

1 AN INTERVIEW WITH
2 JAMES SONNY KNOTT
3 PAST STUDENT OF HOCKESSIN COLORED SCHOOL 107C
4

5
6 BY DAVID WILK, DBA, MAI, CRE
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11 Wednesday, March 6, 2024
12 At The Center For
13 Diversity, Inclusion and Social Equity
14 Hockessin, Delaware
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1 Q. Mr. Sonny Knott, this is your
2 life that we're memorializing. We want people
3 to know your story.

4 A. I'm delighted to tell my sorry
5 because I want people to know it too. I want
6 people to know what all this means.

7 - - -

8 Q. Okay. Sonny, welcome back to
9 107C.

10 A. Well, thank you so much for the
11 invite, my pleasure.

12 Q. It's really exciting to have you
13 here because this is your school.

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And maybe you could just tell
16 me, how did you first come to the school and
17 what were some of your earliest memories of
18 being here?

19 A. Well, I first came to the school
20 in the year 1937 when my parents moved from
21 Maryland to Delaware. And coming to the
22 school. I started off in the second grade and,
23 as this is well known, it was a one-room school
24 with six grades and one teacher.

25 Q. Wow.

1 A. Six rows of seats. Each row was
2 a grade and it averaged about five kids per
3 grade.

4 Very exciting times.

5 Our teacher's name, Ms. Beaujon.
6 Very elegant lady who controlled us.

7 Back during that time it was a
8 lot, lot of discipline and the last thing you
9 wanted was for your parents to come to school
10 because when they came to school, you was in
11 deep trouble. You would say, you know, "Lord,
12 you want me to live? You better freeze her
13 before she gets to me." Because they didn't
14 play with you. They made you respect people.
15 Respect was a strong thing in our community.

16 And we learnt everything that
17 the teacher had to teach you. If you didn't
18 learn, she didn't mind keeping you after
19 school, making sure you got the time.

20 We didn't have the supplies and
21 things like the kids have nowadays: Their
22 computers and iPads. We had nothing like that.
23 The only thing we really had to work with was
24 blackboards all around the wall and we read
25 from books.

1 And that was another situation,
2 because if you was given an assignment to read
3 from the book, you stood up and you read. She
4 might give you a couple pages to read. You
5 read that first page and when you turned to the
6 next page that she had assigned you to, it
7 might not be there because, you see, we never
8 got new books. We got the old books when --
9 the white school up on the hill, they got the
10 new books.

11 We would go to the blackboard to
12 do our assignment and sometimes the teacher
13 only gave you half a piece of chalk. We had a
14 half a pencil because she had to make supplies
15 last. And I believe to this day that she
16 bought some of our supplies out of her salary
17 because the state didn't really support her as
18 they did the schools up on the hill.

19 Q. So you loved -- a common theme
20 throughout lots of discussions we have had over
21 the years -- the students all loved Ms.
22 Beaujon.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. What was it about Ms. Beaujon
25 that was so endearing to all of you?

1 A. Well, she loved us. Love goes
2 two ways and she was interested in us learning.
3 And she was a good, strong teacher. She made
4 sure we had whatever it was she had to share
5 with us. She made sure that we learned
6 everything that she could offer us.

7 She taught us how to do things,
8 not only learn from the book, but she taught us
9 to do things with our hands. Because back
10 during that time it wasn't a lot of supplies
11 and all. A lot of things we made -- we had, we
12 had to make. She would bring in pieces of
13 cardboard and stuff and we would make various
14 things for our activities, for our plays, for
15 whatever we want to put on to be able to show
16 our parents how we were progressing. We had
17 several different plays we would do a year,
18 especially Christmas plays and things like
19 that, so we really loved Mrs. Beaujon. That's
20 why you would hear any of the students, they
21 would say, Ms. Beaujon.

22 Q. And when you -- she had to have
23 tremendous control over the classroom because
24 you were just experiencing -- describing what
25 it was like to be in one grade.

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. But there were five other grades
3 all simultaneously in the same classroom. How
4 did that work?

5 A. Well, what she would do was,
6 everybody had something to do. If your class
7 was selected to do reading, the other class was
8 assigned things to do at the desk or she assign
9 them to go to the blackboard. She controlled
10 us and she was very well organized. So there
11 was no whole lot of downtime.

12 The only break you got was
13 recess. And we had a bell. She would let us
14 go out for recess maybe 15 minutes or so, then
15 she would select a student to ring the bell to
16 bring us in and that poor student's life was in
17 danger because, don't ring that bell. We don't
18 want to go in because outside we made our own
19 games, too. We had seesaws out there and
20 swings. That was all we had. Everything else
21 we made. Baseball or what have you, we played
22 all those games. See, we was excited to play
23 together and when we come in, of course, it was
24 back to the discipline thing again. Right back
25 into the classroom.

11 Q. Fantastic.

12 When talking about getting to
13 school, how did all the children at the 107
14 school get to school?

15 A. All the children, just about,
16 walked.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. There was very, very few cars in
19 the community at that time and we had kids walk
20 almost about two miles. And the Bulah Family,
21 they were a couple miles from school and then
22 you have the family live in -- Mt. Cuba was
23 even further than that. And back then that
24 time we had winters. We don't have the winters
25 that -- and a foot of snow was regular. Once

1 it snowed we had snow all winter. Now we get a
2 dusting and we panic and run out to the store
3 and get bread, cheese, everything, and it don't
4 occur, but now you walk, and, in fact, it's --
5 I don't even remember if they had bicycle, we
6 just walk. It was a thing to walk. It was no
7 big thing for us to get together, if our
8 parents allowed us, we walk to Kennett Square.
9 I walked to Wilmington to go to the movies for
10 10 cents, if I had the 10 cents. That's
11 another thing.

12 Q. So when -- so no matter how far
13 you lived, you had to basically get up in time
14 to make sure that you were in school on time?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Was that a big deal?

17 A. Yes. School started 8:30.

18 Q. Uh-huh.

19 A. The bell rang at 8:30. If you
20 were at a distance, you heard that bell, you
21 took off running because if you don't, you
22 might not have the privilege of enjoying
23 recess. If you were late for school she might
24 keep you in for recess. As part of punishment,
25 write on the blackboards, I will not be late

1 again.

2 Q. And so even the family -- do you
3 remember the family's name that was in Mt.
4 Cuba?

5 A. Yes, it was the Taylor Family.
6 They were down in Mt. Cuba.

7 Q. That's way more than two miles.

8 A. It's a good ways. And don't
9 forget --

10 Q. Rolling hills?

11 A. Yeah. And you had snow. A foot
12 of snow, you walk down the road till the car
13 came, you had to get out of the road, let the
14 car by. It was no joy, but it was just a way
15 of life at that time.

16 Q. Uh-huh.

17 A. It was a way of life and
18 sometimes they would be late getting to school.
19 You might not get there till about 9:00, that
20 was a good little distance to walk.

21 Q. You had said earlier that there
22 were buses available to take the white
23 children --

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. -- to school, and not the

1 colored or black children?

2 A. No. There was no bus for us.
3 There wasn't a bus for us until the Bulah
4 Family got involved years later. I was out of
5 school by that time.

6 Q. Uh-huh.

7 A. Buses just wasn't a thing for
8 this school. It wasn't.

9 High school, now, we rode the
10 bus, of course, because the high school was in
11 Wilmington. Once you graduated from 107C,
12 that's when you went to Wilmington to the
13 Howard High School, which was the only school
14 in the state of Delaware for colored children,
15 so --

16 Q. The whole state of Delaware?

17 A. The whole state of Delaware.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. It was one school, it is called
20 Howard Career Center now, but it was Howard
21 High School at that time and we would ride a
22 public bus called the Short Line. And you
23 would walk up here to the corner. I was the
24 closest one. I only lived a few short distance
25 from the bus stop, but some of the kids had a

1 long way to walk to the bus stop. And the
2 state would give us -- some kind of ticket my
3 mother would get. And you got on the bus, you
4 give them the ticket. And you rode in, we got
5 off the bus at 11th and French Street and we
6 walk from 11th and French Street down to 14th
7 and Poplar.

8 Q. Which is not a short distance.

9 A. No. That wasn't a short
10 distance either.

11 Q. No.

12 A. And then after school we had to
13 walk back, catch the bus back home, so we
14 didn't have any bus available to us.

15 Q. How long did it take to get to
16 school each way that -- on that bus?

17 A. I would imagine probably 45
18 minutes or so.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Because back then Lancaster Pike
21 there were only two lanes and of course the bus
22 made stops, picking up people, so it wasn't a
23 straight shot. It wasn't a private bus. It
24 was a public bus.

25 Q. And that bus -- the whole issue

1 of buses is really what began the Bulah story.

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. When it came to the Board of
4 Education and all of that.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. What was your remembrance of
7 that? And some of the background behind that
8 story and the aftermath, too.

9 A. Well, I was a grown man when all
10 that occurred. I was a grown man when this all
11 occurred in the '50s. By that time I was up in
12 my 20s. I was born the year 1930, so I was up
13 in my -- I wasn't really involved in that.

14 The funny thing, you speak about
15 the bus. For a short time we had a bus to take
16 us to Howard High School, a gentleman by the
17 name of Mr. Pete Peterson. He had a bus, old
18 Studebaker. I never forget it. And in this
19 world today, all school buses are yellow. Ours
20 wasn't. We had a bright orange school bus and
21 he saw it up on himself that the kids need the
22 bus and he would take us to school and he
23 was -- Mr. Pete was a community man. He did a
24 little bit of everything. Boy's Scouts and all
25 that, but he was all around. But he had that

1 bus. I think he ran that bus, maybe it was two
2 years, three years, we were back on the Short
3 Line again.

4 Q. It didn't hold out that long.

5 A. Didn't hold out that long.

6 Q. So when you graduated or
7 finished at Howard, what did you do? How did
8 your life unfold?

9 A. Well, we worked around where we
10 could get a job. We had mushroom houses and
11 stuff around here at that time. It was a job
12 available. It wasn't that great a job. And
13 the money wasn't that great, but it was what --
14 at the time I was called for, you know, so it
15 was jobs around, work at the mills and things
16 and then lot of us went to work for the du Pont
17 company at night doing janitorial work because
18 that was the only decent job -- halfway decent
19 job you could get because these companies
20 wasn't hiring us at the time. They just wasn't
21 available to us regardless of what education
22 you had. So we made out as best we could, but
23 that was the route we took in our lives.

24 Q. And then, didn't you go into the
25 armed forces?

1 A. Yes. I went into the armed
2 forces. I did my short career over in Germany,
3 which, I enjoyed it all, and when I came back
4 home, that was when I went to work for du Pont
5 at night. And I worked for du Pont and then I
6 left there and I went to the Veterans Hospital
7 in Elsmere. I worked there 30-some-odd years.
8 I was in charge of the maintenance program and
9 I also worked Wilmington Trust at night. So
10 you had to do what you had to do.

11 Q. Uh-huh.

12 A. Back then, lot of people worked
13 two jobs. I was -- I had two jobs, 16 hours a
14 day, for 30-some-odd years, but I, I managed
15 it.

16 Q. You did more than that.

17 A. I managed it.

18 Q. Were you aware as -- when the
19 Bulah story broke, was it widely known that the
20 family was, had hired a lawyer and was suing
21 the State of Delaware for -- to get -- for,
22 basically, to get Shirley into the white
23 school?

24 A. Yes. You know, it wasn't so
25 much of getting Shirley into the white school.

1 The main purpose of the bus was getting Shirley
2 a ride to this school because the bus came
3 right by Shirley's door. They lived on
4 Limestone Road and it came right by the school
5 on the way to the white school. And all Mrs.
6 Bulah wanted was, pick my daughter up, drop her
7 off at 107C and then continue on your journey,
8 but I understand she was told, "No, we don't
9 have a bus for colored kids." So that was
10 where the Brown v. Board of Education started.

11 Q. Uh-huh.

12 A. Mrs. Bulah was a determined
13 person to get all she could for her daughter.
14 Now, I tell people, Mrs. Bulah,
15 it wasn't a picnic for Mrs. Bulah because --
16 don't forget, Hockessin is a small community
17 and I say that Mrs. Bulah was like a tennis
18 ball. She was slapped back and forth. The
19 white people didn't want it. That's definite.
20 They didn't want it. And a lot of colored
21 people -- we were colored people. We weren't
22 black people. Lot of the colored people didn't
23 want it because they saw her stirring up
24 trouble. We all getting along, you know, my
25 child is walking. What makes your child better

1 than mine? So she caught the devil. She had a
2 little egg business. She had some chicken.
3 She sold eggs, of course. The white people
4 stopped buying her eggs, so her business fell
5 off.

6 I think the chicken stopped
7 laying eggs. They're not buying, we're not
8 laying no more -- no, just a joke.

9 But no, she, she caught the
10 devil, but she was determined and thank God she
11 did because it opened up a lot of doors for
12 everybody.

13 Q. It was monumental.

14 And how did the community -- how
15 did the black community feel about the whole
16 Shirley situation?

17 A. Well, like I said, a lot of them
18 weren't happy because they saw it as starting
19 confusion, trouble amongst us.

20 Q. Uh-huh.

21 A. It's the whole thing, like, we
22 all getting along, so -- and she was -- Mrs.
23 Bula was the second wife of Mr. Bula, so she
24 was relatively new in the community. You're
25 coming in -- I have been here all my life and

1 you coming in starting trouble. It didn't set
2 too well to my understanding. It didn't set
3 too well.

4 Q. My recollection from having,
5 listening to you and the other students talk
6 about your experiences was that there was a
7 very friendly, warm and fuzzy community here in
8 Hockessin between blacks -- between blacks and
9 white and everybody got along.

10 A. We all got along. Kids -- we
11 played together. We didn't really know about
12 segregation. It wasn't anything that we knew
13 about because we was all playing together. The
14 only thing we didn't do was go to school. Play
15 with each others houses and interchange
16 everything, we played baseball together. We
17 did it all, but we just couldn't go to school
18 and it didn't really dawn on us. It just
19 was -- it was just a way of life, so you can't
20 say that I knew about segregation because
21 everything else was segregated.

22 It was -- now my relatives lived
23 in Landenberg. They went to school in Kennett
24 Square where it was always a consolidated
25 school, just a few miles up the road. Delaware

1 was the first state known as a segregated
2 state, so we -- as I look back at it, we did
3 everything together. We swam together -- in
4 the creeks of course. No swimming pool. We
5 swam together in the creeks. We played
6 baseball. We kids into each others' homes, bit
7 off each others' candy. We did it all together
8 except go to school.

16 Q. Good. And when you are with
17 your children and with your grandchildren,
18 how -- where -- what do you tell them when you
19 talk about your experiences and how they can
20 translate that into their lives?

21 A. I tell them the truth. I tell
22 them exactly what I went through. I tell them
23 about 107C. I tell them about the restaurants
24 that we couldn't go to and the movies, the
25 beaches, I tell them the truth. I don't

1 sugarcoat it all. That's why I'm so proud of
2 this school here. I'm able to bring them here.
3 My great grandchildren, they can come here and
4 they can see the pictures on the wall. I can
5 talk them through why this school was still in
6 existence. What it was from then up until now.
7 So that's why the whole field was left, so
8 excited about this building.

9 And I pray that it stays around
10 so that -- because I truly, truly think history
11 is very important. That's why I don't mind
12 doing the interview or anything, but I think
13 it's going to get out there and help somebody.
14 Help somebody to appreciate what we have.

15 Q. And what they have, right?

16 A. What -- well, that's what they
17 have. My day is gone.

18 Q. You're still doing pretty good.

19 A. I'm still enjoying it, but, but
20 it's not a whole lot I can do with it.

21 Q. Well, you're amazing to me. You
22 are one of my heroes and treasures in life.

23 And, you know, I'm thinking back, we have known
24 each other for 12 years now. We met 12 years
25 ago. And do you remember? We met when I got a

1 call from Judge -- former Judge Joshua Martin
2 to help him out on a real estate dilemma.

3 A. Uh-huh.

4 Q. And that was this property.

5 A. Right.

6 Q. So this property for me as a
7 real estate professor and as a real estate
8 advisor, it started for me as a real estate
9 challenge.

10 A. Right.

11 Q. Because when Judge Martin called
12 me, it was four days before this property was
13 going to sheriff sale. So when the sheriff
14 sale's date was January 10th of 2012. That was
15 the date on the notice. So we, we met not too
16 long after that. But what's really fascinating
17 about this is that it began -- there is two
18 major stories here. The big story is the
19 people and you and your fellow students, the
20 history and the soul and spirituality of this
21 place. But the real estate story was how we
22 were able to save the school -- our group of
23 volunteers -- from sheriff sale and be able to
24 be sitting here today --

25 A. Uh-huh.

1 Q. -- talking inside this beautiful
2 new place.

3 So can you just kind of take me
4 through what your thoughts were when you first
5 met and started talking to all of us and
6 saying -- I love how you called us the
7 committee?

8 A. Yes. You said do I remember?

9 Q. Yes.

10 A. Let me ask you, do you remember
11 when you told me all the things you were going
12 to do to this building, and I told you, I'm
13 glad to hear, but don't you be too long? You
14 remember me telling you that?

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. Because I'm in my 90's then and
17 I have heard this -- used to be a song a long
18 time ago. I heard that song before, and I
19 heard it so many times. And yet I didn't see
20 any progress, so I told you, I hope you're
21 telling me the truth, just don't be too long.

22 Q. Right.

23 A. Let me enjoy it.

24 Q. Did you think we were going to
25 pull it off?

1 A. I pray that you would pull it
2 off.

3 And I also remember one of my
4 presentations I said, I'm looking forward so we
5 can walk through that door. Remember that I
6 said --

7 Q. I never forget that. Gives me
8 chills to this day.

9 A. I want to walk through this door
10 one more time and I did. So my hat's off to
11 you and the committee, Ms. Edwards and all who
12 was so diligent on setting this up. My hat's
13 off to everyone that was involved. And I won't
14 forget, however long I got here.

15 Q. Well, and you never forgot and
16 we formed this -- we've become family --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- over this time period. You
19 and, Ms. Lewis, and Charlie and your two
20 sisters, Blanche?

21 A. And Charlotte.

22 Q. Charlotte, and --

23 A. LeRoy --

24 Q. Robert and LeRoy and Stanley and
25 Walter, and Ms. Hilda.

1 A. Ms. Hilda.

2 Q. That's been the greatest gift is
3 getting to know all of you, but I don't know --
4 I think I have told you this before, but after
5 we met you over in the Chippy Chapel --

6 A. Right.

7 Q. -- because this building was
8 destroyed.

9 A. Right.

10 Q. This building was -- in my
11 40-year real estate career it was a mess. It
12 was a hot mess.

13 A. It was.

14 Q. And that's why it went to
15 sheriff sale because the former owners ran out
16 of money in the middle of construction and
17 didn't have the ability to avoid the sheriff
18 sale.

19 A. Uh-huh.

20 Q. So when we came in, we thought,
21 Oh, my gosh. I looked around and I said, What
22 in the world are we going do with this place?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. And then I went and met all of
25 you, and we had multiple meetings and we said,

1 This is our goal. Our goal is to figure out
2 how to reimagine the school so that you can
3 live long enough to see it come back to life.

4 A. Uh-huh.

5 Q. Because we found out so quickly
6 how much it meant to you and all of your fellow
7 students. And then from -- it turned out --
8 went from a real estate project to a major
9 personal goal, personal goal and personal
10 mission to not let you and the fellow students
11 down.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. And that was -- and it was years
14 because we first met in 2012 and we did not
15 figure out -- we had such an important decision
16 to make. And all the meetings that we had, if
17 you remember --

18 A. I remember.

19 Q. -- we would meet together, and
20 we would talk about -- ask you all to remember
21 what it was like to go to school here and share
22 your feelings and recollections of what
23 happened.

24 And, so, how would you describe
25 that process? Did it seem like it took a long

1 time?

2 A. It did, but you know, the
3 question that was asked to us remaining
4 students was, what do we want this building to
5 be? And we all said in unison, "We want it
6 saved," if you remember that.

7 Q. I do.

8 A. And we said -- you said, "What
9 do you want in the building?" We told you
10 that's what you did, pictures, we all went home
11 and looked in our drawers, places like that and
12 scrambled up pictures and documentations and
13 all and shared it with you, so that would help,
14 from our little part, in the reconstruction of
15 this building. And what it is, the great
16 today.

17 Q. And that was the -- that was the
18 hardest part because we didn't want to let you
19 down. That became the mission. We went from
20 real estate to you and your families and the
21 former students because we had to come up with
22 a way.

23 And it was not fast. It was
24 seven years of trying to figure out what should
25 we do. Because we had to go out and raise a

1 couple million dollars from our local, from
2 local sources and partners. Which we bound up,
3 thank goodness for the Governor, Governor
4 Carney and the State of Delaware, and County
5 Executive, Matt Myer, and Venessa Philips from
6 New Castle County, they were our partners and
7 the Longwood Foundation and Laffey-McHugh
8 Foundation, and Welfare Foundation, and lots of
9 individuals --

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. -- came to us, but what we
12 realized was, and this goes to one of the
13 questions we talked about earlier is, what it
14 got to is, how are we going to take this story
15 and make it saleable and impactful in the
16 future of our society and our country? And all
17 of a sudden we realize it's all about you and
18 your fellow students' stories. And hopefully
19 that being an inspiration, because think about
20 it, what -- as we have talked, what is your
21 goal as you sit here right now for the future
22 of this place? What would you like to see
23 happen here or, you know, not physically and
24 spiritually, emotionally. What's your dream?

25 A. My dream for this building to

1 stay as it is and be open to the public, not
2 only for my family, but all the families who
3 are interested to come and have something to be
4 visible. Hearing it is one thing. Seeing it
5 is another. And for them to come and some of
6 us students are left to be able to tell our
7 story to whoever walks through that door.
8 Because hearing from the ones who actually went
9 to the school is a little bit different than
10 hearing from someone that -- who got it out of
11 the books.

12 Q. Right. It's a world of
13 difference.

14 A. And I remember when it first
15 started, the Committee was asking us for
16 pictures. And I had to laugh. I said, Wasn't
17 that many cameras around, so pictures was
18 scarce back then. But we scrambled together
19 and we found some and we are proud of -- I love
20 to show people this room here. This room is
21 very important. To see my parents and all four
22 parents up on the wall will be here forever.
23 And the pictures here, they will be here. I
24 don't have to tell you, you can see it. And
25 that's why, this few of us left. And that's

1 why we are so excited about this place.

2 Whenever you call us, we show up
3 as best we can. Some of us are getting so now
4 we have difficulty walking and what have you,
5 but hook or crook, we will be here. As long as
6 we can. We will be here.

7 Q. Well, when we started out with a
8 lot of help from the community. Our eventual
9 contractors, EDiS, that spent a lot of time
10 with us trying to evaluate the building and
11 figure out what to do and we had -- remember
12 Kevin and Toren --

13 A. Uh-huh.

14 Q. -- from the architects, they
15 figured out how do we take this building that
16 was beaten up and turn it into the -- something
17 that's a wow, which they were able to do.

18 And then we worked with Mitchell
19 Associates with Lou and Madelyn, and also
20 Lanette, because we wanted this to be all about
21 how to tell the story of what happened here in
22 a way that would not only be a museum, because
23 we ran into a little bit of a roadblock,
24 because during that seven-year period, we went
25 around -- different members of our committee

1 went around to different colored schools in the
2 state of Delaware to see what other people had
3 done with them. And this was based on your
4 insight. Go look at Iron Hill.

5 A. Uh-huh.

6 Q. Go look at Buttonwood School, go
7 look at the Booker T. Washington School in New
8 Castle, Christiana.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. So we were listening to you and
11 your fellow students. And what we realized was
12 most of the former colored schools did not have
13 any heartbeat.

14 A. Uh-huh.

15 Q. They were history. There were
16 stories, but you didn't ever need to go back if
17 you went there one time. And that was our
18 biggest lesson. And the Booker T. Washington,
19 we learned that was a senior center and that is
20 really, has a lot of energy behind it. And
21 Iron Hill, which is your, I think you call it
22 your sister school, right?

23 A. Sister school, yes.

24 Q. So you have been involved in
25 Iron Hill over --

1 A. Yes. As a museum. I was
2 involved with them. They would have me go to
3 other schools and talk about the history of
4 this school.

5 Q. Uh-huh.

6 A. That was a few years ago.

7 Q. So we had Iron Hill. And what
8 we realized was, if we go to the fundraising
9 community with an idea that we're just going to
10 make this into a museum, we are probably not
11 going to be successful because it's not easy to
12 raise millions of dollars for a museum.

13 So we really struggled to figure
14 out, how do we take the history and the
15 personal stories and the heart and soul of what
16 we've learned and experienced together and turn
17 that into a center or a vehicle to be able to
18 impact future generations and to inspire future
19 generations. And, so, that's where we came up
20 with the idea for the center. The Center For
21 Diversity, Inclusion and Social Equity, which
22 was the reason we got the funding. Because
23 everybody loved that idea.

24 And it just so happened we came
25 up with that idea in 2019, and then in 2020 all

1 kinds of heck broke loose with George Floyd and
2 Brianna Taylor and all of the social justice
3 issues that came in, so we thought, Oh, my
4 gosh, we prayed that we would pull this off for
5 you, but we were still -- weren't there yet.
6 We came up with our brand and with our concept.
7 But then we had to raise the money, and we had
8 to rebuild the building.

9 So that took us -- we didn't
10 start construction. I think what happened was,
11 and this is the -- that moment. On Brown v.
12 Board of Education Day, on May 17th of 2021,
13 Ukee Washington on his news story at six
14 o'clock caught the quote of you basically
15 saying, "We're going to crawl through the door,
16 we're going to go in the door with a cart, but
17 somehow we're walking through that door again."
18 And that was 2021 as we were still in our old
19 state of the property being a mess. And that
20 became our rallying cry. And if you look above
21 the door, the window, the wall of windows right
22 there, your quote is right there. That became
23 our theme. That became our rallying cry.

24 And by the end of 2021, we were
25 able to raise the money to break ground on

1 December 14th of 2021. And I'll never forget
2 that day because that's also my beloved
3 grandfather's birthday. And so that's forever
4 there.

5 The Governor came for the
6 groundbreaking and then a year later we had a
7 ribbon cutting. And you were able to walk
8 through the doors again with your fellow
9 students.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. And so that was -- and that we
12 joked about it. Do you remember what I said at
13 that time? We were a ten-year overnight
14 success.

15 A. But we succeed.

16 Q. But we succeeded.

17 And the other fun thing that
18 happened, do you remember what happened in May
19 of 2022, when we were in the middle of the
20 construction, we got a call to go down to
21 Washington. What was -- tell me in your words
22 what that whole experience was like.

23 A. That was a great experience. We
24 got to go to the Oval Office and meet the
25 President. And he was very, very kind to us.

1 He took the time out and spent it. If you
2 remember, they all had to go to some kind of
3 meeting. And he told them, "Go ahead." He
4 said, "I'm going to stay here with my Delaware
5 friends." And that meant a lot to all of us.
6 He didn't just rush us through, in fact, he
7 even told me, said, "Sonny, sit in the chair.
8 You're vice president for the day." But no,
9 that was a very, very exciting day for us to go
10 down and see the signing of this being put on
11 the historical register. Never to be touched.
12 Never to be touched.

13 Q. And that was, that was amazing
14 because you were accompanied by five of your
15 other fellow students: Mr. LeRoy, Mr. Robert,
16 Mr. Charlie, Ms. Lewis --

17 A. Charlie --

18 Q. And we all took the Amtrak down
19 to Washington, D.C.

20 A. Took the Amtrak down.

21 Q. With Dr. Lanette, also with
22 Chief Justice Seitz.

23 A. He was with us.

24 Q. He was with us too. And how
25 incredible that his father, Collins J. Seitz,

1 was the chancellor judge who ruled in favor of
2 the Bulahs in the case that became Bulah v.
3 Gebhart and ultimately Brown.

4 A. Yes. That was exciting. It
5 was -- I would -- I -- I'm glad I lived to see
6 that. All those kinds of things, very, very
7 dear to us few students that's left.

8 Any time something comes up
9 about the 107C we try our level best to support
10 it because it is a dream that we never thought
11 we would have.

12 Q. When you -- you're using the
13 letter C after 107. What is the significance
14 of that C?

15 A. Well, to my understanding, there
16 was another 107 down state somewhere below
17 Dover for the white kids. That's why I told
18 them, It's so important when you're talking
19 about the 107, don't forget that C, because
20 that C identifies this school. Because if you
21 don't, you won't know which one we're talking
22 about. I want you to know that you're talking
23 about the Hockessin 107C school. Don't forget
24 that C.

25 Q. That's right. Absolutely. And

1 now 107C is a United States National Park
2 Service Site under Brown v. Board of Education.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. So it will never be destroyed.

5 A. No, no.

6 Q. And our group wants to make sure
7 of that. That it will always be here forever.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And there is also a lot of
10 interesting surprises that we have had along
11 the way of our journey together. And one of
12 them for me was, that no one in the country
13 realizes that Delaware was the first state to
14 desegregate public schools. Brown was in 1954.
15 Chancellor Seitz's ruling in Delaware was in
16 1952. And he ordered the immediate
17 desegregation of schools, public schools in
18 Delaware.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Do you remember what happened
21 there or how they wound up bringing people from
22 this school into the School No. 29, the white
23 school?

24 A. Well, I really don't know all
25 the details of it. And I wouldn't want to

1 fudge it. I wouldn't want to put out something
2 that's not true because I want everything on
3 this school that's said, I want it to be
4 truthful. Make no mistakes. Don't fudge
5 nothing. And don't keep back anything. Bring
6 it, a one-room school, six grades, one teacher
7 and faulty equipment, but we made it and I want
8 the people to know that. Nothing -- was
9 nothing pretty about it. When you look back at
10 it. It was pretty then. It was okay, but when
11 you look back and I want the people to know the
12 truth about 107C. I really do.

13 Q. And 107C is the first school to
14 desegregate --

15 A. Uh-huh.

16 Q. -- in the country?

17 A. Started it all.

18 Q. '52.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. And Shirley Bula was the first
21 African American child to ride a white bus to a
22 white school in the United States. That's
23 pretty amazing history, isn't it?

24 A. Can you imagine how that little
25 child felt? It's just like going to war

1 without a gun. She was the only one on that
2 bus. Only one in that school and everybody
3 looking down at her. Brave little child. More
4 brave was the mother who had enough courage to
5 expose her child to that. You think about
6 that. Takes a lot, the only child you got and
7 you send them out into a world of killers. One
8 way or another. The only child you got and you
9 have faith in God he will protect her. He will
10 protect her. And had it not been for them, no
11 doubt where we would be till today. It
12 wouldn't have move this fast. Granted, later
13 years great things happened, but she was in
14 this world almost by herself. Almost by
15 herself.

16 Q. And there wasn't any secret that
17 it wouldn't be well received by either the
18 black or the white community, was it? That
19 wasn't a shock?

20 A. No, no. People knew this thing
21 would happen and wonder why, what makes you any
22 better than me? You know, I have been in this
23 world all my life, right here in this
24 segregated world and now all of a sudden you
25 want to come and change stuff and stir up

1 trouble. That was the bottom line. She was
2 stirring up trouble. No one stirring up
3 trouble. I want my child to ride the bus.
4 Don't walk that two miles. Can you imagine
5 today, this day in time, little girl walking
6 with all these crazy people out here walking
7 two miles on a lonely road? Can you imagine?

8 Q. She was how old?

9 A. Seven or eight years old.

10 Q. Six or seven.

11 A. A little black girl like that,
12 two miles.

13 Q. Two miles.

14 A. Two miles.

15 Q. Each way?

16 A. Two miles each way up, both
17 ways.

11 Q. So what role did the church, the
12 Chippy Chapel Church play in your lives, too?

13 A. The Chippy Chapel was the only
14 church in the community. It was the only
15 church in the community, so all of you, the
16 black people went to that one church. Most of
17 them walked because there wasn't a lot of cars
18 back then, so it was a very strong instrument
19 in this community. They had two buildings. It
20 was the church, and the next building was
21 called the hall. That's where that picture was
22 taken, in the hall. All the activities was in
23 the hall. Yeah, so that Chippy Church and this
24 school are two of the strongest buildings in
25 this whole community.

1 Q. And from a real estate
2 standpoint, this area was primarily populated
3 by African American families where we are right
4 now.

5 A. It was.

6 Q. How do you remember it?

7 A. I remember it as a great
8 community. It was a lot of houses here then.
9 And people walked everywhere they went. You
10 knew everybody.

11 But my mother -- where we lived
12 was the last house before you get to the bus
13 stop, and on Saturdays, most people rode the
14 bus because it wasn't no malls then. You went
15 into Wilmington, King Street or Market Street.
16 And back then it wasn't a whole lot of concrete
17 and hard surfaces. It was mud if it rained the
18 night before. So those who lived in various
19 areas, they would put on their old shoes and
20 walk across the field through the mud. Then
21 when they got to my mother's house, that's when
22 they would change to the dress shoes and go to
23 the bus and they would take their shoes off and
24 line them on my mother's porch. Sometimes we
25 have five, six pairs of shoes on the porch on

1 Saturdays. They would holler, you know, Ms.
2 Knott, I'm going to leave my shoes.

3 "Go ahead, honey, leave them
4 there."

5 We were there for each other.

6 Whatever one needed, something
7 happened, crisis happened, my mother was the
8 one, went to that family's house and we would,
9 well, I was a kid, but they could all cook and
10 bring food and all to support that family that
11 was going through a crisis. We were there for
12 each other. That's how we had to survive.
13 Nowadays it's a little bit different in some
14 cases.

15 Q. Uh-huh. So if we think back on
16 the time that Shirley and the Bulah Family was
17 going through the litigation with lawyer
18 Redding, I would imagine that it took a
19 tremendous courage for Chancellor Seitz to rule
20 that the two schools were separate but not
21 equal and immediately order desegregation of
22 the public school.

23 A. Yeah. I would imagine he wasn't
24 the most popular man around at that time.

25 Q. This is 1952.

1 A. Yeah. It took a lot for him to
2 say. I can imagine some of his friends
3 probably retaliated against him in one form or
4 another. What are you doing? You know, what
5 do you mean you're forcing my child to ride in
6 the bus with colored kids? So I don't think it
7 was a picnic for him either. I can well
8 imagine that he had his problems, too.

9 Q. And he -- just in terms of
10 serendipity, he and my grandfather who I
11 mentioned earlier, they were dear friends.
12 Chancellor Seitz was a pallbearer in my
13 grandfather's funeral. And I never knew that
14 until I met and heard the story from my aunt
15 who is 89 years old and still alive today. But
16 you can imagine that he and the legal
17 community, he was, he was probably very
18 uncomfortable.

19 A. He probably wasn't the most
20 popular person.

21 Q. Right. And then you had Louis
22 Redding, these are all the people whose courage
23 is indescribable. Lawyer Redding, the Bulahs,
24 Judge Chancellor Seitz and Louis Redding. I
25 hope I'm correct on this. He was the first

1 African American member of the bar in Delaware.

2 A. True.

3 Q. And his partner was Lenny --

4 A. Lenny Williams.

5 Q. The Honorable Leonard Williams.

6 A. Right.

7 Q. Under him and they were
8 pioneers. And that took a lot of courage. And
9 I think Judge Martin was the ninth member of
10 the Delaware bar. And he grew up in South
11 Carolina. So he really knew what it was like
12 to be from the south, too.

13 A. We had one other judge, too.
14 Sydney Clark. You don't hear much about Sydney
15 Clark, but we had a black judge called Sydney
16 Clark in Wilmington. He was all in there with
17 Williams and all of them.

18 Q. Uh-huh. So it took a lot of
19 courage for them to take on this case.

20 A. Yes, I would imagine it wasn't a
21 picnic for them in all cases. I wouldn't
22 imagine that.

23 Q. So thinking about, as we're here
24 right now, what are the most important messages
25 and thoughts you would like to share with folks

1 going forward about 107C and how it can be such
2 a positive impact on their lives as it was on
3 yours?

4 A. Well, not much left for me to
5 say that I haven't already said, however, I
6 would encourage all people to come to this
7 school, bring your children and your
8 grandchildren. Expose them to the history
9 that's on these walls here. And if you're
10 coming, let one of us students know that you're
11 coming and we will do our level best to be here
12 and explain what those pictures mean on the
13 wall because just seeing them might not have
14 the impact that we want them to have.

15 So give us a holler and we will
16 do our best to support you because we want this
17 school to stand out so that everyone will know
18 about it.

19 Put it on Channel 6, channel
20 whatever, we want this school to be known.
21 Don't let it just lay dormant.

22 If you want to have some
23 activities here, call somebody up and I'm
24 pretty sure we will open the doors for you as
25 another way to expose. We want to do all we

1 can to keep the 107C exposed to the community.

2 Okay? Thank you.

3 Support us in that way and we
4 will be very happy.

5 Q. The last part, Don't wait --

6 A. And don't wait too long. And
7 don't wait too long. You're looking at an old
8 man here. Don't wait too long.

9 Q. Oh, I love you, Sonny. You are
10 a national treasure.

11 Thank you for honoring us with
12 your amazing perspective.

13 A. Thank you for the opportunity.
14 Thank you. Be blessed.

15 Q. Thank you all.

16 (Interview concluded.)

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