

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH JUDY BROWN-ALLEN

CONDUCTED AND EDITED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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KSU Oral History Series, No. 118  
Interview with Judy Brown-Allen  
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott  
Friday, 6 December 2013  
Location: Alumni House, Kennesaw State University

TS: Today the interview is with Judy Brown-Allen, the recipient of the 2013 KSU Alumni Association Betty L. Siegel Faculty Member of the Year Award. Judy, why don't you begin by talking about where you came from—your background, where you went to school, and things like that?

JB: I graduated from a little small country town called Lamarque, Texas and it's just outside Texas City and Galveston, Texas. I grew up with eight siblings. There were a total of eight of us. My mom was a homemaker. She stayed at home and had less than a high school education. My dad was in the military, and he ended up getting hurt in the military. They purchased a little, small home for us. After my parents died, I found the log of the house payments they were making, and the payments each month were like \$16.83. I couldn't believe it. It was just a little shotgun house with two small bedrooms. Four girls shared [one], and four boys shared the back bedroom. We had one small bathroom, and then my parents had their bedroom.

TS: One small bathroom for the whole family?

JB: Now I live in a house with six bedrooms and four bathrooms, and we still can't manage with two kids! It's quite interesting. I grew up there and got my BS degree from Prairie View A&M [Agricultural & Mechanical University], my master's degrees from Texas Southern in Houston, and then my jurist doctorate from Atlanta Law School here in Georgia.

TS: Okay. Prairie View, I didn't....

JB: It's called Texas A&M. Texas A&M took it over so it's Texas A&M at Prairie View. They took over the college some years ago.

TS: What does M.C.S. stand for? That's what's on the [KSU Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice] website for your master's degree.

JB: Oh, Master of Clinical Sociology. My parents were religious people. They were strict on us, but very loving. We lived in a very loving environment.

TS: They must have encouraged you to go on in school.

JB: They did. Education was key in my family. My dad believed in education. He died when I was five years old. I saw my father die. He needed a kidney

transplant, and the only person that matched in the family was my fifteen year old brother at the time. He was afraid to give him a kidney, and my father said that was fine. Having a kidney transplant back then was like having open heart surgery. Now it's like having your tonsils removed. My sister and I wanted to say hello to him because he came downstairs at the VA hospital. We went there like clockwork every weekend to see him. He was on dialysis. We thought he looked painfully thin. I had a nickel, and she had a dime, and we decided to fatten him up by getting some cookies out of the vending machine. We took them upstairs, and we saw them working on my dad. He was passing, and I just remember him having his eyes open and looking at us while they were doing the compressions on his chest.

Nobody paid attention to us because they were so busy trying to save him. I remember my sister, being a little older than I was, and just running through this glass door. It just shattered. But I just stood there and watched the whole thing. I think it affected my life because I stopped talking. I wouldn't talk. I was afraid of the dark, and I didn't sleep in the dark until I was in college. I would have a nightlight in college. It was quite embarrassing. Then I had a roommate who went over and pulled it out of the socket. I remember crying, and she turned the light back on. She asked what was going on, and I shared my story with her. We became best friends. So the first time I slept in the dark was when I went away to college; true story.

TS: Wow. What year did you get your bachelor's degree?

JB: I got my bachelor's degree in 1987. My grandmother and my mother walked across the field on graduation day and said, "This is a beautiful thing, but we think you can do more. You need to go further." I was trying to run from them, but of course they caught up with me. I decided to immediately work on my master's degree and got it in less than a year by CLEP'ing out of classes and graduated with my master's in '88.

TS: Wow. So clinical sociology, you obviously wanted to work with people.

JB: Yes. I love people, I'm a people person.

TS: When did you get your law degree?

JB: On graduation day my grandmother and my mother walked across the field again and said, "You know, we think you can go a little further." I started running from them again and ended up going to law school on a scholarship. I wrote a paper quite some time ago. I saw this essay contest, and it was called How to Build a Better America Together. I won some money, and that was how I was able to put some gas in the car and go off to college. It's a really interesting story. When I graduated from high school, I went to college in my mother's station wagon. My father was deceased by then, and I had two pair of jeans to my name, five t-shirts,

a sweatshirt, a dollar store umbrella, a red coat from Goodwill, and I remember having a yard sale suitcase with tape on the handle. I just loaded it up with everything that I had, and I got ready to get in the car. I remember the expression on my mother's face. She looked really worried. We got in, and she started driving. I looked over at the gas gauge, and it was almost on E. So we made it there almost on fumes.

When we got there, my mother said to me, "I have some money I've been saving for you." I was excited! I couldn't wait for her to leave so I could spend whatever she had given me. The first thing I planned on doing as soon as she was out of sight was getting a perm for my hair, so I could look like everybody else. I had a big Afro. I wanted get makeup because I wasn't allowed to wear makeup [at home]. I wanted to get some fancy shoes because I only had one pair of shoes. I held out my hand, and she pulled something out of her pocket. It changed my life what she put in my hand. She dug so deeply in her pocket that it had lint inside of what she had given me. She put it in my hand. She put cash in one hand, and in the other hand she put a Bible, and she said, "If you can't get in touch with me, you can always call on Him," meaning God because she was a religious person. I'm sorry, Dr. Scott (tearing up).

TS: That's all right.

JB: It just changed my life. When I opened my hand when she drove away—she said, "This is all that I have."

TS: Did she have any money to get home though?

JB: No, she didn't. Years later I found out that she ran out of gas by the side of the road, and she had to depend on the kindness of strangers. I'm so sorry. I wasn't expecting to do this. I lost my mother at Thanksgiving so I'm kind of emotional.

TS: I guess so.

JB: When she drove away I opened my hand, and inside was three dollars.

TS: That's all she had?

JB: With lint inside—which to me represented how deeply she had to dig in her pockets to give me her last dollars. I ran behind the station wagon. I didn't know if she could hear me or not, but I was yelling at the top of my voice that I wouldn't fail, and I wouldn't come home empty handed. It changed my life. I'm sorry. (crying)

TS: So you didn't get the perm and the shoes.

JB: I didn't get the perm; I didn't get the shoes. Instead, I have that three dollars today. I didn't spend a dime of it. I ate what they had in the cafeteria, and I just somehow made it. I did have a skill because my mom was very smart, although she didn't have education. I could play the piano, and that's how I made it through college. I played the piano for churches, I played at weddings, I played at funerals, and people would pay me money. So that's how I made it, because of that skill. I just remember the day of my father's funeral, my mom wanted to empower each of us. The way that she empowered us was she lined us up on the sofa—I can't believe all eight of us fit on that sofa—but she lined us up, and I was the youngest, and she said....

TS: You were the youngest of the eight? Wow, babies of the family are supposed to be irresponsible aren't they?

JB: Not me. I'm the responsible one. I got to see everybody else make their mistakes, and so I learned from them.

TS: So you were lined up on the sofa and....

JB: She lined us up, gave us a piece of paper and a pencil, and said, "Write down three things that you want to do, and I'll make sure you do those things." The point of giving us this paper was so that we could stay busy. My mom knew that she had to not stay at home any longer, but she needed to find a job. Because she didn't have an education, she could only clean houses for a living. I wrote down—I couldn't even spell it—piano. I was five, and I wanted to play the piano. My sister looks over at me and says, "Well, that's just stupid because we're poor, and we don't have a piano, and who's going to give you lessons." I remember my mom saying, "You let me worry about that."

TS: The churches have pianos.

JB: What she did was she found this church; it was a white Baptist church in our town. She went to the minister's wife, and she said, "I will clean the pews if you will teach my daughter how to play the piano." That's what she did, and so that's how I learned how to play the piano. My brother wanted to be a pharmacist, so she found the guy in town that was a pharmacist, and she said, "My son wants to be a pharmacist. He can cut your grass outside the store; he can wash your car." My sister wanted to be a doctor. She went to Dr. Twitwell in town, and she said—he was a Jewish doctor, and he was the only doctor in town that would actually wait on black people.

TS: Really? It's incredible, isn't it?

JB: He was an incredible person; he really was. Mom didn't have money, and I remember he would write down a log of the shots because she was a very proud woman. We'd go, and he'd give us all the shots that we needed for school. She

would pay him like fifty cents whenever she could, and he would accept that. She would iron his shirts for him to pay for the medicine. I just remember feeling like an only child if you can believe that. I felt like an only child because she made us all feel like that. When I got married and I left home, she gave me this binder with awards and different things I had done. I couldn't believe she had this. It was first place. I won a Snickers bar for drawing a picture of a witch. I won first place, and she gave that to me, and I just cried all the way back to Georgia. My brother played football. Also on the list I said I wanted to sing in the choir. I remember being embarrassed about her because she didn't have fancy clothes like the other moms. So she came to see me sing, and it was in the middle of the summer. It was really hot, and I remember her having a trench coat on. I still have that trench coat today. She had it all tied up, and I was looking at her like, she's sweating, why does she have that coat on? It was because she had her uniform on under, and she didn't want to embarrass me.

She said, "I love you." She pointed to her watch, and she was eating a sandwich, and she said, "I have to check on your brother." My brother said she would come to the football field. She didn't have money to get inside, so she stood at the gate. He would be running down the field, and she'd wave to him, and she'd say, "I love you. I've got to go and check on the other ones." We started telling these stories to each other as we got older, and we were shocked that she did this. Here I am, I'm running, driving like a bat out of hell trying to get here because my niece whom I have—my sister died, so I have her daughter; she's a senior in high school and we got custody this year—and she forgot her instrument, so I'm running to take her instrument and trying to get here, and I don't know how my mom did it, but she managed. So that's my background.

TS: Well, that really explains a lot that I was going to ask you later on about how you got involved with trying to help students with financial problems.

JB: I had financial problems, and I had a lot of people to help me. When I stopped talking after seeing my father die, Ollie Jackson, a teacher at Highlands Elementary school, took notice of me. Back then, you could use corporal punishment with kids. So she'd take a ruler, and she'd hit my hand every day after lunch. Because I wouldn't talk, she said, "When you get tired of me hitting your hand, you grab this ruler, and you tell me to stop." I just thought she was so mean. She would take me every day after lunch, and this particular day, she wet the ruler, and she hit me real hard. I grabbed it, and I said, "Stop!" She said, "I've got you now. I can work with that." She stayed in my life until she passed and she was a Delta. She's from Lamarque too, and she passed before I got my JD.

TS: I'm not sure corporal punishment was all that bad back then.

JB: I have to agree. Well, not at the time that I was receiving it though!

- TS: No. Did you have Pell grants and scholarships and things like that?
- JB: I had Pell grants which covered a lot. I had a scholarship. I had Ms. Washington at church back home. This lady, I guess, must have been on government assistance or something. She was an elderly person. Every Sunday I'd go home, and she had her money in a handkerchief. She would open it up and—I didn't want to take it—she would count quarters that she had been saving for me. She'd stack like five and ten dollars [of quarters], and she'd hand it to me in an envelope. She'd say, "Now, you spend this wisely." And that's how I made it. I made it because so many people invested in me.
- TS: Wow. Okay, so your undergraduate degree is Prairie View A&M University [1987], and then your master's is Texas Southern [1988].
- JB: And then [I earned] my JD at Atlanta Law [1992].
- TS: Wasn't Prairie View traditionally a black college?
- JB: It was predominately black with, when I was there, maybe five white students.
- TS: Had it consolidated with Texas A&M?
- JB: Yes. It's completely different. When I was there there were three girls in a room. We had one bathroom we shared with three other girls. It wasn't a co-ed dorm at all. When I was there we didn't have sidewalks, so we would walk on boards in the rain to get to class, and it'd be muddy. They had one dining hall, and it was probably the size of this building [the Alumni House], and we all ate there, breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- TS: It was already consolidated with Texas A&M at that time?
- JB: Before I left. It was during that time. We had so many financial issues with it being a black institution that Texas A&M eventually bought us out. [Ed. Note: According to the campus website, Prairie View was established in 1876. Its name was changed on August 27, 1973, from Prairie View Normal and Industrial College to Prairie View A&M University. At the same time it officially became an independent unit of the Texas A&M University System. However, it did not receive its fair share of state funding until the voters of Texas approved a constitutional amendment on November 6, 1984, that allowed Prairie View to share in the revenues of the Permanent University Fund, an endowment originally created in 1876 for the benefit of the University of Texas and Texas A&M. The 1984 constitutional amendment also committed the state to making Prairie View a "first class" institution.]
- TS: Was that a good thing?

JB: I think so. I think it's a good thing for the students that are there now. We didn't have a lot of things that we needed like chalk, books....

TS: And we're talking about the 1980s.

JB: Yes, but we had incredible professors. We had people that invested in us long after class was over. I think—I know—that's where I get the way that I am because so many people invested in me. They saw something in me that I couldn't see. I try to give a piece of that back to students. I feel like after surviving stage 4 cancer that God has a purpose in my life.

TS: When did your cancer come?

JB: When I got married in 1990, not long after that I began to feel sick. I graduated in 1992 with my jurist doctorate. My health continued to decline. I started losing my hair. Everybody was saying it was due to stress.

TS: You were very young at that time.

JB: Yes, I started just having night sweats, and there was no reason for it. I was too young to be going through menopause. I didn't have health insurance, so I was afraid to go to the doctor. When we got married, I had health insurance through my husband's company. He said, "You're going to the doctor, and you're going right away."

TS: You were getting sick before you got married?

JB: I started getting sick right after.

TS: But you had insurance by then?

JB: Well, I had insurance as soon as I got married. Of course, that's not why I got married. I don't want to make it sound like that!

TS: Oh no, but good timing! You had a couple of kids afterwards.

JB: I have one, and then I have custody of my sister's daughter. My sister died at 37 from breast cancer, so I have her little girl. My mother took custody—my sister was married, her husband.... it's a long story—but my mother had custody. So now I have custody her senior year. And she's coming to Kennesaw.

TS: Great!

JB: Yes, she has a 3.8 GPA. She's a smart kid. So I started getting sick, and in 1995 I was diagnosed with stage 4 terminal breast cancer.



TS: So you already have a child by then?

JB: No. My son Chemo was born while I was going through this. True story—black people and names—how they name their kids—you go to Paris, your child’s Paris.

TS: What does Chemo think about that?

JB: Well, growing up, he didn’t like it so much when he had kids teasing him. When “Finding Nemo” came out they would say Nemo instead of Chemo. So he would come home crying, saying, “They’re calling me Nemo at school!” Now that he knows the origin of his name, he’s proud of it, he’s quite proud of it.

TS: Good for him.

JB: Yes, he feels like its unique, and he takes a lot of pride in it. He makes sure people pronounce it right.

TS: He was born in ’95?

JB: No he was born in ’97.

TS: So he’s about sixteen then.

JB: He’s sixteen. He’s a junior in high school. When I was going through the treatment, I found out I was pregnant. My doctor said, “You need to have an abortion because we have to keep going.” But because of my religious background, I said no. My mother, who is quite religious, said, “God will forgive you.” I said no.

TS: I’m sure she was right.

JB: She was saying, “I don’t want to lose you, and I don’t even know who this kid is.”

TS: Right.

JB: My husband said the same thing, “I don’t want to lose you.” But I said no. I felt like I was on an island by myself because....

TS: No one was supporting you.

JB: I had the support of one woman, Mary Hastings. We lived in a condo before buying our house, and she was on the board of directors for Countryside. She was from this little small country town, and she had never seen black people before. We became good friends, and she supported me. She said, “You have this baby

and you don't listen to them." I really needed her in my ear at the time. We became really close. She loves Chemo.

TS: What does your husband do?

JB: He's a supervisor at a little chemical plant called PolyOne.

TS: What's his name?

JB: Billy Ray, country boy.

TS: Billy Ray Allen.

JB: Yes. He's a good guy. He took care of me when I couldn't take care of myself. I was studying for the bar, and I got sick in the tub. I stayed in the tub for almost ten or twelve hours. He left that morning to go to work, and he came home. Normally, he comes in, and I see him right away. Well, he sat down, and he got something to drink. I could hear him open up a can of soda or something, and then I heard the refrigerator door close. I couldn't yell for help. I was in the tub, and this tumor just sort of pushed out through my chest walls, it was so large. They said it was the size of a grapefruit. I was just in the tub relaxing that morning, and I started feeling like I was going to faint. So all I could do was take my foot and push the stopper out because I thought, if I pass out, I'll drown. He finally decided that he needed to come into the restroom, and he found me. I went to Kennestone at four o'clock that evening, and I stayed there until four in the morning with tests. Then the doctor comes in and says, "I've got good news and bad news." I said, "Okay, give us the good news first." He said, "Well, the good news is you still have time to get your affairs in order."

TS: Gosh.

JB: My husband, who was a military police officer, a very strong kind of guy, just walks backwards. I'm watching him walk backwards. He walks into the wall, and he slides down and hits the floor. I started laughing!

TS: He was a military police officer at that time?

JB: No, before.

TS: Oh he had been.

JB: I just started laughing like I was out of my head because this wasn't happening to me. It wasn't real. I just started laughing like a crazy person. I didn't want to deal with it, I guess. I didn't want to be there. I wasn't hearing this. I touched the doctor, and it shocked me because I could actually feel his arm. I said, "Oh, my God; this is really happening; you're really telling me this. Well, what's the

bad news?” The nurses are trying to help my husband up off the floor, and he said, “The bad news is that you have stage 4 breast cancer. It’s spread; I think it’s in your neck and lymph nodes and....”

TS: Stage 4 because you hadn’t been to the doctor because you didn’t have insurance.

JB: Yes, didn’t have any money. He said, “I think you have anywhere from six months to a year to live.”

TS: But you hadn’t had the symptoms before then?

JB: I didn’t know what the symptoms were. I knew my hair was coming out. I knew that I was having night sweats. I knew that I felt tired all the time. I didn’t know why. I just assumed that it was because I was studying sixteen-hour days. I had finished school, and I was studying for the bar. It had to be that I was just stressed out from that. So when I finally went, that’s when I found out.

TS: Well, the doctor was wrong.

JB: Yes, he was wrong. I went back, and I told him he was wrong. I said, “I’m still here.” But I can’t adopt a child. We wanted to have five kids, and I can’t adopt a child because of my diagnosis, and he won’t change it. I said, “Well, I’m still here.” He said, “I’m not going to change it.” So, if at one point he changes it, and I can adopt a child, I’m too old now. My sixteen-year-old is like having five!

TS: So you’re glad you don’t have eight like your mother did!

JB: I have two teenagers. I have my niece; I have my son; that’s enough. I’m done.

TS: Well, you’re doing a full-time job here too, so that makes a difference. Maybe I should ask, why did you decide to go to law school?

JB: Gosh, that’s an emotional story. Dr. Scott, you ask great questions! When I was growing up in my town, this boy stole a piece of candy from the drugstore. He was an African American boy. He must have been maybe fourteen. He was a teenager, and he ended up dead the next day. He was arrested by white police officer....

TS: For a candy bar?

JB: For stealing a piece of candy. He ended up in jail. The next day they said he hung himself in the jail cell. He was a kid that didn’t have a lot of guidance. His mother was deceased. His father, I believe—I don’t know this for a fact, but people said—that he was an alcoholic and didn’t take care of him. He just sort of took care of himself. His fingernails were just all torn off where he was trying to tear the rope from his neck.

TS: So he's not hanging himself.

JB: He was not hanging himself. It was like nobody cared, but everybody knew. All of the churches were talking about it in town and what we could do and this shouldn't be happening. My father was sick at that time, but I remember my mom saying that we should do something—we can't allow this to happen and not do something. So we made signs. I remember we had a table maybe half the size of this [conference table], and we were all gathered around it.

TS: So about five or six feet long.

JB: So we got cardboard boxes, and we cut the bottom off because we didn't have money for poster board. We made signs, each of us, with sticks, and she took us to the police station. They were all white police officers standing out there. We pulled up there, and nobody else in town showed up. We were sitting there waiting for what seemed like hours for people to show up, and my mom said, "I don't think anybody's going to come." My brother said, "Well, what are we going to do?" She said, "Nothing."

I had the biggest mouth in the South. I don't remember saying this, but my sisters and brothers said that I said, "Well, if we don't do anything, then it means that they're right." My mom said, "I can't live with that." So we got out of the car, and she said, "I don't know what's going to happen. They may take me, and if they do.... [She told each of us where we were supposed to go until she got out]." We got out with these picket signs. I was five. We marched up and down the sidewalk in front of them, and they just laughed at us and went back in, but we felt so powerful. We felt like we had accomplished something, like we could move mountains. I was always made to believe that I could move a mountain. It just took one person. So we got in the car, and we went to the Dairy Queen, and we got an ice cream cone. We talked about what we had done and how brave we were. When we went to church the next Sunday, everybody thought we were crazy, and some people thought we were heroes. But she always made us feel special.

TS: So you wanted to help people.

JB: I wanted to help people, so that's why I did it.

TS: Did you ever practice law after that?

JB: I did. I started with Legal Aid in Cobb County when it was that little, white building on the Square. It looked like a little house. Actually, it looked like a little church. I started there, and I saw some things that I don't know I should share.

TS: You can cut it out later if you want to.

JB: Yes. I saw some things that I didn't like such as folders that were labeled with "WF" and "WM" and "BF" and "BM" for white female, white male....

TS: We're talking the 1990s?

JB: Yes, not a lot of changes at that point.

TS: Where were these folders that you were seeing?

JB: I started out as an intern there.

TS: Oh, you mean the Legal Aid Society had them labeled by race and gender?

JB: Yes, in Cobb County. I asked, "What does this mean?" I knew what it meant, but I wanted clarification. So I went and said, "What does this mean? Why are all the "BF's" and "BM's" in the drawer?" All the others would stack them up on my desk about this high, and they're like, "Don't pay attention to those; no big deal." So I started taking them out. Whenever I would get a new stack, I was told to take those and just throw them in the drawer. I couldn't do it. I started going through them. I didn't care what was on them. I put them in order of the dates, and I started working on them and getting things resolved. I got all of them, not some of them, all of them resolved. I'm probably a better lawyer than I am a teacher, but I fell into teaching because my oncologist was saying, "You need to do something that's not stressful." Of course, teaching is just as stressful as law, but I do a lot of pro bono work. I take cases whenever I need money. I don't make a lot of money teaching, but I love it. I would do it for free, but don't....

TS: So you're still taking cases?

JB: Yes, but the last case that I had was a student that got arrested. I actually had three students at KSU to get arrested. Kyle, I won't say his last name, got eight felony convictions on campus driving in a car with a gun, and he was innocent.

TS: He didn't have a gun?

JB: His friend had a gun that he didn't know had the gun. I believed him because he worked with the students at the NAACP, and I got a chance to know this young man and his mother. He was a senior. His mother sent his high school friend that he hadn't seen in years to Kennesaw, so they could get back together because they were good friends. Well, Kyle went in one direction, and the friend went in the opposite direction, and the mother wasn't aware of that. The friend was on probation. He was on campus driving with two guns in a duffle bag, and he had marijuana in the duffle bag. The campus police pulled them over because Kyle

was going too fast, and he said, “Can I search your car?” He said, “Sure you can search my car.”

So they put one in the back, the kid that didn’t belong here, and they put him in the front. The kid in the back was streetwise, and he said, “Oh, the guns and the dope aren’t mine.” He [Kyle] looked at him and said, “The guns and the what?” And they put it on him because it was his car. Kyle asked if I could help, and I said, “You’re a student here. I’m a professor here. I can’t do this.” So I found somebody that could help him, and we worked together to help him. He’s in grad school at Georgia State, and all the counts were dropped. This kid took the wrap because his mother and his father got involved, and he talked to his parents, and they went to court and said they knew it was his, and he knew that it was his. That’s how he got off—and then just recently two more cases and then my neighbor, so whenever people need me, I help.

TS: How did you get to Kennesaw?

JB: I bought a house out here because I heard that you could get more land [per dollar invested]. I was working at Mercer University. I had just gotten a nomination as an adjunct for the Teaching Excellence Award. Then the vice president’s office called to say that I couldn’t participate in that because I wasn’t [a full-time faculty member]. He said, “I’m shocked because this has never happened before for an adjunct [to be nominated]. I didn’t know you weren’t a full-time professor, so you can’t receive this honor. But we want to let you know that you won.” I was like, “Well, that makes me feel great. Can I be full time now?” “We don’t have any positions, but we do have something in Macon if you’re interested.” I said, “Of course I’m interested.” I’m not from here, so I did not know that Macon was....

TS: Oh, yes, a long way away.

JB: An hour and forty-five minutes away. I said, “I can’t do it. I have a small child.” He said, “Well, that’s the only position we have available for full time.” I’m going to share this with you. Lana knows.

TS: Lana Wachniak, you’re former department chair at KSU?

JB: She knows because we’ve become good friends. I didn’t have an interview here. I picked up the phone, and I called Donna Walls. Do you remember Donna with the blonde hair, real pretty, the secretary?

TS: Yes, of course.

JB: Well, I called Donna, and she has this amazing spirit. She’s just happy and bubbly. I said, “I’m a professor. I’m looking for a full-time position.” She said, “Oh wow, your timing is impeccable. We’re interviewing people now.” I asked

who the department head was, and she said, “Dr. Lana Wachniak.” I threw on a suit, combed my hair, put some make-up on, and I showed up with my Vita in hand. I walked in the door [of the Sociology Department on the first floor of the old Social Sciences Building], and she said, “Hi, I’m Donna.” I said, “Hi, I’m Judy Allen, and I have an interview today.” She said, “You do? Well, you’re not on the list.” I didn’t say anything, and so she asked Lana, and Lana said, “Well, I don’t see her on the list anywhere. She doesn’t have an interview, does she?” But she said, “Since you’re here, we’ll go ahead and interview you.”

So they interviewed me, and then she sent me upstairs to [associate dean] Dr. [Akanmu] Adebayo. He interviewed me, and he said, “If you were to have this opportunity, if we gave this to you, what will you do?” I said, “If you gave me this opportunity, every day that I come to campus I’ll give 110 percent.” He said, “Okay, that’s impressive. Go back downstairs to Dr. Wachniak.” [By the time I got] back to her [office], she [was talking to him] on her speakerphone, and he said, “If you don’t hire her, you’re crazy.” I heard this going in the room, so when I walked in and sat down, she said, “Pick your classes.” I picked my classes, and she said, “You’ll have to do a demonstration at some point, but [we] don’t have time to do it [now].” So she gave me two classes, and she asked, “Do you want more?” I said, “No, I’ll just do these two.” I did incredible. The next semester she called me in, and I thought, “Oh, gosh, I’m going to be fired.” She said, “I want to offer you a two-year contract.” They had the two-year contracts then. So I signed the two-year contract. I believe, but I’m not certain, that I’m the first senior lecturer on campus.

TS: Yes, that’s relatively new to have senior lecturers.

JB: Yes, so there are two of us, a guy in history, and I am one of the others. The reason I didn’t go for the assistant professor position was because of my health. I just didn’t know—and I shared that with her—I declined insurance, and I said, “If I get sick, then I can just bow out.” I probably shot myself in the foot because I do everything times ten what everybody else does anyway, but I just wasn’t sure, and I was trying to protect her for giving me the opportunity if something came up. So that’s how I ended up here. Funny story! But she told me years later, “I knew you didn’t have an interview, but I had interviewed so many people, and you were the most impressive that I’d seen.” So she knew. So that’s how I ended up here.

TS: Did you start out as a lecturer and then became senior lecturer?

JB: Adjunct. I started out as adjunct, and then I got a two-year contract.

TS: Oh, the two-year contract was as a senior lecturer?

JB: Just a two-year contract.

TS: Just as a lecturer?

JB: It wasn't even a lecturer position. It was just an instructor for two years. But I didn't do the two-year contract. Before I finished the next semester Lana came up with the lecturer position. It was a year-to-year position. It was temporary, but the school was growing. I took over the internship program, and it continued to grow. Then later I became a senior lecturer.

TS: Right. Senior lecturer means you don't ever have to go up for tenure.

JB: Well, the way that this was created was so that I could have a sense of job security. In a sense I do have tenure. I know that I'll have a position. It's not a year-to-year; it's more permanent. That's why it was created for me.

TS: Sounds pretty good.

JB: I think so. I don't have to jump through all the hoops that other people have to do.

TS: At Mercer you couldn't get the teacher award because you were adjunct. Here at Kennesaw, can a senior lecturer get a Distinguished Teaching or Service or Research Award?

JB: [Yes, after five consecutive years of full-time service]. The reason that I went from an adjunct to a two-year contract was because a group of students nominated me for National Faculty of the Year for Teaching and Service.

TS: Is this in sociology or just anything?

JB: I don't know. It's just a national award, and I don't know exactly where it comes from because I didn't receive it.

TS: But you got nominated at least.

JB: I was honored to be nominated. My department wanted to give me permanency here by offering me the full-time contract because by then other places were beginning to call our department. I was still job-hunting, and they didn't want me to leave. So they offered me the two-year contract, and that's how I ended up here.

TS: So the lecturer position was a brand new thing we were creating at that time.

JB: Brand new thing that they were creating, and I was the first person in our department that got offered that position. I was told to apply for lecturer. There were certain requirements that I had to meet in order to be a senior lecturer. I met those requirements five years later and was promoted to senior lecturer.



TS: It seems like you can only stay a lecturer so long, but you can stay senior lecturer forever.

JB: Yes, so that's me.

TS: So, in effect, that was getting your tenure by becoming a senior lecturer.

JB: Absolutely.

TS: Okay, you're teaching a multitude of courses it looks like.

JB: I am.

TS: Well, why don't you talk about the courses that you teach?

JB: I teach Intro to Sociology here at KSU. I love it because that's my opportunity to get students to change their major from "I don't know what I really want to be" to Sociology. I believe—I know—that our department has grown because of the Intro classes that I teach. I have a lot of students saying, "Dr. Allen, because of you I changed my major." I love that class, and I can see when I get them, when they have that "aha" moment. I love that, so I just feed off that. I also teach American Family, which is one of my favorite courses here at KSU. I teach Intro to Gerontology, the study of aging, love that course too. There's not a whole lot that I don't like, but I think the course that I probably contribute the most to the lives of students has been the Coordinator of the Internship program because I help the students make the bridge from the classroom to the work force. As a result of that, they give back to KSU. I help them to get jobs, and they give back to KSU.

TS: Where are our sociology students doing internships?

JB: Everywhere. I have over close to 300 approved intern sites that I personally got myself by inviting people out for coffee and inviting people to lunch, which is why I've gained so much weight here at KSU! [If] you go to lunch, you might as well have dessert, right! But I would take people there, and I would say, "Try to think back when you were in college, and what that felt like." I was finding that a lot of employers were saying that our students looked great on paper only, and I wasn't satisfied with that, but it was like a reality check for us in our department. I wanted to try to figure out what we could do differently or better, so that they could have a chance once they graduated. I asked, "What are you guys looking for?" They said, "Well, I'd rather hire somebody with a 2.0 GPA that has experience than someone with a 4.0 GPA that has none."

I created a database of [businesses and organizations] that were willing to give students internship opportunities, so they were already approved. I had that

database, so every semester the students could go to it and select five different sites that they were interested in and go after them. We've been successful so much that Dr. [Daniel S.] Papp has asked me to train through Career Services other departments how to do an internship program. It's very structured. Students have to....

TS: Sounds like you're working harder than anybody else.

JB: I am working hard; I really am. But I love it. I would do it for free, but don't put that in the transcript! I really would do this for free; that's how much I love it. I get to go to a job that I actually love, every day.

TS: On the website it says a 91 percent success rate. What does that mean?

JB: I don't like those percentages, and I don't think that they are accurate. Those are numbers that Career Services created. We have a very high success rate. It's not 91 percent because Career Services counts the co-op positions as well [as internships]. How can you count co-op positions [with] internships? I'll tell you the difference between the two. Internship students are seeking out employers, and they go there, and they work, and some are hired, and some are not. We have a large percentage that [receive internships], even if it's unpaid. A co-op is a student having a job, and I ask the students to write a one-page description of their job duties. If it doesn't fit our sociology criteria, I always ask the student to be trained for another position. For example, we had a student who was a cashier at QuikTrip. I said to the student, "That's great, but that's not what we're looking for for sociology. When you have your college degree, we're expecting you to do more." So I will allow you to [receive] co-op [credit], but you have to be trained to be an assistant or a store manager."

I have several students that had jobs like that, working [for example] at Bank of America as a bank teller, and now they're in the mortgage company as a manager. So I always [tell] the students, "You can use your job if your employer is willing to train you in a higher paying position once you graduate, and if they're willing to help you bridge into that position." I've been really successful doing that. Those are the numbers that Career Services and Sociology are adding together to get the big numbers. I know it's not accurate because although they go to a higher position they already have the job in the first place. So how can we count that? If we're going to be honest, how can we count that? But what they're doing, they're saying, "Yes, but Judy they're not cashiers any more; they're managers." But they were still employed, and so if we're going to be honest, let's not count that. I'll give you an example. This semester I had [about] fifteen students, and out of the fifteen, thirteen of those students have jobs. Now some of the jobs are part-time that will eventually become full-time, but they're hired if they do well. So I think our program is very successful, probably one of the most successful on campus.

TS: I'd say, particularly in the liberal arts! Why don't you start telling the stories about how you started helping students on campus with financial problems?

JB: I was an adjunct professor [with an office] in the [Sturgis] Library because there was no place to put me [in the Social Sciences Building]. You know the little study cubicles? My office was so small that students had no privacy. I had to open the door, and they'd put their chair in the doorway, so that I could talk to them. It was so funny! I did have a window. Every day I saw this kid pass by. As an adjunct, you don't get to pick your schedule, so you're there every day. I would be there, and I would see him walk by with his heavy backpack that was puffy. I thought, that doesn't look like books are in there. It's so soft looking. It looks like maybe pillows or clothes, towels, or something.

TS: His worldly possessions.

JB: I was really busy, but one day I decided to follow him to see where he was going. I followed him over to the old [part of the Carmichael] Student Center where they used to have the cafeteria.

TS: They've still got Chick-fil-A in there.

JB: Yes. It's a tiny one. I watched him. They used to have a pizza thing over there. I don't know if they still do or not.

TS: No, not pizza.

JB: It was some sort of pizza thing. When I was there, he pretended to be a waiter, like he was cleaning up the tables. I watched him, and I thought, "Okay, he has a job." Then I saw these two girls leave pizza on their plate, and he picked it up and rolled it up and went under the little staircase thing, and he ate it. I cried. I went to the bathroom, and I started crying. I thought, "How could something like this be happening on the campus of KSU when we have so much? How could this be happening?" I didn't even know if he was a student or a worker, so I came out, dried my eyes, and tried to find him. But I couldn't find him. As soon as that semester ended and the next semester [began], the same kid pops in my classroom and sits in the front row. I was shocked. I said, "If this isn't a sign from God, I don't know what is." It was like a lightning bolt.

When I saw him, I looked at him, and he had his pants hanging down with his underwear showing with the baseball/basketball shorts. He had a durag on his head, and he had a gold chain on that was obviously not real, kind of faded. He was sharp. He was smart. No book, no paper, no pen. When I started talking, I said, "You need to write this down." He said, "Oh I forgot my bag." So somebody gave him some paper. He said, "I forgot my pen." I knew he didn't have anything. He just started taking notes. After class went on for about a week,

I pulled him to the side, and I talked to him. I had never done that before, but I decided to talk to him because I realized that he was a smart kid.

He didn't have his book. We had vocabulary and different assignments that were due. So he would always ask to borrow things from people. I could see that students were beginning to get tired of it. They just thought that he was irresponsible. I knew that it was because he didn't have anything, so I said [to the class], "I've got a copy of an extra book, and I put it on reserve at the library for students that don't have books. You can go to the library and [check] it out for two hours and do your homework." He flew across campus to the library. He was hungry for his education, and I knew that he had the desire to learn, and he would check it out. I went to the library, and I looked at the log. It was just him checking the book out; he was the only one. He would turn it in and check it out. He started getting smart enough to check it out and come to class with the book, and then he'd run across campus to take it back. I didn't even know that they allowed them to take it outside the library. I don't think they did, but that's what he was doing, so he would have a book in class. I said, "You know, if you ask professors"—I said it out loud—"most will probably do the same thing for each class."

I brought an extra binder with paper and a pencil pouch full of pens and stuff, and I said, "I've been carrying this thing all semester long. Some student left it a year or so ago. Can anybody use it?" He said, "Well, I could use it." And that's how I gave it to him. I went to TJ Maxx, and I bought a book bag. I said, "I have an extra book bag. I had it in lost and found and nobody claimed it. I don't think that they will claim it." I ripped the tag off of it. I said, "Could anybody maybe use this?" He said, "I could use it." So that was his book bag. That's how it started. I pulled him to the side, and I said, "You're so sharp." He was a jokester, and after class I said, "I want to talk to you."

I talked to him, and I said, "You're becoming a college-educated person. You're very articulate, extremely sharp. I don't like the way—I shouldn't know the color of your underwear when you come into my classroom. It's very disrespectful. It's very distracting for other students. You need to pull your pants up or get a belt. And the durag that's on your head needs to come off. Is this the way you want to present yourself? When you walk in a room, you have less than five seconds for people to make an impression of you. People will judge you based on what they see and how you present yourself. At some point you're going to have to let this go or you're not going to make it. I want to mentor you if you'll allow me to." He slid down the wall, and he sat on the floor. He put his hands on his face, and he started crying. I said, "What's going on?" He said, "You're the first person that took the time to talk to me the way that my mother used to."

He's been in my life ever since. He became the president of the NAACP club. He became an officer of the student government. He helped me to take the first group of students to the Gullah Islands to the slave trade museum. We took 58

students to the Gullah Islands, and Theodore did 90 percent of the work. I did 10 percent of it. He would come to me and say, “Hey, Dr. Allen, is this a good thing?” He was just on fire. He was getting ready to graduate, and he didn’t have transportation. So he said, “Do you know of any place that sells used cars?” He was homeless. He was living on friends’ sofas, and when they got tired of him, he’d go to another friend, and he’d sleep on their sofa. He had been living in the library. When they got ready to close the door—now I didn’t know this for a fact, but I heard later that that’s where he would sleep, around different buildings on campus.

TS: He stayed in there all night?

JB: He would stay there all night.

TS: So he hid when they locked up?

JB: He’d pretend to be studying, and then walk out first thing in the morning.

TS: There’s a place, kind of a little recessed area where there aren’t offices, against the east wall in the middle of the second floor where my office is. I see students sleeping in there all the time.

JB: Yes, we have thirteen or fourteen students who have been identified as homeless on campus. I created this group called Mountain Movers, and I brought them to campus, so that we could try to help students. It’s not just me because I know that there are more people that want to help. It’s just a group of good people. We helped two students who had cancer. I don’t know if you know [him]. He was a president of the NAACP too. He has MS, and he’s losing his muscle mass. He stumbles a lot. His wife has lupus, and it’s very debilitating for her. She graduated in the nursing program. They were losing their house, and this group that works with me, we renovated it. Home Depot gave us everything that we asked for, I mean, twelve stores. I wrote a letter. I said, “This is the situation.” We walked in, and they gave us whatever we wanted. So we were able to renovate his house for him.

Theodore, I had a car. It was a 1999 Toyota Camry, fully loaded. It probably had 90,000 or 100,000 miles on it. I paid it off in two years. I asked my husband if I could give it to him, and he said what he always says, “Handle your business, Tutti Frutti.” That’s what he calls me; that’s my nickname. So I gave him the title, and he’s an amazing kid.

TS: How did he pay his tuition?

JB: I think he got loans, and I think he got grants.

TS: I guess he had a Pell Grant, didn’t he?

JB: I don't know, because in my class, the bursar's office sent me an e-mail, and they said, "You have to put him out of class for non-payment." He owed \$750.00. I pulled him to the side after class, and I said, "Do you have this money? They're saying that I have to pull you out because you owe \$750.00." He started crying and said, "I don't have it." I can tell when students have money, and I can tell when they don't. I found a purse, and I walked around with a purse in my classroom that I kept in my possession for almost three weeks with almost \$400.00 cash in it. Everyday I would ask the students, "Did anybody lose a purse; did anybody lose any money?" The student would be there with headsets on in the back of the classroom not paying attention. Then I had asked so many people that I tapped her on the shoulder, and I showed her the purse. She said, "Oh, yeah, that's mine." I said, "Well, it has a lot of cash in it." She said, "Yeah, my parents already replaced it." She didn't miss it at all. I was more worried about it than she was.

So I know when a student doesn't have something, and he obviously didn't have it. I called my husband, and I said, "Sweetie, this kid".... I told him the situation. He said, "Handle your business. That's why I fell in love with you. That's why I married you because you have such an amazing heart and spirit." So I paid his tuition, and he gave me every single dime back. He worked doing odd jobs, and I'm not kidding you, it was mostly ones and quarters. He was so proud of himself. He'd sit there and count it back. I put my hand on the money, and I said, "Give this to the KSU Foundation for the NAACP Scholarship." That's what we did.

TS: How did he end up owing \$750.00? I mean, tuition is like \$2,000 or so.

JB: I think he had grants and different things, and they paid a portion of it. I would call Dr. Roberts who used to be over Financial Aid, and when students didn't have money, I would try to make arrangements for them to pay in installments, so he would try to break it up, so they could stay in school. As long as they had a good GPA, then he was willing to help me. So that's how we were able to divide different things up for students.

TS: I think the press release on the Alumni award says you helped over 200 students?

JB: Oh, yes. Maybe more.

TS: How can you do that without going broke yourself?

JB: I made a lot of friends that would help me along the way and people that over time respected me here on campus. I would call those favors in. If I would call them, they would say, "Okay, what do you need?" It was never them running away from me because I would always try to give back. Whatever I was given, I'd always try to give back. I had a student that one of the professors in our office

had been trying to help for six months and couldn't. She was homeless and sleeping on somebody's sofa with her two year old on her chest. She came in and Dr. [Tanja] Link said, "Judy can you help her?" I said, "What's the problem?" She told me that she needed money to stay in school. I picked up the phone. A couple of times I've called the president's office; a couple of times I've called Financial Aid; I've called the dean's office; anybody that was willing to help. There's a great group of people that are really interested in students that don't get credit. They said, "Judy, how much does she need?" And I said, "She only needs \$1,800.00." They said, "We'll give her \$2,500.00, and it'll be in her account in an hour. Tell her to check." If I can do it, I do it. If I can't, then I try to find others to help out.

TS: There was something about you were helping students buy laptops or giving laptops away?

JB: Yes. [The Student Activities & Budget Advisory Committee gives] each organization that I [advise] \$400.00 for the year. I have a charge card at Sam's Club. So we take \$100.00 or \$200.00, and we buy fish. You may have had one of our fish sandwiches; I don't know. But I go to Sam's, and I tell them what I'm doing. They say, "Well, Dr. Brown, if you buy \$100.00 worth of fish, we'll donate \$200.00 worth." So they'd donate \$200.00 worth of fish. "What else do you guys need?" I'd say, "Well, we could really use potato salad." So they'd give us potato salad and potato chips and drinks and anything positive. So we had a fish fry, and we raised \$875.00, and that money goes to students in need. I think the latest thing we're working on with Mountain Movers is trying to get a scholarship endowed for Laura Stewart. Are you familiar with her?

TS: I think I've heard about her in the student newspaper.

JB: The young girl that succumbed to cancer; she was 20 years old. I brought Relay for Life here. We cut out hearts. I had eight students working with me, and they made hearts. They wrote her name, "Laura Stewart, remember her." We sold them downstairs. We've gotten \$432.00 so far, and we're going to try to get \$1000.00 to give to her family, so they can start to endow a scholarship for her.

TS: Sounds good.

JB: I don't know. I don't do it for recognition. I just do it because I love it.

TS: The laptop project was in memory of Jonathan Freedman?

JB: Yes, he was my colleague that died. Do you remember Dr. Freedman?

TS: Sure do.

JB: He was always trying to teach everybody something about technology, and I remember the last thing he said to me, “Hey, Judy, let’s go to lunch.” I’d gone to lunch with him a million times before, and this particular time I was helping a student. I remember saying to him, “Not now Jonathan; I just don’t have the time.” He looked at me, and I remember turning around, and he said, “You need to have balance, kid; you need to learn how to smell the roses. Nobody is going to remember on your deathbed that you were a great professor. They might remember that they had a great lunch. You’re missing out.” I looked at him, and I started laughing. I just remember his cheeks being red and rosy. He had this beard that he had just gotten cleaned up because it was his anniversary, and he and his wife were going out. He looked really nice. He had on his green sweater, and I told him he looked like Santa Claus. He started laughing, and that’s the last time I saw him alive. I found out later that evening or the next day, I believe, that he had passed. He had died in his sleep. So I wanted to do something to honor him.

We had fundraisers all over campus. The courthouse would give me different things for doing pro bono cases and helping out. When people couldn’t afford a lawyer, I’d go and I’d help out. I got a gift certificate for \$350.00 to a really nice restaurant. We raffled it off, and we raised close to \$3,000.00. Everybody wanted that gift certificate because it was around Valentine’s Day. That’s how we were able to buy the laptop. So I went into Best Buy. When you buy in bulk, they give you a discount. So we were able to buy five at a time, and then we’d buy five more, and we’d pass them out to students.

TS: What do you do for Cobb County Juvenile Court?

JB: I’m a CASA for them whenever they need me, I do child advocacy....

TS: CASA?

JB: Court Appointed Special Advocate. I do their training—cultural sensitivity for people that want to adopt children, especially if they’re adopting minority children. I had one lady that they were thinking about not allowing her to adopt the child because of something that she did. It wasn’t deliberate. It was her not being educated about this little boy. He had dreadlocks. His parents were killed in a car accident, and she cut his hair. The first thing that she did, she thought, “Oh, the dreadlocks! They look dirty and unkempt.” She shaved his head, and he stopped speaking. He stopped doing good in school, and it just devastated him. It looked like she didn’t care about him, but she didn’t know any better. This was his identity, and he remembered his father having dreadlocks. He remembered that he no longer looked like his dad.

She needed to be educated that this is what it is. This is not dirty. This is a part of his identity. If you don’t want to accept him the way that he is, then that’s going to be a problem. So she has dreadlocks now! The last time I saw her she



had this African garb on, and she had the dreadlocks tied up. His dreadlocks are back, and she adopted him, and he's doing good. Once you do that you have to back away from the case because they don't want people to think you're a crazy person by keeping in contact with them. Another case was with this baby who was eighteen months old. Whenever I visited the parents, she would rub my face.

TS: The baby would?

JB: The baby would rub my face, and she'd rub her mommy's face, and she'd rub my face, and her mom said, "I wonder why in the world would she do that?" Do you know?

TS: Well, because of different colors? She's trying to see why it doesn't come off, I guess.

JB: Well, you know, I believe that she was trying to paint her mommy black. I felt like she was trying to take the black off of me and put it on to her Caucasian mommy.

TS: Oh, so she is a black baby?

JB: She's a black baby.

TS: And she's old enough to know that?

JB: Yes, she's eighteen months old. I don't know that she's old enough, but I think that she....

TS: She recognizes that there's a difference.

JB: She sees a difference.

TS: And she's trying to figure it out.

JB: Yes. This little girl's hair was really short, and I told her in the African American community having long hair as a little girl is a sense of pride where the grandmother and the aunts and moms would plat your hair. I had ponytails down to here, you know. That's a sense of pride; it's like your crown. Her hair was this long, and I said, "Why is her hair this long?" And she said, "Well, I wash it every day, and we go swimming. We have a pool in the back, and I take her swimming." The chlorine was breaking her hair off. I hate to say this, but that's why a lot of black people don't swim. It breaks your hair. It breaks it out. Then washing it, it washes the oil out. If I washed my hair every single day, it would just be dry and brittle. So that was something that could be taught. I asked her, "Do you have any black friends or black neighbors?" She said, "No, actually we don't." I said, "That's an issue because this child needs to see other black

- people.” There was a neighbor—there was a moving van, and there was a guy getting out that was moving in. I said, “It looks like they have a two or three year old little girl.” She went down there and introduced herself and started having play dates with them.
- TS: Well, they probably meant well. If they adopted a black child, they must be at least open-minded.
- JB: I believe that children shouldn't stay in foster care because there's not a parent available that looks like them, but you have to educate yourself. If you're going to adopt an Hispanic baby, then you need to know about their culture, know about their language, know about their food, and help them to make that transition or they're going to have problems later. So that's what I did for the Cobb County Juvenile Court. I do a lot of culture sensitivity training for citizens who want to become CASAs. I do some pro bono child advocacy work. Whatever they need, I try to do to accommodate them. Just recently I applied for a juvenile court judgeship position, and I made it to the top three, but then they chose somebody else.
- TS: Juvenile judges get elected at a certain point don't they?
- JB: No, juvenile judges are appointed.
- TS: All of them are appointed?
- JB: Judge Flournoy of Cobb Superior Court....
- TS: Yes, I know Rob Flournoy [Chief Judge Robert E. Flournoy III].
- JB: The reason that I think I was not actually nominated was because he didn't know me, but the superior court judges will appoint the juvenile court judges.
- TS: Come to think of it, I don't think I've ever voted for a juvenile court judge. I know Jim Morris who is a retired juvenile judge.
- JB: Oh, I loved Judge Morris. I worked under him.
- TS: Yes, he was involved with Cobb Landmarks.
- JB: I saw him [recently] out at the mall, and he has the sweetest disposition. He's just a sweet person, a sweet guy. He saw me, and I didn't see him, and he comes over, and he taps me on the shoulder, and I said, “Oh, Judge Morris!” I loved him.
- TS: Yes, it's been some time since I've talked to him.

JB: He was the best. He was absolutely the best juvenile court judge to me, as far as the history of Cobb County. I saw his facial expression and how he worried about the kids. He took his time. He wanted to know every single thing about the kid. He wasn't going to be rushed. He was incredible. When he retired I was really sad about that.

TS: How did you get involved with the campus chapter of the NAACP?

JB: Lana became [associate] dean and called to say that the organization was in jeopardy of losing its chapter on campus for low enrollment. They had one member.

TS: One member?

JB: One member. Shamika Fulstone was the member. [Lana] wanted to know if I could be the advisor. I said, "No." She said, "I really need you to do this. I'm not asking." I said, "Okay, sure, sure I can do it. You sign my paycheck!" I reluctantly became involved, but when I did, I saw the need. Something happened about two weeks later that really got me upset. We used to have a faculty lounge in the student center, and I remember going in there. Faculty used to sit in there and eat in the Fireside Lounge. I got my tray, and I went upstairs. When I walked in, two guys were talking, and one was talking about the NAACP. He had his back to me, so he didn't see me coming in the room. He wasn't saying good things. He was saying, "I'm glad that they're kicking them off campus because they need to invest in themselves, and they don't invest in themselves. They want everybody to—they're always looking for a hand out." That's what he said. So I walked in, and the professor that was sitting on this side saw me come in the door. He was trying to tell him to stop talking. By then it was too late, so I went and I set my tray down at their table, and I had lunch with them, and he was very uncomfortable.

TS: He was?

JB: Yes, he was very uncomfortable, the one that said this.

TS: Was he somebody you didn't know before?

JB: I didn't know him before, but I got to know him. We had a great conversation, and we're actually—I wouldn't say that we're friends, but we have a respect for one another, and it's peaceful. When Lana asked that I do this, I said no at first because I just felt like, oh, it's going to be a lot of work.

TS: Yes, you already had too much on your plate.

JB: I had a lot on my plate, and when I left that room after having a conversation with him, I felt driven to do this so much that I did use my own money for this. I went

to the teller machine, and I withdrew \$200.00. I stapled \$10.00 bills to all the applications. I pulled up the application to join the NAACP, and I stood outside the Student Center in the rain—I had just gotten a perm for my hair, and black women standing in the rain—that’s not a good thing. I had an Afro when everything was over! But I stood out in the rain, and anybody that looked black or looked interested in the NAACP, I handed them an application and asked them to fill it out. So that’s how I saved the chapter.

TS: So if they filled it out they got \$10.00.

JB: If they filled it out—no, the \$10.00 was for the membership. I said, “Today you can join the NAACP.” The money had to be sent to Washington, D.C. to national so that we could remain a chapter. The applications were \$10.00 a piece at the time, and I said, “Free membership.” They filled it out, and I ripped the \$10.00 off, and I put it in an envelope. I said, “You’re now a member of the NAACP.” And they were like, “Oh, thank you.” So that’s how we got forty-five members and we only needed twenty-five. I turned the money in right away, called the attorney over the NAACP at the time—I can’t remember the name; I think it was the same as mine—Brown—and we remained a chapter.

We took students to the inauguration too. My brother-in-law, my husband’s brother, died two days before we were to go. I had two other professors, Dr. Seneca Vaught [assistant professor of History and Interdisciplinary Studies] and Patricia Ikegwonu [lecturer of Criminal Justice] take over in my absence to take fifty-eight students to D.C. We had a chartered bus. Everything was paid for with the fundraisers, and we had the rooms paid for, so they went to the inauguration. Then they came back, and I was [attending the funeral of] my brother-in-law in Kentucky. So I couldn’t go.

TS: This is the 2008 or the 2012?

JB: It was the second. It was pretty neat.

TS: How many members now?

JB: I don’t like counting numbers, but I think we have forty-eight now, but we have ten that are active. I count the active students. We have students on papers that are members, and that’s great because we have to have twenty-five to keep it open, but we only have ten that are at the meetings and actively working. They all show up to the meetings for pizza, but we only have ten that work.

TS: What are you working on?

JB: Currently, we are working on going to the Gullah Islands again. We wanted to take the students there again this year, so we’re doing fundraisers for that. My husband said to the students—it takes \$20,000.00 to endow a scholarship—“I’ve

- given close to \$12,000.00. You guys need to come up with the rest.” So the students are working to do fundraisers to give the \$8,000.00. Used to be right at \$6,000.00 that we owed to endow it, but I think it’s at \$8,000.00 because the university lost some money when they invested it. That was kind of harsh. Then I ended up taking \$3,000.00 out early to give to [a student with breast cancer]—for her last classes, so she could graduate. She called me this morning.
- TS: Great. So, now which scholarship was this? You’ve got one for black male students.
- JB: That’s it. It’s the Dr. Judy Brown-Allen NAACP Student Retention Scholarship.
- TS: And it’s for males only?
- JB: No, females can apply, but I started it for males because they’re missing.
- TS: Because we’ve got a lot more black females at Kennesaw State than black males?
- JB: Black males are incarcerated. We have more incarcerated than we do in institutions of higher learning, and that’s wrong and that’s sad. When you have good students, you really want to try to keep them here. So I try to grab them when I see them, and I try to mentor them. I had two basketball students to come in, and they were sitting in the back of the classroom, not turning in their assignments, and saying, “Oh, we had a game,” and all this stuff. I called them to the side, and I talked to them. I said, “Go back and ask your coach how many basketball players at Kennesaw State University are now playing pro?” They came back with shirts and ties on.
- TS: Well, there are some playing abroad, but not in the NBA.
- JB: But they came back with shirts and ties on and sat in the front row.
- TS: Great.
- JB: And did well.
- TS: It sounds like the Athletic Department is really working hard on student retention. I mean, they’ve got to or we lose scholarships under NCAA rules. Somebody told me the other day that the student athletes actually have a higher grade point average than our student body as a whole now. It’s above a 3.0 average, so I’m sure that the basketball coach would want to hear it if the athletes were cutting up in the back and not paying attention.
- JB: Well, thank you for that.

TS: At any rate, let me just ask you, why do you think it is that there are so few black male students compared to black female students in college?

JB: I can tell you for sure the answer to that question because I have had meeting after meeting about student retention of black males. I grew tired of having meetings. I felt like no one was listening. We still haven't managed to get a handle on this thing. In the black family, traditionally, the females are nurtured and taken care of. The black males are pushed out faster to become men and to grow up and to not be lazy. That's a stereotype that falls over into the black family and how they mentor other black males. Because they're pushed out of the nest early to be successful, they fail. I'll give you a great example. I had two students on campus, siblings. The daughter would receive money from the parents each month, and the son wouldn't receive anything. He was expected to work. He was expected to make a living, make a way for himself, so that he could take care of himself because he's a man, not a boy. You have to go back and you have to look at a lot of single mothers raising black boys and saying, "I'm not going to take care of a man. I need you to take care of yourself." So they find themselves in institutions of higher learning with not a whole lot of people interested in them, not a lot of people interested in keeping them here and mentoring them. That's a large part of the problem. But the biggest problem that people are refusing to address is they have to work full-time jobs, many of them, to try to keep up and pay for their tuition, and they're making minimum wage or less, most of them.

I've had this conversation with several people. We have to find creative ways to legally say we could divide their tuition up, so if it's two installments for most students, then they may need to make six installments. As long as KSU gets the money, I think that should be satisfactory. Yet we have them on a regular basis leaving this institution with high GPAs because they can't afford tuition, and that has gone unaddressed. I've talked to the Financial Aid office. I've talked to the Burruss Institute. I've talked to very high people in positions of power to see if we can get something done, and nothing is being done. So they need help. They need mentors. They need to be rescued. They need people that are interested in them.

When they're discriminated against on campus, many of them come to me to talk to me because they feel comfortable because I'm the advisor of the NAACP. When I ask if they'd like to do something about it, they say no because "nobody cares, nobody believes in me." At that point, when I get that many of them to stop believing in themselves, if we could find a way to help them to not pay their tuition, but just give them several installments to pay their tuition, that would take care of 99.95 percent of their issues. I don't have decision-making power, and I can't do anything about that. I was told that to do something about that would be illegal, and I understand that. I'm an attorney.

TS: It's illegal to do something about it?

JB: I was told that it's illegal to make special accommodations for black students that can't afford to pay their tuition if you don't make those accommodations for everybody. That I understand.

TS: Well, why not make the special accommodations for everybody?

JB: I agree.

TS: I thought we had gone to where you could make several tuition payments.

JB: I think it was two, and now it's three, and if you don't pay in three, then you're out of here. Most of those students don't have it. I've lost seven of my NAACP students that were in good academic standing because they couldn't pay their tuition.

TS: Plus the number of fees that they have to pay.

JB: And if professors and staff are having difficulties because of the economy, shouldn't we assume that the students are too—especially minority students that don't have it, that don't have two parents in the home, that don't have financial help? Shouldn't we assume that, and in order to keep them here shouldn't we make or find accommodations for them? And yet there's nothing. I go off on a tangent with that because I'm really passionate about it, as you can tell.

TS: President Papp asked you to chair the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Dialogue. Talk about that; what are you all doing?

JB: I started out being the co-chair last year. Ernesto Silva [assistant professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Spanish] was the chair. When he stepped down as the chair, I became the chair for it. We're getting together the different organizations to try to bring awareness to the different issues that the campus is facing. With CORED, Commission on Racial and Ethnic Dialogue, we are currently working on creating a video. Each chapter has been asked to create a video that will highlight some of the issues that their particular group is facing. I wanted to highlight homelessness on campus, so we're going to see if we can get a student who would be willing to be videotaped—a day in the life of a homeless college student—to see if we can bring awareness to it.

My particular group this year with Audrey Allison who is the co-chair—she's in Communications—is bringing INROADS to the campus of KSU. INROADS is a predominately black organizations that deals with Fortune 500 companies that are willing to hire minority students. Any minority students, black, Hispanic, whatever their race is, have these companies to pay them between \$4,000.00 and \$12,000.00 over the summer for a two-month period, which is great money for a college kid. We currently have one student with INROADS that is working with Lockheed [Martin], and he's making \$26.50 an hour. He worked last summer and

was very successful, and so they've asked him back for a second summer. Students that are sophomores will work in the summer. Their junior year they'll work in the summer. Then their senior year, they're made a job offer. They're really geared more than anything toward math and science majors, but we're trying to incorporate all KSU with INROADS. So that's what we're currently doing right now—trying to make the bridge.

TS: Fantastic! I've got just a couple of wrap-up questions for you. You've been at Kennesaw ten years now. How have you seen Kennesaw change in those ten years?

JB: I think it's awesome what I see! I think it's awesome. I like having conversations about differences. I think that people need to learn how to accept and appreciate differences, and I think that you have to learn how not to react in anger when people say things that are unpleasant. I don't know if I would have been able to sit down and have a conversation with this guy that said what he said in the faculty lounge. I immediately became angry upon hearing what he said, and then I thought, "I'm at an institution of higher learning, and we have a professor making comments like this. This is an opportunity because hatred, racism, is learned, and it can be unlearned. This is a great opportunity for me to sit down and not react in anger," which was what he probably was expecting, "and to do the unexpected and sit down and have a gentle conversation about what he said." That's what I did; I took that opportunity. I think that Lana recognized that I would be great for the NAACP because I don't react in anger.

I think the judiciary committee, Diane [H.] Walker [director of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity], calls me often whenever there's an issue concerning race. Probably, 98 percent of the time, it's not about race. I'll go over, and coming from me to a black student, and sitting down with Diane and Michael [A.] Goodwin [Academic Integrity Coordinator], saying that's not what this is, they go away because they respect me. I assure them that I'm the first person to not jump on and pull the race card, and this is not what this is.

TS: In other words, you're saying the students think it's about race?

JB: They think it's about race.

TS: And it's not.

JB: After doing my investigation, I find out in talking to whomever it is they're accusing, and having a heart-to-heart, that that's not what this is. I think that it has helped them to close a lot of cases as a result of that, and it helps the student to feel satisfied that, well, if you say that that's not what it is, Dr. Allen, then I'll go away, and I'll believe you. I don't know, that's why I do it.

TS: So in terms of change at Kennesaw you think we're doing a better job now?



JB: I think we're doing an excellent job now, but I think that we still have room to grow. In many of the departments I've seen tremendous change. In the Nursing program I haven't seen a lot of change, and that concerns me.

TS: Do you mean lack of black faculty?

JB: Not so much black faculty in the nursing program; it's visible. I've been here for ten years, and when I came here ten years ago it looked the same. This is the only [school or] department on campus that has been allowed to not jump on board where diversity is concerned. They have very few black students that are allowed entry into the program. I've sent students to Mercer and different schools. I had one student that was so smart that they said, "Why is he trying to get into the nursing program and not the medical program?" We lost that student; Kennesaw allowed that student to leave. I've had white students come to me and say, "Dr. Allen, I don't have all A's in nursing classes, and yet I got in with all B's." The requirement should be the same for all students, and they're not. The students should be treated fairly.

I had three students to get put out of the program that contacted me. Dr. Adebayo sent them to me because they contacted him for help, and he thought that I could help them. Two of those students were accused by a white student of cheating. I went to the instructor, and I said, "Do you have a seating chart?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Do the students adhere to the seating chart?" Diane [Walker] was involved too. She said, "Well, yes, they do." These students were given an "F" and they were going to be put out of the program. Diane said, "Judy, can you come over and check this out and see if you can help me figure it out." I asked, "On the day of the test were the students sitting where they were supposed to be sitting?" The instructor said, "Yes." I said, "Okay. So where was the white student sitting?" She said, "She was sitting in her normal position up front." I said, "Okay, [she accused] one student [who] was sitting directly behind her in the back. The other black student was sitting off to the side further in the back. So you allowed this student during the test to physically turn around and look behind her to see that these two students were cheating that were not sitting near each other?" She didn't say a thing. With that they reinstated them and put them back into the program. I shouldn't have had to do that. They shouldn't have had to take all that. For three weeks those students were crying and upset and not able to go on with their other classes.

I had another case that Dr. Adebayo sent to me. A student was at the end of her nursing program, and they were doing clinicals. She started on her cycle and went to the director and said, "I had an accident. I need to go home and shower and change." He said, "Okay." He gave her permission to leave. She came back after she showered and changed her clothes, and she completed her clinicals. They put her out of the program because she broke the cardinal rule, and the

cardinal rule in the nursing program is if you leave the floor of clinicals, you're out of the program.

TS: Even though she had permission?

JB: Even though she had permission. The person who gave her permission said that he couldn't recognize her because all black people look alike, and he didn't know her from the next one.

TS: You're kidding.

JB: No I'm not. So I got involved. The student was about to graduate. I said to her, "Follow my lead and don't say a thing. Do you trust me?" She said, "Yeah, Dr. Allen, I kind of trust you." I said, "Okay, don't even open your mouth." I walked into the room. I think Lana went with me too. I said to the dean [of the WellStar College of Health & Human Services], "The student broke the cardinal rule. I agree with you 100 percent that she should be kicked out of the program." He said, "Well, why are we here? That's great! Why are we meeting if you agree?" I said, "But there's an issue because I have a list of seven white students that didn't show up at all. So let's call their parents, so that they too can be kicked out of the program." They said, "No, we'll reinstate her." So they let her back into the program because they didn't want to put out seven other students who didn't show up at all. I said, "You're putting her out [when] she got sick, came back, and finished. You want to keep them that didn't show up at all and never called to say why they weren't showing up. That's not fair."

TS: That's crazy.

JB: So that's the kind of thing that's happening on the campus of KSU that a lot of people aren't aware of that needs to be stopped.

TS: Wow. I have never heard that. They've got some great faculty members over there.

JB: They have great faculty over there, but I got on the nursing board to pacify this because a group of students were talking about getting together to sue the university for discrimination. I put a lid on that. It was about to blow up, but I put a lid on that. I said, "What if I got on the nursing board? I could see the students come in when you guys interview and have a say-so in who gets into the program." I didn't have any extra time to be doing this across campus with everything else that I was doing, but he allowed me to do that for two years. For the first time I got fourteen black students into the program. I think last year he told me that I was no longer needed because they're not doing interviews any more, and they are still doing interviews. I at that time had a lot of stuff going on. I couldn't fight the battle because my mom was sick with pancreatic cancer.

TS: What keeps you at Kennesaw?

JB: The students, the job—I love it. Like I said before, I’d probably do it for free if I had to. I love what I do, and I love the students. The students keep me here.

TS: Does it bother you that it appears Kennesaw is going more and more toward scholarship as opposed to teaching or do you even see it that way?

JB: If they’re going to be a progressive university, I think they have to. If they’re going to keep up with everybody, I think they have to. It doesn’t bother me so much, but it should bother the students. The students have more power than they realize because our university is not growing because of the scholarship. Our university is growing because of the teaching. Students come here because they want to see, and they want to have, great teachers. That’s what they remember. I think if our university makes the mistake, and they forget about that, then they’re going to see a major drop in the student population.

TS: Okay. Great! What have we left out?

JB: Not a whole lot! You’re easy to talk to!

TS: Are you doing anything—I don’t guess you have to do papers at conferences and things like that as part of your lectureship, do you?

JB: I don’t, but I have presented before, and I enjoy doing that. A lot of people are interested in the intern program. I have so many stories to tell. What I’d like to do if I can find time is to maybe write down some of the stories about my family. I think that they’re interesting stories. I’d like to maybe write the story about my son and how he came to be and my going to college and just life lessons.

TS: Did your sibling that wanted to go to medical school ever get there?

JB: She went to medical school, and she’s a doctor, yes. We have a close family. I lost two. I lost my mother two years ago to pancreatic cancer, and three months before that my brother. So we have a history of cancer in my family. But I’m doing good. This is my real hair, my real eyebrows and eye lashes. And today is my anniversary. Did I tell you that?

TS: Yes, your twenty-fifth, I think.

JB: Yes, today is my anniversary—my husband and I. I don’t know what we’re going to do tonight, but it won’t be anything major. Well, we’ll see.

TS: That’s great. Well, I’ve enjoyed this.

JB: I’ve enjoyed talking to you, Dr. Scott. You’re an amazing person.

## INDEX

- Adebayo, Akanmu, 14, 32
- Allison, Audrey, 30
- Atlanta Law School, 1, 6, 9-10
  
- Brown-Allen, Judy
  - Background
    - Siblings, 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 11, 34
    - Mother, 1-5, 7-8, 11, 34
      - Gives Judy her last \$3.00 when she drops her off at college, 3-4
      - Cleans a church in exchange for Judy's piano lessons, 4
      - Attends all her eight children's performances, 5
      - Marches with her children to protest an injustice, 11
    - Father, 1-5, 11
      - Military career, 1
      - Dies in VA hospital, 2
      - Impact of his death on Judy and the family, 2, 4-5
    - Grandmother, 2
  - Education
    - Undergraduate education at Prairie View A&M, 1-3, 6-7
    - MCS at Texas Southern, 1-2, 6
    - JD at Atlanta Law School, 1, 6, 9-10
  - Niece, 5, 7, 10
  - Diagnosis of stage 4 cancer and chemotherapy treatment, 7-10
  - Husband, Billy Ray Allen, 7-9, 20-21, 27-28
  - Son, Chemo, 7-8, 10
  - Reason for going to law school, 10-11
  - Lessons learned at age 5 from demonstrating against police injustice, 11
  - Law practice with Legal Aid of Cobb County, 11-13
  - Adjunct faculty member at Mercer University, 13
  - Job interview at KSU, 13-14
  - Senior lecturer, 14-16
    - In charge of Sociology internship program, 15-17
    - Nominated for National Faculty of the Year Award, 15
    - Courses taught, 16
  - Helping students with financial problems, 18-22
    - Helping a homeless student, 18-21
    - Mountain Movers organization, 20, 22
    - Helping students acquire laptops, 22
    - Dr. Judy Brown-Allen NAACP Student Retention Scholarship, 28
  - Trips with students to the Gullah Islands, 19-20, 27
  - Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), 23-25
  - Advisor to campus chapter of the NAACP, 26-31
  - Chair of Commission on Racial and Ethnic Dialogue, 30-31

Work with Department of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity, 31-32  
Helping with diversity problems in Nursing program, 32-33  
Reasons for staying at KSU, 34

Freedman, Jonathan, 22-23  
Fulstone, Shamika, 26

Goodwin, Michael A., 31

Hastings, Mary, 8-9

Ikegwuonu, Patricia, 27  
INROADS, Inc., 30-31

Jackson, Ollie, 5

Kennesaw State University  
Homeless students, 18-20  
NAACP chapter, 12, 19-21, 26-31  
Student retention, black males, 29-30  
Changes of last decade, 31

Lamarque, Texas, 1, 5, 10-11  
Highlands Elementary School, 5  
Racism in police department in the 1970s, 10-11

Link, Tanja, 22

Morris, James F. (Judge), 25-26

Papp, Daniel S., 17  
Prairie View A&M (Texas A&M at Prairie View), 1-3, 6-7

Sam's Club, 22  
Silva, Ernesto, 30  
Stewart, Laura, Scholarship, 22

Texas Southern University, 1-2, 6

Vaught, Seneca, 27

Wachniak, Lana J., 13-14, 26, 31, 33  
Walker, Diane H., 31, 32  
Walls, Donna, 13-14  
Washington, Ms. (Lamarque neighbor), 6