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Jazz

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Jazz's Interview

St Catherine University

L - When were you born? Where were you born?

J - I was born in 1981, in Chicago. I am the youngest of four; I have two older sisters and one older brother.

L - So that was your family, and you completed it by being the youngest?

J - Yes.

L - Did you all live together when you were growing up?

J - Well my eldest sister is about 15 years older than me. So by the time I was in kindergarten, she was already an adult and she already had moved to Minnesota. Our family kind of made a progressive migration. One family at a time and my sister moved to Minnesota in '89 I believe; in 1989. And I ... Well maybe earlier than that but... and then our family moved in 1995 to Minnesota.

L- And so you were, how old in 1995?

J - In 1995, 14 years.

L - Just trying to keep the years [straight]. So when you lived in Chicago, did you live in the city? In an apartment?

J - Yes.

L - Was the living situation [a] secure housing situation? Or was there some moving around?

J - Now that is debatable. I'm not sure if our housing was unstable or if my mother just liked to move. I know that as a child, we moved frequently. Never really unexpectedly; now our migration to Minnesota was unexpected due to my mother's lifestyle got her in a little trouble in Chicago.

L - So she wanted to get out of town?

J - Yeah, so we had to get out of town fast and that's how we ended up being here. _____ I always noticed that we always lived somewhere cozy. If our living situations were unstable I was unaware of that. But they could have very well have been because we moved so frequently.

L - Would you say your family was low income?

J - Well, my mother was an administrative assistant at University of Chicago and she worked in the admissions office. _____ My siblings, my older siblings all have the same dad and I have a different dad, so my dad was a postal worker and their dad is an ordained minister, so he's a pastor at his own church.

L - So did you grow up with both your parents?

J - Not in the same household. My parents were married but by the time was in about preschool or kindergarten, they separated. _____ Their divorce was kind of messy so it took them a long time to finalize their divorce but I don't recall my father being a part of our immediate household.

L - It sounds like, as a little kid, though your needs were met and you didn't question too much and you felt safe at home.

J - I felt safe. There would be times where we wouldn't have electricity for a few days or we wouldn't have gas for a few days, but it was never an extended period and we always had a good attitude about it. I guess we never not had electricity and not gas at the same time. So when we would have no gas, then we would just microwave water or things like that.

L - Right, you could deal with it and it would all get settled?

J - Yeah, get settled.

L - And so as a little kid, do you think you were worried or [that] you just kind of went along?

J - I wasn't worried about housing. Wherever we stayed, we, well we thought we were safe. If we were or not, I don't know but we felt protected and safe. I didn't get my own room until we came to Minnesota to live, so I always shared my room and things like that.

L - But it wasn't the whole family in one room?

J – Yeah, in one room? No.

L - It makes a big difference.

J – Yes, it does.

L - So when you moved to Minnesota, where did you settle?

J - When we first got to Minnesota, we lived in Columbia Heights.

L - How was that?

J – Well, it was a big culture shock. We weren't used to living in such close proximity of Caucasian folks.

L – Well, Chicago is a very segregated city.

J - It is. Even though it's very diverse, it's also very segregated. The only situations that I would see white people is them being my teacher at school. Actually there was only one white student at the school I attended up until we came to Minnesota. So seeing white people every day, on a daily basis, in your same community – I was like, wow, that's different.

L - And I'm sure you felt like I'm a long way from home.

J - Since we were one of the last families to move up here, it was also nice to be reunited with my eldest sister and other family members.

L - Right, you had the other part of the family to draw on and be connected to. Columbia Heights, you stayed there for how long?

J - We only stayed in Columbia Heights for about a year. My mom decided when we first got here that she didn't want to work for a while, so she took about maybe 9 months off before she started looking for work again. _____ Then at that time I was kind of... I was staying with my sister in Minneapolis. She lived in Riverside Plaza and so I enrolled, I used her address to enroll into a Minneapolis school, and I started going to Roosevelt .

L - Ok and how did you like Roosevelt?

J - Roosevelt was nice.

L - Was it predominantly immigrants at that point?

J - It was getting there.

L - So in a way, it was a place where there was a lot of diversity and a lot of multicultural people?

J - Yes.

L - It still felt different than Chicago?

J - Yeah. I did feel a lot safer as far as being able to go outside, being able to go to the store. My parents were really, my parents were really concerned about me being out in the streets in particular. _____ I guess they felt a sigh of relief when we got up here, like you know – I can actually do teen age stuff and ride the bus.

L - Right, they can give you a little more freedom because they figured you'll be okay. And yeah there are neighborhoods in Chicago where a kid by herself...

J – Yeah, not so great.

L - Not so good. When did you first experience housing insecurity?

J - I would say I was about 21. I had first, when I graduated from high school and I got a trade and well I guess... I was an LPN, so I worked as an LPN but my job was contracted through my school because my school was non-accredited. I knew my school wasn't accredited but I was the first person in my family to go to college, so I didn't know what that meant for me and especially what it meant for my future education. So I graduate, I get a job at Fairview University and I worked there as an LPN and it was going great and I purchased a home and that was a really predatory loan situation, and I got stuck with this crazy mortgage. I started out really low, it started off just amazing and I'm like "Oh this is great! I have this great job I'm only paying \$800 mortgage," and you know, my bills were really manageable and everything was going great. And then, I got laid off from Fairview. So I'm applying here, there, everywhere, trying to get a job and they're like, your education is not accredited. "I don't want to hire you to be a nurse at my hospital and we can't even prove that you got taught by a legitimate professor." And that's when the non-accredited piece really started affecting me.

L - You couldn't independently get a job.

J - No, I couldn't and so okay. So then my mortgage just starts sky-rocketing and it then it gets way out of control because I was getting unemployment benefits from Fairview, but once my mortgage started going up, it was just... it just got way out of hand. I called the bank; I said "Take this house, I don't want it. I can't afford it and I'm not about to get in a boat load of debt." So I foreclosed, I got a foreclosure when I was about 21.

L - How long did you have the house?

J - I had the house for maybe 18 months. It was just immediate. I paid \$800 for rent maybe three months and then it was \$1000 and then it was \$1200 and then it was \$1450.

L – Now, on the other side of the housing crisis, we know that this was part of a much larger pattern and that people were targeted and exploited.

J - And I do believe that as a young African American woman, I was definitely exploited. Being the first person in my family to even own a home, I was just excited to be a homeowner.

L - To have someone tell you, you can do this.

J - Yeah, you can manage this and to be able to actually manage it but that was just very short lived so I got in... I accumulated a large amount of debt extremely fast. And, like you said, in retrospect now I see that was a pattern, they were targeting people, I was the perfect victim for that.

L - You were innocent and you figure if they.... they're the ones who know if you can afford it or not.

J - Right.

L - Ok, Yeah. So with the foreclosure, what did you do?

J - Ok so after I foreclosed, I moved back in with my mother, who is homeless, also being foreclosed at the same time. I stayed with her until... Well, we actually stayed in the house until the sheriff came and bolted us out. We didn't have any hot water. We didn't have anything in the house but we just stayed in there because we didn't have anywhere to go. This was right before I was scheduled to leave for the military.

L - Oh – I missed that.

J - Yeah, Ok so yes, yes, yes, yes so...

L - Your house is foreclosed on, you move in with your mom.

J - But I joined the military as a way to have some skills. Now at this time I have two small children already, my son is about 3 and my daughter is ...

L - What year are we talking?

J - We're talking 2000ish – Yeah the beginning...

L - So you've got two little kids? Could you find work in another hospital or did that never pan out?

J - No it didn't.

L - So what kind of work did you do after your foreclosure?

J - I enlisted in the military right away, went to the military, came back from my training. Had to leave my kids for a few months with my parents, came back and then I had scored a job at North Memorial and then I worked there for about 7-8 years before I came to St. Kate's.

L - So, in the military?

J - Oh I skipped the whole homeless part!

L - Whoops.

J - I came home from the military. Ok, so my mom lost her house in the process, she's staying with her partner with my kids. I come back to stay with them; me and her partner have a misunderstanding so her partner asked me to leave and she says my kids can live there but I can't live there. Of course I'm [not] going to just leave my kids somewhere to stay. We're kind of couch surfing.... friends, family, relatives, in the car some nights.

L - So it was kind of a night by night.

J - Day by day situation

L -That's stressful.

J - And then I stayed with my sister, my former sister in law – it's just a mess, I was just every [where], with my aunt and it was always very short term, like just a few nights or a week.

L - How are your kids doing?

J - They were so young I don't...

L - You were their home.

J - I could still comfort them.

L - By being...I think if kids have an adult who says it's going to be ok and I'm taking care of you, they are ok.

J - I had daycare so that really helped because I was able to put them in daycare and then take care of all my county paperwork and appointments. So that was one thing that really helped me out.

L - How long did this period last?

J - I got home in January and I finally found me a 1 bedroom in October or November 2002.

L - Is this when North Memorial comes through?

J - Now I got the job at North Memorial, I think I started a few weeks before I found an apartment. So we lived in that apartment for a long time. It was one bedroom and it was for all of us. They were small.

L - And you were doing your best.

J - That's all I could afford. We're living in our one bedroom apartment and I'm working at North Memorial and I develop a chemical dependency.

L - Is it prescription drugs?

J - Yes, prescription drugs. I actually am a survivor of _____ ductal carcinoma

L - Oh dear, I don't know what that is.

J - Oh, it's a non-invasive cancer of the breast ducts, the milk ducts. So I got the surgery, got a surgery to get a lump removed so they started prescribing me prescription pain medicine and because my depression.... and now in retrospect I know this, when I am depressed, I have physical symptoms, my mood doesn't typically change. A lot of people when they get

depressed it shows in their facial expression, in their mood and with me it shows in my physical symptoms. I was getting headaches all the time so I was taking this narcotic prescriptions all the time and then it went from I'm taking it because I have pain to I'm taking it because I want to go to bed to I'm taking them just because I want to and now I'm taking them because if I don't take them, I'll get sick and that addiction lasted for about a year and that... I did always have a place to stay during that time but it definitely....

L - Made things unstable?

J - Less stable is a great way to summarize that.

L - How long was that period? Does that last... you're chemically dependent and still working, still parenting, still trying to get along but having headaches?

J - And my job ended up sending me to treatment.

L - A lot of healthcare workers.... you know, I'm sure that this is not an uncommon story.

J - So I went to treatment and got myself clean and then I...

L - When was that? How old were you?

J - Yeah I didn't get clean until I was about 25, so maybe about 2 years on prescription pain medicines and...

L - But you did keep your job and you did keep your place and you kept your kids.

J - Yes I did, yeah.

L - And those are a lot, that just says how hard you worked to keep it together.

J - One thing that was... keeping my house.... I never... I don't want to make my addiction seem like it wasn't a big deal cause it was, but I would always pay my bills first and then blow my money. I didn't...

Luci - Functioning addict.

J - Yes, highly functional. That's what the term is, I was highly functional.

L - Obviously because you were able to maintain a lot and I think that says that there was one part of you that could always keep an eye on the big picture, even when there was another part of you that wanted to self-medicate. It sounds like you were able to access different resources at different times - family and friends but also the county. Would you say that part of how you've made things work is being resourceful?

J - Oh yeah, you've got to be resourceful and you've got to put your pride to the side.

L - And accessing resources requires that?

J - Yes, especially when you're not used to receiving them.

L - So you haven't been like, cultivated?

J - I have but not a lot of people. I feel like if you need the help, just go to the place and fill out the forms.

L - And there are people who can help and that is why we have a social safety net, but you think for a lot of people that pride gets in way?

J - Absolutely.

L - Do you think the system asks for that? Or is it internal? Do you think people are made to feel small?

J - Yes. I think it's a little bit of both.

L - Probably.

J - Because sometimes you run into people at the place that are supposed to help you who aren't very friendly, who aren't very helpful. And then, there is so much stigma around being homeless or being impoverished that people like to put of a front that they aren't this type of person because there is such negativity associated with being low income and being homeless that nobody wants to admit that that's their situation because they're afraid, that those negative stereotypes will be attached to them.

L - Right or describing them. I think you're right, there are a lot of ways in which our society generally is very judgmental of people in poverty and that is something I think this research is about is showing you know, time and again there are more systemic institutional forces that it's not the person in poverty, it's not in their control to... it's not a matter of personal failing or whatever, it's just really hard to get a chance to get out.

J - Yes.

Luci - When you received benefits did you received MN-?

L - like WIC?

Luci - Like daycare benefits or childcare assistances?

J - Yes.

Luci - Do you want to talk a little bit about all the things that you had to do in order to receive those benefits?

J - Ok. You go to the county office, you take a number and if you don't get there really early, you've got to expect it to be an all-day thing. They give you a boatload of paperwork, so you fill out the paper work and they assign you to a team. _____ You have to watch a movie on the benefits you will receive and you only have five years, so it's like hurry up.... hurry up! You only got five years. [With] Welfare-to-work we really want you to work, so you won't have to need these benefits anymore. But it's like once you get a job, for me, for example, the cut off cap is \$950. So if I make more than \$950 a month, I'm ineligible for cash benefits. I might get a little bit of food stamps but maybe, probably not. It's like, how am I really going to get ahead?

L - And the incentives seem skewed.

J - Incentives?

L - Right that there is no...they say we want you to work and that's progress but you can only work this much and you can't earn too much, so it just doesn't seem rational.

J - It's not. It definitely isn't. Luckily for me when I was getting childcare assistance I was working 35 hours a week or more but I have heard stories of women who go to school. So say for instance right now, my kids are preteens now.

L - So they're in school all day.

J - But if they were 4 or 5 right now, and I needed childcare assistance for them, they would not count my schooling as work hours. Back when I was going to Everest and working, school did count. Now it doesn't count anymore. I think women...

L - The system is squeezing women... what is by sort of definition a "tough time" and offering limited help but with strings?

J - Yes, lots of strings attached. There were lots of months where I made \$1000 and it's like \$50 more than the cap and they don't use...

L - They don't take \$50 off your benefits?

J - No, how they time it is, however much money you make this month is what affects you two months from now. So if make \$1000 in January, that means in March, I'm not going to get any money. I don't know how they... and I'm not sure if they still do it like that, but that's how... and they keep a very close eye on every dollar you get. It's...

Luci - What it is, is they pay you for February, if you've earned too much for February then in March they say we paid you too much in February so we're taking March.... It's an overpayment.

L - So you need to be resourceful even when you're accessing resources? What did you do in those months where you didn't get your benefits because you had worked too much two months before? What did that mean in terms of paying your bills?

J - I'm debating if I want to answer.

Luci - You don't have to answer.

L - You don't have to, no.

J - Yeah I'm...

L - Let's move on.

J - Yes.

L - Here's a big question. How do you speculate that gender has influenced your story?

J - You know, I hear a lot of people say that women get more resources than men and the social services are just on women's side and I'm not exactly sure if that's true or not. I don't know.

L - And it doesn't mean that those services don't exist within a larger system that doesn't necessarily [extend] more benefits to women.

J - Yes and I think my race influenced my experiences more than my gender.

L - And will you tell me what your race is?

J - I'm African American.

L - I thought so.

J - For the record.

L - For the record.

J - And I do appreciate you asking. Cause a lot of people will just assume.

Luci - I'm Hispanic.

J - Oh, see that's why we can't assume.

L - That's why I'm known to ask. I can't assume. So you think gender plays some part just in what you're dealing with, but that race more shaped your experience you think?

J - Yes, especially with my housing experience and I think just the disparity that African Americans have faced historically in housing and in other social service programs, I think it kind of... it goes from one generation to the next because it's like my parents never... we kind of got our first homes at the same time and if I was a young white woman, I would more than likely have someone to learn from. I didn't know anyone who was a homeowner so I didn't know...

L - Well and applying to school. You went to a school that didn't have accreditation and ended up paying [for it]...

J - And it was predominantly women of color at that school; students.

L - Who were recruited, handpicked and part of it, is not having someone who could look over that and say....

J - No, that's not a good idea.

L - Maybe you want to be an LPN but not these people.

J - I was really missing that piece.

L - You needed to negotiate and again with the housing, these are some pretty predatory people.

J - Also I think back in the '90's in high school.... well perhaps low-income...

Luci - Did you graduate from Roosevelt?

J - Yes I did. I noticed that they prepped us to go to the military or to get a job, but not to go to college.

L - It wasn't a college prep program?

J - No, it definitely wasn't a college prep program and I graduated with honors and still didn't meet the basic standards.

L - You just advanced without making sure you really had learned... and you think that happened a lot?

J - Yeah. It definitely happened a lot at my school. I see young women here and they're like "Yeah you guys came to my school and someone recruited me." _____ I'm like "What?!" No one ever came to my school. It was a Navy table, Army table or Marine table and then job development skills. It makes me wonder, did they expect us to go to college?... I don't think they did... I don't think that was their... part of their goal for us.

L - They saw you as joining the workforce...

J - Yes, or joining the military.

L - And certainly for a lot of working class kids that is the expectation but you'd think in this day and age that... especially an honors student would be cultivated, encouraged and mentored and it doesn't sound like you got a lot of that.

J - No not at all.

L - In terms of resolving the housing insecurity, are you still in the one bedroom apartment?

J - No we moved out of that in 2008. I was selected for public housing after being on the waiting list for seven years.

L - You got section 8?

J - No, I got public housing. Public housing is subsidized housing but it's only for that location. Section 8 vouchers you can move.

L - Where did you get public housing?

J - Minneapolis. Now I live in Minneapolis and I allowed a family member to live with me without being on the lease

Luci - Did you lose your public housing?

J - Yes I am. My lease is being terminated on December 31st.

L - The public housing has its rules.

J - Yes it does. They found out because I asked my niece to leave and then she told them that she was living with me. Now I'm in violation of my lease which I know I was wrong but I didn't know she was going to start freeloading.

L - Right you're trying to help her out.

J - Yeah, I said she could come stay for a month and then she's kicking her feet up and then she's losing her job and it was all a mess. I am in the process of disputing it.

L - Housing insecurity isn't something that's totally resolved.

J - No.

L - Any ideas for January 1st?

J - Well, I am disputing it and so if I do have to leave my house, I'll just come to a shelter in St. Paul and then since I've been on St. Paul section 8 waiting for about five years, maybe they'll call me sooner because I'm in the system. That's what they were telling me.

L - So there is some stress?

J - Yeah.

L - It will work out?

J - It always does. That's worst case scenario is that I'll have to live in a shelter and that's going to be kind of tough on my kids. Not necessarily for me because I've lived that life before and I always have a positive outlook on life but my kids have never been in an unstable... I guess they have they just don't have any knowledge of it, this will definitely probably an experience they will remember and I just want to make it as smooth for them as possible. I'm trying to figure out maybe if I could move on campus next semester. That was another idea I had but then next semester is my last so... That would be a lot of moving around and such.

L - And kids who are in Minneapolis schools?

J - Yeah have to switch schools and all that. That's kind of the least of my worries is the schooling and stuff because once we get back on our feet there is the potential for them to go back. They're almost in high school anyway.

L - There is a hierarchy of priorities. How did you find your way to St. Kate's?

J - I was celebrating my second go-round sober. I had a little relapse. So my second time sober I was thinking I should go back to school to get my RN degree and I owed a community college... I was thinking community college setting I guess that was what I was used to. I was on academic suspension from 2000 from one college and I'm like "taking this suspension seriously and it's like 2009" and they're like "yeah" so they said "when you're on suspension you have to wait a semester before you can come back. So I was no I don't want to do that. The other school I had in mind I owed them \$1000. Then I called my best friend who is now, well at that time, she was a senior at that time and I'm like "What's going on over there at St. Kate's?" and she's like "You know it's a great school, you should come check it out" so I came and I went to the admissions office and I said I want to come here I haven't been in school forever, it's been a mighty long time and I would like to build on my associate degree that I thought I had. I get accepted into the St. Paul campus.

L - Oh that you had the associates so you were going to complete the [BA]... Ok I get it.

J - Only 10 of my 68 credits transferred. I wasn't a junior like I thought I would be. I had to start all over as a freshman but I said "well I'm going to have to start over as a freshman anywhere I go" so I just sucked it up. I was really upset about that, I started winter semester 2009 and now I'm here a senior and I graduate on May 25th [2013].

L - With a double major and a minor?

J - I actually ended up changing my whole... I came here as a nursing student and once I started being able to think critically and learn how to know things for myself and using my personal experience to benefit what I've learned with my education, it took me into a different direction. And I'm way more social justice-oriented and that's why I'm no longer seeking a nursing major but critical studies of race and ethnicity and sociology because I'm a very social person and it's nice to know how society effects your choices and how the plate you're given at birth, is not the same. To not only know that for myself but to educate others.

L - See how that really plays out, what does that mean in life? How do you like St. Kate's?

J - I love St. Kate's. I love the learning that goes on here. I love the empowerment of women. I don't know much about the Catholic identity side of it.

L - Well and if that's not your tradition.

J - It is nice to be somewhere different. I was so accustomed to only liking things that I had already like and not necessarily learning how to appreciate someone else's culture and I really got a lot of that at St. Kate's.

L - That's certainly part of what we try to offer that being college educated means being able to think critically and take a step back. When it comes to... this is sort of two questions; your classmates but then also faculty staff, how sensitive do you think they are to issues of poverty,

homelessness? Do you feel there is awareness out there? Do you think there are some blind spots? What's your experience been?

J - I think a lot of my classmates don't understand that poverty is a system. I think a lot of my classmates think that poverty is a choice and if we wanted to be rich that we would and if we just try harder than we would just have everything that we want...

L - The bootstraps mentality.

J - Yeah, the bootstraps mentality and that is definitely false and I'm glad that we have projects like this to make it evident that that is false.

L - Can you give any examples of things classmates have said?

J - We were watching a film in sociology. I was a TA for a sociology professor for about three semesters in a row so I got very familiar with her movies and syllabuses. So we were watching a film in class and they show a white woman who has suddenly lost everything due to her divorce. Her husband was the bread winner, he had all the money, he had all the everything and he left her. Then they show a single African mother she has three kids, one of them has really bad asthma and she talks about... she has a job, now the white woman doesn't have a job, the black woman has a job and she talks about how she got a \$3 raise on her job and then she ended up losing all of her benefits, like she lost her healthcare and she was saying her son's inhalers are really expensive; those types of things. At the end of the video everyone was like "Oh it's so sad

that woman's husband left her." And then, when we started talking, we said "What about Ms. Such and such? "Well I just don't understand why she has her nails done if her son needs an inhaler." They weren't getting that part and I think race and class always go together because you can have two people close to the same situation and we feel sorry for one person and we criminalize another person for the same situation.

L - So you think if these characters had been reversed and I don't know if you can speculate on this, but if it had been an African American woman who went from having everything to being without through divorce and the white woman... do you think your classmates would have been different in their assessments of what it all meant? Or who knows?

J - It's kind of like, who knows, as a TA I was glad I had the pleasure to be one, because I see a lot of students coming in as first years and kind of getting a glimpse where their mind is at and how broad is their range of learning.

L - Experience and just, right, their imagination.

J - I think that everyone... I can't assume that everyone knows what I know about certain situations. I think my experience more than my education has opened my eyes up to certain issues and have influenced my stance on certain issues but when you've never experienced it for yourself...

L - If it's all academic that's one thing, but if you have first-hand knowledge...?

J - Experience – that makes the academics more richer.

L - Oh definitely and that it's not just an academic question that these are real issues that play out in actual peoples' lives. And somehow, I know I'm a history professor, I spend a lot of time trying to make people think that people in the past were real and I think with lower income population, minorities, others, other people who are considered more marginal, that there is a similar dynamic at work. Where someone who's had a lot of privilege may not even see the reality and that's something that you're talking about with the first years coming in.

J - I think that St. Kate's is also doing a better job of getting more socioeconomic background students here because when I was a freshman here I would say it was predominantly upper middle class classmates that I had. I didn't really have other like "came from a working class family type" that was the rare...

L - In the day school?

J - Yes, I'm in the day program. I know that makes a difference too right?

L - It does. But you know the thing is if the reality of people who are in your classes and I think since the recession things have changed for so many people. Also as you've said, you've come to appreciate more people's circumstances from different points of view and maybe part of it is you can see now more levels of gradation where before they all just seemed privileged.

J - Yes, I think that's very important.

L - Do you think - ok, those incoming students that are from the suburbs or whatever... middle class kids that don't have awareness ... when they graduate, are they in better shape?

J - I hope so. All I can say is I hope so because I really get to see them coming in. I don't really see them going out and what they've learned. I have had a few of my former classmates or TA students come up to me and say "I did not know that and I can't believe that I'm just now finding this out" about... there are a lot of myths out there are perpetuated through the media especially and I can understand someone... I know what's real because I'm in it and someone just getting their information from a source doesn't always get the whole truth for example; this is my favorite memory to date of school –

So class hasn't began yet and me and my classmate I'm sitting next to, we're talking about the inflation in tuition here and we're like "Ah you know, it's already expensive enough and then they're raising it \$40 more," and so my classmate in front of me turns around and she's like "Why do you even care how expensive tuition is?" I didn't even understand what she was saying... like why wouldn't I care about tuition if I have to pay it. She was like "Oh, you pay tuition?" And I said "Yeah, why wouldn't I pay tuition?" "Oh 'cause you know, what I thought all black people got the United Negro College Fund."

L - Oh my gosh!

J - And she was dead serious.

L - That came with blackness. Your membership in the United Negro College Fund?

J - You're black so you must be getting the United Negro College Fund.

L - Wow.

J - So I'm stunned.

L - What did you think about that?

J - I was like "Well you obviously don't know much about the United Negro College Fund because in order to be eligible for the United Negro College Fund, you have to go to a historically black college, St. Kate's is not that so I'm [not] getting the United Negro College Fund. Secondly the United Negro College Fund gives you \$10,000 a year."

L - That's it?

J - Even if I was getting the United Negro College Fund, which I'm not because [SCU] is predominantly white, I would still be worried about tuition. So before you make assumptions like that and make statements like that, you should know the facts behind what you were saying. So even if I was getting the United Negro College Fund, it's not enough to cover my tuition and I

would still have to pay a lot out-of-pocket. But to think that every black person... and they say “Yeah there’s all these scholarships out here for black people and there are none for white people.” If it doesn’t say black, it means white. And I think when I was coming in as a freshman, there was this – have a pity party for me because I’m middle class and I can’t get...

L - Right I’m too rich for benefits but not rich enough to be rich.

J - Yeah, yeah, yeah that’s what I hear a lot and that I’m a mom - “Oh I didn’t know you have to pay for tuition because you’re a mom.”

L - Those black moms are just rolling in it...

J - We’re just rollin the dough with our \$500 a month checks we get in welfare and people need to understand the facts before they can support a stance. They have to know both sides.

L - But getting to the point of knowing both sides’ means being open minded and listening and not just deciding how things work.

J - Yes that’s true.

L - In terms of professors but also staff at St. Kate’s and you don’t have to totally generalize – all my professors are great or they’re all terrible – but in terms of awareness, sensitivity to issues of poverty injustice?

J - I would say all of my teachers have been totally amazing in that area except for one, who was way not understanding and not... not that but...

L - Can you tell me a little more about that?

J - Well, when I would, I guess sharing my story like when we talk... usually my story comes out in defense of someone's statement. ____ It's always like "homeless people do this and poor people do this." And I'm like, "Wait a minute, I fit in that category and actually, I do this and most people I know are working class and blankety, blank, blank," and that's usually how my story gets out there and my professors are very "Thanks for sharing that. Our class really needed to know that. I'm glad we have someone in class who has an experience different from our white picket fence and 2 and half kids."

L - And will say so.

J - Yes.

L - I think that is a whole other thing. I know as an instructor I know there's more diversity of situations out there but I don't want to make anyone feel like they have to explain it all and so if ... you've been willing to volunteer your story when it's relevant to something and you feel like you need to provide that other side, more information. That is giving of yourself.

Luci - But in this instance, it didn't work or what?

J - Didn't work for what?

Luci - You were talking about the instance with the one professor.

J - Oh, I think it was just her personality. She was actually a physical education teacher and she was very... her mind was very... her viewpoint was very narrow and she down talked overweight people and she down talked healthcare, she's like "I don't understand why I have to pay for everyone's healthcare cause people are still going to be fat and they're not going to go to the doctor" and people with... I'm a big, in my volunteer work I'm a big advocate for HIV awareness and things like that. And then one time she said "People with HIV just need their own clinics anyway and I don't feel like I should be going to the doctor with people who have HIV."

Luci - This is a teacher?

J - This is a tenured professor.

L - And you know, I think one thing it seems like the difference is that... ok, [when] it's an ignorant classmate and you as a peer can say... "Girl, wake up."

J - But when it's your professor you're like - I don't want to risk my grade, I don't want to and then if I...

L - I don't want to put myself out there.

J - Yeah. I don't want to... I don't know is she going to suspect me if I complain about it. I don't know, it was really strange and it was constant so it was like, where do you start with someone so ignorant like that? How do you break the ice?

L - And especially as a student to tenured faculty member and I know we feel entitled. And we spout and we as a group but that is an abuse of power and I'm glad also that it stood out to you as this isn't the way it's supposed to be and my other ones aren't like this, that that's somewhat reassuring but the fact is that people with those views can be in a position where they're just putting it out there and nobody can challenge them... or not safely. So we sort of talked about this but is there anything else you wish that your classmates, your professors, staff members that you work with here knew?

J - Knew about me?

L - Knew about you, knew about the economic diversity and that some in our community have really struggled with housing insecurity?

J - I think that you definitely can't make assumptions about people. About where they live based on where they go to school or you would assume an institution as prestigious as St. Kate's, like nobody is homeless but that is far from the truth. And you can't expect your story to be

everyone's and you have to understand underlying issues and to know the issue is more important than the person with the issue, I kind of want to say. Homelessness is not my problem even though I am currently facing housing insecurity. Homelessness is a problem in and of itself. Systemic, you have to....

L - Look at the larger forces and see that one individual cannot make her way through this world without being part of the other systems and... So you plan to graduate in May? Post-graduation?

J - I've already secured a job with Hennepin County corrections so I'll be starting as a probation officer.

L - Excellent – Congratulations.

J - Thank you.

L - Will that be with Hennepin County?

J - Yes. I'm hoping I can keep my place because it's such a convenient location. If I have to come out to St. Paul, then I'd be taking a hike to work every morning.

L - Right, being able to... I certainly hope for the best with your appeal. If you were doing an interview here (and I guess you could be talking to yourself), is there anything I'm not getting at that you would want to ask that you would want out there?

J - I would ask questions about marital status and sexual orientation.

L - Ok. Would you care to answer those questions?

J - I identify as non-heterosexual. I don't know, I'm just difficult, not bisexual or anything like that just non-heterosexual. I'm also single and never married but as an orientation leader in the past and particularly transfer orientation, I hear a lot of women say I'm back in school because my husband blank... my husband left me, my husband died, my husband is sick and can't work anymore.

L - Lost his job, in jail.

J - Wherever and it's like my husband blank. Sometimes some people story is my husband blank but that's not my story.

L - And part of – this is getting back to gender too – that this assumption that women's issues of poverty stem from their relationship to men?

J - Right.

L - That it should just be taken individually? Find out what's what. Anything else I should know?

J - This is a great project. I'm sure you guys already know that.

L - We hope, yeah we think so, we hope it does what we are trying to achieve.

J - I guess one last thing I should say is that to people with housing insecurity just know that it's going to get better and it might not get better on your time but it will be the right time when it happens.

L - When things come together.