforce to make sure that everyone who wanted a vaccine, regardless of this, their inability to access the website, that they were able to get vaccinated, and also that they were able to get transportation to the vaccination sites.

And so we worked hard toward that, we created a public service video of many of the members on the task force, you know, encouraging people to get vaccinated and to reach out if they were having trouble getting that vaccination.

CJ:

That's really amazing. I'm glad that you guys were able to do that. And so before we wrap up this interview, is there anything that you would like to say, just for anybody that's going to be watching this interview?

PP:

The City of Auburn is entering into an exciting time in which we are reopening and re-establishing our bonds with each other. I know right now, I'm able to go out and meet in-person with many of my new parishioners over the last year that I have not been able to visit and I'm able to connect with community groups and members that I've only spoke to via Zoom. And so I'm very excited about the upcoming Harriet Tubman Bicentennial celebration and I'm very excited about making sure that there is access for all persons in Auburn and in Cayuga County to be able to come together. And so we're really excited about ministry and making sure that there is equity in all aspects of the city and the county for all of its members. And that is going to be our focus in ministry and I'm very excited about it. I am making a lot of connections with people within the community and in the ecumenical church community as well as in the community as a whole. And I'm very excited about working and living in Auburn and Cayuga County.

CJ:

Thank you very much for conducting this interview with me. I very much enjoyed doing it.

PP:

Thank you. Thank you so much for having me as part of this program to bring up our history and to share it with others

CJ:

Of course. Thank you.