

Janice Larrimore Interview Summary

Interviewee: Janice Larrimore

Interviewers: Sydney Goodman and Cole Fuchs

Interview date: October 17, 2023

Location: (Virtual) Christopher Newport University/Gloucester, VA

Length: 1 audio file, MP3 format, 32.51

THE INTERVIEWEE: Janice Larrimore was born Janice Bowman on August 6th, 1954 in Morrison, Virginia, and moved to downtown Newport News when she was 14. Larrimore attended Carver Elementary School from grades first through seven and attended Huntington High School for eighth grade. From ninth through eleventh grade, Larrimore attended Carver High School. For her senior year, Larrimore and her classmates were relocated to Menchville High School as a result of Newport News's mandatory bussing program. After graduation, Larrimore's higher education included Peninsula Business College, Thomas Nelson Community College, St. Leo College, and the Richmond and Hampton Roads Regional Criminal Justice Centers. Larrimore has worked as a teacher's aid, sales clerk, PYouth outreach coordinator, and has significant experience as both a campus police officer and a deputy sheriff. Larrimore married her husband, George S. Larrimore, Sr., who passed away in 2021. They both were formally involved in the regular NAACP branch. They owned and operated a mobile car wash service, which Mrs. Larrimore now operates.

THE INTERVIEWERS: Sydney Goodman is a senior at Christopher Newport University as a Political Science and Leadership double major with a minor in Human Rights and Conflict Resolution. Cole Fuchs is a junior at Christopher Newport University majoring in environmental studies and minoring in history and geography. They are both enrolled in Dr. Laura Puaca's course on "The Long Civil Rights Movement" and are carrying out this interview as part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY: The interview was conducted virtually, with the interviewers at Christopher Newport University and the interviewee in Gloucester, Virginia. The interview took a life-history approach where Larrimore shared her early childhood life and her core memories of elementary school. Larrimore then shared her experiences in attending Carver and Huntington high schools as well as her time at Menchville High School amidst the court-ordered bussing program in Newport News. Larrimore also shared her thoughts on the role desegregation played in the greater civil rights movement as well as the unfinished work of the movement that remains today.

Janice Larrimore - Edited Transcript

Interviewee: Janice Larrimore

Interviewers: Sydney Goodman and Cole Fuchs

Interview date: October 17, 2023

Location: (Virtual) Christopher Newport University/Gloucester, VA

Length: 1 audio file, MP3 format, 32.51

START OF INTERVIEW

Sydney Goodman: There we go. Okay. All right. We have started recording. Okay, so just for the recording purposes, this is Sydney Goodman and my partner, Cole. Today is October 16th, 2023, and we are interviewing Mrs. Janice Larimore. And this interview is being carried out as a part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project at Christopher Newport University. And so, yeah, good afternoon, Mrs. Larrimore. Thank you so much for being willing to do this. We're excited to talk to you. So for this interview, we're kind of taking a life history approach. And so we would love to be able to hear—ask a few questions about your childhood and growing up and things like that.

Janice Larrimore: Oh, okay.

SG: If that's alright.

JL: Fine.

SG: Yeah, so, would you mind telling us where and when you were born, where you grew up?

JL: Yes. I was born August 6th, 1954. I grew up in Morrison, Virginia, not far from Christopher Newport.

SG: Okay.

JL: Right up near Deep Creek Road. I lived there until I was thirteen. We moved to [Newsome Park and later to] downtown Newport News, but I attended Carver Elementary and I attended [Huntington and] Carver High School until mandatory bussing.

SG: Okay. Yes, and then what did your parents do for a living?

JL: My daddy was a brick mason.

SG: Okay.

JL: And my mom was a bus driver and she drove for the high school, Carver High School.

SG: Okay. Wow, that's so cool. Were your parents active in any, like, community groups or churches growing up? Anything like that?

JL: My mom was a member of Morrison Church. My dad wasn't too active in the church. He worked a lot, so [he didn't get involved much].

SG: Yeah, yeah. And then would you mind telling us, like, a little bit what your family life was like growing up? Or any favorite memories from childhood? What was your community like?

JL: My family and my cousins next door were the only Black families in the neighborhood.

SG: Okay. Wow.

JL: My mom growing up had quite a few White friends, because that's where they grew up, right there in the middle of that area there. I had one White friend. Her family was military.

SG: Okay.

JL: And they lived right across the [road] from us. My cousin next door didn't have any children. [There was eight of us children in my family.]

SG: Yeah, yeah. What was it like—. What was the dynamic like with being kind of the only Black family in that community?

JL: We didn't seem to have any problems. I don't know whether—. Just about everybody there probably knew my great-grandfather—my mom's grandfather—because that is where he raised his family.

SG: Yeah.

JL: And his brother next door raised their family. We didn't have any problems there [during my time].

SG: Okay. Well, that's great. That's helpful. [to Cole:] Do you wanna? Do you wanna?

Cole Fuchs: Yeah. So we'd like to hear first about your experiences attending some of the city's segregated schools before turning to integration. So, we understand that you attended Carver Elementary School. What grades did that consist of? Was it like elementary school and middle school combined?

JL: One through seven.

SG and CF: One through seven.

CF: Okay, great.

JL: And high school was eight through twelve.

CF: Oh, okay. Okay. That was like a big question that I had because I saw on the interview page that there was elementary school and high school and I didn't know where the—

SG: Middle school was.

CF: Middle school was because I know now they have it all separate.

JL: At that time, we had never heard of middle school. [laughter]

CF: Oh, okay.

SG: Yeah, that's interesting.

CF: So to my understanding, or this is just what I was thinking, was it—. You went to Huntington first, or was it Carver High School?

JL: No, I went to Huntington in the eighth grade.

SG: Okay.

JL: I had an aunt that lived in the area and she was sickly. I could go to have lunch at her house [and] see her at lunchtime. So that's the reason I went to Huntington in eighth grade. And then she passed right after I got out of the eighth grade and went back to Carver. She passed.

SG: Okay.

CF: Oh, okay.

JL: I enjoyed it at Huntington. It's a great school. [It was a great school.]

SG: Yeah.

CF: That answers that question.

SG: Yeah.

CF: What was your experience like at Carver High School?

JL: [Carver was also a great school. At Carver the teachers and counselors showed a lot of concern for their students.] I loved it. I went from ninth through eleventh.

SG: Okay.

JL: So, in my eleventh [grade], I went to school at 12:00[pm] because I worked in the morning. I was a teacher's aide, and I got to school about lunchtime. Then after lunch, I had classes until time to go home.

CF: Oh, okay.

SG: Okay, that was at Carver or at—. Yeah.

JL: That was at Carver.

SG: That's really cool. Did you enjoy being a teacher's aide?

JL: I did, I really loved it. [I worked with the Title One Program.]

SG: That sounds so fun.

JL: But I always had a feeling that I wanted to be a lawyer or go into law enforcement, some type of law enforcement. Then, as I got older, I decided I didn't want to be a lawyer. [laughter] So I got into the law enforcement field.

SG: Yes. We want to ask you more about that later. We saw that and thought that was really interesting. [reads over what has been asked already]. So how was—. Yeah, did Carver differ from Huntington in any way? I know you were only at Huntington for a year. But you enjoyed Carver more?

JL: It wasn't much difference. [Carver] was the school that my mom had graduated from. And that's the school that I wanted to graduate from.

SG: Mm-hmm.

JL: No, it wasn't much difference. The teachers were strict at Huntington and the teachers were strict at Carver. [They both had good teachers.]

SG: Yeah. [laughter] Oh, that's good to know. And it was, it's our understanding that they were—both Huntington and Carver—they were not integrated at the time, right?

JL: No, they were not.

SG: Okay, what was that—. Did you enjoy or—. What was my question? What was it like—I don't know how I want to ask that question. But like, what was it like maybe attending the schools that were segregated compared to when you went to Menchville?

JL: Well, being at Carver and being in Huntington, at the time we were there, that was all we knew. We've always attended, you know, those segregated schools, because that's [the way it was.]

SG: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. Okay. [to CF:] Do you want to transition?

CF: Yeah, sure. We'd like to learn more about your experiences with desegregation. We understand that you helped to integrate and participate in court-ordered busing. What was that process like?

JL: Well, we didn't have much of a choice. Well, actually we didn't find out until late in our junior year that we would be changing schools in our senior year. We weren't too pleased about that because a lot of us had already prepared to graduate from Carver High School. We even had students that had purchased class rings ahead of time.

SG: Wow.

JL: Yes.

SG: That's, that's—. [to CF:] Yeah, go ahead.

CF: How did that, how did that process work out for them? If they already purchased the class rings, did they just refund the money? Or?

JL: I don't know. I don't know how that worked. I hadn't purchased mine. They probably just [kept] the ring. [laughter]

CF: Oh, okay.

SG: Like, well, I got it.

JL: They probably didn't want to give it up anyway after what happened.

SG: Right. Yeah, that's really frustrating to change schools where you've, you know, gone for so many years and then they're like, "Okay, just kidding. Senior year, you need to go, like, go somewhere else." That's really hard.

CF: Yeah. oh, sorry. You go ahead.

JL: No, go ahead.

CF: To our understanding, we know that Huntington and Carver were shut down and then turned into intermediate schools later. What did that mean to you? That they were repurposed in a way.

JL: Well, it was my senior year. Maybe [it would] have been different [if it was] not my senior year. My feelings may have been different. I was really upset. I think now I'm still mad.

CF: Yeah.

SG: Yeah, understandably so. [to CF:] Sorry, keep going.

CF: Can you tell us a bit about the busing process itself? Like how it was organized, and how long did it take you to get to school and back?

JL: I left home at ten minutes to seven to go to the bus stop, and we had to ride probably fifteen to twenty miles to get to the school. That was a little early, and that long ride had you tired by the time you got to school. We dealt with it. We had no choice.

CF: How did your parents and the rest of your family react to these changes?

JL: They didn't like it. A lot of parents fought against it but [either way it would not have made a difference.]

CF: Yeah.

SG: Yeah,eah. How was, like, what was the—. Did you know a lot of people on the bus rides, like, to and from school, or how was the bus ride itself?

JL: Yeah, most of the people were from the neighborhood. [Some] I knew from when I was [at] Huntington [and Carver. We were bussed uptown to the White schools.]

SG: Yeah, yeah. So, do you remember what your experience was like on your first day at Menchville? Do you recall, maybe what that was like?

JL: Confused. [laughter]

SG: Yeah.

JL: Trying to find where [I needed] to go. Trying to get [my] class schedule corrected. I'll just say confusing.

SG: Yeah, understandable, yeah. Did you have any friends from Huntington or Carver that came to Menchville with you? Did you know anyone at that time?

JL: Yes, I knew quite a few people there. It was just hard getting to know new people from other places, other schools. Some of the folks weren't too friendly. [My] teachers were nice.

SG: Okay.

JL: There was quite a few people that I knew already from both schools.

SG: And kind of touching on—. Do you recall, like, what the racial composition of Menchville was like, maybe?

JL: There was more White there than Black at that time. [It was the school's second year open.]

SG: Yeah and were the faculty—. Was it primarily White teachers or did you also have Black teachers as well?

JL: There was more White [teachers] than there were Black [teachers]. Menchville was a fairly new school. It opened a year before I graduated.

CF: Was there any subjects that you particularly liked to study at Menchville? Or at Huntington or Carver?

JL: When I got to Menchville, I only wanted to take what I needed to get out.

SG: Right. Fair.

CF: Fair.

JL: I did have a government teacher that I really liked taking her class. I only had two classes and then I worked in a guidance office [for one hour] and then I went home, I went to work. I can say that I enjoyed my government class with Miss Williams the most.

SG: Yeah. And where did you work after school? You said you went to work afterwards. You work after school.

JL: I was working at Sears then, part-time.

SG: Okay that's cool. Did you enjoy it?

JL: I did.

SG: Yeah, that's so fun. Okay, so, is there anything before we move on? Was there anything else that you'd like to share from your experience at Menchville High School or anything that stuck out to you?

JL: I can say that Menchville wasn't the place I wanted to be at that time.

SG: Yeah.

JL: It wasn't the place I wanted to be. I think my mindset was on graduating from Carver because I wanted to [graduate from the school that my mom graduated from] and I was just upset.

SG: Yes.

JL: I was just upset. So, I went to school, did what I had to do, went to work. But I did run for secretary of the student body.

SG: Wow.

JL: I didn't win that. It was more, I guess, people we didn't know that voted for other people that they knew. So, I didn't win, but I did give it a try.

SG: Yeah, that's great. That's awesome. Yeah. Thank you for sharing about your experience at, yeah, at Menchville. That is understandably very frustrating.

JL: And I enjoyed working in the guidance office for that one hour.

SG: Yeah, for one hour?

JL: Yes.

SG: [to CF:] Were you going to say something?

CF: I was gonna ask, I know you said you wanted to go into law enforcement, what kind of gave you that goal to want to work into that? Was there any specific idea you had in mind, or any event?

JL: No special event, I just wanted to be a lawyer. And I'm not going to say on here why I changed my mind as I got older about being a lawyer. Well, I'll say one thing: I don't think I could defend people that I know is guilty.

SG: Right.

CF: I agree.

SG: That's a very good reason.

JL: That changed my mind about that. The older I got, the more I wanted to go into some type of law enforcement.

SG: Okay, that's awesome. Yeah, we want to transition a little, until we saw on the form that you attended the Peninsula Business College.

JL: Yes, I started that when I [finished] ninth grade. I started taking a typing class there [during the summer. My mom and aunt persuaded me to go.]

SG: Oh wow.

JL: And then just gradually continued through the years.

SG: Through the years. That's awesome. And then, so after you graduated from—. So you said you enrolled there after ninth grade and then did you continue there—. Was that something that continued after high school?

JL: Yes, the first year. The first year out of high school, I went there. And I went to Thomas Nelson [while working for the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), now the Office of Human Affairs (OHA)].

SG: Okay.

JL: I didn't have many courses to take by this time.

SG: Yeah.

JL: Yep.

SG: Sorry go ahead, go ahead.

JL: I went to Thomas Nelson, but I was going to Thomas Nelson part-time because I was working. So, worked my way through there. And then I went to St. Leo for a while, but I didn't graduate from St. Leo.

SG: Yeah. And then we saw a little bit of kind of a history of where you've worked on like on the little interview form. But yeah, how did you end up—. Would you mind explaining how you ended up in the law enforcement field or your other careers throughout the years?

JL: Well, I had a friend that worked at Hampton [Institute (University) campus police], and they were short, and he knew I was interested. He contacted me and told me to apply there, and I did, and I got the job there. Then I knew I didn't want to stay at Hampton, [Institute] (University). I

knew I didn't want to stay there. I knew [that was not the field of law enforcement that i wanted as a career.] I applied for Newport News Sheriff's Office and they hired me.

SG: Awesome.

JL: So that's how I got in law and I retired from there in 2004.

SG: Wow. Thank you for your service. That's amazing. [laughter]

JL: Thank you.

SG: Okay, where are we? Sorry, we got a little off-topic on our interview track here. Okay, did you know, or were familiar with Jesse Rattley while you were at Huntington High School at any time?

JL: She was the owner and the director of Peninsula Business College [when I attended.]

SG: Right. Okay. So did you ever have any interactions with her at all? We're just curious.

JL: Yes, we had a few conversations by me going there.

SG: Yeah. Yeah. That's cool. We saw that she was a really cool—. She was the mayor of Newport News and all of that and a really great leader. So we were just interested in that.

JL: Yes, she was. She had not become mayor when I was at her school, but she was a great director [and teacher.]

SG: Yeah, yeah, that's awesome.

CF: So I saw on the form that you were a business owner or a business entrepreneur, if I understood that correctly?

JL: I am now. My husband and I had a Texaco and a car wash, but we closed that down back in 2000. During that time, we also had a mobile car wash, which we kept going. My husband passed in [2021]. So now I'm keeping the mobile car wash going. Mainly it's my contracts, on the weekend.

CF: Okay.

JL: When he first passed, I kept doing the full service, but that wasn't working out too well with the help. So I'm just doing the weekend contracts.

CF: Oh, okay. [to SG:] do you have any more questions about that?

SG: [to CF:] About-. No, I think we can keep going through. Do you want to do some of these, I think? I'm checking our time. Yeah.

CF: Okay. Were you involved in any community organizations after you retired or while you were still in the police force?

JL: My husband and I belong to the NAACP here, but I [have not participated in years.] I was into my church until COVID. I'm not there as much now. My husband is buried there and it bothers me a little.

SG: Yeah.

JL: Just going down that road bothers me a little bit. I told my pastor, I'm going to come back but it's going to take me a little while to get it all together. I don't want to go to church and be sitting there crying, you know. My husband was deep in the church. He was a deacon, I can visualize him being there. I just don't want to be sitting up in the church, crying. I don't want people feeling sorry for me.

SG: Yeah, I don't blame you. That must be hard.

JL: Yeah. We had or have church service [remotely]. We had it regular, but the person that was doing the recording, they had surgery and they have been out, now. Sooner or later, [I will get back in place.]

SG: Yeah. COVID was helpful. Made church online, which was kind of easy. And then it's kind of fallen away now a little bit.

JL: Yes, yes.

SG: So kind of touching back on high school, how did your experience in Menchville High School affect your, maybe perspective or mindset, going into your career or higher education? Did that affect Thomas Nelson, Saint Leo, or in your law enforcement?

JL: No, the only thing about going to Menchville was that I was just disappointed. I think if it had been any other year, like I said before, if it had been any other year I would have been fine. But it was my senior year. We had people [at Carver] and Huntington that were going to be valedictorians, salutatorians. They were knocked out. You know, once they got to the new schools, they were knocked out. You know, those type of things bothered me a lot. But I think, I'll say this, if it was any other year, besides my senior year, I probably would have been fine.

SG: Yeah, yeah.

JL: I would have had a different mindset and feel, or feelings [about] being there.

CF: Yeah. Going a little before that time period, did you ever experience discrimination in public facilities before and after the high school integration process?

JL: Yes, I can say that in my neighborhood, until the time I was thirteen, I didn't have any problems like that. [There were places that I knew we did not go to.]

SG: Okay. Until you were thirteen?

JL: No, I didn't. When I grew up on Warwick, we didn't have any problem. We lived in the middle [an all-] White neighborhood, I didn't have any problems like that there. I ran into stuff like that, off and on, the older I got. But living there, we didn't have any problems.

SG: Okay. Yeah, thank you for answering that. I started asking the question, maybe you might have already touched on this, but, do you, like, currently, do you have a source of community

currently, or, where have you found that? I know you said you mentioned your church, or [are you] just involved in the community in any way, recently?

JL: Right now, I'm not doing anything because my great-grandson is here with me. He's only three, and it's just me and him now. And I'm just with him mostly now. I'm just taking care of him.

SG: That's a noble cause. Take care of your great-grandson. That's wonderful. [laughter] [to CF:] Okay, do we want to transition?

CF: Sure.

SG: Oh, I can do that, sorry. Yeah. All right. So just kind of looking back and as we're kind of transitioning to the close of the interview, just looking back, what role do you think that school desegregation played in maybe the broader, broader civil rights movement? Do you have any thoughts on that?

JL: It may have been for the better. At least some of us got to know the other race, that hadn't been subject to that before. I had White friends growing up. I knew White adults growing up. What else can I say about that? Things appear to get a little bit better at times. We still aren't there. We still have a long way to go. Seems like now it's trying to go back to [the way it was] before.

SG: Yeah.

JL: I don't know. I just pray for the world.

SG: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CF: What, what do you view as the most important accomplishments of the civil rights movement?

JL: Most important, let's see. I want to phrase things right.

SG: No worries.

JL: Let's say, Blacks being able to do things that we weren't able to do before, to go places that we weren't able to go before, to be, or in positions where we weren't able to hold before.

SG: Great. No, that's so helpful. That's helpful, thank you. Similarly, I think you might have touched on a couple of minutes ago, but what do you regard as like-. Are there any unfinished legacies or works of the movement that you see today?

JL: Unfinished

SG: Unfinished, yes, ma'am.

JL: Where everybody is equal. But the way it's going now, I think that will never happen.

SG: Yeah.

JL: If you look at right now, I don't think that will ever happen.

SG: Yeah, that's, yeah, that's discouraging. I think.

JL: We just, we just need to not give up.

SG: Yeah, absolutely.

JL: I know some great people. Everybody's not the same. There [is some that will never want us to be equal.] It's not everybody. It's just some people.

CF: I have a quick follow-up question. For those who are not supposed to give up, and for those who should keep fighting, would you have any recommendations or starting places on how to achieve the overall goal of total equality?

JL: Well, we've tried to do a lot of that through the years. And it hasn't materialized. So I just say keep doing what we're doing and just keep fighting.

CF: Yeah, we're kind of stuck at that standstill point of-

SG: It's frustrating.

CF: It's a back-and-forth tug of war, just gotta keep going.

JL: Yes, yes.

CF: Yeah. Kind of going off of that, what do you see as the most pressing civil rights issues facing either your local Gloucester community, Newport News, or Virginia as a whole?

JL: The most pressing?

SG: Yes. In Gloucester, Newport News, whatever you feel.

JL: Equality. Yeah, we need to get on the same wavelength or try to get on the same wavelength. I'm going to say equality.

SG: Yeah, absolutely. I think you touched—. That's very important. Well, okay, we have asked—. Do you have—. Yeah, is there anything else that you would like to add or anything that we missed that you would love to explain, or any input that maybe we may have missed, or a question we didn't ask?

JL: No, not that I can think of.

SG: Okay. [to CF:] Do you have any questions?

CF: I'm trying to think.

SG: You answered our questions very quickly, faster than we thought. So we're just making sure we didn't miss anything.

JL: [laughter]

SG: You did a great job. Thank you. [laughter]

CF: We just wanted to make sure that you said everything you wanted to say, or everything has been to your liking. So I just wanted to make sure that you've told us everything you've wanted us to know, or if there's any misconceptions that you would like to clear up of anything we've talked about or anything not mentioned.

JL: I can't think of anything right now that, you know, is prominent that I really wanted to say, other than, what we've been over.

SG: Right.

JL: I just hope that this world can come together, and we all can live together peacefully.

SG: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. [to CF:] Well, do you have any more questions?

CF: I don't. Do you?

SG: No, I don't. Well, if that is actually—. Go ahead, go ahead.

JL: If you think of anything that we didn't go over that you want to ask me, just call me.

SG: Okay!

CF: Okay. Awesome!

SG: Yes, Thank you. Thank you so much for your time, and taking time to be a part of this oral history project. This is our first time doing it so we appreciate you being patient with us as well. But yeah, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with us. We really appreciate it.

JL: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

SG & CF: Thank you.

SG: Okay. Well, we will definitely contact you if we have any more questions or if you have any more questions, questions for us, you can text us or email us as well. But yeah, I think that's all.

END OF INTERVIEW.

Transcribed by Sydney Goodman and Cole Fuchs, December 7, 2023

Edited by Jessica Spencer, February 8, 2024

Edited by Laura Puaca, February 15, 2024

Edited by Janice Larrimore, March 15, 2024

Edited by Matthew Johnson, March 27, 2024

Edited by Laura Puaca, March 28, 2024