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Rapier, Joyce Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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TB: Are you ready? Could you just say your name, your date of birth and where you were born?

JR: My name is Joyce Rapier, and I was born [date removed], 1957, in a very small but culturally rich town in the Mississippi Delta called Greenwood.

TB: Is Rapier your maiden name?

JR: Rapier is my married name. My maiden name is Smith.

TB: When did you come to Holland for the first time?

JR: The first time I came to Holland I think was maybe the last week in January for a visit in 1987. There was snow on the ground so I didn’t see very much of it, and I was eight months pregnant so I definitely didn’t see very much at all.

TB: What brought you to Holland to stay?

JR: We were coming to kind of look around because my husband was recruited here. It was a job, a relocation.

TB: Please tell me a little bit about your family, spouse, children, and where you have lived during your life?

JR: The initial part of my life—until I was eight years old—I grew up in Mississippi. So I had real rich family life because there was grandma there and great-grandmother had parents. But when my grandmother died, who was the stronghold in the family, we moved to Chicago. We lived in the city of Chicago until I was seventeen and I went
away to college. I moved back to Chicago and stayed until I got married. Then I moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. A little bit about my family life (unintelligible) from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to Holland, Michigan. From Holland I went to visit my sister who lives in St. Louis, MO, and one of my kids, their lung collapsed, so I had to live in Missouri for a whole year and a half until that child of mine rehabilitated. So I've lived in Holland since 1990.

TB: Did you meet your husband in Harrisburg?

JR: I met my husband in Chicago.

TB: What were some of your first impressions of the city of Holland, both when you came here to visit and when you came here to live?

JR: My initial impressions of Holland were all word of mouth, so I was quite impressed. My husband had come on a visit. He said, "you will like it because it's a college town." He knows I am about arts and theater and everything cultural. I always try to get close to the college community or university community because you can see plays cheaper (laughs). He said "you will like it, it's very family oriented, is laid back. Probably is more your style," because he knows how much I appreciated Southern style. My husband is an engineer. He's not a PR [public relations] person, so initially when I came to Holland, I lived very close within walking distance to Holland Hospital, and that was really a homogeneous community. I felt like an alien. Everybody always watched me and they always pointed and they always quietly stared. I just felt really depressed being here because I didn't have a support mechanism and there were very few African-Americans. The ones that were here
weren’t like the ones that I was used to associating with and typically coming from an artsy community, people have a tendency to work together until the play gets out or their art form is done. So, you share one example, there is a common ground you share. And then race, age, and sex just doesn’t make that much of a difference when you overcome those things. When I came to Holland, it was such a fear factor.

When I’d go to 8th Street—I finally realized, we’re not supposed shop on 8th Street. No one told me that. They watched you everywhere you went, just because you’re African-American, to make sure that you didn’t steal anything or you didn’t have people waiting on you, just common courtesy. It was not shown me. That made a major impact. No matter how much Holland changes, I’m still going to remember that. There still going to be reserves somewhere in my mind.

TB: Do you have any other interactions with people in Holland that stand out when you first came here?

JR: I tried to go to the Volunteer Round Table. I thought, if I volunteer, somebody will know I exist. Maybe I will get a job. The first really positive person that I met was a lady by the name of...her name was Joyce Gallup at the time, and it is Joyce Barkel now. She worked for the city of Holland, a volunteer coordinator and also she was on the speaker’s bureau. She didn’t baby me, she couldn’t empathize with me. But, she included me. She was the first person, I think, that recognized that I had some talents or had some abilities, that I really had some needs and to nurture them. I was not the typical housewife person. That wasn’t just going to be it for me. She opened a lot of doors for me or just included me. That made a major difference. She has
always had a valuable place in my life. She is a real good friend. We laugh and we hug. She helped me to bridge gaps. That was an outstanding experience. The next outstanding experience was my son, was born the second day after our furniture had come when we moved to Holland. Evidently, there weren’t many African-American children born in that hospital. There was a comment by one of the nurses that really kind of threw me. I thought, what kind of town are we really in? Are we going to be safe here. Usually people would rub my son’s head, just to feel how maybe kinky hair was. Some people would say "why did you get offended?" That offends me, not because people were curious, but they always did it behind my back. They did it when they were taking my son in to examine him or at the grocery store when I was leaning over the counter trying to get something, they’re rubbing his head. I think curiosity must just not have been it. So, those were more outstanding things. Did we answer the question about family? Did I answer that sufficiently?

TB: Well, I asked a little bit about your family. Did you want to add your children’s name, your husband’s name, where you met your husband?

JR: I met my husband in Chicago, really quite by accident because his brother was a sound engineer. At that time, I worked for a talent agency and we were putting together a production. He sent my husband to do his work. My husband had it all screwed up because it wasn’t his thing and I yelled at him. After the production part was done and all the technical things were over with, I apologized to him. He said "Well okay, you owe me lunch." I said okay, but didn’t think nothing of it. I said yes to get out of there. A few days later, my daughter from a previous marriage
brought him and said "this is my mommy," and "this is my mommy’s room, this is her office." So, I was able to see him in a different light. We weren’t tense because it wasn’t business at that time. I did take lunch with him and really liked where he was mentally and spiritually. My husband is an engineer and that’s the reason why we came to this town.

TB: Where does he work?

JR: He works for Herman Miller. He is both a mechanical and aerospace engineer. He's a typical, cliche engineer. We are just total opposites because I’m the artsy person, the other side of the brain. I hug and I cry and I get emotional. He just looks at me. I have four children. My oldest daughter is a biology student at the University of Michigan. She wants to be a gynecologist. The next child is ten years old. That is Crystal who is my personality person. She is very sports and arts and theater. There is not too much that she tackles that she doesn’t like. She is the most fruited child. And Peter, Peter is 9, he is the son that was born two days after I moved to Holland. He is my really spiritual child. He is like a really old little person. He really treasures people and he sees the good in everybody. He is that kind of person. Then, I had a surprise baby who just made two Monday. He is really taking us for a rough ride. He has done everything. That’s pretty much my family. I’ve always been happy because of children and education and recreational things for kids in this community. So, I have any number of extended family children, from time to time. But basically, the hub of my family is four children, my husband and myself.

TB: Do you want to talk about what your career became when you moved to Holland?
JR: When I moved to Holland, I stayed in the house seven years, and I went through a major, major depression. I didn't know it then, because I hadn't been used to people who had been depressed. It worked, we just thought that they were kind of quiet. Typically, minorities don't seek professional help for things like that. We just don't have the trust factor. So many times, it is because of racial things that they were brought on. I think mine was. I got to the point that I really didn't want to go out; I really didn't want to shop. I got tired of being stared at or put in categories. It was even hard sometimes to get up and go to the doctor. I would put things off or wait until my husband came home. He'd take me. So, at that time, I felt like I lost all credibility. I felt like I didn't have a character, credentials had gone to the side. I had majored, my degree was in art, entertainment, and media management. Previous to that, I had studied to be a writer, journalism. I had really a strong hold in communications. I just couldn't find a niche. The same time, what was happening across the country and across the world was that people were eliminating or downsizing their marketing and PR. I just couldn't really position myself. So, I stayed home with my kids. I don't regret because I prepared them for school early and they're competitive. They don't have to look down because of their race. At the same time, I didn't have so much to do to nurture myself. So, after we came back from St. Louis and my son's illness, I told my husband "we're gonna move, I'm not staying here." I've had a little taste of a big city and people that have your own friends. So, we compromised and built a house. That motivated me to have more goals. So, I decided that I really wanted to become a teacher. That's what I loved.
My mother told me years and years and years and years ago that is what I was gonna do, that is what I should do, and that is what I was best at. She had been a teacher. I came from a long line of educators. But, I didn’t listen, because I thought I was going to be a club reporter on the six o’clock news. (Laughs) That’s what I wanted, the glamour. Then, that got boring for me. So, I pulled all my skills together and freelanced for awhile. That wasn’t as lucrative or frequent as I wanted it to be. I went into the day care business. I liked that, but they were destroying my house.

TB: My mom’s had a day care for 19 years.

JR: Here in Holland?

TB: No, in Cadillac, Michigan.

JR: I need a baby sitter...(laughs) I started to go back to grad school. I just really didn’t know what route to go. It was kind of a personal goal. It was so personal that I didn’t want to share it with people. I just wanted to accomplish something and do good. So, I didn’t really search it out and research properly. I started to work on my Master’s at the same time as getting my certification. It is down to one class to get the certification and the student teaching. At the same time, doing grade school. That is more me. I am too busy. There are always too many things to do. I am never at home. But, I get to know the difference. I feel better, even though it is more challenging and more pulling in many directions, I feel like a whole person again. So, my ultimate goal with education is to perhaps be a principal. I would like to be an educator for at least five years.

TB: With being a principal, you get to do a lot of the PR work.
JR: Absolutely, it is pulling everything together. Presently, I work for the Boys and Girls Club. I'm their outreach director. What I do there is a lot of the programming. I do targeting kids that might be just on the edge of the gang world or quitting school or have some problems communicating because they are pregnant, whatever. I'm just the liaison between them and Social Services, or their parents or whatever. I love the job. I always a not for profit phase. I am very much (?) But, it's an interesting job. It's never the same. It's not dull; the hours are flexible. The rewards are just seeing people happy, placed right, and connected. So that makes me a difference. But the same, I'm working out of East Middle School in Holland. I have educational programs. I still am doing my tutorial as far as reading. I am doing leadership and citizenship, bringing speakers in, and having workshops. So it mostly fun. Days that I am running a little late, I have my two middle kids who are nine and ten, they just kind of hang with me. So, they're being educated even though they don't know it! I really like this job, it's really going to be a struggle once I do get me certification to be just contained in one little classroom.

TB: Oh yes, and to only have a certain amount of time to deal with...

JR: Yes. It will be a decision.

TB: It might be an opportunity that are arises that you can do some teaching between classes.

JR: Like a share teaching, so I might be interested in that.

TB: I am an education major too. I'm an English major and Education.

JR: Are you?
TB: I teach Middle school.

JR: You do? Good luck! No... (laughs).

TB: It’s my favorite age, at least now. Hopefully three or four years from now...

JR: Yes. You can absolutely do some things with them. The problem that really steered towards the language arts was seeing kids that couldn’t spell or couldn’t read and really kind of needed the basics still. Phonics of such a bad word now because the whole language has not been approached properly. So, it’s the lazy way out for a lot of teachers. I am going to get into this and I am going to be really good!

TB: One of my big things if self-esteem and that is what I want to teach to my middle-schoolers because that is where they are really getting their ideas for self-esteem. Young women, too, it is very important. That is one thing that I am really worried about.

JR: Oh yes. And I thought you were quiet, Tracy.

TB: No (laughs). Are there any organizations that you have been involved in beside the Boys and Girls Club?

JR: The Speaker’s Bureau of Holland. I am on the board of directors for Child and Family Service. I have been on the board of directors for Minority Advertising Counsel. I am always involved in whatever school my kids go to, so I am always volunteering and doing something in that capacity. I am involved with the Institute for Racial Healing presently, so I am always giving that little bit of extra time to some other organization.

TB: How do you keep it all together?
JR: I don't.

TB: Well, you must be one of those people that if you don't have something to do, then you get bored.

JR: I am. I truly am that king of a person. But my house is not clean because my oldest daughter is gone. When she came home from college, she said, "Mom, you let them do this?" So, I am so glad that it is summer because it is clean. Every time you walked in the door, there were shoes meeting you.

TB: What are some qualities that stand out concerning the city of Holland?

JR: The growth in Holland has been truly interesting. I am so very proud that the corporations and their recruiting efforts have brought in a diversity of people. I mean, all races, all ages, from all thinking schools. So, we're no more everybody's pattern that they all look alike, they all go to school together, and they all go to the same church and we're all friends. Whoever else is here, they're left out. So, I am proud of that. It's grown tremendously. Something else that sticks out, we aren't suffering economic pain, like jobs. There are some jobs. If people really want to work, there is something in all capacities for you from a professional level in college to Steak and Shake. I'm not saying Steak and Shake to put it down, but even something for the teenagers to do. So, I like that. That is what is sticking out. And Holland, even though it is late, they are making some efforts to include all people. Having more social and recreational activities because in my personal dreams, where is the YMCA? What do people do around here besides go to the beach? It really was a dead town. There was nothing. Imagine, nothing on the highway. Nothing,
on US 31. I mean a couple of things. There was no mall. It was boring, quite boring.

TB: I've heard that before.

JR: We spent lots of money taking lots of trips. In the town rolls its carpet up at 5 o'clock in the evening. If you didn't get it during the time that you probably worked, you don't get the service. So, in those means, I think that they've grown and they've adapted. That is positive.

TB: Are there any negative aspects to Holland that we haven't talked about or any drawbacks to living in Holland?

JR: The drawback to living in Holland is native Hollanders, especially the old-timers. They've been so use to things being just one set way that they aren't quite as bendable. They aren't as quick to include people. If they do, they like to go the missionary route whereas they give you a little money and then they tell you how to run your life instead of saying "what would you like for me to help you do?" "How can I be of assistance or service to you?" That's a negative thing. I think that money dictates a lot. For instance, my kids went to a wealthier grammar school. They would come home and say what's his name wore new clothes this week and this person had $100 gym shoes and they wore $50 jeans. I am like, no. It had made an impact even though I would sit down and explain to them this isn't our route. I am sure that they would have liked to be competitive. They would have felt, as you said about self-esteem, their self-esteem would have been much better if they felt competitive enough to "look the part." So, those are drawbacks. I think that
comes in a lot of small towns. It comes with growth and change. People resist change and differences. I don’t think that you’ll ever live in a place where everybody likes each other. Now is it is matter of every positioning themselves and finding their own groups and support mechanisms.

TB: Are you involved in a church in Holland? What church is that?

JR: Right now, I’ve newly been involved with not a church per say. We meet out of people’s homes. I am part of the Ba’hai faith. That religion’s primary doctrine is built around elevating mankind and racial healing and equality of men and women and independent investigation of truth, meaning that people, on your own, not because your mom told you or this is what everybody does in this community, or the pastor said this, you search for yourself. You have to know for yourself. Your salvation is something that is for you. This religion is very much into servicing people. I know they expect us to believe in consultation and believe in sitting down, and negotiating, and working something out. One is of (something) outlet is sharing something at the round table. It is no longer my fault, it is a group thing. Everything goes through a process, so it’s a lot of learning for me. I feel that it is something that I have been searching for because I was not satisfied with typical religion. Typical religion, for me, initially started off in the South as a Southern Baptist. We spent half our lives in church. Then, my parents did a big thing. They allowed me to become what I wanted to be, which was Catholic. Then I stared a lot ills in the Catholic church that they were too stupid to change. Women do this. I thought, this is not for me either. So, I went with a religion that I felt very comfortable with. I feel like this is where I
am. With this religion, you can not be a sit-down person. You have to be of service, you have to be involved. We take turns in giving a lecture or a speech or whatever. It is group service, as much as we can.

TB: What is the name, how do you spell the name?

TB: How do you think that Christian Churches influence the city of Holland?
JR: The Christian churches in this community, simply because this is the last major strongholds of the Dutch people in America, this is where their university and so much of the business is, they have a lot of money in these churches. So, they are movers and shakers. There is no way around that. They have been instrumental in bringing a lot of people here, be it Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, or helping people that lived in the inner-city or had problems with alcohol or drugs, or women in transition, women that had been going through some type of abuse. They help that way. But relationship-wise, they haven’t been accessible to have one-on-one relationships and friendship. I think the major thought that I’ve always had is that the Christian churches here were hypocritical because they would say one thing and they’d do one thing with their monies. But they didn’t have the people skills. I just thought that for such a strong Christian community, where’s the love, where is the choice, where is the friendship, where is the extension? That’s always the major question in my mind. One day I will spring from the towers in Holland and find out why it is happening.

TB: What are some of the biggest changes that you’ve seen in Holland since you have
moved here?

JR: Growth: industrial growth, commercial growth, and residential. Every where you look, there are subdivisions and places that used to be just land and forestry. It is now homes. Why are all these peoples coming to Holland? Initially, they started coming in the late, late '80s and early '90s because it was a continuous recession in most of the country. In a lot of parts of the country, it was actually a depression. So, people were coming to Holland for jobs and businesses were relocating or locating here because there was personnel. So, it was a two-fold thing. The growth is just a major, outstanding thing. If you have been away for 5, 6, 7, or 8 years and you come back, you are probably confused. You don't even know the streets any more. Then the make-up of the people is totally different. This is a blond-hair, blue-eyes haven. Now there are red-heads and brunettes and there are people with black hair and curly hair and there are all kinds of people now. So I think that is another major difference.

TB: What effect does the growth have on the community?

JR: There's new thought coming into the community. It's not always new. It is true that the people that have the money are going to be powerful and controlling. There are segments in the community, advocates for whatever, they have voices. They will not hesitate to speak their voices. So, things aren't done as boldly. Things are done under the table. We find out that things are already in place. That is because other people will start saying, we don't like it that it. The issue of the charter schools coming in is kind of shaking up people, it's going to shake up education as a whole.
People got tired of things being done. Initially, there was one charter school, I can't think of the name, Lakeshore Academy or something to that extent. They wanted to exclude, what they said was "insignificant others," in their words. What they meant was Hispanics, Asians, and African Americans, nobody that didn’t have money. Their name wasn’t in their names (unintelligible). They really didn’t want kids with problems. So, they’ve had a hard time. I don’t even know if they have their charter. But the new charter schools that have come are part of an excel program, that has worked, perhaps in Grand Rapids, just to be close, and they believe in inclusion and multi-cultural educations. That really serves a lot of people. There are people, and I use the incident about Germany and Hitler and the Nazis, there were plenty of people that didn’t believe in that, but the fact that they did not take a stand, didn’t do anything, didn’t say anything, made them be included. So, the same thing here. I found out doing diversity training that people would call me up and say, I really want my kids to grow up with all kinds of people, but I didn’t know how to approach this subject. I didn’t know how to talk about it. He has a poster of Michael Jordan in his room. We’re just so socially and culturally ignorant as people. We could be so far advanced. The culture of 4,000 years ago was pretty much advanced. Think where we would be today if we didn’t have these small little (?) about what color and who is the lowest on the totem pole? So, I think that that’s a virtue for Holland is that they’re getting all kinds of people.

TB: I feel really thankful that I came here because I came from a very predominantly Caucasian community, I never had the chance to make friends with other cultures.
And here I can realize, I always said that I wasn’t racist, but I really know. I have a roommate that is African-American. I have good friends that are Hispanic and stuff. Now I know, that I have the opportunity...

JR: To interact with them. I remember last year, sitting here, in Hope College. It was an English class, as a matter of fact. The professor had a panel, she had Dr. Yelding and myself one of the librarians here who has given her life to bridging those gaps. She had a hispanic student and a hispanic professor or something. One person said that the reason why she felt uncomfortable with minorities coming into Hope College was because Hope College would lose their accreditation. I thought hmmm, this is narrow mindedness to the utmost. She was bold enough to say that. But, how many people are thinking that. If we have two more black people or our campus, or Hispanic people, we’re not going to be safe, we’re not going to be a good school anymore.

TB: It'd be a better school.

JR: Enriching, because the world is more diverse. Typically, like I spoke about that religion, it is the second fastest growing religion in terms of numbers. It is all universal. (Unintelligible) because they don’t go in and do the missionary thing. They say, "How can I be of service? Can I help you irrigate your field?" Not, "This is the way you do it with me, you’ve got to plant this here," without finding out that this doesn’t work because people have tried it before. I just feel like we do so much of telling other people how to be. It still looks bad to them???? Bringing people in or checking them out, or just on a personal basis, you may be going home to her
roommate one weekend, and see how her family is. It might be totally different from yours, it might be really a culture shock. But, you’re educated. You’ve learned something.

TB: Even doing each other’s hair. It’s fun.

JR: Yes. Absolutely.

TB: Has Hope College changed since you’ve been here? How has it?

JR: When I initially got here, I kept being reminded by my husband, you said that you were going to go find a college. That might be something for you to do. So, I ran out and introduced myself to people. I talked to some of the kids that were African and Hispanic, but that were more mixtures, like a Puerto Rican or something, that looked African. I would say to them, if you just need to do your laundry, if you need a couple extra dollars, if you want to have a number where your mother could call, or you want to come over for Thanksgiving dinner and you can’t make it home, let’s do that. So, a couple families and I, we got together and became a support mechanism for some students. They would say, why don’t we put something on for Black History Month? So I would bring speakers in. Never ever, ever did I have anybody here at Hope College work with me on a complete basis. Always things were changed, always things would be thrown at me. Usually, I would have to do everything. I just felt for a college community this was really not a really good atmosphere. It’s ironic now because I get teased by people that say, "You’re going to be at Hope College? Oh my God, it is going to change now." Because they know how outspoken I am. So, I think now Hope College has been a little more user-
friendly to the community, the whole of the community. So people, it's not a foreign little object in the middle of the city. People have come in these doors, for different sports camps and they've had meetings here. They come to some of the festivities or events that take place here, the theater or whatever. It is more user-friendly, I think.

TB: Do you think that the Dutch heritage still has a large influence on the community? How does it influence the community?

JR: Absolutely. This is a stronghold. Look at Tulip Time. I told my kids this year, no we are not going down. There is traffic. I've seen the parade, how many years? And it's about the same. But, yes, it is....It primarily goes back all the way to the Netherlands because the Dutch people that came here did not come here like most immigrants. They didn't come here because of religious persecution or major famines. They came here because they felt like religion was not strict enough. So this was a group that had their agenda pretty much together when they got and how they wanted to do it. So, those are stricter-minded people. They have a tendency to keep their ways a lot longer than other people. They are more stiffer than other people. So, I think that there's a lot to remind you of the Dutch heritage. My son, that I spoke about earlier, he's got a few men on the street to call them Grandpa, neighbors or people we've done business with. We had a guy over, his wife made him a little Dutch cap. Anyway, he came home with a little Dutch cap. He said, you know Mom, that means that I am Dutch chocolate. I thought for a kid to always come with some rationality or some peacemaking, I thought how wonderful. What do you mean by giving him this cap, he's not Dutch? He doesn't need this cap. Dutch
people are the people that brought the slaves over, did apartheid. I don’t want.

Because he decided that he could be Dutch chocolate, that was precious to a lot of people all over the world. I could deal with it. I think that the Dutch and everybody else has to learn, you don’t lose who you are. You just enrich who you are. You keep who are and you extend yourself to other people. You don’t lose it. I cannot lose my color. I can’t lose that. I might lose my Southern accent. But I grant you when I go home to Mississippi, it’s y’all. Wuz’ up. When I go to Chicago, I talk like my family and friends in Chicago. I didn’t lose it. It is just appropriate for the situation that I am in. The old saying, when you’re in Rome, do what the Romans do. That is exactly my philosophy. A lot of times that just happens naturally. You don’t make it happen. When get I’m home, it’s y’all again.

TB: Have the problems facing the general citizen of Holland changed since you moved here?

JR: Yes. At a certain time, there was a major fear of (husband’s name?) because there was crime. Crime in Holland got more attention than crime in Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Muskegon because Holland was not used to it. People could leave their cars unlocked, their doors unlocked, the kids sleep in the yard in their tents, and they still can do that for the most part. But, it was just a fear factor. There were a couple, or one major gang coming in, the Latin Kings. They had control...two gangs, and the Cryps which were Asian kids. They finally got together because they were outsiders. We talked about it to the teens and told them that we don’t really want them in this community. It was a major influx in the early ’80s for them to
come here, and the same with the Hispanic kids. There was a constant tension, you know. So, I think that the crime issue was a big, big thing. Now, they've starting to find things like, the police have come up with community policing and community police and the police walk the streets. They might shake hands with people, they know the merchants, they know the kid. They ride their bikes, so they're quicker and more accessible so they can get into skinny little places. They go to the schools. They have a DARE program. They have an "Officer Friendly," they get involved and play basketball tournaments, so it's not the us and them philosophy. So, they know the people in the community and people know them, so they are less likely to do something because they know Officer Johnson, or whoever. I think that has made a difference. They took a positive approach instead of taking out their shields and their rifles. I think that change, if they maintain it the way they have so far... They have a Junior Police Academy that you or I could go to for 6 to 8 weeks and learn everything, go into Grand Haven to the State Police and see the whole lock up process, and see what they have to go through. Ride with them and see what they go through in a typical day, see how they have to get educated. There are signs or something they look at that gives them the hint that this is trouble. So, you can appreciate their jobs a whole lot better.

TB: What effect does industry have on the Holland community?

JR: It has enabled Holland to take a positive face because the industry is coming just like the people are coming. Most of the businesses that have built in this community, they look good. They look good, they were viable in this community. They've got people
working. They’ve been a major stronghold in here. For instance, I just relatives that came here and they said, "McDonald’s, we saw the big sign: ’Now hiring, McDonalds’s pays $7 an hour.’ $7?! You only get minimum wage where I come from!" So, it’s more competitive here. People still live decently here. If you’ve ever travelled or ever been in the South, deeper in the Midwest. In some regions, people just don’t live as good as they do here. Here, even what they consider the "ghetto," of Holland, which is 12th, 13th, on back to 19th St., the central area, it’s just not as bad as the real ghettos! It’s nothing like it. So, I think the industry has enabled Holland, and most of the industry here gives back to the United Way or whatever. So, they give back, they give something. It helps encourage people to keep their heads up.

TB: Concentrating on Holland, has the role of women changed since you have come here. I know that it has only been a brief period.

JR: Absolutely, along with the role of women across the country or in the universe, this whole world, Holland has made some major strides. There is nothing more then the basic, more women are at work right now. There’s a major problem with health care for women and their children. They need effective day care. They could stand to get some self-esteem, some strength. I can do it; I can take care; I can contribute. So, a lot of people have left the houses, or you find a lot of women that have had careers and decided to stay home, but they are more educated then they were previously. So they know if they wanted to, they could make that transition a lot quicker and easier then they would have been able to years and years ago. You see more women as
CEO's or at the banks, so more women are visible in the community. It’s a wonderful thing.

TB: Can you tell me what you have heard other people say of Holland, such as family and friends from out of town.

JR: When I used to travel, people would see my license plate and see Michigan, they would automatically think I was from Detroit, always. When I would say Holland, especially older people, they would say, "Oh! I’ve been there. That’s the Tulip town!" That would cheer people up and they would talk about the Tulip town and how beautiful the town was and that kind of a thing. They would maybe leave open for my impression. Then on the minority side, you would here, "Oh, it’s so prejudiced here. Those people, they don’t want to see it." They says this... and we can’t keep our jobs," And they got us here. They say it’s unfair. "They are afraid of affirmative action. Oh, it’s just a bad situation." Professional minorities in this community, they don’t have very many positive things to say. They can make a living, but they are definitely not happy. I, personally feel, about all the places that I have lived, I like Holland because it’s centrally located. It’s far enough from my family, that they don’t come tapping on my door everyday. It’s close enough that I can run there, run to Chicago, in a few hours and go shopping. I can go to Detroit in 3 hours, I am located really close to my daughter. I like that. I like the water. I have always like living by water. Coming from a small town with farm area, I’m used to land, I don’t want to live this close to nobody. I appreciate that. So personally, I’m able to raise my children. Because we were shut out, initially when
we moved to Holland, it’s just made a stronger family basis for me. So, we are really kind of our own little clique. I appreciate that. We did have to go through some trauma to get there, but we’re there. That’s on a positive note.

TB: That’s really all my questions. Do you have anything that you want to add about the city of Holland, your work that you’ve done here?

JR: I’m glad that you invited me to do this interview. That lets me know that Holland, the Joint Archives, Hope College, or someone is doing more to include all kinds of people. Other people’s stories need to be told. I think that that’s the reason why we are culturally ignorant because we really don’t know. It doesn’t get personal enough to us. "They always say that," or "that’s how they are." But when you really know and can identify with other people, sometimes you become more sympathetic or understanding. And you just don’t make those little mistakes of saying, "Sister black day", or "Jew, you’re down." You are more politically correct with your language and your attitudes. I am just thankful that somehow, somewhere, some moves are being made to bridge the gaps. I, personally like to do my part, I just don’t hug African-American children. I just don’t hug Hispanic or Cambodian Children. I hug them all because I think that now that mothers are out of the house, a lot of kids are (??). You see more kids on drugs like Ritalin. The parents can’t cope. The teachers don’t cope. A lot of kids are being tossed to the side. They’re latch-key kids. There is any number of dilemmas. If I could be there for one person to make to the difference in one person’s life, or just a little bit in several people’s lives, that what’s I want to do. I will measure my life being a success by making some impact. The
adults have to let somebody else handle them. The old people, somebody else can handle that. But whatever I can contribute through the best of my ability, I can continue doing that. It's looks fruitful from this point on.

TB: What advice would you give a college student that is coming into the community?

JR: When you say a college student that is coming into the community, I look at predominantly, they are coming here because of Hope College. I know that my daughter would have a pretty decent scholarship to come here and she is studying sciences with some of the professors. And she loved them. But, she said, Mom, please don't make go to Hope College. I've lived here most of my life. I don't want to go to a school that I have to continue to fight. She's always been the only or the first black person. She said, I just don't want to go through that. I want to meet some people. I want to be at a university where there's a lot of things happening and going on. Believe me, coming from her, it was strange. This is my bookworm-quiet-stay-in-the-house-don’t-go-skating-don’t-do-anything kid. She just didn’t want... I would think that college life, it used to typically be the time the that you really grow, not just academically, but socially, spiritually, you set yourself up to grow financially. Take this time and go out of your little box. Meet some people, observe some things. Don’t just go on what you have heard or what you think. I say that because we just need to grow as a nation of people. We don’t need those small ills to keep us back. So, my advice would be for the college students, if they have time and it’s not taking away from their studies, to get involved. We need x amount of mentors for children. What other better experience is it then to mentor someone that
maybe is not typically like you. So, you are going to grow; you are going to learn something. They don’t all work out to be positive experiences, but you can probably find something positive about every encounter. Also, go to the churches in our community. Do something that is not strictly Hope College. I think that will set a person up to be open-minded. So that would be my only advice. I am really thankful that I have lived in so many different places, that I have met so many different people. My friendship base is not all African-Americans, it's not all poor people. I know people with megabucks that say, come spend the day with me on my boats, or here's my keys. You take your family and go off a couple of weeks. Just enjoy the cabins. I get there and everything is stocked there. Then, I know people that you have to fight roaches to get in their house. But, I treasure pretty much all the people that I know. There are people that I wouldn't care to invite into my house, but that is just typical. But, because I like people, I try to find some goodness. That's been real rewarding to me. Almost everywhere I go, it's "Hi Joyce." My kids think, Mom, don't talk to nobody when we get in the store. I know that you are going to meet somebody. You are going to talk, and you are going to be there all day. Okay, Mom, promise me. (Laughs). It is the hardest thing to do because I always see somebody that I haven't seen for awhile. They want to know, "Joyce, I saw the paper. I know you're doing this now." They are excited with my growth because maybe some people realize that I was being held back a lot. I have a lot of enthusiasm now because I'm excited. For the first time in my life, I really, really like which direction I am going in. I've planned it and things are falling into place. I
don't have enough money; I could use a new car. I need a dependable baby sitter, but other than that, things are pretty much what a person could ask for.

TB: Great! Well, thank you.

JR: Thank you Tracy.

TB: I just stopped myself from adding things I wanted to say about people, because that’s how I feel. If people would stop and listen to people and to try to find the good that’s in people instead of just saying, oh they live there, so I am not going to talk to them.

JR: The thing is, especially for somebody in the profession, why are you getting into education? Do you think everybody’s going to look like you? Be a straight A student? Be nice and polite and not get in trouble?

TB: No way!

JR: It’s a joke. I thought all these people getting into education, they will be an influence in my children’s life. They have attitudes.