A TEI Project

Interview of Regina Jones

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1.1. Session 1 (April 13, 2012)

CLINE
Today is Friday the thirteenth; that is, in this case, April 13, 2012. This is Alex Cline. I'm interviewing Regina Jones at her home in Los Angeles. This is our first session. Good morning.
JONES
Good morning.
CLINE
It's an interestingly kind of on-and-off rainy day, a lovely morning. We have one other being here with us, Sandy, who's crashed out on the rug here, and I think that Sandy will guard our space while we have this session. We always start at the beginning in these oral history interviews. These are life interviews, and so the beginning of your life is where we're going to start, beginning with the question where and when were you born?
JONES
I was born here in Los Angeles at Los Angeles County Hospital on September 23, 1942, at either 1:15 or 3:15 in the morning.
CLINE
Oh, wow. This is now what's called County-USC Medical Center down there by east of downtown L.A.?
JONES

That's where it is now.
CLINE
I wanted to start talking about your early life by first asking you what you know about your father and his family background, and you can give us his name in the process.
JONES
Leslie Augustus Nickerson, and he was born in Texas and moved here as a little boy with his mother and father and seven siblings.
CLINE
Oh, wow.
JONES
And his father was relatively famous, because William A. Nickerson founded the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company in the early 1920s, but died when I was about a year or two old, so I have no personal memories of my grandfather. But my grandmother was this little woman who, I swear, don't know how she raised eight children, and especially in those days, who was just full of vim and vigor and energy, and she loved to go to the racetrack and play the horses.
CLINE
Which racetrack would that have been?
JONES
That would have been Hollywood Park mostly and sometimes Santa Anita.
CLINE
And they're both still going.
JONES
Yes. And she would sometimes venture all the way down to Del Mar.
CLINE
Wow. Interesting. So your father was then which of the brood?
JONES
He was number two. He was the first boy. He had an older sister, and he was the oldest son.
CLINE
Oh, wow. Okay. What part of Los Angeles did they move to?
JONES
They originally lived on Twentieth Street just west of Central Avenue, and that's where they all grew up and went to the YMCA that's still over there, and they're still trying to keep it intact. I

remember more about it because my father's youngest brother was very active there, Melvin Nickerson, at the Y.
CLINE
And what about your mother's family background and her name?
JONES
Luedelia, L-u-e-d-e-l-i-a, Triggs, and she was born in Arkansas, and her father and mother left Arkansas and moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, when they were young children, and she is the eldest of eight children.
CLINE
Oh my. Both with eight children in the family. Interesting.
JONES
Lots of aunts and uncles and cousins.
CLINE
That's what I was about to say. What do you know, if anything, about what motivated these families to come to Los Angeles?
JONES
William Nickerson left Texas because he received a warning that he was an "uppity nigger" and that they were coming for him, and friends came and stood guard around the house, and when people cruised by and stuff, they didn't mess with him one-on-one because he was a expert—
CLINE
Marksman?
JONES
Marksman with the rifle. He had hunted since he was a little tiny boy, to the point that he would even hunt fish with the gun by shooting it in the water.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
Yes. [laughs] So he made arrangements to get a car, because blacks couldn't just get on a train in those days at random, for his family and wrote letters and did everything and had a special car, where they were not allowed to leave on the trip from Texas here. So everything they needed was on that car. My maternal grandfather—and they were both named William, William Nickerson and William Triggs. William Triggs, living in—I believe it was Arkadelphia, Arkansas, basically came home one day to find that a

Caucasian man had come over his fence to meddle his wife, who was sitting on the porch, asking her what she was doing in that part of town because she looked white to him, and my grandfather went over and socked the guy. So needless to say, he and his family had to leave Arkansas pretty quickly too.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
Yes.
CLINE
Wow. I presume it may be the same neighborhood, but where did you first live after you were born where your family was?
JONES
Well, I guess I want to tell this story. My parents, of course, met here in Los Angeles, and my mother's father and family lived, like, near Alameda and Imperial Highway, and my mother had a beauty shop up around Adams, north of Adams, on San Pedro, and somehow or another she was living there when the two met. And then he was sent off to war and I was born. My father was in Italy in the Second World War, but while he was gone, my Grandfather Nickerson made arrangements to help my mother and my grandmother to buy a house at 118th and Central Avenue, which is kind of near Imperial Highway, and so I grew up in that area most of my life.
CLINE
Wow. And what did you father do when he wasn't in the military? What was his line of work?
JONES
He was not in insurance at all, which is a whole 'nother story. He was an elevator starter at Southern California Edison Company downtown when he went off to the army, and when he came back, he had some kind of a nervous shaking condition, and then from then on, he couldn't even do that, so he worked as a janitor at Southern California Edison.
CLINE
Oh, wow.
JONES

And my mother got her beauty operator license and became a hairdresser and did hair for a living, because she wanted to be self-employed. Before that, she had done maid service.

CLINE

Oh, wow. Okay. What, if anything, do you know about your father's experience when he was overseas and during the war?

JONES

Just that it was horrific. I heard him talk, you know, about being in the—I don't know why words are eluding me today, but that's okay. In the foxholes hiding and the gunfire coming over, and he was horrified the whole time he was there. Purely conjecture, I suspect that he was pampered, and so it was really a horrible experience for him. [laughs]

CLINE

Wow. And that was before the military was integrated.

JONES

Right, and he never talked about that. I don't remember any conversations about who he was with or how. I know he was a proud man, because he had worked so long at Golden—not at Golden State; at Southern California Edison, that, you know, everybody there knew him, all the executives and everything, and he was proud of that. And even when he went back to work as a janitor, which is the only awareness I have of him, he still knew everybody because they all knew him and I guess somehow or another understood why he was less functional. He functioned, but he was irrational, easily excited.

CLINE

Something that we might now possibly diagnose as post-traumatic stress disorder.

JONES

Yes, I'm pretty sure, yes, because his hands just shook, and I remember growing up watching his hands shake, and it really bothered me to see his hands shake, and he had become a fanatic at washing them. He washed his hands so many times during the day that they would crack.

CLINE

Wow. Interesting. Then what about your own family, siblings and that sort of thing?

JONES

I’m a blessed only child. For years I thought it was a horrible thing to do to a kid, and as an adult, I think it’s the most wonderful thing on the planet, because I have no grief with anybody else for not doing their share with the parents, and I have no bad relations and I have no comprehension of siblings that fall out and don’t speak. I just can’t grasp that you could have a sibling and not speak to them anymore.

CLINE

Well, it’s interesting that both your parents came from such big families, but then didn’t—

JONES

Well, I think that was pretty clear that after being the elders, that they didn’t want a bunch of children.

CLINE

Interesting, yes.

JONES

And they waited until they were early thirties before they had me.

CLINE

Right. Well, that was kind of [unclear].

JONES

They’d both been married once before.

CLINE

Oh, really?

JONES

Yes, yes.

CLINE

Oh, okay. Wow. Interesting. Do you have any idea what the circumstances were under which they met?

JONES

Not really. Probably at a club or something like that. They both liked to have parties. My mother was a tremendous—well, a hairdresser. She was a people person. She loved people.

CLINE

Wow. Well, and this would have been during the day when the Central Avenue area was quite the really busy, active, culturally fully cranked-up area.

JONES

Right. I have one photograph of the two of them, you know, and the way she's dressed and he's dressed and he's kind of holding her, they were obviously out partying, having a ball. [laughter]

CLINE

Cool. So what do you remember when you were a child of the neighborhood that you grew up in? Who was living in it? Who were some of your friends?

JONES

It was a wonderful little neighborhood. It was a brand-new neighborhood built during the war specifically for people to have housing. I had no clue that we were poor, because everybody was the same. You know, I had friends on both sides of me and down the street, many of which I'm still friends with. Like the house just north of mine right next door, the little girl that I used to think of as a little girl there, Juanita, she became my children's Godmother and the man she married became their Godfather, and we're still friends. Another family that lived, like, a block and a half or two ago, you know, we're still in touch. One of them got my son a job, actually, twenty-some years ago when she was working somewhere and he was looking. You know, so, long friendships, a lot of awareness of others that grew up that you didn't know well or become close friends with, but that when we met again, there's an awareness that, "Oh, yeah, you're the one in the neighborhood." One in particular had me laughing, because I joined a book club, and she kept looking at me and I kept looking at her and her name was so familiar, and about the third time we talked, and she grew up down seven blocks from me and knew me very well, when she said the first time she saw me, it scared her because it was like the same person walking through the door as she knew as a child. But we weren't friends or close or anything, but we had mutual friends. So it was, you know, a nice little community, all working people and families.

CLINE

And what about the racial composition of the neighborhood?

JONES

All black, except for a few possibly Caucasians that lived in the neighborhood. You know, in retrospect, we thought they were white, but now I don't know. [laughter]

CLINE

Interesting.
JONES
It is interesting. Yes, it was definitely black. It wasn't far from Watts, and, you know, I grew up climbing and playing on the Watts Towers, because I had cousins who lived across the street, so that wasn't art as we know it now and definitely wasn't preserved. We just climbed on it. It was something beautiful and fun to climb.
CLINE
And Watts was, at the time, probably a somewhat more diverse neighborhood than people usually associate with that part of the world, but what is your memory of that [unclear]?
JONES
Not really.
CLINE
No?
JONES
No. The thing is, Watts has grown and South Central has grown, according to the news and people from out of town who have no knowledge from the beginning, and where I grew up was black, primarily black. You could go west a mile and it would be white, and there was a line. I remember when I first got married and was looking for an apartment in 1959, I'd call from the newspaper ads and everything would be fine and I'd go over, and they'd open the thing and they'd see my husband and they'd tell me it was rented. And we're talking as far west as Broadway. Yes, it was a total line.
CLINE
Then you didn't have any siblings, but what about the feeling among your friends in the neighborhood? Was it very close? How much interaction did you have in other people's homes and other people's families?
JONES
Not so much in the homes, but the front yards. You know, I mean, we could play out. It was safe, so you'd play out in the front yards until you heard your name screamed. They'd holler out, "Regina!" And I knew that meant I needed to get home, and it'd be usually right before dark. If it was earlier, it usually meant there's something you'd done or hadn't done, and you didn't want to go home. But, no, we were just equal friends. We'd have parties sometimes and someone would come over, but not a lot of in and

out of your houses, except my best friend, Dolores, lived on the corner, and I would be over there a lot. But she didn't come over as much, but she had siblings and she was the eldest, so she had to help take care of her siblings. So I'd go over there to help her, to be with her, and I liked her siblings, you know, thinking like little brothers and sisters.

CLINE

And your mom had a beauty shop in the neighborhood. What were the businesses like in the neighborhood in some of the places [unclear]?

JONES

Well, my fondest memories of right there where I grew up, across the street and down one block was a cleaners, a pool hall, a shoe shop, and I got a job working at the shoe shop when I was twelve, writing tickets on Saturdays to take shoes in, and I wanted to do more, so I learned how to do more work on the shoes, you know, lightweight work, but to me it was great and I liked earning money. The next block was a post office. Then on the side of the street I lived there was a liquor store, grocery store, and drugstore, and then across that street there was what they call the Green Room Café, Mr. Baines' [phonetic] Meat Market. So, you know, everything you needed was right there. I can just remember walking to Mr. Baines' Meat Market and ordering your meat cut how you wanted it and showing him how thick to cut something I'd been sent to get. The Green Room was not only just a little café where you could sit at the counter, and it had a jukebox and it had those little jukeboxes on the tables, and as I became older, I got to appreciate those. But as a little kid when I was taken with someone, it would be usually with my dad or another friend, because it was also a bookie joint.

CLINE

Oh, I see.

JONES

And so they were placing their bets, and that was perfectly normal, as far as I was concerned. You know, you had the scratch sheet at the house and the racing form, and they went and placed bets. I began going to Hollywood Park racetrack. I was taken there at about the age of four when I couldn't even get the—they had a pole with a seat on top that flopped, and you had to sit on it to hold it

firm. Well, there's no way on earth I could get on it, and my fun for the day was collecting as many betting tickets as I could, picking them up off the ground, and having stacks and stacks of them, all the losing tickets. [laughter]

CLINE

Interesting. Then how far did the grandparents live from where you grew up?

JONES

My mother's parents didn't live very far, and that's why she wanted to be in that neighborhood, because we were at Central Avenue and Imperial and they were near Alameda and Imperial. You know, so I don't know. That's a mile. And we frequently—my mother would go over there to see about her mother, and one of the fun things that she would do is my grandmother loved to garden and plant, so we would pick her up and we'd go to the nursery and buy plants and come back and plant them. You know, when you bought turkeys in those days, there was a turkey farm not far, so you'd get fresh chickens. You'd go pick your live animal, and then they'd prepare it for you, and then you'd bring it home and cook it. Or I remember being in the old 1942 Chevy riding down in that area, like past El Segundo, and my grandmother would scream, "Oh, wild greens!" And my mother would pull over. We'd jump out of the car and pick wild greens along the roadway. And then there were giant eucalyptus trees. Yes, it was more country. [laughs]

CLINE

Right. Interesting. How much, if you can remember at all, did you get out of that general neighborhood? How far would you venture out?

JONES

Hollywood Park racetrack, which was to the west. There was an Italian food restaurant. As a kid, Manchester and Broadway was a major shopping center and that's where the two movie theaters were, the Manchester Theater and the AAA Theater, and as I got to be, like, eleven, twelve, that's where we would go. If someone's older sibling would take us, sister or brother—sisters always—we'd go there.

Downtown every now and then with my mother on the streetcar that we caught at Central Avenue and Manchester, and we'd go all the way—it was the number-seven car. We'd go all the way

downtown to shop at—she liked to shop at the Broadway department store, which was at Fourth and Broadway, and she liked to shop at Innes, I-n-n-e-s, Shoes, which was either on Wilshire or Seventh. I'm not sure. Well, I think it was Wilshire, was Seventh. Those were our hangouts. [laughs] But that wasn't terribly often.

CLINE

All right. So what was the first school you attended in the neighborhood?

JONES

The first one I really remember would be 118th Street School, and that was on 118th and Main, and that was an integrated school, and I don't think I'd been in that situation before, and I know I had a crush on this gorgeous little boy with brown eyes and brown hair, and I never thought about the fact he was white, and I remember he called me a nigger and I went home and asked my mother what that was, totally, you know, distraught because the way he said it. And she didn't tell me. She told me to tell him, "If I'm a nigger, you're a Patty. If you don't believe me, go ask your daddy." [laughter] That was a lot of good help, right?

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

Yes, and I remember her coming up to the school and speaking to the principal about it, and that was in the third grade.

The fourth grade, I went to Carver Elementary School, which was right across Central Avenue, but in the county, and out of district for me, but she got a special permit. But it was closer. She felt safer. She could literally stand on the back porch and watch me walk across the canal on 120th Street, and the school was right next to the canal, so she could watch me come home without having to walk with me. And so that's where I went for the fourth grade. The second grade, she had put me on El Segundo again near Avalon, a Seventh-Day Adventist School, Los Angeles Academy, and that was important to her. She was trying to get me in the best schools. But I remember having to lie that I didn't eat meat.

CLINE

Right. I was about to ask about that.

JONES

Yes. I had to tell that lie, and I remember liking that school a whole lot, and projects and things I did. You're making other memories come back, which is really interesting, that I didn't even know I had. Before that, it's sketchy. I think I went to some Watts schools in, like, the first grade, and I think I went to kindergarten, I did, where Martin Luther King Hospital is.

CLINE

Oh, really?

JONES

Yes, I went to a kindergarten daycare thing there.

CLINE

Wow. So you moved around a lot.

JONES

In schools. The same house. Yes, almost every year she would move me to a different school. When I graduated from Carver, my school was right around the corner that I was supposed to go to, the junior high or middle school, and she didn't like it. She went over, looked at that, and she said, "No way." So I had to get driven every day all the way to Compton, to Enterprise Junior High on Compton Boulevard just west of Central.

CLINE

Interesting. Wow.

JONES

Yes, she was definite about where I was going to go to school, and as I got older, I became definite about where I wanted to go to school. I always liked earning money, and as I'm talking about this, when I worked at Carver, when I was in the sixth grade, I got myself a gig that I was working in the cafeteria, so I got to save my lunch money and got a free lunch, and I didn't mind doing the hard labor. I loved having money, and at the beauty shop when I was stuck there, I built a business of getting lunch for the customers that were waiting. I'd run the errands to get their lunches for them. Wherever they needed food up and down the street, there was a Mexican restaurant across the street or different places, I'd go get their lunch, and I remember thinking how cheap a couple of them were when they just gave me a nickel instead of a dime.

CLINE

Interesting. Wow.

JONES

Yes, and playing down—the canal, the Los Angeles Canal, was not paved then. It was dirt. So I would climb down there, because it was right behind the beauty shop at 112th and Central, and catch crawdaddies.

CLINE

Wow. Interesting.

JONES

Yes, and that was fun, which was, of course, something I wasn't supposed to do, and there was no way of stopping me, but I grew up playing in that canal. [laughs]

CLINE

Interesting. Wow. Yes, this is a picture of the L.A. area that just must seem utterly like another planet to people who are here now.

JONES

And for me even, this is like another planet when I travel backwards like that. There was a black trapeze act that practiced right on the corner of Imperial and Central in that little corner piece of land right next to where the canal is, and I remember, whoa, that was something, you know, or when a new hamburger stand came on the corner diagonally across from it. Nickerson Gardens, the housing projects, was right across the street. I had friends over there, because their mothers got their hair done and I met the kids, and I'd go over there and I played. I had lots of friends in there, in the projects.

CLINE

Interesting. Then what, if any, religious background was present in your family?

JONES

My mother was Methodist, and I got baptized Methodist at a very young age, because she did the hair of a couple women who went to this particular Methodist church and they offered to take me to Sunday school, so I would go with them or my next-door neighborhood. I was very curious about God, and I remember joining there. I remember being baptized there in this pond or pool in a basement, dipped in the water wearing my white. But then I remember there was a Baptist church right across the street from my mother's beauty shop, and my mother would go there, and I remember—this is definitely out of line, but I remember watching the preacher there, Reverend Farrell [phonetic], preach, and people

would get all excited, and I thought that was ridiculous. I didn't like that, and I'd sit there and pray that whatever happened to them never happened to me in public.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
But Reverend Farrell flirted with the women, and I saw him put his hand on my mother's back end.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
And that—
CLINE
That finished you.
JONES
That finished him. That finished him for me totally. Yes, I had run-ins with—I was already questioning. I was a questioning child. There was this one woman my mother did every Sunday. She was a deaconess at the Methodist church, and I don't remember her real name, but it was Helen, and I referred to her as cross-eyed Helen because she had cross-eyed, but, of course, never to her face. And I was a very small child, and Helen would come every Sunday morning on her way to church for my mother to do her hair. She had very, very short, very, very kinky hair, and the only way it would stay straight is if she got it done that morning, because as soon as she went to sleep, it would sweat out and kink back up. And this particular morning she had come, I was sewing by hand my doll's clothes, and she told me that it was the Sabbath, it was Sunday, and it was a sin for me to be sewing, and so then I asked her why did she come to my mother's house every Sunday to have her hair done if that was a sin. And, of course, I was chastised, told to keep my mouth shut in the future.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
Yes. But those are the kind of things—if things were off balance for me, I would notice it and I would ask.
CLINE
Wow. Excellent question, though. [laughter]

JONES
So religion perplexed me, and I finally, of my own will, at somewhere around the fourth or sixth grade, started going to a Catholic church on Imperial Highway, because I had some friends that were Catholics and had invited me, and I liked Mass. I liked the sedateness of it and the church. You know, it was just something—
CLINE
The atmosphere.
JONES
The whole atmosphere was wonderful to me, and so I was, in my mind, a Catholic without classes for many years up until I had my first child. And then my best friend from the seventh grade was a Catholic, and she went to communion every day of the week before coming to school, and the Catholic school was right next door to Enterprise. She and I are good friends to this day, best friends to this day.
CLINE
Wow. Amazing. What, if any, was the reaction of your mother or your parents to your Catholic period?
JONES
It was fine, no objections.
CLINE
As you were now in school and doing your various kind of entrepreneurial efforts as well as other activities you were doing in the neighborhood, at school what were, if any, some areas that were starting to interest you?
JONES
It was more entrepreneurial, because, you know, I left Enterprise and I went to Gompers Junior High for the eighth and ninth grade, and there I worked in the teachers' cafeteria, totaling up their lunches. I was the cashier, but there was no real cash registers, so I had to do it in my head or on a piece of paper, and again, I got my free lunch, and I took cashier's math, I think, was the class. I wanted to know how to do that. I always liked counting money, for some weird reason, and even when I went to Fremont, I was in the change line for the kids at Fremont, again, for the free lunch. There was always a math class, some tie-in. I loved sports by the time I got to high school. I would go to the track meets. That was my

favorite. Baseball didn't do it for me. It was track meets. I loved the track meets.

CLINE

Wow. Then what about teachers? Were there any memorable teachers? And who were the teachers? I mean, you're in an African American neighborhood.

JONES

And I'm going to digress a little bit. In the eighth and ninth grade I made friends with some kids somewhere in the neighborhood or the surrounding tracts and we started a club, the Little Stars, but in French I think it was Les Étoiles or something like that, and we had our sweaters made and emblems on the side. I remember they were bright jade green. And we would have fundraisers over at one of the girls' aunt's home, which was right across the street from Watts at 103rd and Central—she lived right there—from the Watts Park, Watts Will Rogers Park. So we were social at, like, fourteen, having house parties and dances and waistline parties. You'd have to pay to come in. Things like that.

CLINE

What's a waistline party?

JONES

Where they take a tape, measure your waist, and for every inch of your waist, you had to pay a penny or something to get in. [laughs]

CLINE

Fascinating.

JONES

Yes, you know, and I remember we even rented something called—the Town and Country? I'm not sure. There was a little private club on Adams just east of Crenshaw, the Town Club, the Civic Town Club. See, I don't know past and present right now. "Town" was in the name. We rented it. It had a swimming pool and a clubhouse and had a party where people paid, and I remember we dressed, had sarongs made.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

Yes, and we weren't Westside kids. We were all South Central kids, but we came to the Westside for the party.

CLINE

Yes, that would have been the Westside at that point.
JONES
That was the Westside, you know, and there was another place out on El Segundo. A woman, east of Central Avenue, in the back of her yard had a big swimming pool in the back, and we would pay to swim in her pool. And then, of course, Will Rogers Park had a big pool where you would go. We were just all black, and I'm thinking about it, at school I can't visualize any of the teachers until I got to Gompers, and it was quite mixed. I remember those were the first two Japanese kids I knew. I was in the advanced class, and Kenny Kato [phonetic] and Harry Takahashi [phonetic] were both in there, so we became kind of academic friends, and they were very, very smart.
I can't see many of the teachers, which is really interesting, but when I did get to Fremont High School, I had a teacher—God, interesting I remember the negative things outstandingly. I had this wonderful typing teacher, I thought, named Mr. Bornstein [phonetic], and I took typing from him and everything was wonderful first time. The second time around, for Typing II, he took to calling the students out of name. So he would call you Alex "Junior" Cline, and the girls were "Mae" [phonetic]. So he called Regina "Mae" Nickerson, and I wouldn't answer. So he held me in on the nutrition break after, and the next day he called it again and he held the whole class in because Regina Mae wouldn't answer. And this kept on until all my peers were really upset with me, telling me, "Just answer so we can get out. We're losing our free time." And I wouldn't do it, and I finally broke down and told my mother, and then she came and saw the girls' vice principal, and the next day he called Regina Nickerson and I answered and it went on from there.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
I remember Mr. Bornstein very well, and I remember years later seeing a newspaper article that he'd gotten in trouble for something, and I was delighted. I said, "He was a bad man." [laughs] Yes, I stood my ground.
CLINE
To what do you attribute that quality?

JONES
Probably my two grandfathers. [laughs] Probably. I mean, I had no idea, you know, what it was, but my mother stood her ground. My uncle told a story once about when they moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, and they'd be walking down the sidewalk, she and her siblings, and you were expected, when someone white came down the sidewalk, to step off the sidewalk for them to pass. He said, "Luedelia would not step off side. She was like a grizzly bear." And everybody at that school and in that town knew if you messed with any one of us, you were going to have to deal with Lou, and nobody messed with them. Then he just started crying. He was a retired police detective at the time, but he's telling that story and just start crying about how his sister was tough, yes. So probably a lot of it came from her, too, a lot of it, a certain amount of fearlessness that I wish I had now.
CLINE
Wow. And what about music, growing up?
JONES
On the jukebox, you know, we would play, and we would have house parties and we'd play music. I just remember falling in love with the jukebox at the neighborhood café, "Soldier Boy," [sings], "A thousand stars in the night make you realize." One of the Penguins lived down the street [unclear], and I remember being wonderful. We just goo-goo-eyed him. He was a singer. You know, it was always just house parties and music. I mean, kids loved—just like they do now, they always loved music, and we loved music. They used to make fun of me because when we slow danced, I always danced with my pelvic tipped away, so they would crack up on me because I didn't like to let any boys rub up against me type thing, was my—I had issue with that. [laughter] And I never could fast dance well, so that would always be awkward, but I loved it when the cha-cha came, because I had that down. Yes, so a lot of cha-cha. I remember going to see Johnny Otis play, perform, at a club—not a club, but a concert theater on Florence east of Hooper, so there was some kind of facility there. Again, that person who didn't like the screaming in church, my girlfriend Dolores, my best friend at the time, and, you know, we were really, like, twelve and thirteen, oh, she's screaming and everyone's screaming and, oh, it

just outdid me. It bothered me, all that screaming, just bothered me.
My mother would play music, James Brown, early James Brown, which is really weird. I remember when James did "Please, Please, Please" or when I fell in love ear-wise with that. Bo Diddley.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
Oh, there was one radio station that turned all rhythm and blues one night. I must have been fourteen at the time, and I remember they played the same song over and over for twenty-four hours, and we listened to it because this station was going all R and B at the time, and I bet you Teresa would remember the song, but I want to say it was "Arrow of Love," but I could be wrong.
CLINE
Wow, the same song. Then what, if any, memories do you have of some of the music venues and clubs in the Central Avenue area at the time?
JONES
One friend, Jackie, her grandmother lived above the Five Four Ballroom, and Fats Domino performed there, so we'd hear him upstairs. I was too young when that was really Central Avenue to really—that wasn't my music and stuff, and then as the transitions happened, I got married at fifteen, so I was having kids and taking care of kids during that whole era that I guess I would have been out with the clubs. So I was already a mother with children when I started to find out about the clubs and hang out in the clubs, so that had to be in the early sixties.
CLINE
Okay, well, we'll get to that in a little while.
JONES
Our main thing was the Manchester Theater and the movies, every movie conceivable. We were trying to get there to get that. And the other memory was how, like, there was a See's Candies right on the corner on Broadway just south of Manchester, so we would go to Thrifty's on the corner, another corner, and get three-for-ten-cent candy, then we'd go to See's and get some special candy, and then we'd sneak it all into the theater, because we didn't want to pay those outrageous prices to watch movies.

CLINE
Good move.
JONES
I keep thinking of these parties. There was another club on Imperial before you got to Broadway, that they would rent it out, and there were parties that teenagers and kids, we would go to.
CLINE
So as a teenager now, how were you starting to see the neighborhood change, especially in terms of people coming and going in the neighborhood, or were they?
JONES
It really wasn't that much of a change. There's, like, a family that moved in where I moved in in 1965, '64. They're still there in that same house, okay, and I have spoken to them recently, you know, because we grew up together, and these were kids that I had grown up with that then, as an adult, bought that house, just like I went back right across the street from my mother's house and bought a house. So as a teenager, it was all the same, except the world got bigger. You know, now I knew Compton. I knew Gardena. We would go all the way out to San Pedro.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
Yes, I mean, we had a big world. [laughs]
CLINE
And how were the neighborhoods different when you'd go out into the big world? Like, what was Gardena like, or San Pedro?
JONES
Gardena was just newer tracts of homes, same working-class people, same black people in the sections that I was in, even though I know Gardena wasn't black, in retrospect, but the sections that—San Pedro—you traveled in your own black world, as I think back about it.
CLINE
Okay, well, this is, I guess, what I wanted to try to find out about.
JONES
Yes, there was just no reason that you crossed, because that was your world, and, you know, I never thought about it like that. Maybe that's why I was so offended last week when I saw the ads

about the "good old days" and it had all just white people, because there was a whole 'nother world going on besides that.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
My grandmother had died and my grandfather was in trouble and was about to lose his property. I might have been eight, maybe. I know when I sat in the chair, my legs didn't come down. My mother went to talk to the man who owned the loan on the property, and it was a place called Gould, G-o-u-l-d. I'll never forget that. And it sat on the corner, but the door was coming in from a corner direction, so it wasn't on Wilshire and it wasn't on the side street the door came in. And she went in there to meet with this man to talk about what could be done to preserve the property and to keep it, even though it was behind, and I went with her and I remember my first real anger at white people, first awareness and anger.
She's crying and talking about the story and all this, and I'm sitting in the chair watching and he's listening, and then he patted her hand and, you know, "We're going to try to work with you," and the whole bit. And then he came over to shake my hand and I pulled away from him because I didn't like the fact that he was this dominant, and the strong mother that I knew was crying to him. There was something about her crying to him that just antagonized the mess out of me to the point I, like, just recoiled when he reached. It was really interesting. That was the first time. And I grew up—there was a family friend who was Italian, who was in and out of my life from the time I was four and helped raise my kids when they were little, so I knew him, and there was another lady across the street, Frances. When I said earlier you didn't know if they were white or not, supposedly she was white, but in retrospect, I don't know, okay. But she was married to a black man and living right there, you know. But you just don't know. It's not too likely that she was white, an interracial marriage at that time.
CLINE
That's what I was thinking.
JONES
Yes, but to everybody, she was white, everything about her, her skin color, her hair. But my first real anger I remember with the man at Gould Realty or Gould Investments or whatever it was

called. But I remember the name distinctly and the building. It's really weird. But there was not—you know, we'd go to an Italian restaurant and eat, and it was fine, but again, it was right at Manchester and Broadway, sort of, or maybe Century and Broadway.

CLINE

What was your sense of who the people were who owned most of the businesses in the neighborhood?

JONES

They were mostly white, quite a bit Jewish. Like the wonderful drugstore at the corner, that was Jewish-owned, but black people worked there. Interesting thing about that, and a total digression, many, many years as an adult I was at a party, and it was a very, very wealthy couple's home, and at the moment, the name is not coming, and he was married to a black woman, and her mother was at the table with us, with me, and the mother said, "I remember you as a little girl coming into the drugstore. I used to work there. You'd come in with your father or your uncle, and they just spoiled you. Anything you'd want, you got." She said, "You were a spoiled child," you know. Her daughter was married to this famous art collector and, you know, the whole bit, but she remembered me from a child. But so black people worked there. There was never a thought about that. As you're asking me, there was never a thought about the Mexican restaurant and the Mexicans that owned it. The liquor store, they were all white. Yes, there was no thoughts about it. There was just nothing.

CLINE

I also was curious to know if you were aware of any sense of a desire to move, say, west at the time. No?

JONES

No interest whatsoever, no thought, no nothing. No. I remember all the great conversation when Benny Hopkins [phonetic] got the contract as a contractor to build the first Safeway store on Imperial east of Central Avenue next to the Catholic church that got burned down in the first riots of the sixties.

CLINE

Oh, wow.

JONES

But it was the conversation, the beauty shop and everywhere, this black contractor got the contract to build a Safeway. I remember that. It was a beauty shop, barbershop right next to each other. Tom Bradley came in to get his hair cut. That's where he got all his haircuts, at Luxey's [phonetic]. So I grew up seeing Tom Bradley. So in later years, one time his wife was with him somewhere and he got ready to introduce me to his wife, and she says, "I've known Regina and you have, too, since she was a little girl." [laughter] Okay? So this was, you know, doctors came to Luxey's to get their hair cut, so growing up, there's something about haircuts and beauty shops.

CLINE

It still is, apparently.

JONES

Yes, you meet a real cross of people of all economic levels in a black barbershop or a black beauty shop, and they liked Luxey's and a lot of women liked Luxey's beauty shop and barbershop, so they came to my mother or other women in the beauty shop. So, you know, there were people I never thought anything about that were just normal people, yes. And our back door was on—we had a huge backyard, to me at the time—was on Central Avenue, and our front door was on Belhaven, so my mother could go to the back fence, because people could park right there and honk or whatever, and sometimes they'd come in the back, most of the time it was the front. But it just was a whole community. It was a whole different way of life and a whole different feeling.

Yes, there was no feeling of deprivation whatsoever. Yes, that didn't come for me in my life and my exposure until later. I mean, when racism or anything hit me, was, like, trying to rent [unclear] or trying to rent an apartment at sixteen and seeing the door closed or realizing that's what it was. I was, in a way, protected, yes. So this was right up before the riots began. I went to work at LAPD before Karen [phonetic] was born, and she was born in '64, so I was there—I went there in '62 and I was so naïve. I mean, unbelievable, unbelievable, the racism that I was exposed to when I went to work at LAPD down at Parker Center. That was the first real slap, slapped me this way and that way, and the first open rebellion that I could feel in my heart, that just didn't go away because they didn't go away. I worked with them every day.

CLINE
So let's move into this period now. You got married at age fifteen. I was going to ask the question how did things start to change as you hit the teens years and interests change and hormones dictate so much. It's like, obviously something happened. That's pretty early to get married. What happened?
JONES
You know, I had a whole bunch of boyfriends, and they all dumped me because I wasn't going for the okey-doke, so finally I decided to keep my boyfriend and I got pregnant.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
Yes, boy, did I have a run of boyfriends. Everybody, they just would quit me. I remember at high school up at Fremont this one guy who immediately became my boyfriend who just walked me to class and I had his letterman jacket, and I was, you know, a tenth-grader, and I think he started coming on strong in September when I just started there. He went home to wherever it was he was from, back from, during the holidays, and he came back and he told me he needed to share with me—he was a senior, figure out what to do. He'd gotten some girl pregnant at home.
CLINE
Oh my.
JONES
And he didn't know what to do, and I very flippantly said, "Well, then, you've got a baby coming. You're the father. You need to marry her, or we're through." But he basically told me I was a good girl. You know, that was the label. When you didn't put out, you were a good girl, okay. And he came right after, oh, God, I don't know how many boyfriends had all dumped me over a period of time. Whether they dumped me or I dumped them, it's debatable, you know. You're making me remember good stuff I need to write.
[laughter]
CLINE
There was a lot of dumping.
JONES
Battles and fights, horrible fights.
CLINE

Wow.
JONES
Yes, but I got pregnant and I had an option, my mother gave me two options, an abortion or marriage, and what I wanted was just to stay at home and have my baby and keep going to school, but that was not an option, and so I got married and I immediately just—that was it. I had a husband and a child.
CLINE
What year was this?
JONES
And we got married in 1958, April 5th, and my son was born October 22nd, 1958. Then I had a kid every year, so I didn't have a real life as a teenager.
CLINE
So who was the guy? Who was your husband?
JONES
That's interesting too. He was one of the good boys, which is another joke about the time. [laughs]
CLINE
So much for labels.
JONES
So much for labels, okay. And I remember my mother saying, "The quiet ones or the nice ones you have to watch. He talks too much. He has too much to say." And he had already graduated from Fremont and he was working at the post office, but he also was back at the high school all the time announcing the football games and the track meets. He was the voice of Fremont. They were very proud of him. He was a graduate and he announced all the stuff. He was the announcer. His name was Ken, Ken Jones, and, you know, we got married, and he had failed the scheme [phonetic], I think, is the test you had to take to work at the post office, where you knew all the zip codes. He failed that. So I'm pretty sure he was unemployed when we got married, but we still had to get married. Because I was fifteen, you couldn't just get married. We had to go before a judge, and the judge, Judge Triplett [phonetic], had to give his permission that we could get married, and I had to—he interviewed me, whether I was adult enough to know what I was doing, and blah, da, da, da, da. And I remember the first real shock was when I went to get my driver's permit and I made my parents

take me, and they said, "No, they're not your guardians anymore; your husband is," because I wasn't—yes. I remember being angry about that, because I felt more like I was his guardian than he was mine. I was the more mature, fiscally astute one. [laughs]

CLINE

So what was your parents' reaction to this development?

JONES

At that time quite a few of the girls got pregnant around that age, at sixteen, seventeen got married, so it was not a big shock. It was a disappointment. I remember one of the biggest shocks was to one of my aunts, which was really, in retrospect, very funny. It was very hurtful at the time. One of my father's sisters, actually his eldest sister, Aunt Willa B., said, "Jeannie, you're not going to be able to come out as a debutante." [laughs] That was her comment on my pregnancy and marriage, which was stupid. You know, here I am, a kid, a child with a child, and she's worried about my debut into society, which wasn't even a society that I had grown up in, because all my Nickerson cousins grew up on the Westside, more or less, and my parents had stayed on the Southside. You know, so it was like—it was insanity, you know. It was just sheer insanity that that was even a concern.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

Yes, we had a nice little wedding I think at his mother's house, at his mother's house, and then a few months later, we had a reception at my mother's house in the backyard and, you know, the whole family came and supported. It seemed perfectly normal. Now, I'm not sure if that was my perspective or the adults' perspective, but I quite honestly thought I was grown. In every part of my being I thought I was an adult. It never crossed my mind that I wasn't.

CLINE

Not even the high school diploma had any bearing on your perception?

JONES

You know, I dropped out of school to have the baby, went back. They wanted to refuse me, but I went and got the law that said that until I was eighteen, they had to accept me in the school, and so I went back to Fremont. And I didn't fit in anymore with the kids

because I had this baby at home, so then I dropped out, and then my husband put his foot down and said, "No, you're going to finish." So I went to George Washington High, adult high school, and that's where I graduated from. And it's interesting, because I graduated still—because Kenny, I was sixteen, seventeen. I'm sure I graduated before I was eighteen, if not eighteen, with two kids and maybe a third on the way, or two.

CLINE

Oh my.

JONES

Yes, because I was so far in my classes ahead and everything that I still graduated as a kid, basically, you know.

CLINE

Right, pretty much the same age you would have been otherwise.

JONES

Yes, yes.

CLINE

Interesting. Then how during your growing up and now you're perceiving yourself as an adult and, in fact, you're married and having babies, during your growing up, how would you characterize your relationship with your parents, first with your father?

JONES

My relationship became better with my father after I'd married and was having kids than it had been before. I didn't have a lot of respect for my father, growing up, because he had these outbursts. I would tell my friends, when I gave a new friend my phone number, "When you call the house, if a crazy man answers, just ignore him, but ask for me," because he would go into this rages, but not harmful rages, just loud, loud, and again, the loudness of it embarrassed me and made me very uncomfortable. I was never afraid of him, because I always thought my mother was much tougher than him.

A funny thing, though, one time I remember her getting mad at him and breaking a washboard over his head that was glass. She just brought it right down over his head, and fortunately he didn't get cut, for some reason. But a little while later, one time she was screaming and hollering and going through her thing, and he just politely—I was right there—he just kind of politely picked her up and laid her on the floor and said, "Lou, you get away with this only

because I let you." And she was pinned down, and I remember for the first time in my life feeling really proud of him that he had put Mama in her place, but he hadn't hurt her. He was letting her know that, "All this tough you are, basically I'm still the physically stronger dominant person, and I allow you all this," you know, because in those days men hit women and stuff. No, he never hit my mother or touched her, and I'd seen aunts with black eyes and other women in the neighborhood. He always was—he was just mouth, but nothing physical. So I remember feeling a little pride for him at that time. But then when I had the kids, I remember one time—everybody was so nervous about him and the kids, and he had a sports jacket on and one of the babies' diapers leaked a little green poop, yellow poop, and I saw it, and I remember [unclear]. I said, "Dad, there's something." He said, "Oh, that's okay. That's my baby," and put the baby down and, you know, cleaned his jacket off. But he adored the children. He just adored them. Crazy as he was, he adored them. [laughter]

CLINE

Did your mother ever make any mention or reflect on what he may have been like before he was in the military?

JONES

She said he was different, that's it, and she would tell me I had to be nice to my father because he was different.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

Then she'd, of course, holler and scream and fuss at him and all that, so that's what made the impact on me, not the, "Look out for your dad," you know. You know, she would tell me, though, that, "I'm only with him because of you. A girl needs her own father, to be with her own father." And they'd been married—I was thirty-five years old when I realized their fighting was their love relationship. It wasn't until I was thirty-five that I broke the bubble and went, "You two are just crazy. I mean, this is your relationship, okay? And you didn't stay with him because of me; you stayed with him because this is who you two are." But I was thirty-five before I knew.

CLINE

Interesting. So then how would you describe your relationship with your mother as you were growing up?

JONES
I depended on her totally. She took care of my kids. She helped, you know, when they were little. I raised them mostly, but when I went to work, I had four kids and the baby was six months old, and that's when I went to work at LAPD, and she took care of all four. It was like there was nothing. I mean, it wasn't a favor. It wasn't special. That's just what she did, and I never thought anything that much of it until I became much older and much wiser. I took it for granted. She was just always there for me. I mean, I was an only child, so, yes, I was her heaven and her earth, you know, in many, many ways.
CLINE
So what, other than, I presume, pure financial need, motivated you to get this job at the LAPD?
JONES
Well, when I was pregnant with the third kid, my husband came up with this—God, third kid? Fourth kid? Third kid?—came up with this idea he wanted to be a disc jockey, and before that, he had been working, like, at different places, you know, service station. I'm just trying to remember what all he would do. But he wanted to be a disc jockey, so he brokered, literally brokered time on a radio station, jazz station, KBCA.
CLINE
KBCA, right.
JONES
FM, and he had a radio show where he played jazz, and I remember the Jazz Crusaders when they first moved here from Texas, hanging out with them, and they played at a club on Manchester and Central called the Zebra Lounge. You know, so he was interviewing Nancy Wilson. These were people that suddenly were part of his life and sometimes my life, because I had all these kids, and that was our first involvement, really, in the music industry. He also was writing for the Los Angeles Sentinel newspaper. I'm trying to think about why it's so sketchy right this minute. Well, I guess because I was washing diapers for two and three kids at a time. We got so broke while he was being a disc jockey. [laughs]
CLINE
Some things never change.
JONES

Okay. We got so broke that we had moved over to Arlington and Thirty-sixth Street near Jefferson and bought a house on some kind of a weird wing-dinger deal he had found, and I remember the fourth child was born there. When the fourth child was born, I couldn't reach him to tell him I was in labor, because he was a DJ at the It Club on Washington Boulevard, and the only phone there was a phone booth, and a drunk was on the phone and wouldn't get off. [laughs]

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

That's kind of funny. So he was still doing DJ stuff and trying to get his—that was what his career dreams were and that's what he was pursuing. When we first got married, I think he got a job at LAPD as a radio telephone operator, the same job I took and got a few years later, and I remember the salary when our first baby—we only had one child—was $319 a month, and we were thrilled, and we had a little apartment right at Broadway and Imperial, and he would ride the bus to downtown and leave me the car most days, because those days you only had one car if you were lucky.

CLINE

Yes, I was going to say, that would be quite a thing to have a car.

JONES

Okay.

CLINE

It's L.A.

JONES

Yes. God, you made me go back on that one. So he, you know, LAPD, it's sketchy, DJing, you know, It Club.

CLINE

Well, the It Club also had a lot of big jazz people coming in.

JONES

Major. Lou Rawls. So every now and then I'd go.

CLINE

I was going to ask. I assumed you probably didn't go, but I—

JONES

Very infrequent, very infrequent. Those were some really hard—my life from sixteen to twenty was very hard, very tumultuous. You know, I was weighing whether or not to talk about this earlier or

not, but I remember at one point, with two or three kids, knowing that I was about to break, and everybody thought life was normal and I thought life was very unnormal, and I was very scared and I went and sought out help from a lady called the City Mother. I found the City Mother and have no idea how I did this, because definitely nobody referred me, okay, and I sat with her and cried and talked of my life and the kids and just how unhappy I was, and basically she told me it sounded like a thyroid problem to her.

CLINE

Really?

JONES

Yes, and I remember then realizing I was going to have to take matters into my hands, because there was nobody there to help me. My mother would say my husband was hardworking, he would work, and, "You've got all those kids, so you need to stay put," and I wanted to get the hell out of Dodge, because to me, it wasn't right and I knew I was losing it. Because of the clubs and stuff, he was quite a ladies' man, and he also liked to play the horses, so he was living a different life than what I wanted. I read Good Housekeeping and I tried to make those recipes and feed the kids properly and do everything, and it was just impossible, and the lack of money and stuff. So I could feel myself at a breaking point, and I remember one day he came home—he left in the morning to get his unemployment check and he didn't come back. He drove a taxicab. This man did everything. I have to give it to him. He did everything. No job was beneath him, but he was always going to be that celebrity of sorts.

He left to get his unemployment check and he didn't come back, and when he came back that night, by then I was completely hysterical, because that was our money and I was scared to death, and when he came in the door, I pounced, hysterically screaming and hollering and flaying at him, and he tried to hand me some money, because he'd been to the track and had won. He's doubling this money. And I threw the money all over the room. It didn't matter. It was the first time—second time. He had slapped one time before when I was hysterical, openhanded, he said, to calm me down, and this time he slapped me and I went down immediately on the floor because I was frightened, because whatever I saw in his face didn't look good to me, and I always had a belief that there's

no reason on earth a man should ever hit a woman, which I still truly believe, and I called the police, and he couldn't believe I called the police. He ran out the back door, and these two little white cops were a the front door, and basically the cop told me a woman with a foul mouth like mine, he could understand why a man would hit her.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
And I had at that time four children, and so when he came home drunk and went to sleep, when he awakened, I was straddling his chest with a knife at his throat, explaining that if he ever laid a hand on me again, it would be his last time, so if he hit me, he should kill me, but if he did that, my mother would come get him, so he needed to put all that out of his mind, basically. So he never touched me again in life. But I realized between the City Mother and that, that I had to take things into my own hands, so thus I knew I had to get a job and be able to control my income, and so I got a job at the police department so I would have income.
You know, having grown up with two parents that gambled—and I left this out. When I was ten, I used to go to the beauty shop on Saturdays and take my mother's money from her to pay the utilities, and I would walk to the post office and buy the money orders and address the envelopes and pay these bills because it horrified me when a pink thing came through the door, because then I knew she and my father would start a fight.
CLINE
Oh, my.
JONES
So by the time I was ten, I had this sense of—and that's a lot of the money I needed to make for myself. I always needed to have some savings. So I have major financial insecurities from an early age, and I knew there was nobody I could trust to remedy them but me, okay.
CLINE
Interesting, yes.
JONES
So that's kind of my theme song right till today. [laughs]
CLINE

So during this period that was so difficult, how often was your husband even home?
JONES
Well, he was home when he wasn't working, sleeping.
CLINE
Okay, because it sounded to me like if he had all these various day jobs, but was trying to work in a nightclub—
JONES
He would sleep and he was home. Things got much better for us when there was steady income. We bought a house right across the street from my parents. At one point there he was working as an editorial assistant, and it was a title that had this many—a yard's worth of names under it—for The Huntley-Brinkley Report at NBC. Basically he was a gopher who ran and picked film up off the planes at the airport, ran it to there. He was a newscaster on one of the radio stations, I think weekends, and he was pumping gas at the Shell station on the corner. Oh, and on his way home from Huntley-Brinkley, he was cleaning an office building. [laughs]
CLINE
Amazing.
JONES
Well, he was trying to prove to me that he was taking care of the family, but by then I already had my gig, too, you know. But we were able to buy a house, a little small three-bedroom, one-bath house in the same neighborhood I grew up in, which felt very safe for me, and we lived there for a couple of years, maybe, not even that long, when he found this house that I live in now, and I was scared to death to step out and believe him that we could make this stride, but he was doing well, he felt. You know, there were, by now, five kids and I was still working at the police department, and the only way I could figure out how we could make it, we had to sell or let go of whatever the big car was, keep one car, and I rode the bus to LAPD from here, caught the Pico bus, and he would pack all the kids up and take them to my mother's in the morning. I mean, it was a real crazy-making time, and it was before we left Watts that the Watts Riots broke out, and it was major changes for all of us.
CLINE

I think we'll start with that maybe next time. So when the oldest child is ready to go to school—and I guess your mom is taking care of the kids a lot of the time—what part of town were you in then?
JONES
We were on 118th, yes, and he went to 116th Street School. And we should finish that, I guess, before we come here, because the move here was traumatic. But he went to school there, and the oldest was tested as the highest IQ they'd ever had in this neighborhood black school, so all the teachers adored him, and he was basically just a special child. He was very sharp, and when we moved here and we went to Wilton Place, the racist principal said there was no way a black kid could have tested that high.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
That's another whole chapter, yes.
CLINE
Okay. And I wanted you to, for the record, name the children now. You said you were up to five children.
JONES
The oldest is Kenneth; the second one is Kevin; Keith; Kory with a "K"—all boys—and then Karen is the youngest.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
And the boys are all just over a year apart, and then I waited a whole two and a half years until I knew it was a girl.
CLINE
Wow. Were you hoping to have a girl or—
JONES
By the third child, I was hoping that was a girl. Yes, I had a name already picked out and everything. [laughter] And then the fourth one, I was hoping for a girl, and then the fifth one was a girl, and that was the end of that.
CLINE
Yes, got to draw the line somewhere.
JONES
Yes, and it wasn't like planning to have all these kids, it just—in those days a lot of dumb and a lot of things that didn't work.

CLINE
Before we finish for today, four boys sounds like it might have been very interesting. What was that like for you, having that many children, period, but how was that like for you and what was your husband's relationship like as a father to these four sons at this point?
JONES
He was always working, and so, you know, he did what he could when he was there, but he was usually asleep when he was home or he was at work. Before we moved here, that was pretty much it. I mean, that whole story of the Watts Riots and all that is fascinating, but that's from whence SOUL was born. But in those days, men didn't really do that much with their babies anyway.
CLINE
Right. Yes, I guess you're right.
JONES
Yes, so that wasn't—you know, it was just normal that they were the mother's babies. [laughs]
CLINE
Even though they were all boys, just about.
JONES
Yes, but they were little. They were little boys, which, you know, it's a lot different seeing it now to watch my son-in-law engage with my almost eight-year-old grandson. You know, it's totally different. Or my sons, you know, with their kids.
CLINE
Since the 1965 Watts Riots are such a kind of a landmark not only just in terms of Los Angeles history, but in terms of what this meant for your life and that of your family's, what, if any—I mean, you were working at the LAPD and you were obviously very aware of what was happening in terms of racism now. What was your sense, if any, of the atmosphere, racially speaking, in the neighborhood at that time?
JONES
You know, I was in my own world with all those kids and going to work every day. I'll go back to work. There was a little old white-haired lady named Anna, I want to say Anna Bonner [phonetic], who looked like Whistler's Mother, and one day we were sitting side by side working on one switchboard or something, and she asked

me had she ever shown me her little dog, and I said, "No." And she reached in her purse and she brought out the picture of the dog and she showed me, and I said, "Oh, he's so cute." And she said, "Do you know what his name is?" And I said, "No." She said, "Nigger. He's black." And I remember being completely just breathless, like she just punched me, but there was nothing I could do or say. This coming out of this woman's mouth, who looked to me like she was an elder, was like she just socked me in the stomach. There were good people that worked there that were white, too, but that was some real racism. This is before the riots. There was a sergeant that, while I was pregnant, would see me park in the parking lot trying to get in. I had to be there at 3:30, and you sign in, and he would literally be getting out of the car with me at the same time, and he would run to be ahead of me to draw the line at the end of the thing so that I'd have to sign in under the line at exactly 3:30 if it was 3:32, that he'd drawn the line to make it late. There'd be police officers sometime that would walk through the door and, like, just let the door—white guys—slam in my face instead of holding it like a gentleman. There were some horrible white people working at the police department that I'd never been exposed to like that in those numbers.

I had a captain that put me on probation for six months, because he was doing a tour, and I had my hair kind of Veronica Lake over one eye and I had a jumper on without sleeves, and he told me to never have my hair down like that. It was improper clothing. So I wore my hair in a tight bun for the whole six months, and then the day after my probation ended or whatever the sentencing he'd put me on, I had it over both eyes. It was interesting. You know, and that was at the police department, so I knew who many of them were, and then I also knew the good ones that were there too. There were some really lovely people. When the riots happened, they invited me and my family to their homes because they knew I lived right there where it had broken out, and I remember my thinking, "I'd still feel safer in my own neighborhood than in yours, because something could happen to my family out there." So I was really very, very aware. By then I'd put in enough time down there and had dealt with enough that I had scabs. You know, I could feel the hurt when you bumped up against me. I'd become sensitized to the racism and the divide and the whole bit. You know, then I didn't know, and it

wasn't until later, because of my own coloring, people really didn't know, but I knew enough that when the riots broke out, that—I was a blonde at the time, a bleached blonde, and I definitely did cover that blonde hair up and never had blonde hair again after that. I didn't want any mistakes, you know, to happen to me. Yes, it was an interesting—and I wasn't surprised when the riots broke out, you know, because it had become a low simmering in the neighborhood. Nobody talked about it that much.

CLINE

Yes, I guess that's what I was curious about.

JONES

Yes, but it was a simmering. It was just a dissatisfaction. The Italian friend at one point was walking to his house when I'd gone around the corner and two guys came up and tried to rob him and broke his jaw with the handle of a shotgun.

CLINE

Oh, wow.

JONES

You know, so that kind of stuff had started to happen, where never before had there been any of that, to my awareness, in our neighborhood. So, you know, blacks would jump on whites because they shouldn't be there, they felt, you know, and you'd hear about blacks getting hurt in other communities.

CLINE

Right. Tom Bradley was a police officer in the LAPD. How many African American police officers were there when you were working there, that you could tell?

JONES

Can't remember the percentage or anything. There were a few, not a lot, but not—it was a respectable amount. But, see, communications was where they put the police officers that they couldn't put in patrol cars, so basically we had the scum in communications. Yes, they were the bad ones, the bad cops, and for whatever reason, they couldn't be in a patrol car. Some were injured, but mostly they were the ones that couldn't be out on the street and they were in communication, and I could only see two black police officers that were in that thing. And the radio telephone operators, when my husband worked there, I think there were three

of them. By the time I went there, there were maybe about ten of us. You know, so it was pretty fair.
CLINE
And when you moved to this house, it's pretty far from the neighborhood you grew up in.
JONES
A long way from the neighborhood I grew up in.
CLINE
Right. Who was living here at the time? What was the neighborhood like? Who were the people?
JONES
This neighborhood was mostly black. There were two Japanese—there's only ten houses on this block. There was one white family at the end of the block, the chiropractor, and there were two Japanese families, and that was it from our block, okay. Everybody else was black, which is totally different now, and the whole neighborhood was primarily black. It had gone from white to black, and now it's gone back to Korean, and now white.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
Yes, and that's in forty-six, forty-seven years.
CLINE
Clearly it was important for you to feel safe, and you felt safer in your own neighborhood. How did you feel moving to this neighborhood at that point?
JONES
No problem. It just was no big deal by then, yes. My only concern at this neighborhood was the leap from the small house and the mortgage that I could pay, to knowing that it would take both of us to afford the first, the second, and the third on this house.
CLINE
Yes, right, and for people who are obviously only listening, it's a big house.
JONES
Right. Yes, it's a lot of house.
CLINE
Yes, it's a block with big beautiful houses on it.
JONES

Yes, this house was built in 1923 and it was 3,200 square feet. It's a little more because I've added on, and the house I lived in before probably was 1,000 square feet, if that, maybe 900.
CLINE
Right. But you have five kids.
JONES
I had five kids, so we very quickly—I mean, it was no, like, "Oh, my God." And the neighborhood was perfect for these kids, big street out front. They can run wild. [laughs] And then, you know, they went to school with other kids in the neighborhood, so they got to explore, lots of exploration here, total feeling of safety.
CLINE
Wow. So if it's agreeable with you, we can quit for today, and we'll pick up with the Watts Riots in 1965 and the birth of SOUL magazine next time.
JONES
Okay.
CLINE
Thank you.
JONES
Thank you. [End of April 13, 2012 interview]

1.2. Session 2 (April 27, 2012)

CLINE
Today is April 27, 2012. This is Alex Cline, and I'm interviewing Regina Jones at her home in Los Angeles, and this is session number two.
JONES
Good morning, Alex.
CLINE
Good morning. It's good to be here. Unlike when I was here before and we were talking, it's a bright, sunny, clear day today.
JONES
That's why people move to Los Angeles.
CLINE
That's right. That's right, and we're enjoying that. I wanted to point out that for the historical record, this is an interesting time, because this weekend marks the twentieth anniversary of the 1992 civil unrest here in Los Angeles, and we're about to talk about the 1965

rioting that happened in Watts that has a direct impact on our subject, SOUL magazine and the life of you, Regina Jones. And because of that, I think we'll probably get into a little bit of issues that are relevant, and we may somewhat diverge from the chronology. However, before we do all that, I do have some follow-up questions from last time. They seem a little bit trivial, but I thought I should ask them anyway, a couple that I thought of while we were sitting here and then I just forgot to ask them. Last session was our first session. We were talking about your early life, and we got up to the point where you're having what sounded like a very stressful time, the first few years of your marriage when you had very quickly and successively five children before you moved into this house. You talked a lot about the places that you used to go to, details about your neighborhood, and also the difficulty that you had which led to taking a job at Parker Center, ultimately, working for the LAPD.

I wanted to ask you one question that occurred to me while we were talking, which was since ostensibly you're related to the Nickersons, who founded Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, was there any opportunity, or did you ever think of getting a job working for that company, and did that company in any way touch your life as you were growing up?

JONES

Interesting that you are such a good interviewer and so perceptive that you zeroed in on a very sore spot. [laughs]

CLINE

Oh, golly. If it's too sore, we don't need to open it up.

JONES

Yes, I did go and I applied for a job there and I was told that I wasn't qualified, and it was a hurt that lasted a long, long time, a hurt, a resentment. There were no Nickersons there anymore. My Uncle Victor, I believe, was in some way working, but he was, like, in the field or something, and an aunt was a receptionist at the front desk, and that was the depth of Nickersons, besides my grandmother, who was at that time possibly still on the board of directors, but it never would have occurred to me to go to her to ask for a job. I went in on my own, and I remember meeting with Mr. Paujad, William Paujad, P-a-u-j-a-d (sic).

CLINE

Paujad the painter.
JONES
Yes, the artist, and who curated a huge amount of the art that was part—
CLINE
Right. They collected the [unclear].
JONES
Yes, he was a collector, and he was very sorry—I think he might have been HR or something at the time—that I just wasn't qualified. I remember being just really very, very hurt and very resentful, because I knew I was more than qualified and I couldn't understand why I was just blown off like that, and there was no test or anything. I mean, I was really just blown off. So, yes, so I had no real dealing with Golden State on any level except for my love for my Aunt Jessie Mae, who worked there as a receptionist.
CLINE
Wow. Okay. You also talked about some of the places you went and some of the activities that you were involved in, and basically it was a description of what sounded like a long extension into different African American communities all over this area that you didn't move out of very much. One of the things I wanted to ask you was one of the most sort of popular things to do in this part of the world is to go to the beach. You didn't mention the beach. Is this something that you ever did, or if you did, where could you go?
JONES
Okay, I wish I could remember the lifeguard station number for you, but there was one in particular that we all knew to kind of meet up, and that's kind of weird. I don't know. When I say "we all knew." It just was that's the lifeguard station, and my memory's telling me we'd go down Imperial Highway, which was the street to the beach there, and I can't at the moment remember the name of that beach, even though I should know it because I've been there many times. And, yes, I did go to the beach, and San Pedro was another not so much beach, but the rocks, you'd go and hang out there. I can remember my mother taking me to the beach, and I remember it was always a big production, the food you took and the stuff you took, so subsequently, as a young mother with all my children, when I took them to the beach, you carried what you were going to eat. I mean, I just couldn't see the twenty trips back and

forth. Yes, but, no, I used to take my children to the beach quite a bit. I even remember taking them to Zuma Beach, which was lovely, but that was a major traveling thing to go there, and never had any discomfort being at the beach whatsoever.

CLINE

So you went out Imperial Highway. This would have been also probably around the time that they were enlarging LAX over in that part of the world. Do you remember much about—

JONES

Not at all, and what's going on in my mind right now is it's jumping from as a child going and going with my children, but still we're only talking, like, less than twenty-year period, fifteen years, really. So not a lot of memory. But the beach was a happy place for me. That's what's coming up, and it was a fun place and, you know, it was great fun. I've got pictures of the kids running—my daughter, who's now probably around forty-eight, forty-seven, when she must have been about five, and the boys running in the water and that kind of thing, and there is one picture I have of myself as a little girl standing alone, and there's no other people in the background, come to think of it, at the beach. But that's it, but not a lot of memories coming up for that, but it was just a pleasant place to go and it was a joy whenever I got to go.

CLINE

And how much of a mix of different kinds of people do you remember being there?

JONES

Don't even see it.

CLINE

Oh, wow. Okay. You also mentioned going to the movies, the Manchester Theater, I think you said, and there was another one.

JONES

AAA.

CLINE

Right, the AAA. I tend to neglect this topic a lot, and I discover later that people have really sometimes very vivid memories of movies the saw when they were younger that really stayed with them, or the kinds of movies that they saw or anything that had any impact on them. What about you in that regard?

JONES

Going to the movies was more important than what the movie was. [laughs] You know, I remember the impact of even earlier than that, there was another little theater on, I think, Main Street closer to Imperial Highway, going to see The Thing there.

CLINE

Oh, The Thing.

JONES

The Thing. [laughter] And that's so funny because that's the only title that jumps off. AAA and Manchester, not one movie title comes up or even a star or anything. It was more about the fun of going to the movies.

CLINE

Would these frequently have been matinees, then, or when did you go?

JONES

The late afternoon, the late afternoon, and I remember one time we blew it, because the buses didn't run down Central Avenue after a certain time, so there must have been about five of us, we had to ride to Avalon and then walk, because we all lived right at Central, and it was dark and we were scared, but it was great because there was a bunch of us, and we walked down the middle of the street because we'd been told, you know, to be careful. But not a lot other than it was just a fun activity to do.

CLINE

Then one of the things that people associate with L.A. is smog, and I wondered if you had any memory about the air quality in L.A. when you were younger.

JONES

When I was a kid, it was perfect, yes. I remember, like yesterday, looking at the color blue in the sky. Everything was that color blue most of the time. It was soft white billowy clouds and this blue that is just incredibly bright and beautiful. It was like that. That's what it was like, and no allergies or coughing. [laughs]

CLINE

Do you remember it changing at some point?

JONES

I remember as it started to get bad, driving downtown and—this is a little later. I remember the first real impact was when I started to fly places, so we're talking late sixties, and coming back, you knew

you were back to Los Angeles when you saw this blue sky out there, and then you saw this big gray mass and you knew you were home. That's it. And remembering watching my oldest son, who's fifty-three, suffer from asthma to the point of it almost killing him as a baby and an infant, and having him hospitalized and, you know, not really understanding that the quality of the air had gotten so bad.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

So the changes were a long time ago now, and I had never thought about it. We think about it being current, but it's been current a long time. [laughter]

CLINE

It sounds like it escalated very quickly then.

JONES

It did.

CLINE

Wow. Interesting. Just in time for my era here in town.

JONES

Yes.

CLINE

Okay, so that brings us up to your working at Parker Center. You described some instances of flagrant racism that you experienced working there, and I wanted to sort of set the stage for what sounds like—I mean, you said you were—you gave the impression, anyway, you were somewhat naïve when it came racial issues, and so if you could characterize or describe the experience for losing that naivety during that time, and you're raising children now as well. How did that change or did it change your world view at the time?

JONES

It really changed my world. Growing up, one of my mother's best friends, Clare, her husband was Greek and he lived out in South L.A. where we lived, and we had a friend of the family, Johnny Augleria, who was Italian, and this didn't seem abnormal. Even knowing what their ethnicity was had to do more with their food taste and eating Italian food and eating Greek food, but it wasn't about color; it was more about culture. So I never thought anything about it until I went to work at the police department, and I never heard stories about my mother's growing up and racism or any of

that at that time. So it was like culture shock for me. I was very naïve. I had grown up in this small little area in South Central Los Angeles and Watts adjacent, and I just didn't have to encounter that, except in the third grade when I'd gone west, which is funny when I think about it, because we're talking about 118th Street School, which was probably around 118th and Broadway, where it was totally mixed, and being told by a little kid—you know, used profanity. But still, I can't see their different colors even now. They were just kids and people. And then even when I went to Enterprise Junior High School in Compton on Compton Boulevard between Central and Avalon, it was totally mixed, black, white, Hispanic, and our little pack—to this day, one of my dearest closest friends, Teresa and I—there was Teresa O'Leary, who was black, though, Regina Nickerson, Irene [phonetic], and I can't remember Irene's name, but she was Filipina and her family had come here from the Philippines, and I want to say they were on the Art Linkletter Show, the way the father had brought them here and the whole bit and their culture, and Yolanda, who was Hispanic, and her mother, and it was the four of us. We were the tight little—the four, and so there was no feeling of difference. You made friends based on friends, not on—we were all new to the school and had not graduated from that elementary school. We'd come from different areas, so we packed. We became a little group.

So I didn't see color in the seventh grade. When I went to Gompers Middle School for the eighth and ninth, you know, my only awareness there is meeting Kenny Kato and Harry Takahashi. They were my first Japanese, okay. Fremont High School, totally mixed, but becoming more black then. I remember the teacher I fought with, had an encounter with, Mr. Bornstein. That was an awareness then about Jewish. You know, so these are like new registers on the brain, but it wasn't a—and, you know, they didn't teach black history in the schools, so there was absolutely no black history. There's just no reason. So the first racism was at LAPD.

CLINE

So when you were going to school, growing up, and they would, for example, teach about the Civil War, what do you remember about what they were teaching you?

JONES

Nothing. It was just a war. And I remember that history was my worst subject. Even in high school, I had to take history twice to come up with a C, you know, because I was on the academic trajectory and the D wasn't going to work, so I took it again, but I just was not able to memorize the dates and the stuff they were teaching. So I don't know if it was because it wasn't applicable and it didn't fit me, no interest. I have no idea. I loved algebra. History just didn't do it, and to this day, I don't remember that much about it, you know.

CLINE

Right. Wow. That's not unusual, I think. And you mentioned some things that were starting to happen that you had heard about in the neighborhood in terms of examples of violence, of an escalating sense of what people might now call sort of the simmering that led to things as they happened.

JONES

Yes, it was like when Johnny, who was always in the neighborhood walking from our house to the grocery store or the other businesses around the corner, was beaten so badly, just out of racism. They had called him white, and, "What are you doing here?" and broke his jaw with the butt of a gun. That was shocking and just stunning, you know, that this was happening. Not a lot is jumping off today, for some reason.

CLINE

It's okay. And the police, themselves, of course, in L.A. at the time were very much a main ingredient in the escalation of the expression of this frustration and this anger. What do you remember about the unrest as it unfolded in 1965 during a time when I presume you were still working at the police station?

JONES

Yes, I was working at Parker Center. You know, I'd get it on the calls because I answered radio. Different positions, you work Hollenbeck, you work University, you work Wilshire, you work—why can't I remember the one in my neighborhood? It had numbers. Different positions. You rotated, okay. You'd hear more racial calls in some than others. Hollenbeck was mostly Hispanic, and there'd be something going on there. That's the only way it would come. There wasn't a lot of anything else. I mean, I know I sound vague here, but nothing's jumping off. It was more I worked there, I

encountered the racism, but I also encountered some good people. One woman is still my friend, Erma, who was white, but I never really thought about it. We just buddied up, and here, fifty years later, we're still friends, very close friends.

Yes, the job was to take care of the police officers, so even though I'd seen racism, I had a job, and so I was their only connection between in the field and them getting help. If they were a solo officer, an L Unit, or an A Unit meant two, and a patrol car, I was their lifeline, and you took that seriously, because I remember coming home, waking up having nightmares answering a call that I had maybe not heard consciously well, but heard it in the subconscious. So it was really like—they talk about the stress of the air controllers. It was that kind of stress, because knowing you're the lifeline for somebody is stressful, and when they got out of line, you know, you learned to deal with them, and sometimes they got upset enough with you. If you weren't there enough, as far as they were concerned, they'd come into Parker Center to meet you. They didn't get out of line, but they would come in, and sometimes we would get annoyed with them, [unclear] certain one that was just totally out of line, screamers or—just like any other person. You know, so we were in it together. When the riots, though—when I got that call, "Officer needs help," I remember just being shocked, you know. It was, "Officer needs help." It was in Watts. It was—I want to say 116th and Avalon right around the corner from my house. I lived at 118th near Central. It was verifying who it was and where they were and getting them help, but then as I saw communications come together where I was working, how they were beginning to handle it, and they brought the—it's not task force, but they brought people in to talk about it and they set up a room across the hall. This whole thing you see on TV, it was real, and this was 1965, I think.

They were doing it all wrong, because it was a nice neighborhood. These were homeowners. These were people who mostly lived there a long time. And the way they were handling it, to send out the hoses and the dogs and all that was not the way to go. They needed just to get their police officers safely out of there and get the heck out. Instead, the decision was to make a force statement, and that's what blew it up, in my personal opinion. And I'm sure many people would disagree with me, but that's what I observed and that's the

neighborhood I knew I lived in all my life, and I remember just being shoo-shooed when I tried to share what my feelings were, because what could I, a little dumb black girl, know? And no one had the intelligence to even, when I said lived there, to call me in and talk to me about my neighborhood. They immediately—it was like a task force, and it just exploded. It was literally like a little war room right across the hall, which I never knew that room existed until then, and the only reason I saw it then, it was between there and the front of the building and the door had been left open, and I looked in and I was just stunned that they were setting things up like that.

Tension was just out of control. My fear was my family, if it was going to get crazy, how I was going to get home to my family. Of course, I, you know, thought professionally enough business-wise to call home and tell my husband, "This is happening. You need to get out there," because he was a radio reporter. And it completely altered our life, because NBC didn't have—and I probably said this last time. They didn't have any black reporters.

CLINE

You didn't say that.

JONES

Okay. NBC didn't have any black reporters, and he was a glorified gofer, so they used him and sent a camera crew out that he directed around the neighborhood, because they didn't know the neighborhood, but he knew the neighborhood. So he was the reporter. He had the cameraman with him, and he also was kind of protection, supposedly, for the cameraman. I remember Lou Irwin, who was a renowned radio reporter, Lou slept on our sofa a couple nights and stayed right there in the midst of it, and he and Ken hung, again as protection for Lou, but Ken and Lou were already friends. We already knew Lou. And then watching the neighborhood just explode, watching lovely people stealing the hams and the turkeys and the booze from the liquor store around the corner when they burned it, and running down the street right in front of my house with wagons and stuff, and then watching one guy being chased by two policemen on foot, and I'd never seen a gunshot, but seeing fire come out my window and telling my kids to stay on the floor. You know, it was horrific.

Getting off work at the police department at eleven-thirty at night, coming off at Imperial Highway off of the 110 Freeway, which I always call the Harbor Freeway, and being stopped by the—help me, the word. They send in the forces, the military.
CLINE
The National Guard.
JONES
The National Guard. And sitting in the car, being obedient to what I was told, with the National Guard guy there with his gun and another one around back on the other side of the car with his gun and looking, and I'm a baby, because I'm all of about twenty-two, but these were real babies—
CLINE
Oh, wow.
JONES
—and being aware that they were such children with these guns, and afraid a backfire from a car is going to get me shot, and all I was trying to do was go home, but having to show all my proof that this is where I lived and all this crap, and why I was out that late, because it was a curfew. That makes me nauseous right now thinking about it.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
Yes, a major fear, major fear, fear for my family, fear for myself, fear for my husband, who was out in it, and then the surprise and disappointment at the neighbors that were pilfering. And then even a boy, man, who worked at the grocery store—I want to say Jim Bunn [phonetic] or something, he had become a friend, and he died at that grocery store when it burned. Something, I don't know what the actual—but he died. So to know someone who was a nice, polite person just ceased to exist the night that that store burned. The embers flying, wetting down the garage, the backyard, the house roof to keep it—I was that close from burning my house.
Yes, it was horrific. I don't know if it was ten or twenty years later, I wrote a story for the Times about it, my experience, that it was put on my heart to do it and I just did it, and then I submitted it, we edited it and worked on it, and it ran. But it was a lot of, lot of energy there, a lot of energy, a lot of pain. Even going back couple

of years ago for another anniversary for what they call the Watts Riots—I called it an uprising—just the pain of going back to my neighborhood, because these are the people I grew up. That was my hometown. That was my little town that I came from, basically. Like people come from small towns, that was my small town. Though it was part of Los Angeles, it was my small town, and that's where my friends were. Yes, and being angry racially and remembering Montague—they claimed the disc jockey on KJFJ, Magnificent Montague, set it off with "Burn, baby, burn!" Well, Ken worked with Montague. We knew Montague, and hearing that, and never seeing burning and destruction as a way to solve a problem, but it just pointed out for me how big the problem really was and how big the divide and separation was. Yes, it completely altered my life.

CLINE

And what was the atmosphere then like for you after that or even during it at your place of employment?

JONES

It was fine. I found out who my friends were and who the people were that I liked and who the people were I tolerated.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

I didn't stay there much longer. I stayed there long enough for us to—we moved into this home and got the paper started. We put SOUL out on the dining room table in the dining room, in the other room, and at some point we made the decision it was more important for my energy to be with the paper than to be at the police department, and I guess he was making enough by then that I could cut off that little income, and I think when I first came home, though—thank you. I first had to come home not because of the paper. I came home because we moved into this neighborhood, and my oldest son, who I guess was a first grader, second grader, had been tested as the highest IQ at his school elementary, 116th Street, and he was a little prize kid, you know, and we moved here and the principal at Wilton Place, at 8th and Wilton Place, told him that they would have to retest him because she didn't think a black kid could have that kind of IQ, which I lacked the sophistication to know how to handle that at the time, and I think she really

damaged my child harshly for the rest of his life, whatever that was that happened, from being this little center of the universe to being spoken about like he wasn't even a human that could hear or feel. He became such a disruptive force that I remember the third-grade teacher just breaking down in sobs because they couldn't get him to do anything. And it's such a small world, because she ended up marrying a guy that owned KBCA Radio. That's so weird. So it wasn't until he got into fourth grade with Connie Rae [phonetic], who was a black teacher who was able to kind of settle him back down again, but they completely undermined him. But I was also running the paper by now, working at the paper, so I was a much divided parents and a totally unsophisticated parent.

CLINE

So this principal, when she was discussing her suspicion of his actual intellectual gifts, this was said in front of him?

JONES

In front of him. It was said to him.

CLINE

Really?

JONES

It wasn't said to me; it was said to him.

CLINE

Wow. Amazing. So what do you remember about the immediate aftermath of the '65 uprising and what the climate was like that perhaps consequently inspired the establishing of your magazine, of your paper?

JONES

You know, I mentioned before that the barbershop that was part of the beauty shop my mother worked at, Luxey's [phonetic]. Then-police officer Tom Bradley was there. A lot of the doctors in the community were there, Benny Hopkins, contractor got the first big contract and built a Safeway that was on Imperial Highway east of Central. It was the first big, like, grocery store of a name that we had right across from Nickerson Gardens, and it being burned to the ground. It was there and then it was gone.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

Shop-Rite Market [phonetic] at the corner near my house at 120th and Central, burned to the ground, which was a neighborhood market, but it was a big neighborhood market, so it left a big void as far as where we could go to the grocery store. A lot of businesses were lost, a lot of things went down, and a lot of promises were made to rebuild that didn't happen for many, many years.
Ken came up with the idea—he found this house and he wanted to move. He wanted to move his family out of the three-bedroom, one-bath house that we had, to four bedrooms, and I went along with it and we moved here. So most of my life was caught up in trying to take care of the children, and then work a job and then doing the bookkeeping for SOUL. It was during the riots—and I think I said it before—that he came up with the idea that we needed something like a SOUL, and that's where the birth of SOUL came, was watching Watts burn from the Sunset-Vine Building, looking south and seeing his little center of life up in flames from there. He came up with the idea of SOUL and, you know, we launched it in April of 1966, I want to say.
CLINE
What was life then like for your parents still living in the neighborhood and how much did you stay in contact with the life in that part of town?
JONES
When we first moved here, we moved here in, like, late November, early December, and we didn't pull the kids out of school, at least the oldest one, I think, so every morning my husband would load all five of the kids up in the car and drive them back there to my mother's, and then she would, after school and everything, load them in her car and bring them here. So we had this, you know, back-and-forth. You know, the friends were still the same when I went to visit my parents. Luxey's was still Luxey's. Life just went on just like it had always been. Can we pause for a moment?
CLINE
Yes, sure. [interruption]
CLINE
We were talking about the impact of the Watts uprising on your neighborhood. This was during the Sam Yorty era.
JONES
Sam Yorty. That's so funny you mention that. I forgot all about that.

CLINE
What do you remember about the feeling in your community? You said there were some promises made, there were some intention to, I guess, perhaps in some way, shape, or form, pay attention to what was behind this. What was the feeling in your community about—
JONES
Nothing happened and nothing was going to happen. We're speaking about people, like I said, small homeowners, really blue-collar workers, that had to just get up every morning and go to work and come home and try to keep their heads above water. You know, I'm just thinking. You know, the neighbors were the same. The neighbors didn't change. I moved out of the neighborhood. My mother was still there. These were still the same women who, as a kid, would tell my mother if I was doing something wrong or tell me I was doing something wrong. They didn't become more sophisticated or less sophisticated. Life went on exactly like it was in the little Bellevue tract that I lived in. Now, there was a lot of movement in renters around us, but the little, little tract homes that had been built during World War II basically were the same families that had been there, not a lot of sales or turnovers. People usually died—you know, I mean, they didn't—and it was always a rare occasion when somebody moved. I just remember one of Mother's dear friends and the lady next door moved to a big house, and that's how it was referred to. And I think I like the way I said it, was my little town. I never thought about it before, but we were all little small-town people living in big Los Angeles. We were just small-town people.
CLINE
And then you moved out.
JONES
I moved out.
CLINE
What was that like for you psychologically?
JONES
I was too busy to think about it. I just had to run as fast as I could to keep up, between the bills and the kids and the transitions they were going through and working every day at Parker Center, and then eventually leaving there to come home to see about my kids

that were starting to fall apart. And that's why I left Parker Center, was to come home to try to pull my family, my kids back together, you know, having to be on the road every day traveling and all that kind of stuff. And then when the newspaper started, my only responsibility at the very beginning was the bookkeeper, so that was my job, and then it eventually moved out of here, moved up—and it's interesting what the location is that he chose, because the address was 8271 Melrose Avenue. That's Melrose just east of La Cienega, a few blocks past Fairfax or Crescent Heights, and it was already then sort of decorators' area. And the building, we shared a suite with an interior decorator, Ron Baron, and we shared the reception area, and he kept his one office, and then we took one regular-size office and then one huge, like, workroom office for SOUL. So we were there. I remember running into Steve Martin in the hall. He was doing some business across the hall from us. You know, going to lunch up on La Cienega and Melrose.

It was just all the natural evolvement. I have no idea why those kind of transitions weren't really hard for me, but they weren't. You just kind of do what's in front of you, and again, I didn't think about it racially, but I was becoming more and more aware then, because of my exposure, of how much we didn't have in South L.A. and how big the divide was. That was my awareness, and the more I was exposed to, the more I saw the almost impossibility of changing the dynamics of where you were born and how you moved into things. Yes, I was really a divided soul on many levels. I knew where I had come from and what my exposure had been and also knew where I was, so I basically was in two worlds and never really felt that comfortable in either one.

CLINE

Wow. Then in 1992, as I mentioned at the beginning, we had another big uprising here in Los Angeles, something that we're honoring this weekend. It's been twenty years since that happened. Since the timing is what it is, what, if anything, do you see in the way of these issues being or not being addressed during this huge spread of time between 1965 and 1992, and now, of course, twenty years even farther along in 2012, especially when you look back at your small town, as you put it, that you grew up in, and what the City of Los Angeles has done or not or has become or not during

that time? What are your thoughts as you look at the continuity between these large violent events?

JONES

Alex, I'm really surprised with what's going on right now with me as you're talking. I feel very, very sad. I'm almost overwhelmed with sadness and just to the point of sickness, and I get to understand my need to often psychologically disconnect from what I'm exposed to and what I see in order to survive without being consumed by the injustice that I've been exposed to, I guess, all my life and have lived with and through.

I got really pissed the other day and I was going to write an article to the L.A. Times, write an article, write a letter. It was really small. It was a little clipping and it was describing something near where we are now as South Central, and I'd like to talk about that because that sends my blood pressure up, that people, reporters and newscasters and writers from all over the country with no awareness of Los Angeles, have come here and relabeled the boundaries, the borders of our different areas and renamed them. South Central was South Central. That was south of Manchester. That was east of Broadway. That was South Central, and now South Central includes Koreatown, if they hadn't decided to name Koreatown Koreatown. I get really angry with that. I get really angry when I hear reporters and commentators on TV mispronouncing the names of our streets. I don't think about it like that, but that's what's coming up right now, and without ever doing the homework or the studies to really understand our city. Intellectually I totally get it, that everybody's doing as much as they can and moving as fast as they can, but emotionally I'm very upset. To see Rodney King in the L.A. Times over and over again the last few days—I think I stopped reading it for a few days. I had to put it down. You know, and then they summarize it with basically in twenty years he's still who he was. He hasn't grown or improved. Very little of anybody has grown or improved. Government money was thrown into supposedly helping people, but the bureaucracy and the administrative cost have consumed most of that. The people, the schools are worse than ever. The living conditions are worse than ever. It's really bad. Los Angeles was such an incredibly beautiful, wonderful place, and now it's like a Chicago slum in many ways, and then you have the rich areas, but the poor have just

gotten poorer. They've lost the sense of community in most communities. It literally breaks my heart, and I don't see any differences being made.
I hear people rage about what's happening now with the Latin population taking over all of it, and I can't fault people for fighting for survival. And I look at the census that we just had released and I think—and I prefer "blacks" to "African American." We're down from 8 percent to 7 percent here. Black people are almost, like, nonexistent. I wish I could be more articulate about this, but it's all emotional for me. It's not a head thing. I see children and I hear them—I remember one time being in line in a store and these two young women in front of me were talking and I thought they were speaking another language. We don't much talk about Ebonics anymore, but at that time, Ebonics was a big deal, and when I zeroed in, I realized that they were speaking English, but it was Ebonics, and how that's happened and continues to grow and happen. I'm a grandmother with thirteen grandkids, and it breaks my heart to wonder what's going to happen to my grandkids, and not just because they're black, but because they're children who've just been—our kids, our most valuable resource on the whole planet, our children are not being adequately taken care of or provided for. Yes, so this rioting and all this coverage of it right now and making a big deal about it, what are you doing about it? What are we doing? You know, it's not just a news headline to incite people and get them talking or whatever the attempt is. What is the progress? What are we doing? What are we going to do? How are things going to change? Which goes right back to what Ken's desire was, was to help people by coming up with SOUL, to spread good news and let black people know there were black things going on that were positive using the medium of entertainment to do it.
You know, early on in SOUL's life there was a woman—she's passed on, Judy Spiegelman—who was a teacher out at—definitely South Central, the old South Central.
CLINE
The one that's really south and central.
JONES
Yes, and she used SOUL—she discovered it at a liquor store in the school neighborhood and used it to teach her kids to read, and this is, like, late sixties, okay. She eventually—Ken did a story on her

out there. I don't know how she found him at the reporter and the whole bit, and she used it and blah, blah, the connection. She ended up leaving the school. She worked for us part-time because she wanted to help the paper, and then she left the school system as a teacher and became a SOUL editor for many years, because it was so important to her to come up with something that the children would be interested in reading. They weren't interested in reading the textbooks that they had in those days. Black kids, I mean, there was no story that they identified with, and so she was literally—and they were reading SOUL. I mean, it was really fascinating. His purpose—he was definitely an idea man, and he saw a need and struck out to fulfill it. He was the front room; I was the back room. I mean, that's basically how we functioned.

CLINE

What was his status in terms of his employment at that point?

JONES

Well, in order to support the newspaper, he had to continue to work as a reporter, and, you know, that's what he did. I guess at that point he was—you know, I can't remember right off the top the sequence and everything, but I remember he was at KTTV, then he went to NBC, and then he went to CBS, and where the years intertwined, there's nothing there for me. I'd have to literally chart it for myself.

CLINE

How much reporting had he done before his coverage of the Watts Riots?

JONES

He'd been a radio reporter for a while, so he already reported. Ken literally was an altar boy at the People's Independent Church, which is really kind of weird, because that's where my grandfather, William Nickerson, went to church, and then that's where Ken's mother went to church and where Ken was an altar boy at that same church. Just so happens, you know. So he was an altar boy. He loved reading whatever had to be read at the church service. He was an announcer at the high school of the football games and the track meets. So this was who he was, so when he got a chance to work radio as a reporter, I mean, he was beating on doors. I mean, when my third child was born, he had his own radio show on KBCA Jazz, and in order to do that, you had to sell the advertising to pay

the station for your time that you broadcast the music that you liked. He was doing that. He was announcing music acts at different clubs around town. I remember the Zebra Lounge down at Manchester and Central Avenue. Later, ’62, it was the It Club on Washington near La Brea. Gobs and gobs of different clubs and things. So that was his world. That was his interest.

CLINE

How did the climate for hiring somebody who was, in this case, a young black man change after the ’65 that you may recall?

JONES

Yes, he was, I think, one of the first, if not the first. People say he was the first, and it’s almost embarrassing to me. You know, he was my husband, the father of my kids. I didn’t care about whether he was the first, the second, or the third. [laughs] I was just happy he was employed and happy we could pay the rent, the mortgage, and buy food for the kids, and was always upset that he was too busy working to be home with the kids.

CLINE

But how much was it a situation where it’s like, “Hey, look, Ken is on TV,” or whatever?

JONES

For me, it never—

CLINE

It never happened.

JONES

No. For his mother and my mother, it was a big deal, okay, and for his friends and for everybody it was a big deal. You know, it’s the old story. I lived with him, so we came up with the shorter end, and it was always wonderful when he was off and was out in the front playing football with the kids or doing something with us. But he was a real reporter. I know purposely at one point we went on a vacation and I made sure I rented a house with no phone, so he had to go a couple miles to get to a payphone to call and check. I mean, I remember he and I were on a little personal trip, had gone up to Santa Barbara by train and the earthquakes happened. I don’t remember which earthquake.

CLINE

So Sylmar, maybe, ’71?

JONES

Possibly. But, you know, they sent a helicopter with a reporter down to Santa Barbara, and he was on the scene with all the problems there, and I was on the train coming home alone. [laughs]

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

You know, he took his job seriously. He loved reporting. He just loved it. It wasn't hard for him to get a job; it was hard to get fair pay. Yes, they didn't make money in those days like the contracts that we've heard about the last couple of decades. Basically just like brokering the time at the radio station, you know, they were doing you a favor. They allowed you on the air. And I think he would have worked another job and paid them to be on the air, and I used to tease him about that, you know. I guess I probably should have been his business manager negotiating his contracts. Maybe he wouldn't have had a job. [laughs] So it wasn't really hard for him to get jobs, per se, in those days, because he was known. He was a known entity. He knew the city, and he was never afraid of work. If he could work two, three jobs at the same time, he would. That was who he was.

CLINE

I don't know how much you kept up on this, but how many other minority reporters or news personalities did you start to see after he—

JONES

They started after that. They started after that. I don't remember what the year break was or anything like that, but after him and after the riots, then they started to break in more and more and more and more.

CLINE

Do you remember any of those people?

JONES

No. You know, it's like old days, KGFJ, who then became television, Larry McCormick, personal friends, he and his wife, Anita. I was never impressed by celebritydom. There's one story, I'm going to share it now. Ken and I were out shopping together, one of those rare occasions. I had drug him to a department store somewhere to shop, and we're shopping and people are watching him, and finally we're kind of separated somewhat and this lady comes over to me

and she said, "Is that your husband?" And I said, "Yes, it is." And she said, "You're so lucky." And I said, "No, ma'am, he's so lucky." [laughter] Okay. So that was who I was. I just wasn't impressed. I knew how much money came home. I knew how hard the work was, and oh, well. And I know that's abnormal, but that's how I felt about it.

CLINE

So how did he turn his idea to create SOUL, this newspaper when it started out, into something concrete? What were the steps?

JONES

He had an idea. He had a dream. He was working at, I think, I want to say KRLA Beat. I think it was KRLA, the Beat, but the call letters could be wrong, but it was the Beat, B-e-a-t, a radio station at Sunset and Vine, as a reporter with Cecil Tuck, who was the news manager or something, and Cecil was putting out The Beat affiliated with the station. Ken said, "We should do that for SOUL."

We went into business with Cecil as fifty-fifty, using Cecil's staff, which becomes another whole story and a joke, in a weird way, to put out the first few issues, and a few months into it, Cecil realized he didn't really want to do two things, and Ken said, "We'll buy you out." So we talked about it and I said, "Okay." And I don't remember how we did it, but we came up with some way to buy Cecil Tuck out, and that's when the newspaper came from their offices. He didn't want to put out two newspapers a week out of his office. It was just too much stress, and so that's how we started putting it out in the dining room here until we were able to get an office. It was a weekly at the beginning, and it was put out in a couple of days every week. The editor and the managing editor—there were three of them—would come and work on it, and then Ken would be trying to, while he was doing his reporting and stuff, sell advertising and open up distribution and things like that, and that's what we did. It was here a few months, and then we moved into an office, and I was happy because they were out of the house and out of the kids' hair. I had to go in a couple times a week to deal with the bookkeeping and handling contracts to start adding new radio stations and stuff, and I found the secretary sleeping on the couch, and without thinking of the consequences, I fired her on the spot, so that meant we didn't have anybody. Then they had me full-time there basically running the office, and that's how I got

totally involved, and it was always the business end first, and then slowly I got more and more involved in the editorial, and that became—and Ken was very involved in his career as a newsman, an anchorman, and all that stuff. So he was the idea man, and he would come in and shout orders and criticize what was done and not done, and I always had a much softer, gentler glove that I worked with.
So I ended up running more and more of the paper, and he finally deemed that I took it over in a bloodless coup, that I was basically running things. [laughs] I enjoyed the privilege, though, of being able to always be behind the scenes and make sure everybody believed he was in total charge, so I always had to ask him, is the way I would give myself time to check things out and stuff like that. So we had a very positive team relationship going there. You know, it was good guy, bad guy, even with the staff.
CLINE
So when you were first starting this, and then you moved it here into the home for a while, which I have to imagine must have been really crazy, who were the people that were working for you and how did you or Ken or both of you find those people?
JONES
Well, that's where it gets—when I say funny. We utilized the same staff that The Beat was using that had been doing it before, and it was Carol Deck was the editor; Rochelle Reid [phonetic] was the managing editor; and Nicki Wine was the writer, and all three were little white girls from USC. [laughter] And there were little errors, like sometimes Nicki would write something under, to put more male names in there, George Culver, but the way she read it, it was little feminine George. So there would be those kind of bloopers, you know, would happen, and they were out at the Total Experience and the [unclear] and the different nightclubs in South Central. It was really kind of funny, I mean in retrospect. [laughs]
CLINE
How did that change and when did that change?
JONES
I'm sure when I got there. [laughs]
CLINE
Who was the secretary asleep on the couch?
JONES

I don't remember her name, and she wasn't even a secretary. She was a receptionist, and we shared her with the decorator and it was whoever they had there, we just split her salary and she was reception with no thought. This reveals too much about me. I fired not only Ken's receptionist, but the people we sublet the suite's from receptionist on the spur of the moment based upon behavior with no thought of consequences, okay. Totally out of line, in retrospect. [laughs] So I got punished. I had to then find a receptionist, fill in until I did have one, you know, and I was suddenly responsible for running the office.

CLINE

So where did the idea for the name of the paper come from?

JONES

Ken and I talked it out. It was Flash, Flame, a bunch of names we ran through, and when he said, "Soul," I said, "Soul! That's it!" So we came up with SOUL.

CLINE

How would you describe the climate of popular music at the time that this paper then became a reflection of, in terms of, you know, you have popular music radio, you have African American acts, you have white acts, at that time the beginning of the so-called British Invasion and its impact, a lot of people kind of doing soul-style music who were maybe from England. You had a lot of interesting things happening in popular music. The Beatles were already huge. How would you describe the musical artistic climate and how the paper responded to that at the time?

JONES

Well, the first issue is our—I wish I could remember the exact headline. I should, but basically, "Are Whites Stealing Black Soul?" or whatever.

CLINE

Yes, I saw that. That really amazed me.

JONES

With James Brown, I think, and Mick Jagger, possibly, on the cover together, and it's interesting, I can't even remember right this second. I'd have to see it. We were R and B. We were KGFJ Radio, and we were showcasing and doing stories on who was on the top, the records that they were playing on KGFJ, the recording artist. So it was pure soul, and that was the name, SOUL. That was it. We

looked at the British music more as theft, of them coming in and copying black music or R and B music more as theft than anything else. In those early days, it was just straight R and B right off the KGFJ charts. Yes, even advertisements shout neighborhood—I'm just seeing Ronald's Clothing, just see the ads, even though pretty soon we were up at the Whisky A Go-Go, the Whisky, because black acts were up there. The Apartment, the Total Experience, I mean, yes. There was some black booming up on Sunset. There was a fabulous soul food restaurant that I can't remember the name of that everybody went and ate at, and it was high end, sort of, in the day. Oh, that's a long time ago.

CLINE

Well, how much do you remember the word "soul" being used to describe a style of music at that point, or was it?

JONES

I don't remember it being used to describe a style of music. I think it just was a style of music, and SOUL covered that music and those artists.

CLINE

But there was a time when people started referring to that style of music as soul music.

JONES

Yes, they did. I'm just seeing a cloud of faces going by. You know, I'm just seeing faces, faces, faces, not a lot of content. I see Sam and Dave. I don't even remember why they were there so early. Brook Benton. Wow, that's weird. James Brown. Jackie Wilson.

CLINE

How much was your sense of the level of interest in that music and your coverage of it with non-black—

JONES

We got quite a few letters from people making sure they knew we were non-black, quite a few subscribers in London, England. It was very "in" to be black. That was the beginning of that time. You had the copies of the hairstyles, the shoes, the clothing. It was just very, very "in," and this is before even the Blaxploitation movies. We had started before that happened. We were evolving by the time that came into being. It was very grassroots during that thing. You know, SOUL was published locally, but as soon as we would break into new markets, our readers would write letters, so we always

knew what was going on all over the country, because our readers made SOUL theirs and they would write, and we'd get a review from somebody in town, from a reader. So, you know, we read all the letters and we knew what was going on from that. That was our pulse, our actual readers. And, of course, see, at the very beginning there were no black publicists working for record companies, and when we first started, most of the time they didn't even have a photograph of the artist, because if they were releasing this music, they didn't want the photo out there. They were selling the sound. There were no bios at the beginning. Rare, rarely were there biographies on these artists. So we were having to get photos, create bios to match the records that were hits that were going on.

CLINE

Wow. This is almost the total opposite of how it became, where the image became everything.

JONES

No, no, there was no imaging. James Brown was smart enough. He was very savvy when it came to promoting himself, that he loved SOUL, and he made a point of—he knew how to use SOUL to give himself a voice more than just the record. So he talked and preached just like he did in his songs, to the point he was regularly in SOUL and he made sure all over the country they got material to us, his people.

CLINE

Well, he ultimately had a column.

JONES

Yes, he did a column for a couple years, which was, you know—

CLINE

Which I got the feeling was the result of someone following him around with a tape recorder or something while he talked.

JONES

Here.

CLINE

Is that what it was?

JONES

When he got to town. A couple times they went out on the road, but not really on the road per se. They'd hit him with the city. He moved so fast from city to city, but he'd come and we might sit two, three hours and just talk about what was going on in his mind, in

his hotel room—you know what I'm saying—and get as much material and cover as many topics as what was going on in his head, and then develop the columns.

CLINE

Wow. Well, I have to say, his presence in the early years of the paper is really overwhelming. I mean, he is just the major figure until a couple years later or more when some of the Motown acts really start to emerge as hugely popular.

JONES

He understood it and Berry Gordy understood it, okay. James, as everyone had to refer to him as Mr. Brown, and you didn't refer to him as James, he was very proper. You know, the dichotomy of what we saw was so different from his professional—when he was in his business mode. His awareness was just incredible. He understood it and so did Berry Gordy. Berry made a point. There was a publicist working for Berry early on named Junius Griffin, and he was assigned to work with us, so we pretty much had carte blanche to many things, and again, they understood how to use SOUL as basically people produce newsletters or blogs. We were in many ways their newsletter or their blog. They were in the business of recording music and doing concerts, so they got better and better at filling our needs. Once they saw what our needs were, Berry was sharp, or someone there, that, "Okay, not just SOUL. We need to furnish this stuff to these other magazines." So they built a whole machine to do publicity. Not many other people did that at first. I can remember battling with a couple of young publicists, black publicists, who tried to go into that ownership attitude that I'm sure they do now, and saying, "Buddy, if it wasn't for SOUL, you wouldn't have a job. They'd have no reason to hire you as a black publicist." And I'm not going to call names there, but at record company and even at Rogers and Cowan, because early on we dealt with Paul Bloch, and Paul became a partner, but he was assigned to us and we worked with him and Sandy Friedman. I'm just remembering these guys that became big, huge publicists, and then eventually they had to hire somebody black to come in, yes.

And this hadn't happened with Ebony, which is weird as I'm talking about it, but because, I guess, of our entertainment, where Ebony was general, they had to come up with a way to feed us and provide what we wanted and what we needed. A lot of the photographers,

they ended up buying photos from our photographers, and then our photographers ended up working for them.

CLINE

Interesting.

JONES

Yes, so it was a whole thing that evolved from it.

CLINE

Yes, something radically different from, I think, what people think of now when they think of how things are run. It's hard to imagine, for example, that in the earlier issues of SOUL you virtually never even see an ad taken out by a record company for a record. Why is that, do you think? What was happening?

JONES

They didn't want to spend the money. They hadn't done it. They were paying payola. They were paying for promotions. I mean, what do they need an ad for? Yes, it was a whole educational—it was a whole battle, I mean, trying to get ads from them, trying to convince them the importance of advertising and keeping SOUL alive, to support SOUL to support them. It was a whole educational period that we were teaching each other. Yes, the publicists—yes, I hadn't thought about that in a long time, but that was quite a piece. Then it came eventually—and this is way down the line—to they wanted to control what photos we used. They became dictators, as they are now, until the paparazzi has taken over. So to see the way things have evolved, as this conversation, interview is causing me to think, the whole evolution. I've never sat back and really thought about it.

CLINE

There weren't even many ads for concert venues or clubs.

JONES

Nothing. None of these people knew about advertising. There were no advertising budgets. They didn't exist, so they had to pull money out of other budgets to do it, and even local stores and vendors, you know, you had to convince them of how buying an ad would benefit them. No one was educated or aware, and so it was out of a need that we needed to pay the printer and pay our salaries that we had to get the advertising. So we had to go out and educate. I mean, I can remember 1967 or 1968, my first trip to New York, calling on advertising agencies and being put off. You know, "When

you've been here X amount of years, come back," okay. Yes, yes, it was really rough setting that up in those days.

CLINE

And yet there's clearly a lot of money in the business, because one of the things that is so, I think, striking about the impact of James Brown is not just his impact artistically, but the fact that he was so tremendously financially successful and how strongly he demonstrated his degree of success.

JONES

And he, James Brown, had no problem paying for an ad. He wouldn't buy an ad, straight-out ad, but he'd say, "Here, I'll send you two hundred a month," okay. He understood the theory of you've got to pay to keep this going, and he never had a problem with that, as I think back. If he got paid at a concert, you got paid.

CLINE

Wow. How do you think he developed that? I mean, you knew him pretty well, I suppose.

JONES

Yes.

CLINE

How do you think he developed that sort of awareness?

JONES

That's why I'm saying he had savvy. James Brown, that's another whole story. I could see his ruthless side, you know. You could see it, but it never touched me. He was a gentleman. He was professional. He was on time. Somewhere he had been exposed to what he saw as the rules of respect, and, you know, so he had this system where he fined his people for being late, using the "Mister" referring to—it's not like he was Mr. Brown and you were Alex. You were Mr. Cline. I was Mrs. Jones; I wasn't Regina. This was his respect thing, and he really pushed that and he stuck to it, and his people were respectful. Now, what happened behind closed doors I don't know, but his business presence was locked down and tight. You get to a know a person for a long time, you get to see more because the boundaries get softer and softer. You know, I could see other glimpses, but those are other stories. But he was a hell of an aware man. He really was. You know, I was blessed through my life in entertainment and publishing to meet a few very special people

like that who I could learn from by watching and observing and could grow by seeing. I had nothing but respect for James Brown.
CLINE
And as SOUL is now established and is reporting on what is going on in the community mainly in the entertainment world, what were some of the areas that you decided to include that were not strictly entertainment oriented?
JONES
It would just vary depending on need. Nothing's popping off right now, or how many years down the line. You know, it's all kind of a blur. Vince Cullers, the late sixties, Chicago, Illinois, advertising agency, black advertising agency, they had some major clients breaking through that door, and getting some advertising support out of them was a big deal, and it was a big deal for this man to have an advertising agency, and I don't know if it's still alive today or not.
Meeting these very insightful people who started the businesses, meeting with the staff of Essence magazine and them really dissecting me in their office in New York with questions about SOUL, you know, because we were just a little step ahead of, and we were not a scholarly publication; we were an emotional publication. We weren't started as a business plan or any of that stuff. It was all emotions. It was Ken's seeing a need and his love for black music, his music, and his community that started it, and as we evolved, that was as we brought in different staff people who brought us more or businesses opened up as we knew more. Ken graduated Fremont High School and did a few years off and on, not really much, at City College, LACC. That was his education. His mother worked at a place called Cannon Electric on the line for a long time and then decided that she would go to school and learn how to type, and then moved into sales, not so much sales as taking orders, and was loved across the country by people who bought from her. His father drove a truck picking up—he took orders to whatever, the big truck. So he left before daybreak, he drove this truck, he came home, and at three o'clock took a bath, put on his pajamas, ate his dinner. My mother was a beautician. I know she didn't graduate high school. I think Georgia, his mother, did. My father graduated Jefferson High School. He was an elevator starter

and then a custodian, janitor. I graduated from Washington Adult School at seventeen years of age, pregnant with my second kid. So we're not talking about educated people, nor did we even have much in the way of role models. You know, so you're literally—we were pioneering. We were learning as we went. There was no mentoring, very little, little to no mentoring.

CLINE

So when you had to go into these meetings with these people—we're now moving closer to the late sixties—what was it like for you being not just black, but female, and talking about what you were interested in having them do with your magazine?

JONES

You know, not even a meeting. I can remember Capitol Records, really working on them to get advertising from them, and meeting after meeting after meeting, you know, with different people. One time it was some big party or something and we're there, and this guy who'd I met with many times introduces me to his wife and he says, "This is the most independent colored woman I've ever met." And I didn't know what to say. I knew it was a compliment, but I also felt like I'd been slapped. And I learned that oftentimes I would do a meeting, and then they would have me come back for another meeting to show some other people. I didn't know that, that was what was going on. I'm just selling. So I never thought about it, thank God, because then I'd have been uncomfortable. The same thing in New York, getting the meetings and having to really fight to get these meetings with these agencies, tobacco companies, liquor companies, advertising agencies. In retrospect, I don't know who I must have thought I was to even have the nerve to go in there, okay. I have no clue, no clue. It was passion and need, passion and need. I wish I could say someone took me under their wing and helped me. Early on there was a record promotions woman who was rare, Joyce Miller, at Capitol Records. She in many ways took Ken and I under her wing to open doors, and some of the stories, you know, that she and I became friends and heard about her life and how it went, I mean, they're great stories. Some of them I can't tell because they're not my stories, but great stories.

As a woman, a young woman, being out on the road, it was hard. I lied a lot, because if I was invited out to dinner, I would say I already had a meeting. That's how I had to handle it, not

understanding, but being aware enough to understand that a great many of the men were on the make, and I wasn't trading for advertising; it was going to be on merit. Dealing with gangsters and not knowing quite that they were gangsters, but being aware then. I don't know where the awareness comes from. I don't know how it came. Maybe I watched those movies that didn't have a name. I have no idea. I remember John Hayes, who was the president of a huge distributing company who we were being nationally distributed by, and I wish I could think of the name right now, but I did go to dinner with him, and we were on the rooftop looking out at New York and it's beautiful, and he said, "Little girl, you're way out of your league. You're going to have to decide whether to go home to your husband and family or you're going to play the game." And I told him I was going to go home. [laughter]

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

You know, what do you do in those situations? [laughs]

CLINE

Oh, man.

JONES

You say you're going to go home. I'm sure somebody else might have played the game. I still had that awareness, but there was still a naiveté that—yes, it was rough. It was rough, because you couldn't trust anybody. A lot of other experiences that I won't even go into now, and I don't think they have anything, but it was the times, the exploitation of women, and a black woman was a rarity on that level. In the late sixties my advertising salesperson and dear friend who passed last year, Lois Johnston, beautiful blue-eyed blonde, former model in New York, okay, oh, God, and working for SOUL. I remember there was Liberty Records. I was calling on this guy. Three, four times I met with him. I couldn't get anywhere for ads, so I switched up and sent her. We got a whole contract. [laughter] And then we're sitting in the office one night, laughing, she and I, moving things around, cleaning up, and she said, "Could you imagine? He wouldn't—." I can't remember his name. I almost got it. I wish she was still alive. "If he saw me moving this file cabinet, he couldn't handle it." We're moving this four-drawer—this is before women's liberation. And she said one day he asked

something about, “What would I do?” and she said she had to go home and defrost a chicken, and he was like, “Defrost a chicken?” He couldn’t imagine this gorgeous woman even defrosting a chicken. [laughs] Jesus. You know, and I want to say, you know, a lot of very—I’m going to call them opportunists—no, that’s a negative word. Opportunity-seeking wiser women did exactly what women have done to survive all their lives, and to this day, I know quite a few of them that have huge retirement funds and have a lot of things going for them that I don’t. [laughs] So what can I say?

CLINE

Yes, there you have it.

JONES

I can’t fault them, okay. [laughs] I can’t fault them. Yes, so it was a different time, having a secretary go out to lunch with an entertainer and not come back. Jesus. And I always told my staff to be honest with me, that I can deal with honesty, and I did that with my kids, too, and sometimes regretting that I ever told people to be honest with me. One of my secretaries went out to dinner, I think with Dennis Edwards, and, God, she was gone for a couple days, but she called and said, “I’m going to go to this next concert.” What do you say to this? Or having another one of my writers held prisoner up at Sly Stone’s home.

CLINE

Oh, golly.

JONES

There were three of them went up there for lunch and interview and the whole bit. He let the pit bulls out and they couldn’t get past the pit bulls out of the house to leave. He said, “You guys can’t go home. You’re prisoners,” basically.

CLINE

Wow. We’re not quite at the Sly Stone era yet here, but, yes, I hear what you’re saying.

JONES

Yes, it was a different era back then. While it was hard work, it was comedy, it was fun, it was scary. Yes, going to Chess Records, Chicago, big locked metal doors like going into a vault to even go in, but then going to Atlantic Records and sitting down with Jerry Wexler and just a total love. “There’s somebody famous that’s

coming. I want you to meet him." Donny Hathaway. You know, it was just so much going on.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

Yes, so much going, and still fighting for survival. I know magazines still fight for survival, but it just wasn't already set up. It wasn't in motion yet.

CLINE

Right. There was no model to—

JONES

There was no model. There were no budgets. There was nothing. Creating, creating.

CLINE

In terms of your content and in terms of your lives at the time—and we're still in the first couple years of SOUL magazine here—how much did the Civil Rights Movement have an impact on how you were thinking and what you were doing?

JONES

It didn't make it any easier for us. I don't know what year it was, but remembering going up to Monterey Jazz Festival. Judy Spiegelman, Joyce Miller, and myself, we drove up. Joyce was very militant at the time. Running into some of her friends in the Black Panther Party, and it wasn't really safe for them to be out, but they were up there for some reason doing target practice or something, and putting them up in our motel room, so that there's wall-to-wall on the floor Black Panthers with their guns, and Judy frightened to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, but handling it very graciously. [laughs]

CLINE

This must have been in the late sixties.

JONES

Yes. Really kind of funny when I think about it. The music just led us, and I probably need to look at the papers to refresh those periods, because it's late sixties—where are we now? Are we fifty years—are we really that much further along? Yes, we are, aren't we? Yes.

CLINE

And Dr. King assassinated in ’68. How much did what you were doing reflect that?
JONES
We did a small piece on it. Ken did it on the radio and that part with SOUL because of the time lag from when it happened to when we came out two weeks later. With two weeks of prep, it’s a month-old news by then. I do remember my distributor, though, exploiting it and jumping on it and selling these busts of Dr. King’s head. He took out a small ad. [laughter]
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
I do remember that. He jumped on it. We didn’t see it as a business. It was something that hurt. It was a loss. Yes, not a lot. I’m embarrassed to say, it’s like one of my kids is named Fitzgerald, after John Fitzgerald Kennedy. He was born in ’61, April ’61, so I don’t know if that was before or after Kennedy’s assassination.
CLINE
Yes, that was before.
JONES
Okay. But that was, you know, out of the respect for the president. I guess we were that excited about him being the President of the United States.
CLINE
What do you remember about his assassination?
JONES
I remember seeing it on TV over and over again and just everybody being brokenhearted. It was a major loss. And then it’s interesting that that impacts me much more than King’s, and the same time, though, my feed would have been just like anybody else’s, the TV. So that tells me there wasn’t as much—there wouldn’t be, but, you know, so different. My Dr. King memories are later learning more about the history of what he did and what he accomplished, which is really interesting.
CLINE
Yes, it’s interesting and somewhat, at times, depressing to know what it takes to have that information become known.
JONES

Yes, yes, I mean, you know, as we speak, I can see the picture up on the balcony and see everybody there, but that's all after the fact, I mean, that this all really came to play so much, and reading books later.

CLINE

Well, I think we'll get more into sort of the evolution of SOUL and its content in maybe the next session.

JONES

Yes, because my most role, which is really interesting, has always been the bill payer and the person who had to get the money, collect the money, and then apply the money where it needed to go. So I was always in survival mode more than creative. That's just always been what I would obviously accept and pick up and take responsibility for.

CLINE

How much was a copy of SOUL when it first came out?

JONES

I want to say twenty-five cents. That's what I see, and I see a three-dollar subscription. Then I see a five-dollar subscription. See, you ask me those questions and we got it. When I see the sweatshirts we sold, you know, and packaging those to get those out, but when I see those envelopes coming in with those subscriptions and three one-dollar bills, you know, there wasn't a lot of checks. There'd be money orders, but a lot of times there'd be just three one-dollar bills.

CLINE

Wow. Interesting.

JONES

That's interesting. Now, see, ask me any of that and you got it. [laughs]

CLINE

And you had sweatshirts.

JONES

Later we sold sweatshirts.

CLINE

You discovered that a little merchandise would help move things along.

JONES

Yes, "SOUL Sister," "SOUL Brother," and "SOUL Power."

CLINE
So this obviously was also the later sixties.
JONES
Yes, yes, and, you know, that's another story about the FBI coming in—not FBI. Maybe Secret Service, I'm not sure, coming in to investigate who we were and why these people in the military in Vietnam were wearing these "SOUL Brother" sweatshirts, and who were we and what were we really doing.
CLINE
Interesting. Well, I think in our next session I'd like to talk about the sort of dramatic shifts in not just the culture in your community, but in the larger community as the late sixties really take hold and what the impact that had on our life and what SOUL magazine was doing. I wanted to close today by asking you more about this earlier topic, being the civil unrest that we're thinking about right now. The anniversary's coming up. And I wanted to mention the opening of the new public transportation line that's going to run from Culver City to downtown, Exposition Park area, right through what people call the Crenshaw District, and I wanted to, as a little detour, mention when you were talking about how upset you were with seeing people label parts of the city incorrectly, for the first time in many years I remembered seeing coverage on TV during the '92 uprising of a news reporter standing in front of the Fedco store on the corner of Rodeo and La Cienega, which is just about four blocks from my house, and under her name it said—to indicate where she was reporting from, it said "Crenshaw District." Right. And then, of course, at the end of her reporting she said, "Reporting live from the Crenshaw District." And I remember my wife and I just tearing our hair out, going, "You know, what are they talking about? This is not the Crenshaw District." But it's on fire and it's being looted, so we have to give the impression that this isn't too close to an area where people with a little lighter skin and maybe a lot larger bank account might be really very concerned.
But I wanted to ask you, now that we have public transportation going right through what some people perceive to be one of the last truly black neighborhoods in this city, what, if any, impact do you think this'll have on the awareness or on the situation in terms of not just public transportation, but issues like people's perception about economics and race in the city?

JONES
I don't feel it's going to have that much impact, because, number one, the line should have gone at least into Culver City.
CLINE
Yes, it just kind of stops there, doesn't it?
JONES
Yes, it should be into the business area of Culver City. So it stops short, so how do you get from the end of the line into the shopping areas? So how does it help the merchants and everything? I wonder, has anybody thought or made plans to adjust more public transportation to get people in?
CLINE
After the millions that the City of Culver City spent upgrading their whole downtown there too.
JONES
Yes, which is fabulous, which, of course, has no adequate parking for all the business establishments there. And I do notice, because I do like that area, I like Culver City and I'm there with some frequency, I do see black people there, but not really that much. They're mostly young successful families with babies and little kids or the young dating bunch. Don't see a lot of elders over there at all. I wonder what they did with all their old folks.
I don't think any of this is going to force people to think any more. I mean, we seem to have reached a point that we react to things that impact us, and everybody's so caught up in the survival mode that there's no real talking or thinking except to react to, versus being prepared and planning ahead, and I don't feel we're that involved in the government at all on most of these decisions that are made. We wouldn't even know how to react if we were consulted and brought in. I just feel like we're almost puppets that are just there in place. Economically I don't see where that's going to change anybody's life. I cannot honestly see, from the corner of National and Exposition—I believe that's where it ends.
CLINE
National and Washington.
JONES
And Washington. I can't suddenly see the people from Culver City rushing downtown or to USC. I really don't get that particular line at all, myself, for Angeleno.

CLINE
Yes, well, I think it's where they could put one. You know what I mean?
JONES
Yes.
CLINE
All the other neighborhoods said, "We don't want a train going through our neighborhood."
JONES
Right. But, you know, let's digress to the fact that at 118th and Central, where I grew up, Bellevue neighborhood tract homes that I've said is the tract homes that they took the 105 and demolished and displaced people for many years before they finished the freeway there, okay. So I already saw they came in and literally took away a community, divided it, destroyed it to build a highway to take people from the Alameda corridor to the airport.
When I worked for a while in nonprofit ten years ago, the whole Nickerson Gardens projects and those acres of projects there and the rundown shape that it is, that whole Imperial corridor running from the manufacturers east to the ocean and to the military west, I can see where at some point that's going to all be scooped up for high business. It's like going back to see where my grandfather lived and seeing a big huge jail at Alameda and Imperial Highway, and even rezoned the land, that it's not Los Angeles, I think. There's another name for it, because they couldn't do it in L.A., how they changed the boundaries and the zones and everything to do it. I had no idea there was a huge jail right there. Did you know there was a huge jail?
CLINE
No.
JONES
Huge. Huge. And that's not far from the Martin Luther King Hospital and all that. So, yes, I never want to get into conspiracy-theory thinking, but it's almost like there's another universe and another bigger plan with a bigger timeline far beyond our life expectancies that is moving and shaping things. So I don't get that line. I wish I could be optimistic, but I don't see any improvement whatsoever in the lives of the majority of people. They're more wealth, but we're still talking about such a small segment. Based on where you live—

and this is ethnically, racially, and everything—we need to look at the fact we're being divided to the rich few and the poor many, because the middle class and the good people that consider themselves middle class have just almost been completely—we're being eliminated, and I don't see any way to change that with what's going on now, and I wish I was one of those brilliant thinkers that had a plan and an idea, and I don't know where those people are and why they're not stepping up. Why is there no Martin Luther King? Why is there no John F. Kennedy? We have the Dalai Lama. Where's Gandhi? Where are those people in our time that have a bigger vision and are working to unite us versus to continue to divide us?

The '92 uprising, they burned the shopping mall a few blocks from here at Western and Venice. A great deal of that got burned to the ground, and literally the sparks from there, again in my life, caught a mattress on fire on the balcony here that, fortunately, we saw and put out. Across the street one house over, completely landed on their garage and burned their garage to the ground. There's no garage at that house. We live better on some levels, but I think people that aren't blessed to have been a part of middle class I think live much worse. So I'm just not an optimist about any of that. I wish I could be, and it brings me all the way full circle back to our children, your daughter, my grandchildren. You know, what is there for them? Where's the SOUL for them? What would you produce to try to help people? I don't see it being produced anywhere. I mean, LAUSD, the fights and all the mess that goes on there, it's just—you know, I'm an Angelino. I keep saying that. I love being an Angelino. I'm proud to have been born and raised here and lived here all my life. Where's the pride?

You know, we laugh—one of my sons always says as black people we can't even get mad and go home, because we don't even have a homeland. You know, me, I have no homeland. I mean, where would I get mad and go? I mean, seriously. I love Los Angeles and I wish I would be given an idea of what could be done even in a small way, change one life. I know that I've been blessed to have affected a great many lives of people who've become professionals because of SOUL. For that I'm very proud, but I don't take credit, because it wasn't me. It just happened. It's not like it was some brilliant plan. It just happened. My life just evolved. I truly feel I've been blessed

with a great many gifts, and I try my best to be respectful and aware of those gifts. I'm just grateful for long relationships and friendships and every gift that I've received from every person that I've met along the way that has given me something, whether I recognized it as a gift or whether it was a spur that made me react to do something a little bit different. Yes, I'm not one of the hopeful. I want to live forever and I'd love to see some beautiful things happen, but I don't see in the next ten to twenty years, if I'm lucky, that I have on this planet that I'm going to see anything turning into positive. As an elder, my thing is how to live the best quality of life one day at a time that I can, and how to try to be as kind as a can to people, and continually trying to learn how to be kinder to myself, and that's about it. I see needs and things and I see things that can be corrected or improved, but I no longer have the willingness or the desire to put my shoulder up against anything or anybody to try to roll it uphill or make a change.

CLINE

We have the unfortunate opportunity to simultaneously at this time be looking at the Trayvon Martin case, and it's an interesting time to be looking at that while we reflect on 1992 and 1965. Any feelings about that?

JONES

I raised four boys, black males. There was never a day that they weren't out of sight that I wasn't worried or afraid. I've heard it quoted somewhere else, it's when do you have that first conversation with your black male child that they have to be submissive to the police to not get hurt? My heart goes out to Trayvon's parents. They seem to be elegantly handling everything that's going on. The loss is incomprehensible. The same time, there's some stuff going on about another black kid in Pasadena earlier that was murdered, basically. I wouldn't advocate for any kind of uprising or anything like that, but really it's just a whole lot of talking heads, and I don't see anything happening with Trayvon. You know, are they going to settle it with a big sum of money like other things are settled? I don't see what's happening going to improve the safety for life for the next Trayvon or change the next person that feels they have a right to take out a kid. The fact that we fear our children is very scary to me, and a black male child is even more to be frightened for on the world's vision. It just hurts. It

just hurts bad. I'm blessed. I got four boys to manhood, and they're still alive, that were never physically hurt in any way. One of them did watch his mixed Asian friend get slapped up to the point the man still has a problem in his hearing. They were together and stopped, and he thought he could give mouth and they slapped him, but they had everybody's back turned, so nobody saw it, okay, and to this day, his hearing is gone in one ear. You know, so it wasn't just about black. And probably because he was with black, he probably lost a lot of points at the time. I don't see any real change in that.
One of my best friends from Enterprise Junior High, her son was gang-executed and murdered, and I know how she lives with that every day, the loss of a son. Yes, it's horrendous, and I don't know what we do. I really have no idea. We just keep getting up and we keep trying to be the best people we can be. And I don't know why I didn't write that letter to the Times about the way they quoted it. The paper's still on my desk to do it, but it's been almost a week now, so it's old news. But it emotionally triggered me, and then sitting at my desk I had to equate, "Do I want to write this letter or do I want to do these things that I need to handle?" So I did the things that I needed to handle. With Trayvon, I don't have a clue. It's just prayer, just prayer. Prayer.
CLINE
Well, it's another opportunity to look at this, but, yes, I don't know what's going to happen either, and as for your letter, you may get another opportunity.
JONES
They happen on a regular basis.
CLINE
I was going to say, you know it's going to happen again. Wow. It's almost twelve-thirty.
JONES
Is it really?
CLINE
Yes, so I think that's it for today. Does that work for you?
JONES
That's it. Thank you very much. I'm fine.
CLINE

We'll pick up next time with the late sixties, the culture in the country and the world, in your community, and in SOUL magazine as it's reflecting the changes that are happening at that time. All right?
JONES
Fair enough.
CLINE
Thank you. [End of April 27, 2012 interview]

1.3. Session 3 (May 4, 2012)

CLINE
Sandy's laying down. Everything's chill. We're here once again at the home of Regina Jones, and this is Alex Cline. I'm interviewing her today, May 4, 2012, and this is our third session. Good morning.
JONES
Good morning. Time passes all too fast. It's almost Christmas again.
CLINE
It is whizzing. Last time we talked a lot about the early days of SOUL magazine, which started in 1966, and we also started looking at some of the more sociocultural issues that were happening around that time, beginning with the Watts uprising in '65. We then actually followed that trajectory all the way to 1992 and up to the present, and I wanted to follow up now with more discussion of what was happening in the late sixties and how it was reflected in SOUL. One of the things that I actually mentioned last time or asked about was the impact of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, and I did want to note that there was, in the April 21st issue in 1969, a transcript of Dr. King's "dream" speech in commemoration of the year of that horrible event, the one-year anniversary. But there are also, I think, a lot of clear reflections of what was happening in terms of just the culture and how rapidly and dramatically it was changing. But while we're on '68, which is when King was assassinated and also Bobby Kennedy was assassinated, that was also the beginning of, for example, the Watts Summer Festival, one of the things that also got mentioned in SOUL, and I wanted to ask you, to begin today, the kinds of changes in the community and, consequently, in the coverage in the content of SOUL that you were starting to see certainly by 1968

when counterculture, the popular culture is sort of reflecting hippie culture, more militant African American culture is starting to emerge, things are happening, like by 1969, James Brown changes his hairstyle. [laughs] That actually got coverage in SOUL. All of these things were happening, and happening fast. What do you remember about that time and how it was affecting how you were doing your work at the magazine?

JONES

Well, it's funny, because you mention the Watts parade, and, you know, immediately you took me back to being in the station wagon that was the kids' Buick station wagon. It was brown. And SOUL was invited, so I think we had something on the doors, and I remember my friend and editor, Judy Spiegelman, and I had set up for nights crocheting red, black, and green hats for the boys to wear, kids to all wear, which they wore, you know, and the whole bit. But the consciousness, the black consciousness, had become very strong. I'm just amazed with the memory of sitting all those nights, how important it was, that you couldn't go out and just buy a hat that color, and so we crocheted them, and just to sit there—you know, we're running a newspaper, but our black consciousness—and understand, Spiegelman is black-conscious also, probably more than me. We're there crocheting night after night with time that we could be sleeping or having a life, to make a statement in the parade, and thumbing through some issues of SOUL, you know, coming across the Angela Davis story that we ran and other things like that.

The whole community was into blackness then. KGFJ really was blasting away the music and preaching at the same time. SOUL, we were trying to preach and teach through our pages and share information. It was kind of a drum that went on all over the country, and what I'm feeling right now is the energy, is that it was an inspirational energy. It was Black Pride. It was, "We can do it. We can do something. We can break down boundaries. We can make a difference. We can make a change." And I'm just remembering that was the mantra. That was the feeling. That was the culture, and it wasn't just a personal thing; it was everybody. And SOUL and myself, we all just were pulled into it, and it was a magic time. It was a wonderful time, and the hippies were wonderful, too, because some of our writers, one in particular, was a hippie, a total

vagabond, and it was cool, you know, working in the onion fields somewhere up north and then living at one of the Buddhist places right over here near Adams, and then working for SOUL. And I remember she was so tired sometimes because the sensei would hit them when they dozed off at four or five in the morning when they're doing their meditation. You know, so learning about that, which was not something I would have otherwise been exposed to, and she's exposed to, because she's a New Yorker who had come here and had become a hippie, I'm sure much to the dismay of her family, and then working for a black publication. So, you know, the cultures mixed, and as I look at the staff boxes of how united we were with all nations, it just feels really good, and I don't feel that—even though there's, on certain levels, now more integration or more, on the surface, people coming together, but it's not in the numbers it should be when you say that this happened, this big event happened in the sixties. And I remember feeling and thinking a few years back that we came a distance and then we started to go backwards a distance, and I so feel that we're backwards now. We're not forward. We're not, and I don't know if we're as far as we were.

So SOUL in those days, it was just a happy—black music was "in." We were "in." It was a nice feeling to be invited everywhere, to go to openings.

CLINE

And the color barrier was really coming down to some degree at that point, at least in the media, at least on the surface.

JONES

It hadn't come down so much. We were just too young and dumb to know that it wasn't, and when it was up, I had no problem kicking it. [laughs]

CLINE

Well, your husband was suddenly on television as an African American newscaster. People were being cast here and there on television, and there was coverage of that in the magazine as well, actors, actresses, people who were up and coming that never seemed to really make it and others who actually did become quite successful.

JONES

Blaxploitation films came out of that, and, you know, it was a season that went on for a few years.

CLINE

Also I wanted to bring out something we talked about a lot last time, which was record company ads and that sort of thing. By ’68, you’re starting to see a lot of that, labels like Capitol and Liberty and some of these other labels, Atlantic, actually, quite noticeably, and you mentioned your experiences last time of basically trying to get your foot in the door with some of these people. How were you starting to see the record companies’ relationship with the magazine changing as the culture is changing? And as you said, it was “in” to be black at this point. What changes were you seeing in that area?

JONES

I was seeing the record companies employing black publicists to work with the black media, so jobs were being created, black photographers were being hired in order to take photographs. You know, bios were created on these artists. We got some advertising. There were more black promotions people. No longer was black music distributed without the face of the artist on it as before. Now it was okay to put the black face out there and show pictures and show what these people making the music looked like. There was a lot of pride on just so many levels, and the music was all over the place, and it was not just on the black stations. Some of it was getting played on other stations as well, yes, and then there was the big surge from London and England. It was just very “in.” It was a good time and it was an exciting time.

CLINE

I was interested in the coverage in SOUL about James Brown’s tour where he went to London finally and did his big concert and what the reaction in London was to James Brown, those people finally getting their chance to experience someone who was kind of purely legend, perhaps, at that point, and just how amazingly unfavorable some of the responses were, kind of startling and actually very funny. James Brown continued to be a major presence through this period in SOUL. I mentioned that he changed his hairstyle to a, quote, “natural,” unquote, hairstyle, and this actually made me wonder about something that seems very trivial, but with this development, how were people, for example, like your mother, who

worked as a beautician, handling this incredibly different sort of trend?

JONES

Well, understand, that trend at that time was mostly with the younger people, so it didn't really affect—

CLINE

She had plenty to do still.

JONES

She had plenty to do, and then also the barbers had plenty to do, because you had to work hard to keep your 'fro up. You know, I even went through it for a period. I wore my afro, and it was always a joke, but it was my 'fro, you know. [laughs] Yes, and I loved the natural state, you know. It was fabulous. I remember my sons at one point all had their fabulous 'fros, and their hair textures were all different, and one of them had the kinkier, thicker hair, and the barber had cut their hair and he was so disappointed with what they had done to his. He went in the bathroom and locked himself in. And then another had this long 'fro, and if he'd walk, it would fall. You know, it couldn't stick up, you know. Or going to Disneyland with them and kids mobbing them, thinking they were the Jackson 5, even though there were four, only to find that, no, they weren't Jacksons at all. So it was a wonderful time. I have no complaints about the time other than it was a continual educational time too. Being in business, it was constantly trying to educate people that this was going on, SOUL was selling, it reached people that bought their products, be it a record or pair of shoes or can of beer or soft drink, and those were the barriers that were hard. The record companies came around faster than anybody else because it served them to advertise to the very audience that we were reaching that bought records, but the rest of them didn't get it. It was very hard selling it, because I can remember 1968, being in New York, going from agency to agency and getting nowhere. You know, they were nice. They saw me, but, you know, you could tell the mind was already made up before you went in for the meeting. It was a courtesy meeting.

CLINE

Interesting. As the pages of SOUL started to reflect something at times more, I'd say, clearly political and social, how much concern might have you had about what someone like a big company who

wanted to advertise, how they might react to seeing articles that had, for example, mentions of Black Panthers or Dick Gregory or some of these other people who started to show up in the pages of SOUL once in a while, along with Smokey Robinson and the Jackson 5?

JONES

Blessed are the young and brave, because we really didn't give a darn. We thought they should come onboard anyway. There was no compromise in our game. We figured we had the integrity of what we were writing about and we were reaching the people, and what our content was was not their fare. It was never quite put like that, but that was the general attitude, and there were, from time to time, battles internally at SOUL between editorial and advertising. That would occur occasionally, and I've got to say I was usually the bad guy, because I was the one doing most of the sales.

CLINE

Interesting. And because your husband was actually quite the visible person in the community here in L.A., how many people really connected his face with the magazine?

JONES

Not a lot, not the people he reached.

CLINE

On TV.

JONES

On TV. You know, he couldn't do anything there. That was corporate America, even in its earlier stages, and he couldn't really do anything there. Of course, though, in the pages of SOUL we did stick his face in every opportunity we had, in the event it would reach somebody.

I was surprised, going through the other day the issues and saw an editorial or a piece he wrote from the publisher on our third anniversary, and he was announcing the starting of the new magazine, SOUL Illustrated, and then that's when it was announced that I was taking on responsibility of co-publisher, or assistant publisher, I think was the title, of that, and then he talked about coming out with a SOUL Teen magazine, that never came out, but that I was the assistant publisher of all three and blah, blah, blah, blah. And I don't remember that happening, but I know it happened, as I think about it, but it was like—I was all for SOUL

Illustrated. I don't know where I must have stood with SOUL Teen. Obviously I didn't believe in it, because I didn't push it. And he came right out and commented about imitators that were already too non-black-owned, you know, these racial comments, too non-black-owned imitators out there. He didn't call their names, but he referred to them and kind of made a comment that you could tell the truth, and that was very strong for him, being on television, to make that kind of a statement, and I don't remember him making a lot of statements like that. I always remember him as being more careful. So this interview is causing me to kind of go back in my head and look at things more closely.

CLINE

Wow. And who were the imitators, do you remember?

JONES

I want to say they were put out by the same people that put out The Beat. Oh, gosh.

CLINE

The people who didn't want to keep working with you.

JONES

Well, no, they weren't The Beat people. Wait a minute. It was the Laufer Publishing group, and I can't think of the names right now, but Black Beat or Black—you know, Black Beat could be the one out of London. They're all [unclear] right now, but there were two of them and I know they were Laufer. I do remember that. They were right there in Hollywood, yes. And became friends and had a relationship with Cynthia Horner, who was the black editor, or figurehead, that was appointed to take care of those publications.

CLINE

Interesting. How much would you have considered imitation as the sincerest form of flattery, then?

JONES

Just saw it as exploitive, and then I didn't see it as anything flattering. It was just exploitive, seeing an opportunity to make a buck and reaching over and grabbing. Greed.

CLINE

And maybe not realizing that there weren't that many bucks to be made yet.

JONES

Yes, I was totally aware there was not that many bucks and that they were stepping in.

CLINE

Interesting. Very interesting. You mentioned now people working at the magazine and you mentioned this hippie employee. Do you remember her name?

JONES

Oh, sure, Naomi Rubine. She's still a dear friend.

CLINE

Who were some of the people that, as the magazine was now much more firmly established—you're even talking about branching out. Who were some of the writers and people working on your staff?

JONES

Well, that was interesting, because at the beginning I think I already said we were started by three Anglo ladies that were USC students and graduates: Carol Deck, Rochelle Reid, and Nicki Wine. Then we started to add more people, Judy Spiegelman—and I talked about her being a schoolteacher—that came to work part-time at SOUL, and then eventually quit her job and became an editor there and was completely blackballed by her father.

CLINE

Oh, I didn't know that.

JONES

Oh, yes, yes. He was quite horrible, you know, very angry with her. Kathy Fern [phonetic], who was a publicist for NBC-TV, black, was one of our freelance writers and was doing some writing for us. There were a host of—Walter Burrell—and this is interesting, I hadn't seen the theme until now—who was a publicist for Universal Studios. He was a columnist, "Walter Burrell's Hollywood," and Walter would just tell it like it was, and I don't know how he was getting away with that, as I reflect back. His column, he would make all kinds of comments and people loved his column, and he was a black publicist, which brings me to detour just a bit. I remember trying to get some advertising out of Universal Studios and trying to make an appointment with Lou Wasserman, who was, I believe, the head, and not being able to make the appointment, so showing up with a guy named Jim Hunter and myself—and I was wearing a 'fro—at Universal in their lobby, asking to see Mr. Wasserman, and it really unnerved the receptionist. I said we would

just wait there until he could see me, and next thing I knew, Walter Burrell was sent down, and I explained to Walter that this had nothing to do with him or his column. It was bigger than he and I hoped it didn't incur any problems for him, since he was a columnist, but we were going to wait.
So then this very distinguished Sam Keith, was an executive, black executive, he came down, invited us up to his office for a meeting and listened to what we had to say and promised to do some things, what he could if he had a film, and I don't remember if they ever came through or not right this second. I'd have to look through the pages of SOUL. But never did get to see Lou Wasserman, but just to watch how, in those days, a woman—and Jim was black, but he was a very gentlemanly black man, we could show up and just cause Universal Studios to wiggle and rattle in their boots. You know, now I think security would come and kick you out, probably, or the police or somebody.
CLINE
Yes, it seems unlikely that you would get that far.
JONES
Yes, yes, yes. So, yes, and it was also the fact that we were SOUL and had the power of being a publication, so there was a certain amount of clout to that.
CLINE
And you were just starting to probably discover and get a little more clarity as to how the dynamic often manifested when you'd go into these meetings or try to meet these people.
JONES
Except that they were all like giving you an aspirin. It was all front, no back. It was all just gesture and posturing, but they were all kind enough to have an audience, to let you express what you wanted and what you were looking for, and, unfortunately, I would say that hasn't changed a lot, which is shocking to me, because within the last few months I saw where Danny Bakewell, who owns the Los Angeles Sentinel, and that's just one of the many things he does in our community, was upset with—I think it was the Grammy Awards, and demanded an audience with—again, a name is slipping and I know it very well, who was heading up the Grammys, and got in to see him and had a big meeting with him.

I'm going to be really honest. I was shocked when I was the big picture of this congregation of, as we are now, African Americans with the head of the Grammy Museum, and they were first time getting tickets and access and this. We kicked those doors down thirty, forty years ago and got access to those things. So somehow or another, again, as I said before, the doors opened, and we were responsible partly for kicking them open, but they got closed, and for someone to be starting again forty years later, that that's a historical moment, is very stunning to me and very heartbreaking to me as well.

CLINE

Well, the music business is very different from what it was in the late sixties.

JONES

Is there a music business?

CLINE

There's a business.

JONES

Okay.

CLINE

Other things that were happening in the culture at the time—and actually, before I get to that, since you're talking about this subject, let me ask you this. How much did your husband's work situation—here he is, a black man working for a big media company—how much did his experience or maybe insights from his experience working in that sort of a context help you, if at all, when you were going to try to meet these people and take these meetings? How much would that affect maybe your expectations or your sense of what the relationship might be that you were walking into, or even what was his experience working for a big company like that?

JONES

One time he came home and related a story to me that he had gone in to the news director with some copy that he had been handed to read and it was awful. It was poorly written. It was just horrible. And the head of the news department basically told him that, "That's why you make more money than he does, is to take his shit and turn it into pearls." I wouldn't say he was treated that kindly at all. His job was hard, and being black made it harder in many instances, and he fought his battles every day. There was not that

much rollover. He loved being a newscaster and he loved being a reporter. He was more inclined to be less confrontational than I.
CLINE
More protective of his job.
JONES
Yes, because he had more to lose than I did. I didn't really have anything to lose, in my mind, and I never really thought much about the fact that we took the money sometimes that he earned as a newscaster and as a reporter to cover the payroll for SOUL. He never went Afrocentric per se. I did, and, you know, it could have to do with he was brown-skinned and I'm very fair-skinned, so I always had to work harder to be black. [laughter] So, you know, that could have been part of it, but my militancy became very, very deep, and I loved the controversy of it. I love being black, and as my daughter once busted me at a movie preview I'd been invited to and I said, "They wouldn't let me sit there because I'm black." And she says, "Mother, what would make you think they even realized you were black?" And I was just too through with her, because I know I'm black, and to me, everyone that sees me and meets me knows I'm black. I think I have a sign that says, "I'm black," and you can't miss it. But, you know, if I do look around honestly, on the streets you don't know what many people are these days, and I could blend with other countries, but I've always been black to my core, so, you know, I've never had a desire to be anything but black. [laughs] I've never expressed that, but, yes. So, yes, he was more conservative, but probably much deeper cut and hurt and wounded, because he couldn't blow up. He couldn't really express what he often felt, and I'm sure it had an effect on him.
CLINE
How much, if any, racism did he experience in his line of work that he talked about?
JONES
Rarely did he talk about it, which was also interesting. I was the one that would say, you know, ugly things, except he came home one night and he actually had tears because someone had put in his typewriter on paper anonymously "You ugly black ape-looking" something or other. And this is at his typewriter at his job in the newsroom, and I believe it was NBC, KNBC. It could have been KCBS. I'm not sure which years it was.

CLINE
Which was KNXT in those days.
JONES
Yes, KNXT. And so when these things would happen, he was shocked, because he was much favored by the people that loved him. All the little old ladies just adored him that watched the news, and they liked having this black young man on there and they built him up on the air and off. He had a lot of—I don't call them friends, but people he socialized with and we socialized with that made sure we were invited to parties, and I don't remember too many that we weren't the only two black people in the party. But he was widely embraced and accepted and invited to beautiful homes. Especially because he liked the racetrack and he liked the horses, this was another class of it, and he hung out in the Turf Club because he was a friend of Marge Everett's, who owned Hollywood Park. She had embraced him.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
Yes, you know, being invited to a party that Marge Everett gave. I could have sworn I told this story already, but maybe I didn't. As you walk in the door—and I want to say it was at the Beverly Hills Hotel—you walk in the door, and the first thing as you go in, your name is given and a photograph is taken of you.
CLINE
Oh, really?
JONES
And then you go in and you're dancing on the floor, and there's Cary Grant, there's Fred Astaire, you know, okay, and this is her husband's birthday party. I can't think of his first name, but Everett, and it was a significant amount of years in his life—Webb, I want to say. But when you get ready to leave, Walter Matthau's son presents you with a gift, and it's a Tiffany silver frame, three-by-five, four-by-six, engraved, Webb's such-and-such birthday, with your photograph in it, okay. That's a realm you don't travel in as a black newspaper—
CLINE
For sure.
JONES

—or any normal human being on the planet, okay, but this is what came from him being on the television news. And where he comfortably embraced it and loved it and enjoyed it, I was the kid sitting in the back watching with big eyes and seeing that we were the only two there and seeing that this is just absurd wealth and seeing that it's not equal. You know, all this was processing in my mind. I never felt that comfortable or fit in, even though people were gracious.

CLINE

What, if anything, you can remember was specifically inspiring or informing your more militant feelings at the time?

JONES

Probably all the way back to being a little girl sitting there watching my mother cry when the white guy was trying to work out the—maybe that and just whatever had, I guess—working at the police department.

CLINE

What, if anything, that was happening in terms of influential figures maybe coming up, articulating what was happening racially and culturally at the time?

JONES

That early on—I mean, I'm trying to think. My actually exposure in the late sixties was a lot more limited. I'm not quite sure. I had been out on the road a little bit, so I had heard Julian Bond speak at a luncheon or a dinner. I'd heard Jesse Jackson speak. Yes, you're making me remember. So hearing these speeches and being exposed to that, bigger than Los Angeles, being in Chicago with Jesse's camp, Julian Bond, God, somebody else, several of them, but crossing paths with these people and meeting them, getting to know a few national representatives that worked for agencies that couldn't do anything, that would open up and talk and share what their limits were, a clear understanding in the record companies that often black people had been hired and given titles, but they didn't have the authority, so they couldn't make decisions and they definitely couldn't allocate money. So they were basically figureheads, but they were grateful to have a job and pay and title. And battling with blacks. Two gentlemen in particular I can remember going off on, explaining to them when they, as publicists, had attitudes about what access we could and couldn't have to their

artists, and explaining that they only had a job because of SOUL, because without SOUL, there would be no need for them and they'd have no job. They needed to get their heads together. I'm going to be really honest. One was Win Wilford, who was Debbie Allen's first husband in New York, and I want to say he was at Columbia Records or CBS Records, one of that group. The other is a wonderful man whose name is not jumping up, so maybe that means I'm not supposed to say it because he'd be hurt, but he was working for Rogers and Cowan, big PR firm, and his sister became very big in the TV industry. He's still an active consultant, and I really can't come up with his name, not because I'm trying to avoid it; it's just not ringing.

CLINE

That happens.

JONES

That tells me the story. [laughs]

CLINE

I mentioned, for example, Dick Gregory shows up in your pages. A name that doesn't come up, at least from what I could tell, in your pages was Malcolm X. And then you also mentioned this experience of going to the Monterey Jazz Festival and rooming with a bunch of Black Panthers, and you suggested, or you told a little story relating to this before because of the t-shirts or sweatshirts that you were selling, this definitely was a time when certain associations could get you very much on the radar of the authorities, shall we say. How much do you remember about being concerned about that or how much—you sounded like you were kind of willing to just be daring.

JONES

We were totally daring. We were totally insane. Sometimes when we'd be on the phone late at night talking, we'd have the conspiracy theory that our phones were being tapped and we'd say, "Well, I hope they're enjoying the conversation," because this had nothing to do with anything other than whatever we were talking about. But we would, you know, make comments. It was funny to us, because all we were doing was putting out publication. We were reporting. We truly—I believed and all of us believed that we were merely reporting the news of what was going on as it pertained to black entertainment and black culture as we saw it. I remember going to

see Dick Gregory perform a couple of times, and again, that's an influence. It was a major influence hearing what he had to say, because he made a lot of sense with his humor, which was totally different than Red Foxx.
CLINE
Also you had Bill Cosby, was big on TV then.
JONES
Yes, we knew Cosby before he really had made it. I mean, he was on a cover of SOUL. You know, what was it, Diahann Carroll in Julia? Was that the name of the show?
CLINE
Julia. That's right.
JONES
Okay. You know, this is what we saw on TV, okay.
CLINE
Lieutenant Uhura on Star Trek—
JONES
Oh, God.
CLINE
—Nichelle Nichols.
JONES
Nichelle Nichols.
CLINE
Or Room 222.
JONES
Yes, and I want to say Mannix and Gail Fisher, the secretary.
CLINE
The secretary. That's right.
JONES
And I love the way the spotty mind—why could I remember Gail Fisher? And that quick I equated Gail Fisher was married to John Levy, who managed Nancy Wilson, and Nancy recorded on Capitol, where my friend Joyce Miller worked for Capitol, and she got us the first Capitol recording advertising, and she's the one that had become so militant that was friends with the Panthers that invited them into our room in Monterey. How about that? [laughs]
CLINE
Beautiful.
JONES

So that's why I could remember Gail Fisher, because it was more—
CLINE
Yes, in the stream there.
JONES
Yes, and Sid McCoy was a disc jockey who moved here from Chicago, that I had met in Chicago when I was working with WVON SOUL and I was out on the road promoting SOUL and, you know, the whole bit. You know, so when it interlaces, then it's very personal. It steps back from just being the non-judgmental writer, reporter, okay, yes, because I was always very careful, because what you said to me was on the record. There was no off the record, but I would tell you that up front.
I remember being so angry with three of my photographers one time—God, it seems like I'm telling these stories more than once, but they had gone to the—I want to say it was the Melting Pot down on the corner of Melrose and La Cienega, right there, for lunch, and they came back, three of them, Bruce Talamon; G. Fitz Bartley, our New York correspondent, a Jamaican; and one other one. I don't remember who it was. But they had had lunch and they came back because they'd seen Jim Brown, the football player, actor, standing on the curb kissing a white girl, and I said, "Oh, we got the photo." And they said, "Oh, well, no, we couldn't take a photo of that."
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
And I said, "He was out on the curb on the street corner in public and you didn't take a picture? What are you? You should lose your cameras." I gave them the whatever. I was all over them. You know, we laugh sometimes, Bruce and I, about that. And I went out and bought a camera, because I said that would never—I would shoot it, you know, and I believed that you should put your money where your mouth is, and I felt that I had the courage to do that. You know, we basically are who we are from the beginning to the end. [laughs]
CLINE
That's right.
JONES
And I don't think Bruce would shoot that picture now unless he was cleared to do it or asked permission or something, and I'd shoot it

in a minute, okay, and be mad because I don't have his five-thousand-dollar camera to get it if there was movement. See, so it wasn't just militancy or it wasn't just blackness; it was journalism. I believed what I'd been fed that journalism was.

CLINE

Someone else, since we were talking about Dick Gregory and Bill Cosby, I wanted to mention Richard Pryor, the young Richard Pryor, starts to emerge around this time as well, and one of the things that I wanted you to comment on, especially since this has come up directly, is the connection between feelings, emotions, concerns of the community and the role of comedians in expressing a lot of that, how you view the importance of that. We certainly have the music as a potent example of that, but there's a whole tradition of comedy that also connects in this way. Is there anything—

JONES

We put Moms Mabley on the cover of SOUL Illustrated, I want to say in '68, '69. She was a hell of a comedian, and we did a piece, a story, on a number of black comedians. We loved the fact, and I loved the fact, that they speak the truth. I mean, Cosby was always clean, but he spoke the truth when he was a stand-up comedian. You know, like I said earlier, he's old enough and rich enough now, he's speaking the truth as he sees it, even though the black and white community may not be happy with what he says.

CLINE

Yes, that's right. Interesting. Since you've mentioned it a couple of times now, might as well talk about this. The SOUL Illustrated development, what was the idea behind that and the motivation behind branching out in that way?

JONES

Ken, the idea man, wanted a slick four-color publication and he wanted more sophisticated adult stories and coverage and writing, so came up with the idea of SOUL Illustrated and felt there was a void there, and SOUL Illustrated thus was born, against my fiscal advice, and we had a nice little four-year run, I think, maybe sixteen issues or something like that, and it was a beautiful thing, way ahead of its time, and it almost took us out.

Our distributor became our partner, and he believed in it, too, and he was a—[unclear] Jewish people. Ron Stanman. Red's Liquor was the name of his liquor store on Florence near Figueroa somewhere,

and he somehow or other partnered with two of his friends that had, like, a branch market at the corner of Central Avenue and Rosecrans or El Segundo, and they thought a slick magazine was the way to go. So Ken and Ron and these other two gentlemen and an advertising agency on Melrose down the street from us, another friend of theirs, all thought they could get the ads, which they never did, and they thought they could penetrate the distribution, which they did an iffy job, and the overhead was humungous on a four-color slick And though I obtained some advertising and Lois Johnston obtained some advertising, I don't remember if they ever obtained any advertising, but subsequently, it was either everything was going to go or SOUL Illustrated had to go, and so we folded SOUL Illustrated. We had a much more sophisticated team of writers and editors. Leroy Robinson was the editor, and he had been a jazz columnist for the newspaper for a while and had worked for another publication that John Daniels had done out of Maverick's Flat on Crenshaw that didn't make it, and then Bernie Rollins, who's a wonderful graphic artist was in Vietnam at the time, and we shipped stuff to him and he did the layouts and shipped them back to us. Thus was born the first and second issue of SOUL Illustrated, until he came home. It was more adult reading and writing and coverage, and the stories were magazine stories versus newspaper stories.

CLINE

You walked right into a question that I was going to ask you about, which was Vietnam, actually. This is a time when the Vietnam War is a very, very big topic in the country and in the world, and a couple of things I want to ask you specifically about that. The first one is your husband didn't go fight in that war.

JONES

Five kids.

CLINE

That was what did it?

JONES

Yes.

CLINE

Interesting. Lucky guy. [laughter]

JONES

That was a lot of people he had to take care of.

CLINE
Interesting. And one of the things you already mentioned is these "SOUL Brother" and "SOUL Sister" and "SOUL Power" shirts that the magazine was offering and how they were cropping up in Vietnam on some of the G.I.'s over there. There was a comic strip that ran at this time in SOUL, "The Brothers' Love." Do you remember this? Very interesting. It was a juxtaposition of the story of an African American soldier and an interesting, as I say, juxtaposition, but even more of a parallel between fighting the war in Vietnam and living in the ghetto. I was going to ask you about that comic strip, but I see you kind of shaking your head.
JONES
I'm trying to see which one in my mind is "Brotherly Love" or "Brothers' Love." If it was Vietnam, it would have had to been Bernie Rollins, I mean, I would think, because he was the one in Vietnam, because back then it was Bernie doing cartoons, it was Chuck Siler started doing some cartoons. There was another duo, and one was Johnny—was an actor on a TV show for a long time. Anyhow, he wrote the copy and another artist did the illustration, so it wouldn't have been him. So I would say it would have been Bernie's cartoon, and I would have said that it would have been direct—he was writing from his heart and his experience.
CLINE
Wow. Because it first shows up in '68, and then it runs for a little while. It was the first comic I remember seeing in the pages of the—
JONES
That would have been Bernie Rollins.
CLINE
Okay. Wow. I thought it was amazingly, to use the word again, daring to run this, amazing especially if it was the first one where this very direct drawing of the parallel between seeing action in Vietnam and living in the ghetto and the streets where violence and injustice are so rampant, and just very, very political.
JONES
Bernie Rollins is probably one of the more gifted people—I'd put him with one of the more gifted people I've known, had the benefit and pleasure of knowing in my life and working with him, but also at the same time, he is an artist, so though he wouldn't talk or say that

much, that would have been a cartoon he would have come up with through his soul and through himself, deep philosophical views, really stated. You know, writers write and chitter-chat and do all kinds of stuff. He can write, but he's an artist, so his stuff will come out in other ways, and so that would have been him, and the daring, the depth of the soul, that's definitely him. Yes, and he hasn't changed, you know, as he's aged, not one iota, I wouldn't say.

CLINE

Wow. What made it seem a feasible idea to even, for example, have someone do layouts for you who's in Vietnam and then ship them back?

JONES

The price was right at the time. No. [laughs] No, Bernie and Leroy had worked together on John Daniels' magazine, and so they knew each other and they had a relationship, and Leroy was really and truly the editor of SOUL Illustrated and Ken pretty much gave him loose reins. So he pretty much hired, if I remember, mostly his staff and pulled it together and ran it, and these were not kids like most of our other editors and writers. They were grown adult men, maybe young men still, and they were both very militant in an intellectual way. You know, they didn't yell and beat and scream; they contributed through their writing and what they believed. If you read any of Leroy's columns about jazz, I mean, he loved it. Not a musician, didn't play, but he loved jazz. I mean, he was a jazz—that was his main thing. Everything else was what he did, but the jazz was his love, and it's so funny, because they lived—he and his wife, Rose, and their two sons lived about five blocks from here, right over there. We ended up realizing we were in the same little neighborhood, you know. He's a teacher in Hawaii now.

CLINE

Really?

JONES

Yes.

CLINE

Interesting, yes. Well, his jazz columns were really good. When we're talking about this period and the Vietnam War, I wanted to just ask you, since I, as one would expect, didn't see, other than this comic and the occasional mention, anything that could be

construed as a position about the war at that time, but for you, what significance did that have, especially even though they were young, here you have four boys growing up. There was a draft at that time. People certainly didn't know where this was going. This is certainly how I remember growing up during that time. What were your thoughts about what was happening in the country and in the world as it related to that war and its effect on the country?

JONES

I think I remember being grateful that when Ken had to go down and whatever had to happen with the draft thing and he was—

CLINE

Exonerated.

JONES

Very grateful that he missed the bullet or dodged the bullet, because that would have been really horrendous. I remember opening the letters sometimes that would come in to SOUL—and I wish we had them—from the G.I.'s with their three-dollar subscriptions, and the dirt and sometimes blood and the things that they would share sometimes, nothing, you know, secret or anything like that, but just the hell that they were living in, being devastated. My kids were young and I didn't equate with them having to go to war, but I remember, you know, hearing of someone's brother or husband or boyfriend being gone and getting hurt, killed, or coming back maimed, ruined for life, basically. It was just a very painful era that went on and on, but we didn't take a stand and things like that, basically. If one of our writers had, we very likely would have run it, just like we ran the cartoon that Bernie did, but nothing must have come up, otherwise it would have appeared, yes. You know, I remember Elaine Brown coming up to the office and hanging out and saying that, you know, she was being followed. I remember meeting Angela Davis.

All this was a big influence, but there's something also about youth, of being caught up in the cause and the excitement of the cause versus the reality of the harshness of what it really is, and I think it was more of that. I just remember the outrage we felt when they came into our office to see what we were, why those "SOUL" shirts were in Vietnam, and the outrage at the government, okay. "You already have us over there. How can you come into a person's office like this?" They had the wherewithal to do it in a more undercover

way, but that was strictly a threatening stance, and being defiant enough to not succumb to it, watching the whole office shattered when they knew who it was, and me pretending it was no big deal. You know, every day somebody from the Secret Service agency shows up, right, and they had nothing to worry about. This was just fine. This is silliness, you know, with the government is wasting money on this and there's people hungry. It was a harsh view of reality. I'm just old enough that I remember one of my friends' older sister's husbands being in the Korean War, okay, and seeing what happened to Freddy, that he was never the same when he came back, and that was nothing compared to what was going on with the Vietnam War. So there was a complete awareness. My dad had come back shattered from World War II.

CLINE

Right. That's one of the things I was wondering.

JONES

Yes, and so I was totally aware of what it did to our men, in that time more than you would say women, but women, too, who served in the armed forces, but feeling powerless on that one. That was a bigger dragon than even the bravest young silly person could take on. I'm serious, because that was devastating. It was horrible.

I just remember us sitting there reading those letters and how the whole staff—you know when things are so horrible that you deal with it and then you go on to something else quickly because you can't deal with the devastation of what the real feelings are? I remember sitting there opening the letters, our secretary coming in crying, receptionist, secretary, with the letter that she had to share, and me being grateful that she shared it with me, but also wish she hadn't. Yes, so I do remember some of that.

CLINE

Right. And your husband had to report the news.

JONES

Yes, he was reporting it every day. I don't know what year he reported on—Volkswagen was doing something defective with the cars, and he was the reporter who broke that. It was some different stories, and the devastation of the backlash that happened on some of those when they even called the TV station into account, the advertising things. So I got to see some glimpses of reality too.

CLINE

Interesting. Before he was assassinated, Dr. King came out against the Vietnam War and it certainly came to symbolize quite a lot, and, strangely enough, in 1969 when I think it appears that a lot of the hope and idealism starts to deteriorate to some degree, it's a lot more anger and frustration starting to manifest, Richard Nixon is elected president.

JONES

You say Richard Nixon and my mind clicks, "Tricky Dick." That was all that happened. [laughs]

CLINE

Interesting.

JONES

Oh, that is sad.

CLINE

Big change, a big change of direction. How did that sit with you at the time?

JONES

Well, you know, see, again, it's all very personal. I'm sorry, but it's all personal. Going to D.C. with Ken. Ken had broken his leg probably playing football, or his ankle or something, in the street with the kids and was invited to Washington, D.C. for something or another and Nixon was in office, and I had my 'fro, short, but it was a 'fro, and going with Ken and lining up to see the president and shake hands, and they took a picture of Ken and the president and you see a little piece of my clothing right there, and by then I think I had moved from black to chauvinist pig in my anger, so I was angry at the white male, you know, even Ken, the way it was handled, the way women were treated, second-class citizens. I think I had, in my mind, gone to the black woman was the biggest nigger of all, because she carried all the sacks on her shoulders. You know, I'm pretty sure that's where my head had gone by then. And I was running the company and raising the kids, and my militancy—I don't remember what year Steinem was—

CLINE

Yes, I was going to say, we haven't even really hit the Feminist Movement yet.

JONES

Okay. But I was living it, okay, and I was living it, like I said, before on the road with guys with the hits and I couldn't go out to dinner

and all that crap. It was just a sad, sad time, as far as I was concerned and how I felt. It didn't directly affect SOUL, because we hadn't made any breakthroughs that much that Nixon or that entire time could take away from us.

CLINE

Did you ever find out if you were on J. Edgar Hoover's enemies list or anything?

JONES

Never checked, never cared, didn't figure, so never thought about it. You know, really felt pure in what we were doing and really still embraced the principle that if you really worked hard, you could turn things around, especially your own life and the people you affected, and still was a total optimist. Just work a little harder, put a little more into it, do a better job, be more organized. It was always if you could do more, if I could do more.

You know, staff members later in years would write me or call me and say how much they just sometimes were just angry with me, almost hating me, sometimes in tears, that I expected so much of them, more than they were capable of, they felt, and then thanking me that because of their time with me, they could outshine people everywhere in their work ethic, because my demands were really hard on myself, but they were also hard on others, not nearly as hard on others as on myself, but really hard. I was hard on Ken, I was hard on staff, and I never could understand anyone settling. It was always reach for better, reach for higher, reach for more, learn more, develop yourself more, but in retrospect, realizing that I was quite tunnel-visioned myself in my own way, but at the time I had my eye on the prize and I was going to get there, and you were either with me or you were against me. You know, sixteen-hour days were the norm, not the exception, and, you know, the life at SOUL was at the office all day. I mean, a typical day was getting up, getting the kids all ready for school, out the front door, dropping off at the elementary, the junior high, and eventually the high school, then going to my office, beating the staff, because the kids had to be at the school by probably 8:05 or something, going in the office and trying to get a head start on what needed to get accomplished that day, and then greeting the staff, working with them all day, and then going to some kind of event after probably 50 percent of the time, you know, and if not, working late at the office.

The kids, it was a running joke that I would call and say I was coming, and I'd cruise the house, honk the horn. It was a treat once a week, probably, that they'd hop in and we'd either go to McDonald's or the Hamburger Hamlet and eat. And Ken's at work, because he's gone to work at three-thirty or three. You know, and then we'd come back and we'd all crash, and you'd just do it again. My mother was here, and that's the only reason I could make it, because she sacrificed her life to take care of my kids so I could become and be a career woman, because there's no way you could hire a babysitter, you know, I mean, to really do a job with them. So she was here much of the time, but when she wasn't here, then it was on me, and five kids, you know, it's a wild group, a year apart. Four of them are a year apart and the fifth one is two and a half years later, so, you know, they were swinging from the chandeliers, and there were pets and snakes and hawks and hamsters and bunny rabbits and lizards and food for all of them, too.

CLINE

Wow. What about your father? How did things fare with him?

JONES

He was just strange, angry, strange, angry, always angry at life. Doesn't come up often, but every now and then we laugh about how he'd come up, and before he would ring the bell or knock, he always tried the doorknob and he'd shake it. It was a running joke. We'd hear it and people would vanish in the house.

CLINE

Oh, my.

JONES

Okay?

CLINE

Okay.

JONES

People would vanish, you know, so somebody would be relegated then to opening the door and letting Grandpa in. He was basically harmless, but not fully present. He had his own damage of being the oldest son, or the second child, of a man who started, at the time, the largest black-owned insurance company west of the Mississippi, I think is the way it was said, who died, I think, in '45 with no family member really with ownership or participation in the

company. So that hurt, of being a Nickerson, and you're an elevator-starter, and then after the war, you're a janitor with hands that were washed so often that they just cracked and bled sometimes. Yes, he was a piece of work.

CLINE

Damaged goods.

JONES

Yes.

CLINE

That's really sad. Then another thing that I wanted to talk about before we finish today, getting back into the content of SOUL during the time—and we're still in the late sixties—one of the things that I noticed that really amazed me, which I think paints quite the picture of how incredibly different the relationship was between, for example, musical artists and their fans, was that SOUL at one point published addresses where fans could reach their favorite artist through the mail, which clearly were not the artists' personal addresses, but still, I think there was a comment that even said, you know, "Your letters will be answered," or at least read or something. I wanted to get a sense from you what the relationship was like at this point in the magazine's history—we're still in the late sixties—between the artists themselves and the magazine. You used James Brown as a good example of somebody who was very closely associated with the magazine and realized its worth very early on, but you're covering a lot of artists. You're covering a lot of people who are charting at that point, and I wondered not only what the relationship was between the artists and the magazine, but what the relationship was between, say, in this case, KGFJ and who's charting, and this may be hard to articulate, but what the dynamic is between who's charting and therefore who gets covered or who gets covered and maybe therefore begins to be charting, a chicken-or-egg sort of scenario, I'm sorry to say.

JONES

They would approach us when they knew they had a record out and they wanted coverage. We would approach them when we had a story or we had a glimpse of something and we wanted to do a story. Sometimes it worked out as publicity for their artist. Sometimes it worked out as they were very upset with us because we printed something they didn't want known at that time. If they

could have directed everything we did, it would have all been just a newsletter based on their artist. Motown really worked hard to work with us and they really worked hard to control us but to act like they weren't trying to control us. Berry Gordy was very smart and he had some very smart people working for him. His nephew, Tommy Gordy, was our Detroit correspondent. I can remember when we got all the letters for the Jackson 5 mailbags, them coming up and picking up the letters to take them to Motown, sit and reading. I mean, we worked together. I remember Skip Miller coming up, you know, different guys, different women from the office, working closely with Suzanne de Passe back then.
The publicist early on was Junius Griffin, and he was out of Detroit and smooth and always helping us, but trying to control us. And then they brought in Bob Jones, who was the publicist there for many years till he left to go with Michael Jackson. Michael would get really pissy with us when we did something—Bob would, I mean, but Bob was a piece of work, and we could fight and still get along, okay. The slickest of all is still alive, Michael Roshkind, who I remember meeting in his New York office really early on. He was the shaper of the publicity and always a very gracious, elegant man, but don't cross the boundaries, and then we'd cross them, and then Father would frown upon you. It was never Berry; it was these people. Berry would want an interview, we'd get an interview. It might take a few months, it might be instantly. You just never knew. During the interview, Berry would play with you. I can remember seeing me with the camera shooting one time as a photographer and intentionally going over behind him, opening the drapes, and standing right in the window where he was backlit, and then I just went to the side of him and got down.
CLINE
Photographic warfare.
JONES
Yes, and he played little games just like that. Or being in Vegas with him one time with Bobby Holland, the photographer. There was a crew of us there. Maybe it was Diana as a solo artist. I'm not quite sure what, but him going and holding the daughter, Rhonda, that is, later years, came out to be his, and with the life-size statue—not statue, but, you know, the cardboard thing of Diana, standing next to it with the daughter and him and looking at us and telling the

photographer to take the picture, but basically daring you to put it in print and saying that that was his daughter.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
Okay.
CLINE
That's kind of playing with fire.
JONES
Play. Just, "Here. Here, what are you going to do with this?" Strictly rumor that that was his daughter then, but you looked at her and you looked at him and there was no doubt. I don't remember if we ran it or not. I want to say we ran it, but we didn't say anything. But then blowing up when David Ruffin was fired from the Temptations and him calling the office and me being there late at night alone and interviewing him and getting the story in the next issue without whispering a sound to Motown or anybody.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
And, you know, them being very, very upset. You know, there were at least two times, if not three, that they completely cancelled all advertising with us. You know, they would give us the punishment and the power, but it was such a mutual relationship that they still wanted us and our coverage. So we got our hands slapped and we behaved for a minute, and then something came up, we'd be off and running again, because there was no thrill being a publicity organ. We enjoyed the thrill of being news reporters and journalists.
CLINE
Yes, breaking stories.
JONES
Breaking stories.
CLINE
Interesting. One of the things that also interests me is what maybe you found to be your parameters in terms of the type of artists that you were covering.
JONES
Parameters?
CLINE

Yes. In other words, like you said last time, you were rhythm and blues. This was your milieu, and I wondered—for example, Sly Stone, he shows up in 1969, but what about somebody like Jimi Hendrix? He's black, but maybe—

JONES

Well, we started out as rhythm and blues, and then it became black entertainment across the spectrum, music, television, film, you name it. And then there's something on Wilt Chamberlain in one of the early issues. O.J. Simpson in one of the issues. Yes, so we crossed over. We even had a local sports column at one time. At one time we had high school student contributors. It was always looking for what might be the thing that was most interesting. Yes, it was never just R and B, except at the very beginning when it was the first affiliation with KGFJ and playing the hits that they had going on, writing about those stories and developing that, but then it quickly, very quickly, changed. A lot of support for Jesse Jackson because we believed in him and we had a relationship with him. Being invited to the Black Expo. I'm trying to think who else was back there. I think Junius Griffin was helping with the Black Expo, and Judy Spiegelman was invited back to cover it and to help, and when it was time for her to come back for her next issue, they had asked her to stay to help with some more things, and so she called it "the Reverend Jackson," you know. And I basically said, "Well, is he going to be paying your salary?" [laughs] And then she missed her plane, supposedly. Then I think it was Junius that called me and said I was really too hard, but I basically told her, "You're either working for him or you're working for me."

And that brings me to laughter, because when Jesse ran for president in 1986 maybe, '85, I ended up working at a record company, S.O.L.A.R. Records, and we were the West Coast management team for his presidential run, and I worked very closely with him, went on the road with him. At one point I wanted to stay longer and Dick Griffey said to me, "Is Jesse paying you?" And I was on the next plane smokin' back. [laughter]

CLINE

There you go.

JONES

So that did come full circle.

CLINE

So the magazine was really looking to broaden its base rather than keep it narrower focused.

JONES

Yes, we wanted to give the readers anything they thought they wanted to read about within, you know—in a younger version than the—you know, we covered Sammy Davis because Sammy was really cool, but we didn't want to become just the "establishment," quote, black artists. We wanted the young ones that other people were afraid of. You mentioned Jimi Hendrix. Dwight Russ, who was kind of volunteer and then paid, he kept our files for us, and Dwight is probably still one of the foremost knowledgeable people and collectors of Jimi Hendrix information, so he beat us up on a regular basis that we didn't do enough coverage on Jimi Hendrix. Even though we would say, "Well, it's not a lot of audience," he was in there knocking all the time. So we did do a few things on Jimi Hendrix, not a lot, and, no, his music was not the soul of SOUL, because it just never occurred to us that that's what our readers wanted that much of. But, like, a few years later, we did Bob Marley, which our readers—we were the first black publication to put Bob Marley on a cover and really feature Bob Marley. So things changed over the years that we published.

CLINE

One of the things that started with your early issues and I think was also quite a sign of the times, especially 1966 and that period, was "Miss SOUL."

JONES

Funny thing.

CLINE

We've touched on feminism today, so I couldn't help but bring that up. Where did that originate and how long did that stay as part of SOUL's—

JONES

It stayed for a long time in the early times.

CLINE

Oh, it did?

JONES

Yes, it stayed for a very long time, and it brings me two different ways at the same time. One, my cousin, first cousin, Van Nickerson, very recently said his barber was a "Mister SOUL," and he gave an

approximate time and gave me his name and he sure would like to get a copy of that issue, and I said, "Van, I'll see what I can do. That means I've got to go through page by page, but I'll give it an attempt." And I did. I found the issue in a bound volume. I haven't found a separate issue, a loose one yet, that I can then photocopy the page for him or something and send it to him, but it's probably rare enough or few enough, I can't give it away. But it was Mister SOUL, too, and he, at this age—you know, how many years later are we talking about—remembers when he was Mister SOUL. So we were equal, and he wants his pinup, okay. He wants his pinup. Now, Miss SOUL, I never liked it. [laughter]

CLINE

I find that hard to believe.

JONES

I suspected foul play, and I never kept my mouth shut about it and I would fight about it. I was not very nice about that. I didn't like that idea. That brings to me to one time the Love Machine, which again, we're out of Maverick's Flat and John Daniels, and they traveled all over the world. I think there were seven beautiful women. We did a photo shoot here in the backyard of them, and my daughter was maybe ten at the time. I'm not quite sure. But she called me at the office and she said, "Mother, you need to come home." And I said, "What's wrong?" She says, "There's all these pretty women in bathing suits and Dad's here alone." I said, "Isn't there a photographer there too?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, they're fine." [laughs] So just natural female instincts alive and well, no matter how hard the work is. I'm not going to lie and say, oh, no, didn't bother me. Heck yes, it bothered me, especially if someone was especially pretty. And so I liked them better when the photographers submitted them, okay, pack and parcel altogether. One that used to submit quite a few of them was part of the Fifth Dimension, Lamonte McLemore, was a photographer also and a singer, and he would submit the whole piece.

CLINE

So how were the early ones submitted? Just the women themselves would send photos?

JONES

No, more the photographers.

CLINE

Interesting.
JONES
Were the photographers.
CLINE
With these little profiles.
JONES
Yes, that was it, yes.
CLINE
And every year you would have sort of the Miss SOUL.
JONES
I don't really remember doing that.
CLINE
Really? I think I noticed—
JONES
You saw one?
CLINE
Yes, Miss SOUL of the year nineteen-whatever.
JONES
So I don't remember if the readers voted—
CLINE
I think the readers were voting, yes.
JONES
Okay, that's very possible. Yes, and some of them were actresses, starlets, and some were just Jill at the clothing store down the street. We tried, as we could, to make them national so they just didn't all seem to emanate from Los Angeles, even though that's where we were. About a year ago, one contacted me somehow or another through, I guess, Facebook or something and was looking for hers, and, fortunately, I was able to go right to it, because she remembered so much, and find it and send it to her, and, oh, she was just—you'd have thought I sent her money, and she was just thrilled. [laughs]
CLINE
Wow. So as we're winding up the sixties here, as I said, we have Nixon as president, couple of things really start to become noteworthy as we head into the beginning of the seventies. One is something you already mentioned, which is the phenomenon that becomes the Jackson 5, and the other is the Jackson 5's record label, Motown, who move to Los Angeles. What do you remember

about SOUL magazine's coverage of both these particular stories and how they affected the content of the magazine or even you personally?

JONES

I was invited to visit the Motown headquarters in Detroit before they moved here, so I had been there. I had seen the studio and the building, and I don't remember a lot about it, hardly anything, but I knew I was there. When they moved here, it was a delight to us, because that made them more accessible, and it was a base, because Detroit was not somewhere where we went that often or needed to go or wanted to go. I mean, I remember going in and seeing the advertising agencies for the car manufacturers trying to get advertising, always my head first, and that's interesting. I'm more impressed by that than the other. When they moved here, we were just excited, and they were right here on Sunset and Vine one block east, where they remained for a great many years. We were in and out of there an awful lot, and as part of their unique brilliance of how to secure good relations, they hired an awful lot of our photographers to do their publicity shots, which then gave them more favor on what the photographers would and would not shoot.

CLINE

Interesting.

JONES

Yes, brilliant. I mean, I would be mad, fuss and complain and gripe about it then, but brilliant. Brilliant. I greatly admire the brilliance of Berry Gordy, control freak. [laughs] He controlled everything. In my youth I didn't like it. As an elder, I see the wisdom in it, and it was done in a way that we paid our photographers ten dollars, saying, "That's not the amount for a photograph," and he maybe paid them a hundred for a photo shoot. Well, who's going to become your—okay? And even though they'd come back and occasionally share, give us information and stuff, but I could see the loyalties changing, and Bob Jones was the biggest advocator of that, and he said he was helping us keep the good photographers and keep them paid. That was the win-win and that was blacks helping blacks, brotherly love thing, but it was a two-sided win, and it was appreciated that they recognized the quality of some of the people that we had found and secured and hired, that they started using them.

Another funny story, one time we were invited to cover possibly Gladys Knight, could be the Supremes, in Vegas, myself, two photographers. I don't remember who else went with us, but anyhow, they covered the airfare and the hotel, and Bob called the room and I answered and he was trying to find one of the photographers. He says, "You're not staying in the same room with the photographers. That can't be." And he had me in a room the next day. I said, "It's quite all right." [laughs] It's like, we were kids on the road. Yes, I was married and had five kids, but these were kids working for me. It wasn't anything romantic; it was work. And that's what a poor journalist did. You might sleep with the photographer, in the same room, okay. No big deal. But, oh, he was too outdone and too through, had to get another room, you know, and we laughed.

Even going there, I remember that time, the photographers with all the equipment, because they had sold me on needing all this fabulous equipment, all these big cases and stuff, and I'm helping them with the equipment, but as soon as we got near the premises, don't touch anything. I was suddenly the princess, publisher. So it was fun. I mean, it was fun. We were all in it together. We all believed in what we were doing and we got love from Motown, and then we got kicked by Motown. I mean, it was like family.

CLINE

What did it tell you about Los Angeles that they moved here at the time?

JONES

I don't really remember other than it made more sense for them to be here, and I'm sure they were all tired of Detroit, wanted to come here to the land of promise and beautiful skies, and Berry wanted to get in the film industry. He had that dream already manifesting. You remember he went into thoroughbred race-horsing, and he had a nice little hit in the film industry, not big, and you remember it was early enough that it didn't really allow him to grow that much, and the racetrack kicked his butt, and the thoroughbred race owners and the gentlemen's club said, "You can be Berry Gordy. You can be Motown. You can even afford to buy some thoroughbred horses, but you're not one of us." So, see, that again—and I don't remember what years he was into race-horsing, but he was going to be—what do you call race-horsing, the sport of kings?

CLINE
Yes.
JONES
They made it well known. And, see, that's the dichotomy. That's the imbalance. Ken was—okay. But I think Ken's involvement was earlier. You know, he really was a fan and he had been there for a long, long time, loving horses from a kid on.
CLINE
Interesting. Some would argue that even though Motown moved here, that their classic years never happened once they moved. How were you able to keep up with musical developments in all these different cities? You mentioned, for example, you wanted Miss SOUL not to look like they were all coming from L.A., and I know you had radio affiliates all over.
JONES
We were a Los Angeles-based publication, and, yes, we had correspondents and affiliations, but we were Los Angeles-based. We were influenced. We were privileged. I mean, let's face it, even now, Los Angeles is a great place. [laughs] And especially if you're in the entertainment industry in any area, you're not a novelty. You know, you go to a restaurant and you can almost tell the ones that are actors and actresses that wait on you. Even today, it's still where you think you want to go. Other cities have gained some—like the films going elsewhere because of the money, cost, but Motown coming here just made sense, that moving the Jacksons here just made sense, and they all moved in and had homes here and were very happy coming to Los Angeles. I don't remember ever hearing them cry about leaving Detroit or Gary, Indiana. I just don't remember any of that, hearing any complaints about that. And then, like, Martha Reeves stayed in Detroit. Many artists remained. Some came later, some didn't come at all, but most of the classic Motown Sound artists that didn't come, that's what they remained, the classic, in the past. I'm not saying I agree or disagree with the quality of the music or the passion or the heart or the soul of it all, but strictly from a business aspect, it all makes sense and made sense. Chess Records out of Chicago stayed, and it's jazz, but where's the money? And it's not as if these decisions were made based on art. It's strictly business.

The soul in music, it became more homogenized and less soulful as the years have progressed, because people live better and easier lives. I mean, I once got in trouble with Aretha for telling her she wrote better songs and sang better when she was suffering, and, oh, she was angry with me for a while about that, but it was the truth. Unfortunately, many great writers, poets, everybody—I mean, when you're in angst, the suffering comes through, and then many identify with that suffering. Life gets easier and things become glossier. So I'm not a purist that would disagree. I have friends that would battle with me, but it's like childrearing. I still believe you should spank a child to get their attention, and I don't mean beat them or hurt them, but some children just don't understand, "No, no, honey." Like raising pets, my big dog, there's got to be someone in charge, and evolution has not reached necessarily a place that I think is a good place, but we have evolved and there's no stopping it.

CLINE

So just to finish up, then, what about the Jackson 5? What do you remember about how that developed? Because that certainly became a major presence in the pages of SOUL.

JONES

That's a long story.

CLINE

Okay, well, maybe we'll have to get that one next time.

JONES

Yes, yes, because we were right there in the trenches at the very beginning from the first night that we met them at the Daisy Club in Beverly Hills when Diana Ross introduced them, and we did separate interviews and we spend great amount of time with them. I called Jackie Jackson about something probably the end of last year, "Hi, how are you?" You know what I'm saying, okay. It'd been years, but—okay. We were close and then we weren't close.

CLINE

Like you said, the Jacksons moved out here, Diana Ross, Marvin Gaye. They were all in L.A.

JONES

Yes, Katherine goes to church where the lady that's a friend and who used to do my hair goes, and when [unclear] that I knew Katherine, she went up one day and said, "Regina Jones said to tell

you hello." And she stopped and she says, "Oh, how is she? Tell her hello." I haven't talked to Katherine in years. My son recently, who works at Hawaiian Airlines, sent me a text that Diana Ross had just come into the executive, or whatever, seating lounge, and I said, "Tell her I said hi." And so he did, and she just stared at him and didn't say anything and she went and sat down. And then about ten minutes later, she came over and she said, "How is Regina? Where is Regina? And please tell her I said, 'Hi, what's she doing?'" So this was the little text back and forth between he and I. I don't expect them to know me as Regina Jones. Usually I would say to you, "Oh, Alex, tell them Regina Jones from SOUL," okay, because I never figure people known Regina Jones. I figure they know SOUL, and, oh, Regina Jones is the lady—okay.

CLINE

Actually, one thing I wanted to ask before we call it for today, when you were young, you went through this period of kind of checking out the local churches, and you settled for a while on a Catholic church. You liked the atmosphere there, and then you went through this very stressful period when you first got married and had your children. I wondered, as we are now in this period where you've become more militant in your views, you're more aware of what's happening, more savvy about a lot of the racial and social dynamics out there in the world, what, if any, role did any sort of spiritual expression play into your awareness and your life at that time? I mention this partly because I noticed that when you went through this very stressful challenging period, you didn't say anything about seeking solace in religion or anything like that. I wondered where you were at as far as that went at this time in your life, and you're also raising children. I didn't know if you had ideas about what you wanted them to—

JONES

My love for the Catholic Church ended when I had my first son and I was sixteen. I went to the priest about having him baptized, and the priest told me he was a bastard because we hadn't been married in the church. I'm pretty sure about then I was through with the Catholic Church. I observed all my life with the church, which I talked about before, people who spoke of God and religion, and they sinned on Saturday nights and then they went and cried and prayed on Sundays. That never made sense to me. If you know it's wrong,

why do you do it on Saturday night? And then I observed preachers that I felt were out of line.
So at some point in my life, in my hurt, in my marriage—my husband had grown up in the church and was an altar boy and announced, read the programs, very involved. In my hurt and pain with him, and I was forced to often go to church because of my mother-in-law, and when I'd bring the kids in, people would grimace when they'd wiggle in the pews, so it became a nightmare for me. So I started to lean more and more towards agnostic, because if these are churchgoing, God-fearing people, please protect me from ever being one of them. That's how my young mind worked. My personal religion towards integrity was stronger than what I saw in most of the Christian people that were constantly banging the Bible about what you should do or who else should be there, and, unfortunately, over the years, I've not seen a whole lot of shift from that. I've just had my own spiritual belief that came by the way of Overeaters Anonymous, joining and getting very involved in that, sixties, seventies, early seventies, and accepting a higher power, which then grew into the twelve steps and integrity and a whole different principled life, which then took me back to following and learning yoga and meditation and Christianity and joining a Christian church and just around and around to where I am now of I believe totally in God and I have complete faith, but I won't try to sell you my God, and I will allow you to talk about yours and I won't say a word, usually, and if it differs, it's fine and I will agree. We can agree, disagree. I have one Mormon son. My kids were not brought up in the church, per se, even though they were all baptized, christened. Sometimes as an older woman, I regret that I didn't have them more involved in the church, and especially as I look at my grandchildren, which are, you know, a sea of different people. But yet I can't find a church that I'm willing to go and just be there, as I have friends who say, "I don't know why I'm at the church, but God sent me there, so I just keep showing up."
And I'll say things like, "Yeah, I saw your pastor and I picked up the energy from he and his wife, and I don't think I could sit in his church." But I'm very honest and I allow my friends to be—we're honest with each other. We don't have to agree, but I notice a strong faith amongst all of us. With SOUL itself, James Cleveland, Reverend James Cleveland, he was a friend and knew him, and he

was very supportive of SOUL and everything. I never judged. I went to his church. I enjoyed myself, but it never occurred to me to have him as my pastor. The same with Carl Bean. I just ran into him recently, and, "Oh, Regina!" And glad to see each other, but they're people. They're people. They're people, just like you and me. You could become Reverend Cline tomorrow, and so many people that I know in entertainment that were entertainers have become reverends and practitioners.

CLINE

Al Green and, for a while, Little Richard. Wow.

JONES

Yes, Della Reese. [laughs] So I try not to judge and I try not to put my views on anybody else, and I just am happy when I hear a person has faith, and it saddens me when I hear a person who says they're a practicing Christian who is suicidal or has no hope, because it's hope. I had a horrible day yesterday, but the fact that I knew that day would pass and there would be a new day, or not, makes it okay, and that I know I have lived a very blessed life, because though I've had some hardships and extremely trying times, I've always been protected and taken care of, and I believe that.

I guess I should talk about it a little bit. I'm a total advocate for mental health and therapy as a continuing practice, and I do to this day, because it has worked for me in helping to refine who I am, and it may go for a year with no work, but it's kind of like having someone else there as a gauge or something erupts or to deal with versus letting it go to an extreme, because I see how easy it is to go into your own head and get lost in the mind versus the heart and how really dangerous that is for me, because I'm a compulsive all the way. There's no real middle. I'm all or nothing, and what I'm learning is try to be in the middle. So it's made for a much kinder, more loving, gentle person. I remember the first time I saw Ammachi, Amritanandamayi, when she was in Malibu at a beach house down there and a friend invited me, and I thought, "Okay, I'll show up." And when Ammachi embraced me, I've never felt loved like the love I felt shoot through my body, and stumbling away from her like I was stoned on marijuana or something. I went to a number of her retreats and followed her for a while and worked in the kitchen and did things, and I fantasized—I'll call it that then, but

then I thought about going to India and the whole trip, and then I realized I've got these five kids that I love. Even if they're grown, they're mine. Yes, I'm really grounded in family, and for some reason, now preserving the history of SOUL because other people think it's important. I'm beginning to see some importance as I go through this process, but basically everything that I've done and everyplace I've been and everyone I've met has been God-designed, not Regina-designed. I've never sat down and decided, "Oh, I want to publish a newspaper," or, "I want to be a musician," or, "I want to write a story." It's always been I've been kind of thrust into these places, so now it's kind of accepting what I have experienced as being a divine guidance and just being agreeable to it. Does that summarize it?

CLINE

Resistance is futile.

JONES

Futile. [laughter]

CLINE

Since we're finishing up with the late sixties when this was a time when people were really questioning everything, and certainly their religious views and their political views and everything sociocultural, and experimenting a lot and trying some new things on, and you're certainly a product of that time and that's why I wanted to ask about it, and I appreciate your answer.

JONES

I wouldn't redo any of it. If I ever sit down and write about it, there are some things I think I would write about that get into really some deep philosophical questioning and experiences. I'm going to go on record with this one. I remember being in London in the hotel room and reading—I wish I could remember who the author was, but you had these exercises you do, and I remember watching the—and I wasn't using drugs—watching the walls breathe with breathing exercises and things like that. Yes, I was very open to learning what all this magnificence is about, though I don't see any need to go anywhere now or follow any guru, but yet on my bedroom wall is a huge picture of Ammachi, that it just seemed important to put it there, and I consider her still my guru, even though I have not—I mean, I remember going to see her in Santa Monica. There were thousands of people.

CLINE
Yes, very big.
JONES
I went, "I don't think so." I swam in a swimming pool with her at a retreat, and she loved the cucumbers I grew out of my garden that I took, especially loved them. And there's a certain smugness I'm embarrassed about, but with Oprah and all of her intelligence and success, that she's just now—and it's good. Everything in its own time, but there is a judgment that bothers me that she's just now embracing and experiencing this, and even in today's thing, because I usually won't open her "10 Reasons," because this is something I did twenty, thirty years ago. But today it was, oh, God—what's his name—[unclear]. Come on, it's three names.
CLINE
Thich Nhat Hanh.
JONES
Yes. She had one of his sayings there, and I'm like, "Yeah."
CLINE
Yes, she actually had him on—she interviewed him a couple of years ago.
JONES
Okay, but it was like, "Yeah." But it's the world. It's everybody trying to spread—
CLINE
Yes, and then there are other people—I read, somebody, because of this, said that this person thinks that Oprah is in league with the antichrist.
JONES
Right. Then there's that. And then there's what Mitt Romney running for president, and he's a Mormon. My son and I have not had any discussion about this, because I don't know if I want to get the answers.
CLINE
Well, they didn't used to be able to be black and Mormon.
JONES
Okay. So I guess they figure if a black could be president, certainly a Mormon could. [laughter]
CLINE
That's amazing.

JONES
Wait. I'm sorry. There's something—I just saw a catalog this week, and it was a photograph of, "Get your photos duplicated on canvas for outside," that can take all kinds of weather and water, and the picture was of a woman with six children, and I said, "This has got to be a Mormon-owned business. Who else would show a picture of a woman with six kids?" Now, see, that, again, is brainwashed. But it's great that we're all getting more aware of one another.
CLINE
Right. And the world certainly is unavoidably way smaller.
JONES
It's so tiny.
CLINE
It's tiny. One last thing. You said you weren't doing drugs or anything, but this period that we're talking about was a time when there was a lot of drug use going on, and I used the word "experimentation" as sort of a euphemism for that. How did that touch your life in the late sixties, or did it?
JONES
Well, it was a joke, parties were they smoked a lot of marijuana that would always be in a back room somewhere, and nobody ever let me go near those back rooms. That's when I saw I've always been protected.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
Or if someone saw me headed—"Where you headed? That's not where you need—."
CLINE
Redirect you.
JONES
Yes, and these are actors, actresses, musicians. It was like everybody knew I was this, I guess, square—
CLINE
Yes, you were the straight one.
JONES
—and so they kind of almost wanted to keep me that way, which I find really both flattering and weird at the same time, you know. The only time anybody ever stepped out of line with that, really

over the threshold with me, that's another story in the seventies, but I remember cussing him out.
CLINE
I guess we'll get to that.
JONES
Yes, that's interesting. But, no, the drug era, yes, it was really weird, when I think back, in the late sixties, what was going on, and I missed it. They just didn't quite allow me in.
CLINE
Well, you were a mom.
JONES
Maybe that was it, huh. I don't know.
CLINE
Interesting. Then it ultimately, rather quickly, took the lives of some of these artists. Amazing. I think we've hit the wall here. So we'll pick up next time, get into the seventies and definitely talk about the Jackson 5. All right. Thank you.
JONES
Thank you. [End of May 4, 2012 interview]

1.4. Session 4 (May 11, 2012)

CLINE
Here we are again. It's Friday.
JONES
Good morning, Alex.
CLINE
Here we are. Good morning. It's May 11, 2012. This is Alex Cline interviewing Regina Jones again in her home. We're back in her living room. It's an overcast day, but pleasant, and this is session number four.
JONES
Wow.
CLINE
Amazing. Well, last time we left off with a lot of discussion about the shifting culture in the late sixties, the developments in SOUL magazine that reflected those shifts, particularly the emergence of black pride, hippie culture, and the beginnings of the real palpable and demonstrable growth in the music business, how music became more of a business, I think might be a way to put that. We

mentioned Motown moving to Los Angeles, and we're going to get into the whole Jackson 5 phenomenon in a minute. One name that came up that I mentioned last time that I wanted to mention just because in some of those early issues of SOUL, personally speaking, I was kind of surprised to see how relatively frequently he came up, and that was Little Richard, and I mention it for a couple of reasons. One is I think when people think of the late sixties and when they think of SOUL, they don't necessarily think of Little Richard, and also because reading the pieces that were on him or, at times, in a sense, more by him, because he was so heavily quoted, I was struck with how utterly candid he was in these pieces in a way that, looking back on it, seems somewhat almost daring at the time. He's certainly a really, let's just say, flamboyant character, and I wondered what his relationship was with the paper during those first couple of years and how he managed to wind up in its pages more than a few times.

JONES

I wasn't involved in the editorial part at all the first couple of years, so I really don't know, but he was still very prevalent and he was a good entertainer and he performed a lot around Los Angeles and people loved him, so that's the coverage, was automatic. No, he was not up at the office that I ever remember. I don't even remember Ken talking about any close relationship with him. He was definitely an entertainer, but immediately when you mentioned his name, I went, "Penniman." Was that his—

CLINE

Right. Richard Penniman.

JONES

Okay, so I don't know what that is or why that came from. I, kind of like you, when I looked at pages and seeing the pictures and seeing the frequency that he was there, had to smile, because it was almost, like, informative and educational for me that he was that prevalent there, but personally there's not much I—I wish I could say more, but I honestly can't.

CLINE

Well, there's a lot of him talking about how pretty he is and stuff. It's very kind of amazing, I think, to look back on.

JONES

I'd have to look at the photo credits, because my head tells me that the photographer, Earl Fowler, would have been taking photos of him and he would have been at the Five-Four Ballroom and some other clubs that were easily accessible, and that Earl probably followed him a lot, because I just remember some really photos of him. That's what stands out the most for me, and being surprised that there were so many good ones and wishing that there were a lot more.

CLINE

Wow. So was the Five-Four Ballroom still going in the sixties?

JONES

I'm pretty sure it was, because I remember it, I remember going, and I don't know how long it continued. But there was a separation between places like the Five-Four Ballroom and places like the Whisky that had opened up on Sunset and other clubs on Sunset that aren't rolling off my tongue. I mean, like, I even remember seeing Al Jarreau at the Troubadour. So your more recorded—how to say—middle-stream R and B versus your more gutbucket black music, there was a definite difference in where they performed.

CLINE

Right. Well, this is actually a good topic to explore a bit. What do you remember about particularly the emergence of the Sunset Strip scene in the sixties, which was probably not so much a venue for black music at the time, but ultimately everything started to kind of blend. What do you remember about that whole shift in geography? No?

JONES

See, what comes up is Elmer Valentine.

CLINE

Oh, yes, the Whisky guy.

JONES

[laughs] Okay, the head, this is where things go and going, and seeing different performers there at the Whisky. It was the place that the artists wanted to perform. They wanted to perform on Sunset or the Westside or Hollywood. There was that same desire that everybody in the country still has that there's something special about Hollywood, and if you go there, you've made it big. The more comfortable places to go—the Whisky was comfortable, though, relatively. I just remember the darkness and the tables in

the back. I'm kind of walking through there now. But for me, I had more fun going to the Total Experience, or early on it was the Apartment, which was Dick Barnett's—maybe it started out at Guys and Dolls, and then it became the Apartment or something. These were both on Crenshaw and these were both south of Adams. That's where the Temptations played. That's where the Four Tops performed.

There was definitely a division of some sorts, and also it's part of the same trend of black people moving out of the black communities when they achieved a certain amount of fiscal or financial success and wanting to move into a non-black area. They're, to me, hand in hand, running along parallel, and it's not a good thing, necessarily, that that has happened countless times with the music or with the ownership of homes, but it's what happened, you know. It's what happened. Back in those days, the Crenshaw District was primarily black, but there was a strong—near Santa Barbara, which is now King Boulevard—strong number of Japanese families.

CLINE

Right. They called it the Seinan [phonetic] neighborhood.

JONES

Yes, and the black students and the Japanese students were together at Dorsey High School, and this is the sixties and everybody got along. There was no race riots between the two or anything like that. I mean, you just went to school together and you lived together. Yes, I'm not saying much, and I don't know why more is not coming. For me, it was fun to go to the Total Experience. It was a nice club. For some reason, I see not Bill Cosby, but I see Camille Cosby sitting there at the club with the baseball player, possibly Maury Wills' wife. The celebrities' wives were often there on their nights out, as a few girls' groups and women's groups and things like that. It was very normal to see that, and they were very safe and comfortable. I don't remember any concern about the safety of being in that area. It was completely safe.

Yes, I'm just thinking back, and going to Sunset was fun, bright lights, lots of traffic, you know, the Whisky sitting right there on the corner. I remember even going—and I don't remember who the artist was at the time, but the girls dancing in the cages.

CLINE

Oh, yes, right.
JONES
You remember that, or you've seen a picture?
CLINE
Go-go dancers.
JONES
Go-go dancers, yes. It was fun. It was new. It was exciting. It was entertainment, and it was top-flight entertainment. And think about it, and these were in intimate venues versus the Amphitheater or the Forum or Madison Square Garden. [laughs] We were up close and personal, and it's a whole different vibration with the music when it's a more intimate place than when there's thousands of people sitting there and you're a great distance away. Yes, and that's gone. I mean, that is just so totally gone. It's unbelievable. It's hard for me to even think about it as I'm sitting here. It was a special time and it was a musical special time for those of us that were blessed to be a part of it, whether as a performer or all the behind-the-scenes related things, from what it took to put an artist on the stage to the coverage in the media. We knew the artists then. It was just a different world. It's really hard to describe it, but it was wonderful. I'm glad I got a chance to experience it.
CLINE
As some of these people and people that you knew started to become more successful and move out of the old neighborhood, let me ask when you started to really see that sort of geographic shift and what was the impact on your old neighborhood as the center of it started to disperse and started to kind of basically decline?
JONES
Well, it's interesting that I moved here before SOUL started. My neighborhood was made up mostly of where I grew up, spent most of my life, till I moved here, which was a very smart part of my life, when I think about it. They were just working people, working-class people, just regular people, people who had a nine-to-five job or a three-to-eleven job or graveyard shift. Some of them worked in the different companies that were involved in making planes and ships, laborers more than anything, and that didn't really change that much, not for a number of years. I think that held tight through the sixties, the seventies, but then as more migration happened, as more people from other places came—and I guess in that

neighborhood it was primarily black neighborhood—from the South, then it became more of a struggle, and I would say that was more into the seventies, the later seventies, because people still could afford a house there. It was your home. I remember 1967 or whenever the first issue of SOUL came out, my first trip to—well, it wasn't my first trip to New York, but it was, like, one of my—my first trip to New York representing SOUL, and I met some very wealthy people that I had no clue that they were wealthy, because they had these townhomes, these townhouses near Park Avenue and, like, 34th, and they were just little homes to me. They were little narrow homes and they went straight up, and there was no reason for me to be upstairs, so I didn't know what all was there, but the little living rooms like we had and the little '42 tract home for during the war. So I wasn't impressed.

I remember riding in a BMW, and I didn't know what it was. I knew it was foreign. I didn't know it was a BMW. I did notice it had wood on the dashboard, very highly polished wood, but it didn't occur to me that these were very, very wealthy people that had lived like that. Growing up and living in California and in Los Angeles, real advantage, because you could be poor and not be poor, like in cities that get cold where you have these heat requirements or freeze-over and crowded like D.C. or like New York or Philadelphia. You know, we had a lawn. We had fruit trees in the back. We grew gardens. Totally different lifestyles here, very privileged on so many levels. I'm very grateful to this day that I was born and raised and still live in Los Angeles, California. I don't think there's any place better in the world, as far as I'm concerned. Those trips east that I first made, eye-opening to see the level of poverty in New York, and then the snobbism of the New Yorkers. I remember often they would say, "Well, you guys have no culture," you know. Who wants culture at 10 degrees? We jumped in our little cars, even if they were ten years old, and boogied wherever we wanted, and we had roads and streets, and then eventually freeways. So I'm happy to have been born and raised here. I think we had great advantages, and if we didn't come from the East, ignorance was another wonderful advantage, because we didn't—people, I mean, live in apartments in New York that have been there thirty, forty years. I can't imagine, and they're apartments that cost a fortune, and they're just these little tiny boxes. Yes, you know, we have space,

and even when we don't have—three-bedroom house with one bathroom that I raised my kids at the beginning in, or the two-bedroom, one-bath tract home that I was raised in, I didn't know they were small, because everybody else's was the same. Now the ridiculousness now, they have a house with ten bedrooms and twenty bathrooms. What do you need twenty bathrooms to do? I mean, maybe there's some parts of our anatomy I don't know about yet. I'm sorry.

CLINE

Right. I hear you totally.

JONES

I don't get it.

CLINE

Yes, I don't either. So the few people who did make it out, maybe entertainers in particular, where were they moving to in L.A.?

JONES

Funny thing you should say that, but Lou Rawls used to live right here in Country Club Park. He lived about six blocks from me, he and Lana, and their two children went to the same public school my kids went to at Wilton Place. That's where he moved with his success. Hattie McDaniel actually owned a home right here on Country Club Drive. A lot of them moved to this neighborhood and a lot of them moved up to Baldwin Hills, up in the homes up in Baldwin Hills. Nancy Wilson. When the Motown crew came, Marvin Gaye, I remember Marvin when he brought his family out here, they bought a house just south of me. I think it was Twenty-third and Gramercy, okay. Someone Tuesday night at a neighborhood meeting said Cindy Birdsong used to live in an apartment at 3800 Country Club, from the Supremes, that was a later Supreme. Dianne Reeves lived in the apartment right on Wilton Place within the last two decades. But I also remember, like when the Jacksons came, first they lived in a little rental house on Queens Road, or maybe it was Queens—it could have been Kings, but I think it was Queens—in Hollywood, near Hollywood, and then they moved to the big estate that Katherine still lives in out in—Woodland Hills?

CLINE

Encino.

JONES

Encino, yes, and that house, when they first moved there, I don't remember ever being invited to their house on Queens Road or Kings Road, but we were invited often, Hayvenhurst, frequently. My kids, would take them there. You know, it was a normal thing. When we first interviewed the Jackson 5 as individuals, we did it all right here in Los Angeles at a park at La Cienega near Olympic, just south of Olympic, the big park there—no, it's not south of Olympic; it's right on the corner of Olympic.

CLINE

Yes, I know where that is.

JONES

That's where we did the interviews, and they played ball and we took photos, and one at a time we would interview one of them, and that's how we started the interview process on the series of stories we did on them. My kids were all there because it was an outdoor thing and it was perfectly—it was comfortable for everybody. It was like family. I don't know how many times I've been to the home, but it was a very normal thing, pulling up to the gate, speaking into the box, the gate opened. [laughs]

CLINE

Now, I gather that this wasn't this way for you, but for any of these people that you knew, when they relocated, what, if any, experience did you hear about where perhaps they did not feel particularly welcome when they first moved?

JONES

Way before my time, Nat King Cole, when he moved to Hancock Park, they didn't want him there, but when Mary Wilson of the Supremes moved to Hancock Park with her husband, Pedro, at the time, I think the father of her children, that was no problem whatsoever moving in. You know, the doors were first kicked in moving in, like, in this neighborhood, I think, in the forties, so it was before—

CLINE

Before the housing covenants were even struck down.

JONES

Yes. Actually, a black family a few blocks from here, I've talked to him before, their father had to strike down the covenant. I remember Diana Ross, when she bought her house on Elm Drive in

Beverly Hills, it was no problems, none at all. Everybody wanted Diana Ross.

CLINE

I was going to say, she's Diana Ross, right. And as we get into the seventies, of course, eventually L.A. gets a black mayor, someone who you've already mentioned, Tom Bradley.

JONES

Tom Bradley.

CLINE

So, yes, times changed at that point rather quickly.

JONES

Before Tom, I remember being in the Brown mansion in Hancock Park a few times for parties and things in the early sixties that had nothing to do with entertainment, had more to do with politics and the news and from Ken, but those social boundaries here were being crisscrossed, I'd say, quite heavily in the sixties. My mind told me don't hang out mostly in Orange County, even though we went to Disneyland as soon as it opened, and I never became a Valley-ite. To this day, I don't know the Valley that well, but there's never a need to. You know, it's hot and flat. [laughter] Sorry.

CLINE

Well, it used to be a real different culture out there. It's not quite as radically different as it used to be.

JONES

Not anymore.

CLINE

And the same for Orange County, in fact. It's all becoming kind of just one big mass. Since you mentioned the Jackson 5, let's get the chronology here. When did you first become aware of the Jackson 5 and what happened once you became aware of them?

JONES

Well, it was the late sixties. We got an invitation to come to the Daisy Club in Beverly Hills to meet a new group that Motown had discovered, basically they said Diana Ross had discovered. The Daisy Club was a small, more private upscale Beverly Hills club, so I was tickled to be invited and go into that and to meet this new act, which was no big deal in your minds, just another act and their showcasing it, but they were impressive. They were incredibly good. Diana Ross introduced them. It was the cream of the cream from

the whole Motown stable that was there and the press and the other people that they were bringing onboard, and we all had a good time. Ken, my husband, immediately said, "They're going to go far. I want immediately for us to do a series of interviews and stories on them." He jumped on it. He saw it, he jumped on it, and thus we did exactly what he said. We set up the interviews and started to interview them on a series of issues, and I want to say it was 1969. I'm not certain. Many years later, we learned from Gladys it wasn't Diana Ross. It was her that discovered them, first seen them and pulled them in. I've never really taken that story apart to find it out, because the rest was history. The Jacksons grew so rapidly, it was unbelievable. Like I said, we went to this park—and I wish I could tell you the name of it, but the name's not coming, but it's definitely Olympic and La Cienega.

CLINE

I know where the park is.

JONES

You know the park.

CLINE

It's right there, yes, right on the corner.

JONES

Okay, and we did the first interviews there, and the kids were open and welcoming and nice and easy to communicate with. Katherine and Joe were open and helpful. We then moved on to the house to do more interviews and more pictures. We had carte blanche with this. I remember Roland Charles was the photographer—he's passed on—that took those first photos of the Jacksons. Michael was different than the rest of the boys. He was more introverted. He was quiet. He was watchful. He didn't jump out there and play basketball with the rest of them and bump elbows and stuff. He was always off to the side more, watching, drawing. I remember seeing him in his backyard, again, drawing. He was curious about what my husband did on television and asked him about it and asked to be invited to come to the studio one day to see a broadcast, which did happen. He was a very deep, thoughtful kid, and also he was older than we were told he was, which explains a lot of his more reflective energy. [laughs] So, see, the stories were being built by Motown. They were being sold to you gullibly, because at those times we didn't think about why somebody would lie, shave a couple years off

someone's age to—it's good marketing and merchandising, I guess. You know, it proved to be very successful.

CLINE

What were they saying specifically, if you can remember? How old were they saying he was at the time?

JONES

My oldest son and he were supposed to be the same age, and I think Kenny was about—God, in'69, Kenny would have been eleven, okay, and he was supposed to be eleven or ten, and I think he was more like twelve, maybe even thirteen. It's a big difference. So all of them were made to be younger. They were all older. [laughter] Oh, God. The house was a house for kids. Katherine was totally hospitable and warm and Joe was too. It was like first dates. Everybody was on their best behavior and everybody was dressed to impress, and they talked about their time back in New Jersey, and they were looked at more as pretty much what you saw was what they were without going a lot into the amount of work that had already been put in them by Joe before Motown discovered them. Yes, I mean, they had done a lot of work. They had paid a lot of dues, basically almost their entire lives. Yes, that, at first, was not brought out. That came out as years progressed. It was fun. It was nice. It was also a good foundation to build upon. Once we started running those stories about them, it was interesting that as soon as the first issue, which I believe was—could have been the entire Jackson 5, hit first, and then we did the individual ones going from Jackie backwards to Michael, was the last one, boy, the paper, we were flooded with letters. We were selling out papers. People were writing for back issues all over the country, and at the same time, they had gone out on tour. So we were getting reviews of their performances from readers around the country, incredible amount of excitement. Literally the mailman would show up instead of with our usual stack of mail, with bags sometimes, two, three, four bags of mail.

Tommy Gordy, which was a nephew of Berry's, became our Detroit correspondent, and he wrote of news from Detroit, and I remember him being in town and coming up to the office with a couple of the Gordy boys, going through the mail. So everything was smaller and more homey and more family, and just being amazed that that many letters had come, and I think probably Berry had sent them to

see with some eyes to bring back that we weren't exaggerating the bags of mail. [laughter] But I would imagine they were getting bags too. I don't know. I don't know, but I know what we got had to be small in comparison to what they got, or maybe SOUL was an easy place for our readers to respond. I don't really know.

CLINE

One of the things that I think makes the Jackson 5 story so remarkable is just the incredibly broad appeal that they had, and this makes me wonder, since you got all this mail and there was such a huge surge of interest in SOUL at that point because of their coverage of the Jackson 5, for example—we can even be local—white readers here on the Westside of L.A., where would they have found copies of SOUL to read about the Jackson 5?

JONES

It's a hard question. [laughter]

CLINE

I didn't mean it to be hard.

JONES

But Frank Diskin and the distributor had a few spots. He lived in Van Nuys, so he had a few stops out in the Valley. He had a couple stops. He'd find a few place we'd talk it into, and Ken was a good salesman always, so anywhere he went, he was talking up SOUL. So if he stopped at a liquor store on Robertson, he might be trying to talk that guy into carrying it who recognized him from TV, and then he would get to Frank and say, "Frank, get the paper up there." The hardest part of that was that wouldn't be in Frank's normal delivery area and it was an inconvenience, okay.

CLINE

Since there was, at this point especially, somewhat of a broad readership, partly maybe almost entirely due to this phenomenon—it sounds like you had quite a huge increase in readership—since SOUL was a paper really focusing on black music and black culture and is really largely appealing to that audience and that community, as the readership grew, what, if any, impact did that have on the way the paper was editorially approached? Any changes?

JONES

No, not really.

CLINE

Since we know that there were a lot of white people interested in black music, what, if any, coverage did SOUL give to white artists that might have been interesting to the black community?

JONES

Early on, hardly anything. There'd be a few things. I can see pictures in my mind, but that's it. Later on, more, a lot more. Here's a nice reach for you. I remember interviewing Mick Jagger by telephone, because we were interviewing him because he was going with Marsha Hunt, who was black, and she was the sister of a Los Angeles Times writer, Dennis Hunt.

CLINE

Oh, yes, Dennis Hunt. I remember Dennis.

JONES

I don't know what ever happened to Dennis. Marsha—we do know about Mick Jagger, okay. But that was the reach and the excuse to put Mick Jagger on the cover and interview him with an inset, because we didn't have a picture. I don't remember having a picture of them together. I remember there was a picture of her there.

CLINE

Of course, he found himself on the cover of the first issue because of the controversy of—

JONES

Stealing white music.

CLINE

Yes, whether or not white people, white artists have soul—

JONES

That's right.

CLINE

—which I thought was great. Mick Jagger, Eric Burdon, the Righteous Brothers, you know, these people.

JONES

Yes, like I see a story later on in there on Eric Burdon somewhere. I don't remember what year it was when we covered the Doobie Brothers, but that was down the line. But again, that was because they were trying to cross the Doobies into a wider audience, and this was not necessarily the recording company. Again, small world. Publicist David Gest who, before he was a publicist, was a kid coming up to the SOUL offices with Billy Eckstine's son, Ronny Eckstine—God, was David actually selling records out of the trunk of

his car? I think so. I think that's what it was, and I think Ronnie brought him up to SOUL and introduced him and everything, and they were both kids, I mean literally kids. And I don't know if you know who David Gest is or it rings any bells, but David became well known when he married Liza Minnelli.

CLINE

I guess that would make him well known.

JONES

And he is now a celebrity in his own right in London, England, just because of his humor and his differentness. Like I said, he was a publicist. He was already as a kid. So these were the kind of people who SOUL drew in, and David became a good friend, and he was representing the Doobie Brothers and he wore us out until we finally consented to do something on the Doobie Brothers, and I remember going—and I don't know, again, what year it was—back to Memphis, Tennessee, to see them perform and becoming friends with the Doobies personally. So music industry can go each way, but it's more of friendships or connections and contacts behind the scenes that make things happen.

CLINE

Wow. So we're in the early seventies. The Jackson 5 is huge, Motown has moved to L.A., the Jacksons have moved to L.A., and because of this huge level of success that the Jackson 5 experienced so quickly, what, if any, changes did you start to see in their personal lives and your relationship with them at SOUL?

JONES

Like I said, we crossed many boundaries, and I wish I could remember the different years, but, I mean, when Tito got married, I was invited to the bridal shower for his wife, Dee Dee, and personally things would happen, like the kid at the corner here who lived at the corner who we called "Dude"—his name is John McClain—is famous at this time. He did a lot of things in his own right, but he's famous to the world because he's one of the trustees for the Michael Jackson estate.

CLINE

Oh, okay.

JONES

Okay. [laughter] So he became friends with the Jacksons. He became friends because he went to Walton [phonetic], I think is the

name of the school, which is a private school that Michael went to, and they were in school together. So soon as we were doing the Jacksons, he was excited, and they knew each other, and he and Michael stayed friends until Michael's death.
Tito and Dee Dee were going together, and I want to say Dee Dee was at Fairfax High School, and again, David Gest was friends with them, because he went to Walton, too, I think, at some period. And Tito wrecked Dee Dee's mother's car and he needed to get the money to straighten it out, and he was talking to Dude, and Dude says, "Well, Kenny plays bass, man. Let's see if he wants to buy your extra amp." So they were down here to buy it, so I knew about the accident—you know what I'm saying—behind the scenes. Just a lot of that kind of stuff happened. It would come to you because the social lives, it crossed over. They weren't the exclusive, hidden-away-in-the-hills wealthy people that artists have become now. They were much more accessible. You know, Marvin Gaye married a girl from Hamilton High. Smokey Robinson was dating the older sister of one of my eldest son's best friends, and she was a high school student, and he was married. I mean, so this is the kind of stuff that you didn't look for, but it was in your face, and some of it we reported if it merited reporting, and some of it, you just left it as personal stuff. It just depended. I have to laugh sometimes because my kids remember more of the details than I do, because my main detail always was to pay the printer to get the paper out of there to the distributor on the given day. So my job was to always have enough money in the bank account to cover the printing bill, and honest to God, that's how we lived from issue to issue, being able to pay the printer to get it out. It wasn't like we had some extra thousands in the account that set there and waited, or you had six months' money or a business plan that allowed that or a loan or capitalization. We literally lived from issue to issue and what we sold and got from the distributor and what we sold in advertising and the subscriptions, which at three dollars a subscription, you've got to sell a whole lot of subscriptions. [laughs]
CLINE
As the readership seemed to grow, particularly in the wake of the Jackson 5 phenomenon, how would you estimate the size of your circulation once you were moving into the seventies compared to what it was earlier?

JONES
It was always minimal by comparison to today's numbers. You know, the top we ever were able to quote was 125,000 circulation, and that's really nothing, but back then that was really something. Maybe we picked up another 10,000 people, maybe 5,000, and there was no time for assessments or audits or any of that stuff that you can put on a computer now and easily keep track of.
CLINE
With Motown here, with a lot of the music business growing really rapidly, and ultimately as the seventies start to progress, also the disco era gets ushered in, what kinds of changes, particularly in comparison to that very brief period in the late sixties that we discussed last time, what kind of changes do you remember starting to see in the music business and in the music itself that were reflected in the pages of SOUL?
JONES
Well, the music became slicker, more polished, less grassroots. It was more studio, amplified, orchestras. Technically it was much tighter, much more savvy and polished. Everything just became more polished. It became more of a business than just some musicians hanging out and recording or practicing until they got something going. I mean, the equipment became better. The sound systems in venues became better. It was just we technically were growing by leaps and bounds. There was a need, and something hopped in to fill the need.
SOUL itself, still the same eight-sheet-up press that it had rolled on all the time. I remember at News Type Service, which was a phenomenon in itself, because the printer was in Glendale, and Glendale was one of the last to have a covenant on the books that no black people were allowed out on the street, I think, after ten o'clock.
CLINE
Yes, Glendale for sure.
JONES
Okay, and that's where we printed and was often there to eleven or three in the morning. You stayed until you got it ready to hit the press with the final edits and stuff. There was two days every two weeks at News Type Service in Glendale with the proofing situation and a couple maybe drop-offs prior with copy. It was so different

than it is now. You know, you type into a computer and you can print out polished stuff and you can lay out columns and you can put pictures in. In those days, everything was called hot type, so literally they set the hot type, and we're talking metal on pages, big heavy pages that they roll off a proof, and then we'd sit there and read it, mark it up, and then go back. It was a lot more work-intensive. I don't ever remember an artist asking how the paper got printed or done, but we were always over there trying to find out and record how they got a record made and done. Being invited to the studio was a wonderful thing, because then you were a part of making that record.

CLINE

Well, and Motown owned Hitsville by then, I presume.

JONES

They had Hitsville. The writers would love to go to the studio. They just loved to hang out at the studio, okay, because they were part of hearing the process go down. There was Hitsville, but there were other studios too. I remember one on Virgil over in more easterly part of Los Angeles, going to, and, see, I don't even remember where the studio was. I remember being in the studio with Stevie Wonder and Minnie Riperton, but no clue where that studio was.

CLINE

Well, there were a lot of studios at that time in L.A.

JONES

Yes, and a lot of them were in Hollywood.

CLINE

Right. And even Ike Turner had a studio out in Inglewood.

JONES

Ike Turner, he had an Inglewood studio.

CLINE

He was Bolic Sound, something like that. You mentioned Stevie Wonder, and he's one of the artists that I wanted to talk about today, because, for one thing—see, I'm steering around Marvin Gaye.

JONES

[laughs] Thank you. Nothing personal, Marv.

CLINE

But both Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder were on Tamla, which was a division of Motown, and Stevie Wonder emerges as one of the

most successful and important recording artists of the 1970s on that label, and, of course, he came here as well, like seemingly almost everyone else. I wanted to ask you what your memories of the emergence and the rise in stature of Stevie Wonder as an artist on the scene here and how he was covered in your paper.

JONES

We loved to cover Stevie. It was easy to get to him in the early days, and I don't know what year he built his studio right around the corner here on Western near Eighth Street, which is still there, and I don't remember it being there during the SOUL time. But Stevie was always fun because Stevie was a phenomenal artist, writer, performer, human being. You interviewed him and he talked, and at first it took a little getting used to, because when he talked, because he couldn't see you, he'd often tilt his head back and his dark glasses and kind of look up as he talked, and he would move when he talked a lot. But he would say what we felt at the time were such profound things out of this young man. They were just—wow. I mean, just even his music—maybe you can tell me, what was the year that he did The Secret Life of Plants?

CLINE

Yes, that was later. That was around '79 or sometime in the late seventies.

JONES

Okay, up in the late seventies. Watching him perform onstage was fun because it was amazing that he could get up there and play the piano and play the harmonica and just spin around and do different things, and I can't tell you where I remember seeing him intimate, and then I remember also seeing the phenomenon of him at the sports arena. He was just an incredible musical genius. The other thing that would always blow me away is Stevie could hear you and know who you were by your footsteps and different stuff, so he might call you out, just hear you walk in, and that would, like—

CLINE

Yes, that's pretty freaky.

JONES

It's very freaky, okay, very freaky. Even young, he was a warm, wonderful, great talent to be around.

CLINE

The music that he was doing, besides being brilliant in many ways, socially and politically relevant in a way that a lot of music was not, in a way, continues what we were talking about last time, the changes that happened in the late sixties—again, I'm sort of drawing out the minor parallel here to the Jackson 5 phenomenon only in one sense, which is the incredible broad appeal that his music had. I mean, it really cut across every what we think of now as demographic at a time when the music business was becoming increasingly more genrefied, but not nearly so much as it is now. What, if any, memory do you have of anything in SOUL's readership that would reflect that sort of broad appeal that he had, or did you have a sense of who was following the paper outside the general readership that you'd always sort of been aiming at?

JONES

Well, we had a tremendous supportive readership, again, in London, England. It was surprising and shocking to see how informed and interested people were there to black music, very intelligent letters and questions and information. That was one of the biggest surprises, because, you know, in the late sixties, early seventies, we were here. You didn't have friends in London per se. Well, there were people that were following very heavily, one of which is still a dear friend who was a youngster early on, David Nathan, who became an editor of one of the London-based black music magazines, Blues and Soul, possibly, who later came here. Now he's back in London, but, I mean, he lived his whole adult life mostly here, and he just went back within the last two years. What always got me is how well read and well informed people in London were about the music. They had more background information and details than the normal listener or music fan here. They had studied it, and how they got enough information I don't know. They were grabbing anything they could, so they grabbed SOUL. Blues and Soul was a good publication because it was very in-depth in the coverage. So that would be the biggest surprise audience.

Here, if you look at a picture of Jackie Wilson back in the late sixties, you'll see Caucasians in the audience, two or three popping up, and a room full of black people at the Five-Four Ballroom. So there were always non-blacks that loved the music, and they didn't care what they had to traverse to get there. They followed the music, the real lovers. When the more broad appeal came, it was

more surface in the music. It was a little bit—who doesn't love good music? It's infectious. It catches you. It captures you if there's any heart and soul in you, and so it was never a surprise. It was very normal. It wasn't, "Oh, my God." It was just these are hip white folks that know what's going on. [laughs] I mean, you see musicians, even yourself, but, I mean, if there's a heart for music, the heart is usually colorblind in many ways. [laughs] I think music is often colorblind.

CLINE

Yes. One of the things we touched on last time was Jimi Hendrix, for example, who, by the early seventies, is already gone, but I wondered if one of the reasons he wasn't covered so much in SOUL wasn't just sort of the genre issue, but the fact that interest in him musically was largely not with the black audience.

JONES

Yes, there wasn't a lot of black interest. I mean, I don't remember letters saying, "Why don't you write a story on Jimi Hendrix?" I just remember back to what I think I said before. The white [unclear] would say, "Why don't you do a whole issue? Your whole files should be on Jimi Hendrix." [laughs] And he's a black kid at La Brea and King Boulevard, grew up there, went to school there. He loved him some Jimi Hendrix. So where did he come from?

CLINE

After the late sixties, it's almost a complete—people wouldn't even think about this, that many people referred to the genre of music that oftentimes we're talking about as soul music. What is your memory of when that term started to become pretty much universal and what were your feelings about it, if you were aware of it?

JONES

I was aware of it, but I would say from a bit of an egotistical point of view, that I'm the one that's at Ken, when he said, "Flame," and all these other names, I said, "Soul. Soul, that's the name. That captures it." So when everybody else caught on to the importance of what "soul" meant, I was like, "Yeah." [laughter] I knew it early on. I felt it, I saw it, and I'm sure a whole lot of others felt it and saw it at the same time, but we had it on the name of the newspaper and we were putting it out there and we were spreading soul, you know. I have to laugh at youth, my own. When you're young, you're doing it. It's a whole different thing as you get older.

There's just no boundaries. You don't think out what you feel when you're young. You feel if you're blessed, and then you execute, you do, and if it's coming from a positive vein like music usually was, you just do it, you don't think it. Like now, where is music now? It's all the attorneys and the accountants and these management people who don't have an ounce of talent in them usually trying to direct things. How do you put soul, how do you put good music, how do you put feelings in an incubator, and then put them in a marketing department to turn them into something? Now we don't have that much in the way of music.
I think about Amy Winehouse for some weird reason. That was tortured soul. Adele, she's singing about her pain. So in 2000-something you saw Amy come and die. Now we see the phenomenon of Adele, and I don't know how black people feel about her, but girlfriend has some soul. [laughter] I can't speak for anybody else, okay, but she's speaking her truth from her soul, from her heart, from her feeling places. So to me, it's not that strange that whites embraced soul back then.
CLINE
And after a while, that term starts to kind of fall away as the music becomes itself more genrefied, and pretty soon you have funk, you have disco, you have these various forms that emerge during the seventies, variations on a theme, if you will.
JONES
I mean, when you say "funk," I think Sly, I think Larry Graham. When you say "disco," my immediate thought is Donna Summer.
CLINE
Yes, me too. [laughter] And the Bee Gees, right.
JONES
Bee Gees. And, see, these other musics would cross into my life because I have these children, and my oldest son is a funkster. I mean, he loves funk, okay. My daughter, and only daughter, loves the Bee Gees. [laughter] So there'd be funk in one room upstairs and there'd be Bee Gees across the hall, and then I have a son who was into classical music and piano, so he was playing his classical, and then there was one that was in love with the whole Fred Astaire and that kind of music, so he was into that, and then one was into the Hawaiian, who became a—
CLINE

Slack-key guitarist.
JONES
No, no, he didn't—he became a Hawaiian dancer, and as a matter of fact, speaks old Hawaiian, took it upon himself to learn it and speaks old Hawaiian.
CLINE
Wow. Interesting. [interruption]
CLINE
We're back. A little interruption there. So other artists emerged during this time. We have people like the Commodores, which ultimately produced Lionel Richie—
JONES
Lionel Richie.
CLINE
—and you mentioned funk, ultimately Earth, Wind and Fire from here in L.A. You have the Ohio Players and other groups maybe not so famous, Lakeside. People like that start to emerge as the seventies progress, and I wondered—
JONES
Philly Sound.
CLINE
Yes, right. You've got Barry White. You've got this wide range of people, and yet all of it at a time when the music business itself is really looking very different from how it did a few years earlier, and you mentioned in our last session something you said to Aretha Franklin, that you thought her music was better when she was suffering. I'm paraphrasing. I'm not sure those were your exact words. And you just mentioned Amy Winehouse and you mentioned Adele. Earlier I was asking about the changes in the relationships with some of the artists and the people involved in the making and promoting of the music as the business starts to get bigger and the money gets bigger, and I guess this is leading into a question that is a little bit tricky to articulate, but I'm going to try it anyway, which is how do you think and how important do you think it is for artists, particularly so many of them in this genre who come from, let us say, very humble origins, to stay in touch with their origins and with their roots, and what kind of impact do you think that has on the kinds of choices they make and the kinds of decisions they make

that ultimately affect not just their music, but their lives and the lives of those people around them? A big question.

JONES

Artists are just people. It's like struggling family that somehow or another managed to get a kid through high school and then college and medical school and he or she becomes a physician, and she moves on out of her community, away from her family, his family. Artists are the same way. The difference is, though, that because they're idolized, they've got double trouble or double challenges. Not only now are they educated and quite different from their family, but they're famous and people all look up at them and to them, and a family can be very humbling, because they still remember you as the dummy or big head or klutz. You know, family just brings you right on back down, and I think that brings me back to Aretha and the late sixties, early seventies, meeting her sister, Carolyn Franklin, and Carolyn just laughing and sharing stories about how Aretha signed that first contract with Columbia Records and came back with her little fur shawl and her false ponytail, and Reverend C.L. Franklin said, "Girl, you still got to get in there and clean that kitchen floor." Anybody in their right mind would break away, where they don't have to clean the kitchen floor anymore. I mean, that's just the evolution of people. The other thing is you've got artists with people, as my friend Alice used to say, always blowing smoke up your skirt trying to make you feel better than you are, and nobody telling you, like the emperor with no clothes, nobody telling you you're out of line because everybody's afraid to say anything because they want to hang on. That's a lot for a person to deal with. And then they're struggling to still be good, your own personal demons, and if you don't think you're good, then there's alcohol and drugs and there's people following you around offering it to you.

It's a hard road to be a successful entertainer. It's a lot of hard choices, a lot of isolation, and then the feeling that everybody wants something from you. That's some shoes I would never want to have to walk in. I don't know how some of them make it through intact, and I'm trying to think of who I know that is intact. Possibly Gladys Knight. Definitely not the Jacksons, not Marvin. Stevie. Wow. Aretha, I can't say she made it through intact. I can't think of one that I could—again, I'm back to Stevie, with I'm shaking my hand a

little bit, with everything that he came here with and what he accomplished, I'd say he's done darn well, and he's still alive and well and still creative and talented and showing up.
CLINE
Right, although then the real impact and strong relevance of his own music diminished after a while, and I don't know what happened there, but it just seems like the inspiration sometimes can't—
JONES
How long can you—
CLINE
Exactly. Getting hot is one thing, staying hot is always another.
JONES
Yes, he was hot for a long time, I mean, for years and years, and quite honestly, with Stevie, I love Stevie Wonder. I love Stevie Wonder's music, but when I would listen to Stevie, some of his music, I would go into deep depression, because there's always an undertone I could always hear and feel of a whole lot of pain in his soul, so it was never jump-for-joy music for me, hardly, you know. I can remember very vaguely some deep philosophical conversations with Stevie. He was deep. He was very deep. He was looking at the whole world, and that's a heavy burden to carry, and like me, I carry an extra hundred pounds. He's carrying an extra hundred pounds. That's some insulation against—
CLINE
Well, at one point he went on TV and predicted that he was not going to live. Do you remember that?
JONES
No, I don't remember that one at all.
CLINE
It was Barbara Walters or something, and he basically prophesied that he was not going to live past the next year or something, and then he did, but things seemed to really change after that for him. I didn't know if you knew anything [unclear].
JONES
No, I haven't been in touch with him in many, many years. I've had a deep conversation, because of UCLA, with his brother Calvin, maybe two years ago and was going to try to move it to get to Stevie because I wanted to see Stevie on the honorary committee

for whatever debut we do with the new collections, but then we never had a date and it just felt all premature and silly. But it would be great to just sit with Steve and laugh and talk. That's somebody I would enjoy doing that with, and I hadn't thought about it, and I don't know how he'd feel about being pursued to just sit and talk. No interview, no benefit, just two people that have known each other for a long time laughing and talking and crying, if we want to. So whatever must have been going on with his head that he thought he was dying, that's not good, but, you know, you didn't have to be a celebrity to have all those kind of weird things happen, too, but it's extra hard for them. It's extra hard for them to be out in the limelight and to have to create, and you're as good as your last record, and then the criticism and the judging and everybody knows your business. It's not a life you would—I don't know. And people want it. I don't get it.

CLINE

So how do people like that—how can they stay grounded and keep perspective, do you think?

JONES

Keep a few people that are honest with them close to them and learn how to accept the honesty, and I don't know how you do that as an entertainer, because if you've got twenty people telling you you're great and you've got two over here telling you, "Eh, man, you're out of line. Hey, girl, you need to watch it." who are you going to listen to? You don't want to hear those two that are telling you you don't have it together, that you need to work on yourself or work on something. I don't have any solutions for entertainers. I just think they're hard lives. I mean, I got to know Tom Bell, the writer for Gamble, Huff, and Bell—I'm not saying it right, and I should be able to—at Philadelphia Sound, Kenny Gamble, Leon Huff, and Tom Bell. Again, Tom Bell, oh, deep thinker. Kenny Gamble, philosophically deep, okay. Tom moved up to Washington State or somewhere and I think does movie scores and stuff when he gets a call. That's how he's maintained his sanity as a songwriter, and he wasn't a performer. The performers really take a toll. Barry White stayed pretty sane. He was always a good person. I can't see anything but good when I think about Barry, which is really interesting. He did good music. He stayed with his community and his family up to a point. Then everything changes, but that's, again,

life. He lived large, but it always included family and old friends and people and the new people. Extravaganza at his home. I just want to say there were camels there. [laughter] Some big party. I don't remember the purpose of the party, but wandering through.
Lou Rawls stayed relatively—you know, United Negro College Fund, all the years he did that, and I don't know how lucrative it was for him. I imagine it had to have been somewhat. Nancy Wilson, we're talking jazz singer more than anything, I mean, she's still a great normal person. But you're really making me reach. If you hit me with just some top names right now, the Four Tops, I think only "Duke" is alive still, and these are my peers. The Temptations, maybe only one original Temp still here. Otis. Wow. This is not good.
CLINE
Well, Smokey Robinson's still around.
JONES
Smokey's still here. Smokey's a survivor. Smokey's a real survivor. [laughter] He was always very close to Berry Gordy. He was always a Motown man. I suppose he still is. What has he written lately, or anything, but at sixty-some years, about seventy, you know, what should he be writing? [laughs] But I think he's still performing and things, isn't he?
CLINE
Yes, I think he's doing something this summer at the Hollywood Bowl.
JONES
Yes, yes, so I guess older people still love him. I don't know if young ones do. I have no clue. Yes, Smokey's an okay guy.
CLINE
Also we mentioned funk and disco and all these things, and another wing, you could say, of the funk world is more of an alternative thing that emerged during the 1970s, was the whole George Clinton side of things, the Parliament-Funkadelic subgenre.
JONES
Archie Ivy became their Minister of Information, and he was a writer for SOUL, and he was like Dwight was with Jimi Hendrix. He was with Parliament-Funkadelic, George Clinton, and, oh, we needed to do more on them and the whole bit and we finally went for it, and

Archie went out on the road to interview them and we never got him back. [laughter]
CLINE
Absorbed into the—
JONES
He became a funkster. He was with them. He was gone. Lost. He brought them up to the office and I remember it was some of the strangest dudes I'd ever seen in my life sitting around our office for interviews and stuff. George, he played his part to the max. [laughter] Oh, my God. You're making me laugh, to think about this, you know. I'm sitting here, now all of a sudden there's Lenny sitting over in that chair, Williams, from Sly and the Stone. Lenny's sitting there and Larry Graham with his long wig. They're here together. See, you're really taking me back now. Was it George Clinton going through the airport with diapers on and pacifiers—not him, but one of his band.
CLINE
Yes, there was a guy in Funkadelic, the guitarist, who always wore diapers.
JONES
Pacifier.
CLINE
Pacifier, yes.
JONES
[laughs] This was some strange stuff, when you think about it. [interruption]
JONES
Bootsy Collins, Casper the Ghost up at the SOUL office, I see them. We're taking pictures, having fun, a wall of photos. SOUL newspaper was—we put all the issues on the wall, and so it was a hell of a backdrop anytime somebody stopped by to stand you anywhere on the wall and there's SOUL on the wall and SOUL covers and Bootsy Collins and his guitar and his backward finger motions to you and his gold tooth. God, that is another time. [laughs] I had fun with it, I think. I had fun with the fact that I was just an ordinary young woman, and here I could go from the PTA—well, I didn't do well at the PTA, but I could go from being a mother at the school, to running the business, to a funk concert, to Ken Jones and his political lunches or dinners and stuff like that, and I

could do all of that in one day. So it was a strange sweet life. It was a bit extreme. I remember at one point Raspoet Ojenke and Thurman Moore riding around in a Jeep, and they came over here to see me, and Ojenke had these long dreads and he wrote a column for SOUL. He did some writing for SOUL, and I remember my poor husband coming home and seeing these two Rastafarians in the house, and he just, like, croaked. I mean, he didn't know if we'd been invaded or what was going on, because Ken was very conservative. He loved to party, he loved people and recognition, but he was more the Motown genre.

CLINE

Right. Definitely not Funkadelic.

JONES

Not the funk. [laughter] And I was fine with any of it, because it was just all part of it. But, you know, it was a little strange now. Who am I kidding if I say they weren't? They were different. George Clinton was a genius at what he did, and the man was intellectual. He had two kids going to USC, at least one, I think.

So what you get and what it really is are—we make fun on the block here of a couple of the guys. I don't know yours, because I don't know you beyond our interviews, but next door Brook is "Betty." When we refer to him as Betty, that's his alternate ego, and he likes to bake. And two doors down is Jason, and his other name is "Orlando." He's the decorator. [laughter]

CLINE

Clearly your block is different from mine, or at least your relationship with the people who live on it is.

JONES

Yes, and these are straight married men, men with children, raising children. So to me, that's not weird that I get to know this about them. That was the same, to me, with entertainers. They had alternate egos. I mean, they were alternate personalities. The duality never puzzled me. To me, it was normal. Yes, it was very normal. So for George Clinton to be who he was and who we saw and who we heard, but to also be Father Clinton with kids in school and getting them through college, to me seems perfectly normal. Just like KISS, the group. You know, when they came out of those masks and face paints and platform shoes, they were just people. I almost could give you a couple names, but I can't at the moment.

[laughs] I want to say one dated Diana Ross, but I could be wrong about that. You know, they're just people, and that's like Michael Jackson. I'm going to go back there. This subdued, quiet, introverted kid could be that way all the way till he stepped from behind the curtain to the stage, and then there was this loud, captivating showman. His whole life there was the person that people loved onstage and there was quiet Michael behind the scenes. And so to me, that was normal. It's like when I interviewed Michael Jackson ten years ago, could be fifteen now—

CLINE

This is the Vibe magazine interview?

JONES

The Vibe magazine, thank you, because I couldn't think of it. I had lost track of him, personally. I had no personal—I mean, Michael Jackson.

CLINE

Yes, right, who by then had made the biggest-selling album of all time.

JONES

He was a superstar. I didn't know him. I knew little Michael Jackson. But going to meet with him and sitting there in the room with him much closer than you or I—he was literally right there—and just the interaction with him was weird for me, because I was still Regina Jones, publisher of SOUL, to him, but he wasn't still little Michael Jackson to me. So I wasn't that comfortable with "The King of Pop," nor was I that comfortable with how he made me feel in his respect and treatment of someone that was a parent figure, older, respected, someone to be careful around because they were a media person, and the fact he went back after our interview and reported it to Dude, or John McClain, "Man, she still looks good, just fat," you know. To me, that's preposterous, okay. So even I can be affected, having been in the business, by the growth and transformation of a superstar. I couldn't go in his house and just treat him like I would one of my children, okay, so I treated him different. I felt different, very different, with him, and probably would have been more comfortable had I gone into my old role, would have made him happy.

It's like remembering sitting with he and Janet Jackson when he had gotten where he didn't want to talk to the press anymore because

things got twisted, and I'm sitting there with Judy Spiegelman, the writer, editor, and myself, Michael, and Janet, and we're sitting in a small den in their home, and Michael is not going to talk to the writer, so every question had to be asked to Janet, and Janet would ask Michael, and Michael would respond to Janet, and then Janet would repeat it to Judy. Now, understand—

CLINE

When was this?

JONES

Four of us are in the same room. I don't remember, but it was in the seventies, early, okay. Now, that's bizarre, but as an adult, that I went along with it because I wanted the story, the interview, but there's definitely something wrong with this picture, and there's no publicist in the room, so we were trusted enough. No one babysat, but he babysat. He had his little sister, okay, and went through this dramatic protocol. Now, this is insanity.

CLINE

Well, and I was talking earlier about, in a sense, to reframe it slightly, how one can so easily basically lose perspective altogether and one's sense of reality becomes completely distorted and how one can possibly try to fend that off or can basically stay in touch or stay grounded or keep one's sanity. In the case of Michael Jackson, who's an extreme example, what do you think could have been done differently? Anything?

JONES

No, not really, not really. I mean, you could micromanage it and say, "Well, if this." It's not true. If it didn't peek through one way, it was going to peek through another. You just can't be under that extreme pressure of fame and not have a whole lot of cracks emerge. I mean, your persona has got to have taken a hell of a blow.

When Kevin and I were there with him—and I don't know how much of it I wrote in the story, but the things that got me were the worn-out loafers that he was wearing, and he was walking on the heels of them and his clothes were old and worn, shirt had stains on it. He had a bandage over his nose. We weren't taking photos that day. We weren't allowed to. He was so thin, it was scary to me. But when he came in and first saw us and stood up and I introduced him to my son, Kevin, he said, "Man, I don't remember you being

that tall.” So he was a little boy, and my son, this one, which would have been three, four years younger than him, though, was younger then, who turned out to be six-three. So he’s remembering these kids. Now, I’m having trouble remembering what we’re talking about, but here this superstar who’s been all over the world remembered those little Jones boys, okay, and made that comment or the comments that he made to me and the personal treatment. I don’t quite understand it. There’s no way I could understand it. It had me off balance. He was saying to the lady who ran his home—I guess when they sent people out on the estate in the carts, they sent escorts with them.

CLINE

Neverland Ranch.

JONES

Neverland. “Oh, she’s family. They can go wherever they want.” We were just given a cart and let loose on the property. But then when we sat down to do the interview, he changed some, and when I asked the hard questions at the end—and I fortunately saved them to the end—he completely flipped on me. I mean, it was a personality change that was astonishing right—36 inches away from one another.

CLINE

And these were the questions the magazine really wanted to ask.

JONES

Really wanted about, “Your plastic surgery,” or whatever, “Ask him about his face,” or something. And, oh, he went into a—I didn’t even know who suddenly this person was, and the only thing I can say that saved it is that I’ve been around enough strange behavior in my life that I calmed him down. Never recovered 100 percent of where we had been, but calmed him down so we could finish it with grace. But I just remember being just astonished, stunned when I saw his—I want to call it his Linda Blair act, because he really totally changed. He swole up, he stood up. I didn’t feel fear, but I just knew I had lost my interview. I mean, it was, thank God, over, and I wouldn’t have wanted to end on that foot, and then I never heard anymore from him, but then he talked about me to Dude. So he must have calmed back down, got back where—you know what I’m saying. You know, sometimes writing and putting out a publication, we would get on the bad foot with people. I remember whatever

story, after all the love we had from James Brown all the years we had it, I don't remember what we wrote, but whatever it was we did, I remember—and I guess I can say this now, because James is dead and gone, but his dear long-term, I don't know, manager, road manager, left hand, right hand, Charles Bobbitt, said to me, "Whatever you do, don't end up alone in a room with Mr. Brown." And I heeded that advice. You never had to tell me something twice, okay, and so I pretty much pulled back from him, but always made sure there were two people when there was any encounter with him, because I didn't quite know where that could go or what it meant. I just knew you didn't have to explain yourself if you told me something. But he was upset about something.
I don't know if I talked about how Sly Stone—I sent two members of my staff and a third one up, and he let the pit bull out, wouldn't let them out. I mean, these are people who can go above and beyond the law and have been covered for.
CLINE
We're back into the theme of drug and substance abuse at this point certainly when you mention Sly Stone, and another person who emerged during the seventies that is also already gone, Rick James. I don't know if you had any encounters with him, but—
JONES
I didn't.
CLINE
—a lot of extreme behavior.
JONES
The writers had to deal with more of it than me, because they were out there with them, you know. I was always pretty much protected, for some weird reason, so I didn't get really exposed to—I know a lot of journalists do, a lot of writers out there do, a lot of people do, but I never really saw the drug use. I never witnessed it with my eyes, and teasing a friend that had participated in a lot of marijuana and stuff, I said, "I remember one time being at your house and going down the hall and two, three people blocked me, wanted to know why I was going that way, and they were smoking marijuana in one particular room in the house," and I was—I guess the word was I was straight or whatever I was, but, "Keep her—.'"
CLINE
Off limits.

JONES
"She's off limits." Maybe it wasn't because I was straight. "Maybe she's press and she'll write about it." Maybe I'm flattering myself that they cared about me. Maybe it was just that, "She's got loose lips and fingers and it'll end up in SOUL." [laughs] You know what I'm saying?
CLINE
Yes, sure.
JONES
And I never thought about it that way until now. I remember going to interview with [unclear], and I went to a group's hotel room and I remember seeing pills on the floor where somebody had—whatever they were up to, they were so careless that they were on the floor, and thinking, "Oh, God, this is not something I want to deal with, groups like this." And I didn't have to. Somebody else could love the music and write about it. I didn't have to deal with that. And I don't think we ever really addressed drugs in SOUL either.
CLINE
Well, maybe not the paper specifically. We talked a little bit about the drug culture last time.
JONES
Yes, but I don't remember SOUL ever taking a stance or—
CLINE
Yes, or covering somebody and someone's—
JONES
And so for some reason, we treaded softly around that, okay. Maybe that's because it was the culture. I don't know. I don't remember any discussion or verbal decision. You know, think about it. In the sixties and the seventies we didn't talk about stuff that is all over TV now.
CLINE
Right. Oh, definitely, yes.
JONES
There were some things you just didn't speak about that were seen and done, but you didn't talk about it.
CLINE
Right. Indiscretions.
JONES

Yes, interesting.

CLINE

I guess one of the things I'm wondering, particularly when you look at some of the artists who started in the sixties at the same time that SOUL was starting and covering them, and then looking at some of the artists who came later during this decade of the seventies—we tend to think in terms of decades—especially when you see the development of things, and certainly from our twenty-twenty hindsight now, how prepared could any of these artists have been for the kind of fame and level of success some of them achieved? How prepared could they have been for that level of success and that level of popularity and that level of public scrutiny, and related to that, people who got into the music business a little later when it was bigger and more of a business, what is your sense of what the awareness was of what the price of fame could really be?

JONES

I don't think anybody ever thought of it as a price, including the parents that sold the kids into it. The fame, success, money, wealth far outreached any fears that anything would go wrong with their children or with the person themselves. I have to give it to Motown. Motown definitely had a kind of a school—and that's my name, not theirs—that worked with their artists to try to groom them and prepare them for the public face that they put on, but even that didn't deal with the personal devastation that happens, and isolation and questions.

And it's interesting that I'm hesitant to even—I mean, I remember being surprised at a party at Berry Gordy's. Maybe it was for "Pop" Gordy—he was still there and alive—and seeing Diana come totally inebriated, I mean totally, and then almost carrying her into the house. That was one of those moments that aren't supposed to happen, and she probably had had to get drunk to come, because she didn't live far from where he was living right then. I want to say both were in Beverly Hills. Or maybe she was mad at Berry. Who knows, but she was skunk drunk, okay, and they kind of whisked her off, because she was loud, speaking out of—I don't remember what she said or anything, and I doubt if we wrote about that, but I remember being quite stunned at the whole thing. You act like it's no big thing, it's normal, but it was like, "Whoa," okay. Somebody

really missed the boat there, because Motown really had a team of people always in place to prevent these kind of things from happening. They couldn't control Marvin. Later with Rick James, I mean, that's a whole 'nother era, but the early big artists, they were pretty policed pretty tightly. The Temps didn't go around committing errors publicly. Four Tops didn't. Smokey definitely didn't. I just knew of his liaison with a high school student, because personal. The Supremes didn't. They kept them clean. The Jacksons didn't. Martha Reeves and the Vandellas—and Martha was left in Detroit still. But the slick ones that came out here, they were really pretty well protected and managed, pretty tightly managed, and that's Motown, but that's also Shelly Berger, who was the manager of a great many of them. And again, I mention the name Mike Roshkind, who is still alive, who's main job was cleanup. When you think about—

CLINE

Damage control.

JONES

Damage control. I mean, we were sitting across the desk from Mike once and he needed to brag a little, and he showed me a huge check—I don't remember the amount—that Holland, Dozier, and Holland had had to pay Motown from some suit when they broke away or something, and that's what he did. I mean, you didn't mess with Motown, and I know when we messed with Motown, we'd have to see the wrath in his eyes. I do remember one time—this is a funny story, and everybody's old, so I hope they can laugh if they ever read this, and maybe they won't and they'll die first. [laughs] But, oh, God, I think it was Hazel Gordy's sixteenth birthday and it was up at Berry's house, and you drove up this hill and you parked and valets took your car, and then a limo would come and pick you up and drive you the final—up the curved road to the mansion. So several cars—you know how when you pull up and you park, any kind of a tram, but it wasn't a tram; it was black limos. If there's one person in the car, you wait till the next few cars and they load the car up and the car goes, and this is what's going on, and you observe it. And then came time for my limo, and it was Judy Spiegelman and I, and she and I hopped in the limo and the guy hit the door to close it right then. Nobody else was getting on. Well, Judy and I both looked at each other, and then you start up this

winding road, okay. This is drama in your own head, okay. But we're a little bit—looking at each other, "What's going here?" And we get up the road a little ways and the limo stops and a guy comes out of the bushes and hops in front seat. Now we're, "Oh, shit. What did we do? Are they really that mad?" I don't remember what the story was, and I'd have to look backwards to see when Hazel's birthday party was. We're like, "Ohh. Are we going to make it to the party?" is what went in our heads. "What's happening here?" And then when we got to the final top of the hill, the door was opened by Mike Roshkind, who greeted us out with a big smile. He had scared the mess out of us both. Now, I never asked Mike—and I'd love to know—was that deliberate, was it coincidence, or was it our own paranoia. I have no idea, okay. And also the imagination of writers and young people. You know what I'm saying? I don't know which was at play, and the real interesting thing was that same night at the end of the party somebody was murdered or killed up there, shot, and they completely swept it under the rug and covered it up. I don't know if it was an accident or what it was, but there was a death after the party that night. So all of that builds the dramatic suspense and the excitement and the whole bit. Yes, see, things like that would happen. I don't know. I don't know about your adventurous spirit, but there was something also very adventurous about it, even though we were scared to death when we got there and he opened that door, okay. Like I said before, Berry would play little games with you. Mike could have been playing a game with us. How much of it was psychological games? How much of it was our imagination? How much of it was just coincidence? I have no way of knowing.

CLINE

Wow. At this point in the seventies, what was, in a sense, the stature of SOUL? Did it have competition? Was it still essentially the voice of that music and for that community?

JONES

There was Black Beat, I think, which I think was a Laufer publication. There were other ones. Jet had started covering, Johnson publications, Jet Weekly. Jet was covering R and B acts and entertainers, definitely the Motown big ones. So there was competition. It didn't mean that one publication got more access than us. It meant that we were there with them, where before we

had been kind of on our own little ahead-of-the-game thing. We kicked in so many doors of what we perceived to be discrimination or racism or a different set of rules for black media. Anytime there was an obstacle that we weren't getting what we want, we didn't go quietly to the back of the room. We kicked the door in. We'd ask for meetings. We'd ask for change. You know, that was that era, the late sixties, the seventies, of a certain militancy. There was a certain entitlement of things being corrected and being made right. We didn't understand "no." I remember the few times—I want to say I went to the Academy Awards once or twice. I think the second time I gave my pass for one of my kids to go with my husband. We went to the Grammys regularly. So these were things that we weren't at first admitted to that we got admitted to, and I wish I could sit here and tell you that, oh, just automatically they accepted us and invited us. No, we had to demand. We had to rock their ship somewhat. That's not right, but we did.

CLINE

And as SOUL has progressed through the seventies and, as we've been saying, the music business gets bigger, gets wealthier, gets glossier, slicker, who—you mentioned a few, but who were some of the notable writers and photographers who worked for SOUL during those times that might be particularly important to know about in terms of maybe what they did after SOUL?

JONES

Well, I talked about Howard Bingham. He was our beginning base photographer. He's still alive and well and was the personal photographer and even manager for a time for Muhammad Ali. He still may be with his wife. I'm not sure. Howard's a personal friend. I never asked him—I mean, is he an Ali? There's no definition. Bill Cosby, he was a photographer for Bill and like part of the Cosby family and still very close to the Cosbys and still a dear friend of mine. They're making a movie right now at HBO on Muhammad Ali, and he called me the other day. He was just thrilled they called and invited him back because he was such a part of it. Oh, God, name the actor who's a big star in the movie. He said, "He knew who I was." [laughter] Howard has stayed humble and himself for damn near fifty years. He's still the same Howard, Howard Bingham. Roland Charles, who shot the Jacksons, he pioneered and did a lot of things with black photographers, had an Association of Black

Photographers, and they fought and did things, and his collection is out at Northridge, of photographers, and he died of a heart attack at a very early age, and still friends with his wife. Earl Fowler was an early one, come and gone, passed away, and it's interesting, photographers don't seem to have a long life. Eric Whitaker was one, again, died. Win Muldrow captured some incredible images, went down, had a fabulous lab that we used. IRS came in one time, seized everything, shut him down. He's gone on. Joe Flowers. Wow. He's gone.

The next era that was really brought in that really made some major changes with us, Bruce Talamon, alive and well. He's published a book on Bob Marley, working on something else, the Tuskegee Airmen now. Howard was a studio photographer for films being made. He was part of the union. Bruce got into that union and worked there for a long time. Doesn't get calls now. Bobby Holland took us into studio photography and proper lighting. He'd worked with a couple of the—pardon me—white boys that did it, and then he brought it to Bruce and to SOUL. Remember the fun of lighting Donna Summer and the special ragged photo edges, arty, you know, stuff. Still alive and well. Nobody is thriving. Howard is probably doing the best of all. Howard is probably one of the easiest people on this planet to get along with, so I would say that's part of his longevity. He never says a bad thing about anybody, never has. Even when you know him personally and you try to get the dirt, you don't get it. So everything is safe with Howard Bingham. [laughs] I'm sure there are some I should be remembering and don't after that, but these are the ones that have remained friends. Our most renowned writer/editor is Leonard Pitts, USC, came to us at nineteen, a writer and became an editor. Miami Herald, is it, syndicated columnist, Pulitzer Prize winner.

J. Randy Taraborrelli. Supremes Fan Club. Fan as a kid, wrote into SOUL, came to California, ended up writing for SOUL, became an editor at the end, the last few years, published books on Diana Ross, Elizabeth Taylor. It's a bunch of them. Then there are a lot of others that have come and gone, became Times writers for a period, or reviewers, Connie Johnson, Marsha Brown, yes, probably some that I'm forgetting—no, not probably. There's definitely probably a whole lot of them I'm not saying right now. Joe Nazelle, who was the editor of Players magazine for many, many years, did

a short term as an editor of SOUL. He's passed on. Fred Beauford out of New York, he had Neworld magazine, artsy magazine. Fred was always artsy, editor of SOUL for a short period of time, back in New York doing his art thing, and I should say the name of his publication. It's more online. I can't tell you what it is, but a more cultural publication. Lots and lots of people. Lots and lots of people. Bill Van Doren. Hadn't heard from or knew anything about him in forty years and somehow or another ran into him on Facebook or somewhere, artist living somewhere in New England, shooting the sunrise or sunset every day for a year—or drawing it. Not shooting it; drawing it. Put out books and other things, art shows and stuff. He was a sandwich salesman, he tells me, and I vaguely remember, and we talked and I gave him a shot at writing and he said it saved his life. He's a white guy. I just happen to mention that because SOUL was always very integrated in our staffing. It wasn't so much about color, but it was about ability and the love of the entertainment, and then sometimes there were just plumbers, that we needed to fill a hole. There were a few holes. One editor one time left our office so dismayed that she was headed to the printer with the copy, threw it all in the trash and disappeared. So there'd be stories like that, and we had to recreate the whole newspaper overnight. [laughs] I don't remember her name, thank God. Some ended up publicists for PR firms. Some worked for Billboard later or Cashbox or Record World. We had an alumni party I don't know how many years ago. Amazing number of people that showed up, Mike Terry. Yes, just lots of them. Yes, it would be interesting where some of them are. I wish I had the time and energy to devote to going backward down my road. This, to me, is a real luxury to sit here and do this, because I'm not a reflective person on the past. I live really in the present, and what passed is usually really past and gone, so it's a real struggle for me to try to even to go back there. SOUL was from 1966, to me, up until about '81, but I wasn't that involved probably the last three, four years. Really turned the reins over, and then after SOUL, I did a stint as a publicist first as an employee and then my own PR firm, the NAACP Image Awards, and then I reinvented myself again and then worked for twelve years with Crystal Stairs childcare development nonprofit, and these are each—even though they interconnected in some weird way which I never intended or planned. I don't know what

this phase is right now. This is closure. This is getting the SOUL files to UCLA, to Indiana University, a few more key places that I think historically the information should be left for research or interest. And then what to do with the ones I have beyond the ones they have. Do you just burn them, throw them away? But I'm not going to carry them the rest of my life on my back. I see no point in that. I really don't.

So that's why I donated to UCLA. I thought, "Oh, that's a good institution. It's been here forever. It'll be here forever. It's safe. It's not my responsibility." So I felt this urgency, in a way, to finish up the work with the turnover to UCLA, because I want to be free to be about what my next phase is, and it's really hard while you're still dancing with your toe trying to go backwards. I'll be seventy this September, and I don't know if I'm going to live another moment or another twenty years, but I want to explore a whole lot of other things, and they're not so much going backwards. It's more about spirituality and feelings and personal development, which I'm not comfortable talking about now. But when we started, I said, "I don't want to talk about Marvin Gaye today because I won't be kind," but I've spent the last six years of my life working on his wife, Jan Gaye's, story of her life with Marvin Gaye and before Marvin and since Marvin, and we had a very tumultuous conversation yesterday, and I wouldn't call it a conversation, because a conversation goes two ways. I took a hell of a verbal beating yesterday with her just being honest about her feelings, and I'm proud to say I did not attack back nor defend nor hurt. It took a lot of energy and a lot of effort, and some of who she is and has become was before Marvin, but a lot of it is because of Marvin, because in our interviews we spent months talking, and I would say, "You know you were an abused wife. You know you were abused woman," until finally she could say to me one day—I said, "You know why?"

She said, "I was an abused woman." So that's why I'm not right past that part of Marvin right now at this moment after enduring that. So I really want closure. I loved being in the entertainment industry while I was there. I don't hold nostalgic feelings unless encouraged to go there and talk about it. There's too much going on today. [laughter]

CLINE

We get to talk a little bit about some of that too.
JONES
Life today is wonderful. You know what I'm saying?
CLINE
Yes, yes. I don't think this will stir up anything. One of the reasons I was going to mention Marvin Gaye is just because, aside from the fact that What's Going On, usually important record, came out in '71 or whatever, still sounds great today, just in the last week there was some coverage of a project that people are doing now where they're doing essentially this big remix of What's Going On and involving all these new younger contemporary current artists, many of whom I am not familiar with, in some ways not only proving the continued relevance or importance of something like this, but also, according to just my own opinion, pointing out just how impossible it is to match it in any way, something even that's now that, quote, "old," unquote, that still remains essentially sort of untouchable.
JONES
Marvin Gaye and Jan Gaye hooked up in 1973, and so I've been so immersed into her life with him. It would be interesting, what I know and what I know. [interruption]
CLINE
The last thing, "The Brothers' Love," I mentioned the comic strip that was in—yes, there was just such an amazing—it's like a foreshadowing of What's Going On, in a way, the whole Vietnam/ghetto irony juxtaposition, and it was very interesting to see that.
JONES
Marvin Gaye was a musical genius. Even with the angst, I say that. The man, the music was given through him and the lyrics came through him, okay.
CLINE
Thank you so much.
JONES
Thank you. [End of May 11, 2012 interview]

1.5. Session 5 (May 25, 2012)

CLINE
Today is May 25, 2012. This is Alex Cline interviewing Regina Jones at her home once again in Los Angeles. It's a kind of a weirdly

tropical day with unpredictable weather, although we're enjoying it quite a bit. This is session five. It's been a couple of weeks since we were sitting here talking, and we're going to pick up where we left off. Good morning.

JONES

Good morning.

CLINE

It's already been a very interesting morning here.

JONES

It's ten a.m. and I'm worn out. [laughter]

CLINE

Last time we were talking largely about the seventies, although I have to say that the late sixties keep coming back. They just won't go away. It was such an important and pivotal time for so much in the world, including SOUL. I wanted to also mentioned—this'll probably come up too—in case I don't get this, one of the things that came up last time, since we were talking about the seventies, was disco, and two names came up in the course of this last session. One was, pretty unavoidably if we're going to talk about disco, Donna Summer, and also the Bee Gees, and since we last met, both Donna Summer and one of the Bee Gees have died, and this is the way it's been lately. We have a lot of people in this music historically or even more recently, people like Whitney Houston, for example, people who are just leaving us, and as I was pondering this, I also got to thinking about how many of the artists that came up during the seventies, even the late seventies, and some of them in the eighties, who already are no longer with us, and that, of course, includes some of the people who started earlier, some of whom we've talked about and some of whom we haven't.

We touched a bit on Marvin Gaye last time very little, because we were kind of steering around that one, but I started to think of all kinds of people who have come and gone, people like Curtis Mayfield, Isaac Hayes—now I'm going to forget, because there were so many I thought of yesterday—Teddy Pendergrass, just a ton of them. And we talked last time about Michael Jackson. He's no longer with us. I wanted to ask you, since you're still here and you knew many of these people, who were some of the people, other than the ones that we've mentioned from the sixties that were just really starting out, who were some of the people that you really

developed friendships with, personal relationships that really went beyond the professional, some who may be gone now, but some who are still with us? And we talked last time about Stevie Wonder, for example, who is very much still with us.

JONES

I didn't really develop personal friendships with the artists, basically. We were writing about them, and once you become friends, then there's stuff off record, and I believed in pure journalism. There was nothing off the record, and so I never put them in that position or myself, but there was a lot of social exchange. Friends call each other to see how you are on the phone and just chat. That didn't really happen with many, and the ones that that did happen with didn't become extremely successful. One that comes up that was a dear friend was Rhetta Hughes, who you've probably never heard of. Rhetta, I want to say, somehow or another was tied in with Melvin Van Peebles, but the mind is a little fuzzy then. Became a very close friend for a period of time before she left the state.

Developed a friendship later after SOUL more with Mary Wilson from The Supremes. I knew her professionally. We'd laughed and chatted, but after it became closer, one of the later Supremes that I'm still in touch with on a regular basis, Sherry Payne, Freda Payne, and the two were sisters, you know. Aretha knows me, I know Aretha, but I wouldn't consider us friends, but I do believe she would probably respond if I reached out to her. Same with Gladys Knight. You also get me to thinking about—as the people who have passed on, I just read in this morning's email loads that famous radio personality out of New York, Hal Jackson, passed, and I remember Hal before he became the superstar he became, and Hal must have been, like, ninety about now. He had something called "The Talented Teens," and he had these contests across the country, and we would work with him here, and I remember judging one of the contests. So he was a disc jockey, but he was also concerned about our youth, so he did these contests with "The Talented Teens." Then I think further about The Temptations and The Four Tops. Like, there's only one of The Four Tops still alive. I believe it's Duke. There's only one Temptation still alive, and that's Melvin Franklin. Thank God Stevie's still here, and it was delightful to see him perform the other night on Masterpiece or whatever it

was. Anyhow, it was at the White House, to see him perform, because I watched him from, like, a young Stevie Wonder.

CLINE

Right. Little Stevie Wonder.

JONES

Little Stevie Wonder, and now he's an elder, basically. I don't know what his age is right off the top, but I'd say he's sixty, sixty-something.

And they have been going at a rapid pace. When Donna passed on, and this is a story that just came out from her passing, two of the photographers, Bruce Talamon and Bobby Holland, on us exchanging that Donna had died, it came up about the photo session we did with her. The PR person said that we had—I don't remember if it was twenty minutes or whatever it was, so the guys went all the way to setting up the lighting. We used the equipment boxes that the lighting came in, like music equipment, those big trunk-type things, stationed it all around and just set up for the photo shoot, and she came in and she was so impressed with this top-of-the-line photo session that had been set up for her, and she started laughing and posing and talking, and when they said, "Well, we were told we had twenty minutes, so we wanted to get it," she hung out for four hours.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

She said, "You guys are so professional. I want to hang out with you. I want you to do more." And she just literally hung with them and played with them, and I was there for a period of it. I couldn't hang the four hours. I had to go back to whatever I was doing. But I remember that. I remember what a darling she was. She was just down to earth. She was real. She posed, she played, she teased them. It was fun, and it was cover story with a center spread of her sitting on one of the trunks. I can see it like it was yesterday. I'm glad we did that then. And it was a shock that she died when I read that, because I know she's younger than me, and I think it always surprises me when someone younger than me is gone, because I don't want to think about the fact that I'm getting older.

CLINE

It's very sobering always.

JONES
Very awful. It's horrible, actually. Hal was ninety, you know. It's okay. And then I start thinking, "That's not that far." And that's right, that Donna passed since we talked, and who else did you just say?
CLINE
Robin Gibb of the Bee Gees.
JONES
I know the Bee Gees because my daughter, my youngest child, loved the Bee Gees, and so she played their music upstairs all the time. I could hear it going, and I remember going with her to one of the Bee Gees concerts. I had to be diverse a little bit to get along with the kids, too, besides just what we covered in SOUL. As a matter of fact, she and I went to the Amphitheater to see Elton John, and was an open theater in those days. It was a wonderful show, but, yes, she was into Elton John and the Bee Gees and other people like that that were not part of soul music, but they were soulful. What was it, Chuck Brown, I think, passed away also, and I remember Chuck Brown, but I don't remember a lot about him. And all of that's just in the last two weeks since we saw one another, so we're giving, like, four death reports or three right now, and that's very sobering.
CLINE
You said you had a son who was into funk in the seventies, and you mentioned that this is the time when—you talked about George Clinton.
JONES
He loved George Clinton and Larry Graham.
CLINE
Right. Graham Central Station.
JONES
I remember Larry sitting up here in the living room in one of these chairs, big old wing chairs, with his long hair hanging all down, and Lenny Williams would come over. Lenny became a friend for a while. I'm glad to see that good things are happening right now with Lenny. He's working and looking good and doing things.
Chaka Khan was never a personal friend, but she was very close friends with one of my writers, so I'd get all these reports on Chaka all the time. And now the people that I know from the industry are

writing emails back and forth about she just performed somewhere and she's lost weight and she's back to the—she looks like the Rufus days. She's back, because she's had one hell of a hard journey, and it makes me very happy to hear that she's doing okay. And immediately when I say, "Chaka," it makes me think of—I want to say Otis Smith, who was a music executive at ABC Records that was on Beverly Boulevard, and Otis always drove his blue Rolls-Royce. And I remember being a little upset with Otis, though, because I had heard that often Chaka would go up to the office and get cash from Otis to feed her disease, and I never liked that. I didn't want to learn that about anybody, that executives were supporting that, even though I think intellectually I know that a lot went on to keep their artists happy and attached and sick.

CLINE

Enablers.

JONES

Enablers, total enablers. But Otis would do that to Chaka on a regular basis, and their record company was just—we were on Melrose about the 8200 and they were about 8000 on Beverly Boulevard, so we were close. Just that whole tidal wave of—and you say "Donna Summer," and I think Nellie Prestwood, because that was her publicist. Yes, the connections of the people and their publicists and stuff, working with you and doing these tapes has awakened a lot of information in my head. There's so much missing because it's so long ago.

But I loved going to a Chaka Khan concert and sitting there and watching her. She literally worked, you know. And I don't know what year it was, but what was the year for Wattstax? I don't really know.

CLINE

Wow. That's a good question. I don't know off the top of my head, but, yes, I'd forgotten about that.

JONES

Yes, I mean, that was huge, and those were friends that put that on. That was Al Bell out of Tennessee and his right hand, at the time, marketing man, Larry Shaw, and then Bill Cherry. That group came out here and put on Wattstax.

CLINE

Wattstax Festival.

JONES
That was out of the Stax Records and that was at the Sports Arena, and it was, like, filled to capacity. And again, back to my photographers, Bruce and Bobby, they had convinced me to allow them to hire a helicopter to fly over to get an aerial shot, which we did, of that, and I do think Bob Jones at Motown ended up picking up the helicopter cost for us to do that photo shoot. [interruption]
JONES
Anyhow, it was a huge concert. It was fabulous. Everybody you could think of us was onstage, and you talk about Isaac Hayes, and that was during his chains era, big scores of chains hanging on him, and Jesse Jackson up on the stage. I'm seeing it. But, see, again, for me, the most outstanding thing was that it almost got into kind of a riotous-type thing towards the end, and I think I had all my boys with me, probably not Karen, and we got back to the station wagon, which we were parked as, like, part of the working people there. We were missing my youngest boy, Kory, and the crowd was flying out and I'm trying to go back, and I remember Bobby Holland stopped me and literally physically held me back, because I was going after my child, and put me on the trunk of station wagon and said, "You stay here. I'm gonna go get him." And Bobby went and got Kory, came back.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
But I remember being really frightened, because I had the kids there, and before that, I don't remember ever having been afraid at a concert. I'd take the boys or Karen anywhere, but not when it was so huge. It wasn't like gangs or anything today. It was just so many people, and I don't know if they had come at the stage or what it was, but for some reason, they were coming the way to exit that we were trying to go out. But that was an exciting, very exciting concert for me, in my memory, and then that they made a film about it later was wonderful. But to be there is, I guess, what people talk about—what's the latest one now, Coachella?
CLINE
Coachella.
JONES

Coachella. They're trying to revisit and do things like that, and they did it for years with the big ones in New York. But those were some of the wonderful funny memories, and like one of my sons just said to me this morning—we were talking about children growing up private schools versus public schools and how if you go to a private school, your chances are pretty much 90 percent that your kids are going to go on to college, and so you only have 10 percent that they're going to fall in the wrong crowd and not go, whereas in public school it's probably almost the opposite. But then the child misses its childhood because they're a student studying from the beginning, and my son was saying he had a wonderful childhood and that he remembers how much fun he had as a kid, and he said so when he became twenty-something, he was ready to grow up, because he had played, whereas so many kids now are playing all through their twenties and they never come out of their adolescence because they've been cheated out of the freedom of childhood and they never quite come back together again. And we were just this morning having that discussion.

So my kids really got to benefit from entertainment from me being in that industry. None of them said, "Oh, wow, I want to grow up and do this." I mean, they pretty much were a lot more—they knew there was more than wanting to be a singer or an actor. There's a lot of other jobs to do, and even if they cared about the industry, it was more behind the scenes and than in front of the scenes, and they got to witness what a hard road it is for a celebrity.

CLINE

Well, also in the seventies, at least via hindsight, there started to be a lot of what we might term excess in the business, and the flipside of that was when we get into the early eighties and the industry itself is having some pretty hard times, and this certainly had a major impact on your magazine. If you can, describe the conditions at SOUL as we're heading out of the seventies and into the eighties, maybe including some of the—maybe not editorial, but perhaps at least graphics changes, the look of the magazine, maybe the content, but things that were going on at the magazine to reflect what was going on in the music business as underneath there starts to be this kind of erosion of security in the entertainment world.

JONES

I don’t remember what year we did a story, a series, called The Men Behind the Music, and it was done intentionally to do profiles on each of the record companies and their executives that ran it, and it was intentionally a demonstration that there were really no black people with power or that could make big decisions, meaning sign a check or okay something for a large check, and too of the few that could were both, it’s interesting, at CBS Records, Columbia Records, Sony, all one. Jim Tyrell, Jimmy Tyrell, could sign an act and okay a recording for several hundred thousand dollars, and that was rare, and it wasn’t just black acts; he could do other acts as well. LeBaron Taylor was publicity. Jimmy was more marketing and production. LeBaron was publicity, but he had a heck of a lot of power, and he was a former disc jockey from Detroit and an executive at CBS Records or Sony. I can’t remember the names in those days, what they were for sure. He was very instrumental in getting blacks in the industry involved in the black political conference, the Black Caucus, as they called it, and got financial support for black politicians out of the record industries and got others to follow suit, and that was politically very important, because it had always been done, but blacks were not included. It’s surprising to me, in retrospect in 2012, how really—when you go from the sixties and where African Americans or blacks or Negroes were back then—

CLINE

Right. Even in the early pages of SOUL [unclear].

JONES

In the early pages of SOUL, to the evolution of some semblance of power and wealth through the seventies, and then the demise of black music as we came to the end of the seventies into the eighties, because when black music became a big hit, it was no longer black music. It became popular music, and the financial implications were on the pop music side, no longer on the black side. So now we’re in the late seventies, the early eighties, and then after SOUL, the transition into, I guess, the rap genre.

CLINE

Yes, rap starts up.

JONES

Starts up, which slowly took everybody out of the studios and the high-end recordings into the garages again. But then it became a

multimillion-dollar industry, bigger than life itself. But while that was happening, there was really less and less to no music at all, to where we are now, that the big fight is how to get the artist paid for their recordings, because with our technology, nothing's sacred. Everything's just for the open market, and then there's no real music industry per se. I'm really grateful that I don't have to traverse that, I mean, because I don't even know who I'd want to get to know to try to put a SOUL out. Everything's online, so the paper copy of a book or a magazine or a publication, there's still an abundance of magazines on the newsstand, but where would a spot for something like SOUL even exist, the niche? I don't see it. There's just too much.

CLINE

Well, there are all these amazingly specialized magazines for types of music or all kinds of other things, but especially now with publishing being what it is, which is basically going away, they can't exist either. I mean, everything becomes totally genrefied into these tiny little categories, but then the artifact is not valued anymore.

JONES

No, not at all, and, I mean, even most of these magazines, I've gotten several surveys from general population magazines asking about would I read it online. As an elder who grew up liking something tangible in my hands, no. I only like headlines online. If I have something really big to read, even on the computer, I need to print it out to look at it and walk away with it and put it down on the table, maybe eat. But at the computer just looking at that screen, I look at it far too much already.

I love people who listen to their music on the computer, but I've tried a few times. It doesn't work for me. I don't want to hear my music at the computer. I mean, I just don't. I loved it in the car. The car was it. So I don't know what people are doing, and then I have people—like, I must have, I don't know, maybe a hundred CDs left. I've given away or sold all the LPs, all of that, and the few CDs that I have left, I've had several people in the last two weeks say, "Girl, you need to get yourself an iPod. You can load six hundred, seven hundred songs." And I stare blankly at them because I can't even imagine me sitting down to download six or seven hundred songs. I wonder, do these people have these kind of gaps in their

lives that they have so much free time? I don't know. I wonder what I'm missing, because I'm still too busy to sit down and try to pick out my favorite six hundred songs. If you had a gun to my head right now, I don't think I could give you ten or twenty.

CLINE

But also the audio quality keeps going down the more people rely on that sort of technology, so MP3s and stuff. It doesn't sound the same.

JONES

Yes, it's not the same. So I'm at a loss, to be honest with you, Alex. I'm at a real loss. I'm really at a stop right now, and I guess that's part of why it was so important to me to want to preserve SOUL. I understood that there was some historical value in information the way it was, then these little sound bites that went on for a long time, to now they're more than sound bites on the computer, that history needed to be documented and I needed to do my part in whatever I played in it, giving it to an institution that would keep it. I didn't need it to be in my garage. I mean, when I hear the horrors of people going, and if they haven't set that up, where does their stuff go? Into the vaults or the homes of these individual buyers who collect this stuff. What's the point? The history is for people in general. We should be able to look back on our history.

CLINE

So the music business is sort of—it's in crisis right now, because it doesn't know what it is, and it was in crisis around 1980 as well. What impact did that have on SOUL?

JONES

And '80, that's thirty years.

CLINE

How did things change—I mean, SOUL didn't last much longer after that.

JONES

Well, I think we went till '82. It started getting hard to get advertising because there were so many people vying for the same pockets. More publications had sprung up and it was harder to get interviews, it was harder to get advertising, it was harder to get anything, any cooperation out of the record companies. If I can get a story in People, why do I want be in SOUL?

CLINE

What changes, if any, did you find yourself having to make to maybe appeal to more and therefore maybe more advertisers to interest them?

JONES

I hit the circuit for a long time on selling ads to advertising agencies in New York and Chicago and Detroit, breaking through that, and it was just almost impossible to do. We'd reach out, and, like, the Doobie Brothers were on the cover of SOUL at the very end. This was not my choice, but I went along with it. Barry Manilow.

CLINE

Oh, my.

JONES

Talk about a reach. And whoever that was, was running it at the time, editorial, was trying to feel that if we did something on Barry, we might pick up some advertising from that genre, which was insane, but I didn't put my foot down and say no. It was really hard. The distributor was having major problems at that time. We were having trouble collecting from the distributor at that time. Everything was just kind of really hard. It was probably no harder than it was at the beginning, but sixteen years later, it's hard to go all the way back to the intensity of the labor that's required at a beginning, and I know me, for one, I was really tired. I think that was the third—I'll call it a recession in advertising that had happened, and I'd survived two with SOUL, and I didn't feel like whatever that fight was for the third one. I pretty much turned the reins over, back over to my husband, Ken, and to J. Randy Taraborrelli, became the editor and was running things, and I took a hiatus to save my life. I knew I couldn't handle the strain anymore, and I don't know if I shared it on tape or not, but my mother was going through a bout of cancer and a few strokes and stuff—she died in '83—and that went on for several years.

CLINE

How old was she when this started?

JONES

I want to say she was seventy.

CLINE

JONES

Maybe a year older than I am now. So there was a lot of guilt that I hadn't really been able to be there for her, and that I was there for

her as much as I could, but it was a very stressful situation, and my twenty-year marriage was coming to an end at the same time. So I just didn't have the stamina nor desire or mental capacity to deal with all of it at the same time, so I just stepped aside, like I said, and allowed some things to happen. Out of relationships, I must say, we did get a flood of advertising when I would make a call and try to get something. I had told Randy in running the publication that he had pretty much carte blanche, except there was one thing he had to do, he had to make sure the back taxes from employee withholding were paid every month, and I had made a deal, even met with them, that it was a certain rounded-out amount that he had to pay, and we're talking a few hundred dollars. When IRS put a lien on everything I had—

CLINE

You knew things weren't—

JONES

I called them and they said the taxes hadn't been paid, and I promptly walked around the corner, I believe, or sent one of my young adult children around the corner to the liquor store, grocery store, Wilton Ranch Market, picked up a copy of SOUL, brought it back to me. I went through it and I looked at the advertising that was in there, and there was a number of ads in there, and I proceeded to call every one of those record companies and tell them not to pay the check, and I called IRS and said, "Here's where your money is and here's where you need to go after it. I need those liens off of my life." And so that folded the publication. Yes, I called the death. No. And it was about a broken promise and somebody really—so I still had enough relationships and contacts that I was able to do that. I was through. I was through. I was through. I felt betrayed, and I don't like betrayal and I don't take too kindly to it, and I was through with SOUL.

I became even sicker, though, when I did it, because SOUL was my sixth child and it was my crippled child who I probably gave more energy to—no, let's get real. I gave a lot more energy to it than I did any one of my children, because it was a very crippled, needy child, and I really devoted a huge amount of my life to it, and so when I finally made the decision that this kid had to go, it was costing too much emotionally, it was like I had just pulled the lifesaving plug from one of my own children, and I was really

devastated then, but it had to happen. I've never had any retrospective thoughts that, "Oh, if I only could have," or, "If I had only done this." I have no regrets on knowing that that's what I had to do. That was the call I had to make if I wanted to stay alive and keep functioning. I think I've guided my life a lot since then, except for a few hiatuses, of knowing that strokes run very heavy in my family and high blood pressure, and that I can't take—when anything's sending me over the top, it has to go, and I pretty much followed that, except for my last ten-year stint at something else impossible that I got a hold of and rode all the way into the sunset.

CLINE

We'll get to that later.

JONES

Yes. Compulsive personality, yes. I mean, to this day, in my office, if you go in there and look right now, there's boxes of SOUL issues that my eldest son has been helping, because this is something I've been trying to do for a long time, but the rare ones, starting with the first issue, there's one copy left that I have of the first issue of SOUL. I know UCLA has one, but, say, the first year of SOUL, wrapping in plastic folders and just seeing what's there and how many gaps there are and having a correct list of what I have besides what UCLA has, still taking care of SOUL.

CLINE

How much optimism, if any, did you have that after you turned it over to J. Randy Taraborrelli—

JONES

I was hoping for a miracle. Didn't think it could happen, but really thought maybe it needed a new direction, and also, before Randy really had it, I'm pretty sure during that time I signed it back over to Ken, or maybe I didn't sign it, but I gave it—

CLINE

Yes, relinquished it.

JONES

Yes, I relinquished everything and was hoping that his creative genius could do something, but it was a time of completely falling out of grace with the universe. Mama—I was an only child, and that was big. SOUL, like I said, was my sixth child, and that was big.

CLINE

And your marriage. I mean, what was happening there? You turned it over to Ken, but where was he [unclear]?

JONES

We had separated, and he was doing another publication, and that publication and the TV news, and I had basically had a—I'm going to call it a nervous breakdown. I mean, it was diagnosed as that. I wasn't hospitalized, but I was there. It was there and I was fighting for my life and my own sanity. I think when IRS really came in on me and put liens on everything that I had worked so hard for and literally taken all the money out of the bank accounts that I was living—the SOUL account, the Regina account, anything that had my name on it—I didn't expect that and I was blindsided with that. I didn't know that that's what they did, because it had never happened before. I think that devastated me, because I didn't know what I could do next, how I was going to take care of the kids, how anything was going to exist after that.

I never reached out to anybody in the entertainment industry and asked for help or anything, because I've always worked for myself, for what I want and need, and I think that I've never liked the word "no," so if I don't ask you for anything, I don't have to hear it, and Ken had no problem, and I'm sure that he went to a few people and got support and got help as much as he could. I don't know. But even to this day, there's a few friendships that have always had this kind of air about themselves that, like, they'd done something for me some day or owed them something that I'm, like, blind to, and a couple unresolved ones I said, "Before we die, I'm going to ask them, 'Do you think you benefited me in some way? Because you didn't. I didn't know anything about it.'" That's just me. Maybe that's my ego, my pride. I have no idea what it is, but it's part of who I am and who I tried to make SOUL be, no owing anybody anything as long as I could, and I'm pretty sure that's, at the end, part of my willingness to relinquish also. Everything was becoming compromise, and compromise and didn't suit me well. I didn't wear it well. This morning I was laughing because I had a conversation with my contractor, and the bottom line is he's trying to get a check and I was saying, "Until you finish this, you're not getting a check." And we went round and round. It was a very pleasant conversation, and the last thing was he was just like I used to be. He's got to cover his construction company.

When I had to run SOUL, the bottom line is I needed to collect from people that owed us in order to pay the printer to print the next issue, and I don't know why it was the first time I heard that so clearly, that you may have the best staff and team in the world, but the bottom line, it sits on your shoulders to pay your employees and have them go to the bank and cash their check. I always prided myself—and I've had it come back to me—that if you and I made a deal, if it was $30 or if it was $300, we were going to honor what that agreement was, no matter what, and you could count on me that your check would be there, and if it was promised for tomorrow, it would be delivered tomorrow with no strings. It wouldn't be, "Here's the check, Alex, but you've got to hold it till a week from Friday." I didn't play that. That was not me. It was my word. I was a woman of my word, and it was important that other people were that way too. Randy and I met and had lunch with another friend and made our amends to one another.

CLINE

When was this?

JONES

I don't know, eight, nine years ago. Basically I had just released it all emotionally and mentally and had moved on, but a friend intervened and felt it was important that there were still SOUL files that Randy had and I didn't have.

CLINE

Yes, I was going to ask about that.

JONES

So Randy returned them all to me.

CLINE

He did?

JONES

Yes.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

What he had, he returned, and even put together a special box with the personal photos of myself or my kids that were in this box, and then framed a picture of me, which I'm thinking now, where is it, gave to me sitting at my desk.

CLINE

This is all stuff that at one point he denied that he even had.
JONES
For years he denied that he ever had.
CLINE
Man. [laughter]
JONES
And he's successful now. I mean, right now he's working on another Kennedy book of the Kennedy family. He did a Marilyn Monroe book. He's done a couple Kennedy books.
CLINE
Are these all hatchet jobs essentially?
JONES
I won't comment on that because I haven't read them. He gave me an autographed Marilyn, and one day I will read it. But I have to admire his tenacity. This was a kid from Philadelphia who was a Supremes Fan Club member who came to California and endeared himself enough and entrusted himself enough, and, I mean, he was really a kid when he came here. He survived all these years, and I don't think he's that concerned about black music anymore. I mean, Kennedy, where do you go from there? He's an authority on TV. You'll see him on TV. Yes, and I don't have any hard feelings for—I feel good that I spot talent. I always did. I could recognize talent. Even if it was in the rough, I could see it. He's not a bad guy. He was obsessed with what he was doing and did what he thought he had to do. Yes, I feel really good about that, that we got to that point and moved things to that, and I'm very happy for his success.
CLINE
So when you turned things over to him at the very end of SOUL, and you said you relinquished to Ken as well, what, if any, interaction or what kind of relationship did Ken and Randy have at the end there, or was there any?
JONES
I don't really remember. I really had to step off there at the end. I was so stepped off—and it's really so funny, because Steve Kopstein [phonetic], who was a sixteen-year-old Fairfax High School student when we hired him as an after-school worker, who stayed with SOUL until SOUL's demise, stuck with me all the way, finished college. I know I told the story about his parents saying he should go out and get a real job. He went out and applied for jobs all over,

found a few jobs, came back to me and said, "With my college degree, I want to work for SOUL, and I want to stay here if you'll have me." And he and I were honest from that age, that, "My parents don't feel this is a real job," blah, blah, blah. They were nice. His dad owned a service station up here on Fairfax and something or another, lovely Jewish couple, old school, though. He stayed through all of it, and then when I relinquished to Ken, he tolerated and put up with that and with Randy. He tolerated and put up with that. He stayed until the very, very end. We had lunch, he and Helen and I, as recent as forty-five days ago, and we get together at least twice a year or more, and I love him dearly. Grown man, three of his own kids, one in medical school, you know. He would have the stories. I would have to talk to him to get the stories, because he would remember. The only thing I can say, whatever state I was in—and he was so young, he wouldn't have really understood it—he took care of my business. He would fuss at me if he saw something out of line that he felt I'd spent too much for. He handled it. He was good, and he did the best he could to look out for me.

He can say to me at this stage of life, "I love you," without batting an eye, and I can say it to him. It's a hell of a feeling to have all these years later about somebody who you worked with and who has known you most of their life, and they're not related to you or stuck with you, because of anything like that other than respect, and it's mutual. Yes, I got tears as I'm thinking about. I mean, I've been to his home. I know his wife. I mean, it's like if I have a party here, alumni or something, he's here in a heartbeat.

CLINE

What did he wind up doing?

JONES

Insurance salesman, more commercial. He sells all kinds, but more commercial.

CLINE

How many people were on the staff at SOUL when it ended? Do you know?

JONES

It was probably down to Randy, Reggie, and Steve when it ended, and freelance writers. But I would say at the end, that would have been it, and I would suspect Reggie was working another job.

Reggie ended up—and I don't know what he's doing now, but when I ran into him a decade ago or less, he was an executive at, I think, Walt Disney Studios, Reggie Wilson, and we know what happened to Randy. Leonard Pitts continued to write for SOUL through Randy as long as he was asked to write, went on to become a Pulitzer Prize winner. Bruce Talamon, the photographers, they hung in there, and Bobby, as long as they could, both successful photographers. Just a whole bunch of them, kids that bloomed out of there. Howard Bingham, he sends me pictures of his first grandbaby. He's still doing well, I mean, and he's the first photographer that gave photos to SOUL for us to go.

There's a bunch, like Walter Burrell was a famous columnist for SOUL, but he was really an employee at Universal Studios and a publicist, and I got a Mother's Day note from his wife. They were divorced before he died, but his widow, and if I have a SOUL alumni thing, she'll come and bring her kids, because we were family in those days. But I got a Mother's Day greeting online from her, exchanged. So many of the people—I mean, it just makes me go back and think, and it really overlaps for me, because then I did the career after SOUL as a publicist at Solar Records, so there's staffs there and people there. But SOUL itself, it just, in some way, has lived on, and when I look at the old issues, I'm flabbergasted that we did it. I don't know how we ever did it. I really don't know how we ever did it, and some of the entertainers that still have issues, they still have their issues, their copies of their covers and stuff, that blows my mind, that they kept this. Michael, when I interviewed him, talked to him a decade ago, I guess, in that Vibe story, he wanted to know where my files were, and he'd buy them from me. He offered to buy the old issues of SOUL, and I said, "Nope, not for sale." He had a collection, so I am curious where his went when everything got taken, and I'm sure there's a lot of storage bins, different places.

CLINE

It's hard to even imagine.

JONES

It is, and then you see every now and then they'll pop up on eBay an issue of SOUL from someplace in Timbuktu, and somebody will buy it, that somebody was cleaning out their—and a few times I've

reached out and tried to contact the people, and they had a collection, and so many of them, it's some kind of memorable part. I think I shared with you last time we talked, my first cousin's barber was a "Mister SOUL," and he wanted a copy. Now I have gone through, and we don't have that issue, and it's only in the bound volume, and I'll probably go ahead and scan it and send him, but I can't break the boundary—you know what I mean—so it's the bend of it. I wish I had a whole copy of it to send him. And just did one for "Miss SOUL" about two or three months ago. She wanted one. Found it, sent it to her, and she's so happy, and maybe I can understand people my age wanting to see the pictures of themselves back when they were young and vibrant and doing things. I don't know. I don't get it, but I think it's great if I can make somebody happy. A friend was saying that she had just bought a bunch of SOULs at a convention in Maryland, saw a table full of them, and I've been meaning to follow up on the vendor that was selling them, and I'm sure I can track him down, because I'm beginning to catch—with Facebook, it's a small world. It's a very small world now. But then she expressed that she wished she had more, and I'm curious why would she want them, but she's a collector of black memorabilia and movie posters and stuff, and I guess she sees a space in her thing for SOUL.

CLINE

As SOUL is coming to an end and your life is clearly in—you're having a major crisis and the music itself is kind of on a bubble of transition as well—and we mentioned that as the eighties come in, we start moving into the rap phenomenon, which is initially a return to something of sociopolitical significance, and I wanted to ask you about what now, I think, historically you could see as something of a harbinger of that whole movement, which is The Last Poets, who were from here, and I know that they got some attention from SOUL, even though they were not exactly mainstream. They weren't Motown. That's for sure.

JONES

No, but we loved The Last Poets. How could you not love The Last Poets?

CLINE

This sort of leads me to want to ask you what your feelings were about what was happening to the music as sort of—we talked about

how Stevie Wonder's music in the seventies retained some social and political significance, certainly addressed some difficult issues in its way. What were your feelings about the direction of the music as the magazine is fading out, of course, especially if your life is in crisis? I guess I'm kind of wondering if there was a soundtrack that went along with it.

JONES

What year was Marvin Gaye's—oh, God. How can I not just jump out with the title?

CLINE

Are you talking about What's Going On?

JONES

What's Going On.

CLINE

Yes, that's early seventies, '71, '72, something like that.

JONES

Yes, it was almost poetically, both he and Stevie captured what was going on, and so it's almost like their two songs, their lyrics was guiding what was happening in my life with SOUL and with SOUL with me and our writers and everybody, my marriage, my family, everything. It was like everything was in some sort of a chaos. I wish I could separate the years more, but I really can't. I'm sorry. I just can't. God, was I numbed out? What was going on? I wasn't on drugs, so where was my mind, really?

Kory was born in '62, '72, '82, so twenty, so eighty—so at the end of summer, I remember my youngest boy finished high school, and he was going to LACC and he was working as a box boy at Ralphs at Olympic and Western, which is now a huge Korean marketplace.

CLINE

Oh, yes, the Galleria.

JONES

The Galleria. Things were so hard for us that he would bring home the damaged cans from the grocery store, and often they didn't have labels, so our running joke at the house was you had to open the can to discover what was for dinner. [laughs]

CLINE

Oh, man.

JONES

And there were marshals at the front door serving subpoenas for a printer bill, different bills like that. There was a lien, finally, on my accounts, whatever there was. Obviously it wasn't that much. Maybe the dented cans came after IRS. I don't know which came first anymore. I can just remember driving home, and if I saw a car parked out front or across the street or anywhere on my block that was unfamiliar, I did not pull into the driveway. I would drive by and take a look at the person and often keep going, because I figured it was a subpoena server, somebody beating on the door at six o'clock in the morning to serve a subpoena. After SOUL—and I've got to tell this story. Worst thing in my whole life that I ever really remember happening was my mother had died and it was her funeral, and I'm sitting on the front-row pew at the funeral home, I want to say Harris and Ross. The kids are right behind me, and this young man came up to me and he extended his hand in sympathy from his family and he handed me a fat card—it was thick—really about "Your time of loss," and the whole bit, and I remember looking up and he had light eyes, green eyes, and looked right into his face, thanked him very much, and he walked off.

And then I opened the card and it was a subpoena, was literally a subpoena service had done that. I knew that if I had any reaction, it would just tear everybody apart, so I just tucked it back and tucked it aside and we went on with the funeral. But I was carrying that through the funeral service and then letting go of it sort of, but not really, in the drive to the cemetery and all of that, and just thinking, "Wow. This is a hell of a situation. This is unreal." Ken and I, like I said, were separated, and I was dating a man who—and this is really a small world—Robert Richardson, Bob Richardson. I'd gone to high school with him and I didn't remember him from high school. He's the same grade I was in, and he had been one of the reporters that was written about during the Watts Riots, too, that was out there, and he had, after that, become a complete alcoholic and was in a halfway house, the Bimini House over here on Third and Vermont. So we were kind of dating. So he's sitting on one side of me and Ken's sitting on the other side of me. Everybody thinks I'm still married to Ken, because we were separated, but we hadn't filed, and I'd asked my brother-in-law, the Baptist minister, brother of my husband, to tell the funeral director and to tell everybody nobody back to the house after the funeral, and my brother-in-law

made the announcement, which pleased me. And after all this went on and we came home, and Bob and I, and we pulled up in front of the house and there were cars all out front. I guess certain people thought that that meant not them, because they were too close for it to be them, and he looked at me in the car and he said, "Well, should I go to the store and get chicken and fry it, or should I go home and get my fishing rod and we go fishing?"
And I said, "Go get your fishing rod. I'll go upstairs and change and meet you back out here in twenty minutes." So I walked through the house and I went upstairs and I kind of smiled at everyone and I changed and I came back down, and he was out front and we got in the car and we went out to San Pedro and just sat on the rocks with the fishing poles.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
That's what I needed, and we sat there and we didn't talk, and at that time someone walked past us with their boom box blasting and on the radio was, "Ken Jones indicted for check fraud." [laughs]
CLINE
You heard it on a boom box?
JONES
I knew that something was going down, because Ken had warned me.
CLINE
This is the same day as the funeral?
JONES
The same day as the funeral. Boom box. So we got back to the Bimini House, and it was fortunately my car, not Bob's car, and we sat there and he said, "I can't see you anymore, because if I continue to date you, I'm going to start drinking again." [laughter] "I'm sorry."
CLINE
Whoa.
JONES
Oh, God.
CLINE
It's like when you think it can't get worse, it just keeps getting worse. Amazing.

JONES
So we said goodbye.
CLINE
How did you meet him, anyway? I have to ask.
JONES
At an Overeaters Anonymous meeting, and that's when he started talking to me again and reminded me of who he was, okay. That's even funnier. It was an OA meeting. So he was doing OA because he'd blown up as an alcoholic, I guess, or not eating, he'd blown up. But I'll never forget that, and, I mean, that whole episode in there, that I had hung out with him at the Bimini House. So here, from riding on planes and front-row seats, I'm hanging out with the inhabitants of the Bimini House, and that is my social activity when I'm not running from marshals and subpoena servers. [laughter] Oh, God.
CLINE
And eating out of old cans.
JONES
And eating out of dented cans with no labels. But it seemed perfectly normal to me. I mean, it really did. I was broken, and it was okay. It was all part of my rehabilitation. It was a time. It was a hell of a time, Alex. It was really a long, hard thing, the closing of SOUL and to the next few years.
CLINE
What was the deal with Ken's bank fraud?
JONES
Ken had tried to take on SOUL and he had this other publication, and he had gotten out of control as a—I was a stabilizer. I am a stabilizer, okay. I don't know what it is, no fault of my own. I see very practically, okay. It's a spatial thing. I see space well, too, because it's space. So he's running all these publications and he's making loans, and then he's kiting checks, because it wasn't quick like it is now. So if he had a check and he deposited on Monday, he probably had three days before it hit the other bank that he'd drawn it on, before it hit the other bank, and the lady he was dating was a banker, so she must have helped him work this out. So they both got busted. He did time, because he didn't roll over on her. But he had done this check-kiting thing.

Along with that, it's interesting, he had forged my signature on loans and all kinds of paperwork. He had completely lost control, and it was not like he was a drug addict or anything like that. He was addicted to making a business succeed, and he was doing whatever he could to keep all the presses rolling and all the things going, with an inability to really see the handwriting on the wall or to say no when it came to a stop or an end. It's like when we folded SOUL Illustrated in, like, 1973, 1974, that was my decision. I looked at it and said, "If we print three more issues, we are completely out of business for the newspaper. This one's killing us. We have got to stop." And I was the bad guy. Everybody hated me. I mean, the SOUL Illustrated staff, Leroy Robinson hated me, took me to court for back wages. Even though I told him, "We're out of money and we can't publish another issue," he still showed up at the office, even though they're was no issue to work on, so by law, he was coming to work. I didn't know, and he filed a lawsuit for that. I had to go to court and deal with it. But I was the bad guy, because I could see that this was going to take everything down, and to me, that's no bit of genius. That's just an honest evaluation of the numbers.

CLINE

Well, wasn't Ken also a gambling man?

JONES

He gambled. He would gamble to try to—I don't know. In his mind, he thought you could win, and, see, that's not me, because both my parents were gamblers, so gambling's no good. I don't like gambling, and I've done it. I've tried it and I've never had success at it, and you don't have to fail so many times at something for me to get it, that this is not the solution. It doesn't work. So Ken gambled. He played the horses. He loved the horses. Before he fell, at some point he even had bought a thoroughbred horse.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

Yes, he was really into it. You know, I realize during our entire marriage I was the—I'm always the bad guy. I mean, I'm the ultimate bad guy, which is—I'm laughing, but it's not funny. I mean, yesterday or day before, had to fire the pool man here because my kids decided they wanted a different pool man. So I'm the—

CLINE
You're the heavy.
JONES
I'm the heavy and I do it with grace, and I think people think it doesn't bother me. At SOUL one time they had me laughing because they had busted me, that they could tell when someone's going to get fired because I would wear my cowboy boots, and I had no idea that's what I was doing until someone pointed it out, "When you come in with those cowboy boots, we know somebody's head's about to roll." So then, of course, I never wore the cowboy boots again, but that was my armor, I guess.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
I can just speak for the bad guys in the world. We're not bad guys. We really just get left having to shovel the shit for survival, and it is very painful. It's not pleasurable. You have to gird up to do it and there's quite a cost to do it.
When I think of SOUL, it's just the funny, funny stories. I'm exchanging emails lately with Chuck Siler, who was one of the cartoonists for SOUL Illustrated, and I think "Roscoe" was one of his cartoons that somebody loves, now that they've seen it. These were social cartoons, political, and he is totally a political activist somewhere in Texas or wherever he is now, and his wife, dealing with John Henry Clark. So there were always these kind of people around SOUL, and I always embraced them because I believed there was the thrill and the pleasure of the music, but there was also the socialist side, and I felt we owed having both sides equally in there. I can say honestly just to put out a fluff piece to entertain people, to me, is not enough. You've got to educate them and inform them. Now, whether they absorb the information or not, you can't control, but you can at least make it—you can put it in a pretty wrapper and make it available to them, and that, to me, was always an integral part of what SOUL had to have. That's "The Men Behind the Music." That's the essay or editorial piece I wrote once about the fact that there were no financial people with any ability. They had the accoutrements, I think was the word I used, of power, but they couldn't sign a check. Let's face it. When I would say something like that publicly or dared to put it in a paper, this

angered every black executive in the country, and these are the guys I'm getting the money from, you know. I can remember sitting across the desk, and I declined a few weeks ago to say who it was, but it was Ramon Hervey, who went on to marry Vanessa Williams and had a couple kids with her, who was a publicist for Rogers and Cowan. He was a well-educated lovely man, lovely gentleman, young gentleman at the time, but he was another one like Win Wilford that I had to run the Riot Act on to explain that, "You only have a job to come here to see me because we have SOUL. You'd have no job if there was no SOUL."
Now, it's hard for me to go back there in my head now of who was I and where was I coming from, because I don't know who I was, in retrospect. That young woman, I don't know where she came from. I don't know how she had her sense of whatever there was, and if I'm repeating, tell me, but the story about the SOUL name being used for a concert, and I—oh, God. He's dead. Dick Griffey, concert promoter, club owner. Dick and I, I guess, have danced a few times. Sports arena, big concert, soul concert, and I said they couldn't use the SOUL name and they said they were using the SOUL name, so I hired an attorney and put an injunction on the box office.
CLINE
This is the guy who hired you later?
JONES
I put an injunction on the box office, and Dick called me and said, "Regina, you don't understand where this money's coming from. This is not my money. These are my backers. You don't want to upset them. You have children." And I said, "Dick, I have five. You only have one. Don't start the game." Who in their right mind would say something like that? I did.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
Then he called Ken and talked to him and the attorney and scared them both off, but I was ready to go toe-to-toe all the way, and after that, Dick and I didn't speak for a number of years. We'd run into each other and we wouldn't speak, and finally one time I went up to him and said, "Come on, let's make amends. Let's move forward."

We exchanged hugs and the whole bit and we could speak when we'd see each other, and then after SOUL was over and all of that, in 1983 Dick calls me and invites me out to dinner, and I was a little suspicious of it because it was some restaurant I had never heard of. It was a private one over there on Beverly west of San Vicente and La Cienega behind a gate with no sign. So I was supposed to meet him there, so I met him there at the bar and then we had dinner, and basically asked me to come—I thought he was coming after me to talk about John McClain, who I had gotten involved in the music industry as an employee at A and M Records—he was somewhere in the area—and, no, he didn't want to talk about John; he wanted to talk about me. He wanted to hire me as his publicist, and I said, "Well, Dick, I don't know how to do publicity." And he says, "I'm willing to bet on you that you do." He says, "I'll pay you for six months, and then you'll know you know how to do publicity." And I said, "Well, let me think about it." At the time, I was just trying to get myself back to work and going and had gone from doing some temp work for agencies to taking on a long-term temp assignment at the Ladd Company working for Alan Ladd, Jr., as the assistant to Paul Maslansky, who was doing the first Police Academy, and his secretary was out on maternity leave. You know, they're doing you a favor in the film industry when you go to work for them, and so I'm working for Paul at whatever the minimum—lovely place to work. Everything was great. Friend of mine was "Laddie's" assistant, and she had recommended me.

Then there's Dick now making me an offer on something I don't know how to do, so I took a meeting with my attorney to meet with Virgil Roberts, who was the attorney at Dick Griffey Productions, and to talk about money and contract. So Virgil is always late, and Virgil this time was no different than any other. He was an hour late, and we're in the reception area and I'm telling Thomasina Reed, "I'm going to walk out of here. This is an offense. I don't need this. I don't take this." And she said, "Just sit down." And so we sat and she somehow or another got word, because she's an attorney, Virgil's an attorney, to word and he got us on in. So we negotiated the money, and Tommie never charged me for that. I'm just thinking now about that. But anyway, we meet, we discuss money. So now I go back to Paul Maslansky and tell him, "Okay, I got an offer for another job. How close can you get?" "We can't do

anything, but I really want you. This'll be good for you. This'll be wonderful." I said, "Right now it's about money." So I took the Dick Griffey job and I learned that I know how to do publicity, so I had another career that Dick is responsible for me starting.

CLINE

So here's something I can ask you that relates to both what you were talking about in the past and now that you're in this new job, publicity with Dick Griffey. You talked about the lack of black executives with any real power, and now you're working in this business, you're an African American woman. How many women were working in these sorts of positions?

JONES

There were a few. Yes, I was a publicist. I think my title was Vice President of Publicity for Solar Records, Dick Griffey Productions. I mean, nice long title. I was a publicist. Yes, I sat with the other managers, but basically it's a small company. The managers did all the work and you were lucky if you shared a secretary, okay. So you could get the big head if you want to, but the reality—there were other women. That's when Sheila Eldridge and Ornetta Barber and Carolyn Baker—there was a whole bunch of them around the country, that I've got to say, because of what I'd done with SOUL—and they knew who I was, because I had been a sole woman, alone, s-o-l-e, very rare—they all embraced me and were very supportive of me. At the time I didn't think that I was already, in their eyes, an old-timer, but I guess I was, because I'd been in the industry a long time already and had played with the boys. So there were quite a few women, and not just black women. Bryn Bridenthal over at Geffen Records, I'll never forget her. That was a big account when I stepped out of Dick Griffey got, was Geffen Records as a client because of Bryn Bridenthal. Brenda Andrews in publishing, music publishing, at St. Andrews—Brenda Andrews at A and M Records. Almo Irving had worked her way from secretary up to music publisher. There was another, Rochelle Fields, music publishing. This is Sylvia Rhone, Atlantic Records. Yes, they were popping up all over the country now, quite a few women to be respected and to be dealt with. Yes, because I think I knew Sylvia when I was working for Dick. That's how I got to know Sylvia Rhone. Names come and go, but there were quite a few, to the point there was, like, almost a network or some kind of a communication thing that we kind of

had going on, nothing formal at the time, but, yes. Yes, because it was after Dick that BET came into being, after I left Dick Griffey. God, I didn't realize I'd been through so many eras. Thank you very much, Alex. I don't know how I feel about this this morning. Jesus, I'm starting to feel like a relic. [laughs]

CLINE

What was happening with the music then when you were doing the publicity?

JONES

At Solar Records, I never really dealt on this level with music people, so I was a publicist to record people. Shalamar, Jody and Jeffrey had just left Shalamar, so they were reforming a new Shalamar. So that was one of my big things, and Shalamar was very famous. Howard Hewett was the remaining of the three, and we had a contest to audition for Shalamar. I mean, it's a whole thing, okay. I'm really cloudy in there, but I had Lakeside, who I loved as people, but they were really always late.

CLINE

Oh, really?

JONES

Terribly late. So I had to put the screws on them and zero them in, almost like wrangling cattle, because they were a trip. The Whispers, which were sweethearts, professional. The Deal, Babyface and L.A. Reid. God. I remember Babyface, Kenny Edmonds, with his shirt open to his navel and I remember three or four chest hairs, and they had all this slick stuff on their heads. Oh, God. They were fresh out of Ohio, if I remember correctly. And Midnight Star. Now, we were hitting it. Don't get me wrong. Lots of stories about Dick Griffey, a million stories about Dick Griffey that people tell. I found Dick to be probably one of the most progressive people at the time that I ever met, in all fairness, that did not treat women any different than men as to our ability to run what we were running, and his dedication to blacks I've not seen reflected hardly, if ever. I can't right now think of any other person, and I can remember going in with Dick, fussing about a hire. Just it was the wrong hire and blah, blah, blah, blah, and he says, "Regina, if there's a black person and a white person and the white person's more qualified, but I see potential in the black person, I'm going to hire the black person, because if I don't give them a chance, who is?" And that

was Dick Griffey's integrity as far as his blackness was. It was not a form of speech. I saw him do it over and over and over again. Now, it was not an easy kindergarten class. It was rough, but the integrity was there and you had an opportunity to make your mark, and it was like owning your own company. Whatever your little fiefdom was there at DG, it was like running your own company, and that was a hell of a good experience for me. That's when I got to know the Reverend Jesse Jackson really well with his presidential run.

CLINE

Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

JONES

We managed his West Coast campaign, which seems insane in retrospect. We're talking '83 to '86 I was there, and it was late '83. We did major fundraising for Jesse. I think I told you the story about me going out on the road with Jesse, saying, "I'd like to work his campaign for a while." He said, "If Jesse will pay you, but I'm not going to keep you on the payroll here while you're out with Jesse." That's how straight Dick was. "You've got a choice. Do whatever you want to do, but here's the bottom line."

I don't know why, but I think I told you about how my next-door neighbor, officemate next door, Daryl Stewart, and I came up with the idea of putting Jesse on Saturday Night Live, and that was the first presidential candidate to ever go on Saturday Night Live, and we both knew going in to New York that we might have to walk home if it went badly, but we pushed it. We sold Dick on it and then we sold Jesse on it, and it was accomplished and it was a big success. We were really proud of ourselves.

CLINE

Wow. Was this when you did Green Eggs and Ham?

JONES

Probably. I don't really remember.

CLINE

One of my favorite moments on TV.

JONES

I remember Green Eggs and Ham right now as you're saying it vividly, and he loved it. I think I talked about how Jesse never said thank you, and after the Saturday Night Live thing, I was sitting with my friend, one of my son's ex-girlfriends from college, Teresa

Wiltz. I'm sitting there in the hotel dining room downstairs having dinner with her late, and Jesse and his entourage come in and they go sit across the room, and then Jesse sees me and he gets up and moves his whole entourage to my table, which there's just room for two or three, and he's literally sitting on my lap, almost, eating the food off my plate. And because of having raised four sons, I knew this was thank you. I could hear the "Thank you." I mean, in his way, he had—everybody now is looking at, "Who is this woman that he's moved his group over and they're all uncomfortable sitting around?" That was his way of saying thank you.

I found him wonderful to work with. We'd have a six o'clock call, five-thirty call in the morning, and when I got to the limo, he'd be in the limo, and we'd go all day. If we got back at eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock at night, there'd be people waiting for meetings with him at the lobby of the hotel as I crawled up the stairs to my room to get some sleep before tomorrow. He went just like that, and I think we were together about a week. Never stopped. Bruce Talamon, I think Life magazine put him on the road with Jesse at some point. It's the same thing. Bruce said, "He almost killed us all." He never stopped. I don't know how people do that day in and day out. I know I shared with you about him being late all the time and I lied to him. If he had a ten o'clock interview, I told him nine so I could get him there on time. We were at ABC-TV to do some show, and for some reason he had a lag in his schedule, so I told him, say, nine, and he was there at eight-thirty.

CLINE

Oh, no.

JONES

Yes, and the appointment wasn't until ten.

CLINE

Oh, golly.

JONES

Oh, he was so through with me, and he read me the riot act publicly in front of everybody. "Don't you ever do it. Do you know how much I have to do and how valuable my time is?" And blah, blah, blah, blah. I just said, "Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. Yes, sir." I was, after that, the only person that I ever heard of that he was always on time for.

CLINE

Interesting.
JONES
Yes, I told him the truth about what I had done. From then on, we had an unspoken agreement. He was on time for me and nobody could understand it. He was on time for me.
CLINE
So you started, I guess, to get the money rolling again and get your family sort of—
JONES
Yes, Dick Griffey Productions, I started—I was treading water at the Ladd Company at Dick Griffey Productions. I was starting to get my life back together pretty good.
CLINE
When did your marriage officially end finally?
JONES
I don't remember.
CLINE
You don't remember. Wow.
JONES
When Ken was doing—Ken's jail time was interesting because of who he was, and his attorney got him a work-leave thing, so he had to pay for drug testing every night when he came back, but Monday through Saturday he had a job and he was selling used cars at some car thing. So he would just sleep at the jail, basically.
CLINE
For how long?
JONES
I think it was six months. He slept at the jail for six months. Maybe it was a little less than that. Our third child, who was the first one to get married, was getting married. She was a judge's daughter, so when all this fell, it wasn't very pretty.
CLINE
Ouch. [laughter]
JONES
When we went to pick out patterns with the bride and groom, the other mother and I, my daughter-in-law at the time's mother, we met at JW Robinson in Beverly Hills, the four of us, and she and I didn't know one another, but we got to talking a little bit and she shared some of her feelings and I shared some of mine. Basically

she asked me did I want Keith's father at the wedding, and I said, "Keith would want his father at his wedding, no matter what's going on, and so I support that." And Ken was able to get off to come to the wedding. And before Ruby passes on, I need to ask her, did she pull some rank and get that to happen or not, because he was excused to come to the wedding.
A sheriff that I knew said that while he was there, they were being very careful there with how they handled everything, because they didn't believe he was really in jail. They believed he was doing some kind of under—
CLINE
Some kind of a story.
JONES
Story. So all the prisoners got off really well when he was there.
CLINE
Oh, interesting.
JONES
Then what appeared in my life within the last year, a young man—and he's vanished again—whose father was in a group, and it had started out with he was trying to find a picture of him on his dad's shoulders from the page of SOUL. He tracked me down through something—he'd gone to junior high school with one of my sons, and I gave him permission that, "If you haven't heard from me in two weeks, call me again, because this is not a top priority, but gently nudge me and I'll try to do this." Finally came down to he had been in jail at the same time Ken was in jail, and his job was—he was kind of like an orderly or something—was to kind of take care of Ken, and he took very good care of Ken and they spent hours and hours talking, and Ken was a nice guy and he had a lot of things to share, which was really nice for me to hear. Why this was brought back to me within the last year is weird, but we never did find the issue, and he's vanished, so I hope he didn't go back to jail, but he stopped calling. It's interesting how so many things loop around and finish up.
When Ken got out, he was doing really well, really well. He couldn't get back into the broadcasting, so he dealt with van conversions. So he sold used cars, van conversions. He did the Bible quiz on the radio. He created a radio show. Had some kind of a modeling fashion show thing going all out in Orange County. He moved to

Orange County. He and the kids kept very close, and he was always here for holidays or birthday parties or whatever. We agreed that we were parents and only the two of us could talk badly about our children to each other. No one else could ever penetrate that. So we laughed and we were friends until he became very ill and died. I think he died in—I don't know. He died in the late eighties, maybe.
CLINE
Not too much longer after [unclear].
JONES
Could have been early nineties. Between you and me, Alex, I don't know. The children would know. I don't know. Well, okay, Max was in arms, so, say, if Max was two—and he's now twenty-two—was that 1990? He died probably about 1990, somewhere in there.
CLINE
What was it that took his life exactly?
JONES
Prostate cancer.
CLINE
Oh, wow.
JONES
Yes, he didn't have insurance, and I learned later that it was diagnosed and he didn't go back for follow-ups, and then when he did finally go back, it was—
CLINE
Too late.
JONES
—too, too late, way too late. He wasn't ready to go. I remember on his deathbed he motioned for me to come on over there, and he whispered and he said, "Roll me out of here." And I said, "What do you mean roll you out of here?" He said, "Just roll me out of here." And I said, "Why do you want to roll out of here?" He said, "I see them coming. They've got this white thing they're trying to put on me. Roll me out of here." Do I want this on record or not? Being the person I am, I said, "You got a direct line to God. You need to give me those lottery numbers." [laughter] To which he frowned. He didn't get the humor, and he was gone the next day. My humor is really sick. [laughs] But he did, he had a direct line. I mean, they were trying to put the white thing on him. Those were the angels

coming to get him, and he wanted to escape it. "Roll me out of here."
CLINE
Wow. Really hanging on.
JONES
He was hanging on for dear life. Yes, he was not ready to go, and he really believed he could turn everything around all the way to the end.
CLINE
Wow. Amazing.
JONES
Yes, all the way to the end.
CLINE
What was the impact then on especially your kids?
JONES
It was hard. They weren't ready for him to be gone. Yes, they took it quite hard.
CLINE
I think we'll get into what you did after the whole Dick Griffey thing next time. That will be our last session, I think.
JONES
Good. [laughs] This memory stuff, this is rough work.
CLINE
I know.
JONES
People don't realize this, and we're covering so much, and the brain, there's so much we're not covering because it's a lifetime. So how do you capsulize a lifetime? And the head is saying, "What should I have given him that was information on the times?" And then I have to let go of that. That's a gift of being aware. I have to let go and know that I'm not in charge.
CLINE
So let me ask you, just since we're in the eighties now, what, if any, developments in the music during the eighties captivated you? We had a few big people come up during that time. Just off the top of my head, I'm thinking of people like Prince. Somebody you would have known when she was little, I guess, Janet Jackson becomes a superstar.
JONES

Prince. When we had the talent contest for Shalamar, we were at a big warehouse-type facility on Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood, and it was right next door to the Ice House, and there's this steep staircase along this wall, and I went down the staircase and I got to the bottom and somebody said, "Don't you realize you just stepped over Prince?" And I said, "You're kidding."
He was this little tiny guy. Never even occurred to me that was who he was. I can see the stairs. I can see all of it, and he was just really very, very tiny, but, boy, was he big. I was flattered that he was at our talent contest for Shalamar, and I don't know if I used it in our press releases or not. Knowing me, I probably did, that Prince was even there. I went to one Prince concert with one of my children. I think it was Kenny, my eldest, and he loved Prince, and Prince's music has changed considerably since then, but I felt, sitting there right on the floor, I think, again, at the Forum, that Prince's music was very demonic. It was something about the beat. It was very primal and it went all through my whole body sitting there, and I didn't like that at all. Onstage he was a hell of a performer, but again, there was something that went against the grain for me about Prince, so I was never a Prince fan.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
As big as he was, it just didn't work for me, and I haven't bothered to listen, really. Everybody says it's a whole different Prince and it looks like it and it sounds like it, and I may have seen him on TV or something, but that one time on the floor at the concert, I remember it just totally unnerved me, and even the back of my jaws are bothering me now, remembering that feeling. I've always been addicted to bass, and if you've got the bottom, you've got—it's got to be a good bottom. I mean, it could be great music, but it's got to be spiritually good, otherwise it's very uncomfortable for me. I love the bottom, and the bass, to me, is the bottom. The drums would be next, but the bass, to me, is the whole—it's the whole floor. It's the foundation. Was something about that bass, and it's his bottom, and I knew it was all his creation. Maybe I gave him too much credit, that he even—what was going on, but it was just not me.
CLINE

Interesting. Then there's that whole Minneapolis development that happened during the eighties too. People like The Time and Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis become huge.
JONES
Great musicians. I mean, his musical genius don't let me diminish, but I operate on feeling. Incredible what came out of Minneapolis or what came out of Prince's camp.
CLINE
He's a Jehovah's Witness now.
JONES
Who?
CLINE
Prince.
JONES
Is he really?
CLINE
Oh, yes.
JONES
Okay, I hadn't read that. Boy, is that an about-face from what I felt. Well, that would make sense, because if you're really influenced by other worlds, then you'd go to a more strict other world to try to come back to some kind of ground, so that makes good logical sense. So that, for me, confirms that what I felt was correct.
CLINE
Interesting. Then we mentioned a little bit about the rise of rap music, which eventually gives us hip-hop and things that are still very current and very, very popular right now.
JONES
Yes, rap music never appealed to me. Must have been through Geffen Records as a client, I—Ray, a recording artist, Ray. Ray Parker, Jr. I don't really remember many of my Geffen clients, which is interesting, but 7A3, three guys. Muggs, who went on to be in a real famous rap group later, is a white guy, and the two black guys that were brothers. 7A3 was a client and I worked with them, and they were lovely young men, and the father of the brothers was lovely. Muggs was lovely. They were really nice to me.
We did a concert somewhere out in Orange County, one of those in-the-round or something, and I'd go to different locations for them for record signings and stuff, and already had picked up a group of

7A3 fans that would be at every one of those, and they already knew who I was, and they'd meet me at my car to walk me in and stuff. Nice young people. I remember this Orange County concert, the group that met me was larger, really grown, walked me in, whole bit. Some were just fans, some worked behind the scenes. But the concert, some kind of fight broke out and I got a dislocated finger just from people in the crowd, and I said, "This is not what I want to do with the rest of my life. This is where the music industry is going. I can't do this. I would not survive in this. I don't want this. I don't want any part of it. It's not music for me. I've got to figure out something else. I do not want to deal with rap." And that was my beginning and my end. I knew a few people that got involved and became very, very wealthy. I mean—oh, Russell Simmons. I mean, that's how I got to know him then, was up at Geffen Records, him and Leore. They were fine enough people, but wasn't what I wanted. It was a different stretch for me. It wasn't music to me, even the more high-calibered, and I've always thought myself flexible. I had no real flexibility. I just wasn't interested. Ray Parker, Jr., was fabulous and fun to work with. I forgot all about Russell Simmons, and that's back again to Bryn Bridenthal.
Yes, I just knew for a fact I wanted no part of rap, and I tried to even convince myself that they were the coming of age of the Last Poets. I tried my best to reconcile that with myself and I tried to hear the poetry in their words, and I even was able to force myself to listen enough to see that—and I think I philosophized about it in a couple of articles I wrote for a couple publications, that they were really talking about what their times were like and it was a signal of what our times were like and blah, blah, blah. But I didn't want a part of our times. Yes, it just was not of interest to me. Yes, I do remember doing a piece on it, on rap music, for Impact magazine. Jules Malamud. Yes, it was "A Sign of Our Times," I think, was what it was entitled, or something like that. So that must have been when I was writing or something—don't really remember—for some other magazines.
CLINE
In early nineties it seemed like you were writing a fair amount.
JONES
Yes. See? [laughter] That is funny. There was somebody else you mentioned. That's a side story. What I mentioned before, John

McClain, he's a historical name that if I don't put it in, it will never get down. John McClain was the young man, a kid, that lived at the corner house down there and I think he was three years older than my eldest son, and when we moved in, he came down and my kids became friends with him, and he was like an older brother to them. He spent most of his free time, that I knew of, down here at the house. He ate at the table with us. If we went out to dinner, he went to dinner with us. To me, he was like my oldest child.

CLINE

This is Dude now?

JONES

Dude is his name. That's all he was, was Dude. [laughter] Loved him dearly, love him dearly now. Dude went on to become—he was a fabulous guitar player, went on the road with the Sylvers for a minute. Got him a job at A and R at A and M Records, literally trespassed to do it. My friend Brenda Andrews was there. She didn't recommend him, so I beat her up Dick Griffey style, talked about her bad, and got her to write a reference for him that I just came across in the files recently. He got hired over there in A and R and he became famous over there, because he's the one that had grown up with Michael, gone to school with Michael, and was friends with Tito and Jackie, and he had Janet, and he's the one that—

CLINE

Hooked Janet up with—

JONES

Hooked Janet into Control. He squeezed her beyond her limits till he got her first big hit out of her. Hardcore. Hardcore perfectionist, off-the-hook crazy, okay. He got her first big hit, and he remained Michael Jackson's friend even after his death, because he's one of the two trustees on the Michael Jackson estate. I need to put that in there. Again, the weirdness of my life, and it's funny to me, even now, that some people that know him close to him will try to get to him through me, and I'll just say, "I don't talk to him. He calls me when he wants to call me." But it's still a mother-son relationship, even though he's grown and hardheaded and thinks he's smarter than me. I still know I'm his best friend. [laughs] No doubt about it, okay.

Yes, so I'm not brilliant, but I spot brilliance in people, or talent or capacities, and I encourage it. That's another story. That's John's

story, but John's success in the music industry is his talent and my belief in him, because he could have had a different life totally. He's still the same person, but he would not have lived this life. It would have been a different life. It would have probably been a life of crime.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
He knows it, I know it, and I can say it on record.
CLINE
Also, interestingly, as we move into the nineties, even A and M Records couldn't keep Janet Jackson. They couldn't afford her. And things get even more corporate and even bigger and even more business, and eventually you move out of that world entirely, and we're going to get to that next time, okay?
JONES
It's another world, huh?
CLINE
We'll at least bring it up to the present day.
JONES
Yes, and we've still got to go back and talk a little bit about Marvin's music.
CLINE
Okay, if you're feeling okay about it.
JONES
Oh, yes, I'm fine.
CLINE
Well, I think not today.
JONES
Not today. It's fine. We'll still be okay.
CLINE
Excellent. Thank you for today.
JONES
Thank you for today.
CLINE
I know we were headed into some potentially hazardous terrain here today, but I'm glad you hung in there with me.
JONES

Thank you. You're an easy interviewer. [End of May 25, 2012 interview]

1.6. Session 6 (June 1, 2012)

CLINE
Today is an easy day for me to remember. It's June 1st, 2012. This is Alex Cline. I'm once again interviewing Regina Jones at her home in Los Angeles. We're in a different room today. This is the third room we've been in and they're all equally comfortable and all different. We're going to probably enjoy this room as part of the interviewing experience ending. Good morning.
JONES
Good morning. I think this is appropriate, because this is my shift to a new quarters in my home of forty-some-odd years and this is my new—
CLINE
Yes, it's fresh.
JONES
—space.
CLINE
It's very nice.
JONES
Thank you.
CLINE
Couple of things I wanted to get into right away this morning. Last time we talked about the end of SOUL and your being hired by Dick Griffey, and you gave the impression that he actually was somebody who allowed his employees a fair amount of freedom and latitude, but at the same time, I wanted to ask you, as somebody who basically had worked for herself, or at least someone who had a fair amount of autonomy, maybe a lot, in your previous enterprise, that being SOUL, what was it like to have to work for somebody after all those years?
JONES
Well, it was fine, because I thought it was my own—my department was my own, my little enterprise. It's not like anybody else was doing it but me. It was me and I shared an assistant. At the beginning I had another little assistant he had given me. That is another story that's his story, not mine. But I was fine with it. I

didn’t have issues with it until at one point he instituted a sign-in sheet, and when he instituted that, I stopped putting in my sixteen-hour days and started working eight-hour days. [laughter] So the rebelliousness did pop up, if I have to be accountable, which I find that’s just part of my personality. [laughs] I’ll give you everything, but if you put a leash on it, I’m going to give you just what the leash is requiring me to give you.

CLINE

Wow. I know that feeling. [laughter]

JONES

Yes, it’s kind of funny to think about that. No, nobody told me what to do or how to do it. I got to invent the publicity department and machine for the company, and I can’t remember any restraints, really, yes. It’s like there’s one thing that came to mind since we’ve met, was, like, Dick wanted to do a luncheon for Bishop Desmond Tutu, and he calls me in and he says, “Bishop Tutu’s going to be in town, and I want you to put together a luncheon for him,” and blah, blah, blah, “and I want dignitaries there and people,” and blah, blah. Say it’s today, June 1st, and I said, “Oh, when is it?” He said, “Oh, it’s the fourth of June.” [laughter] And I remember thinking, “How in the heck am I going to pull this off?” And I did, some "in" restaurant in Century City [Jimmy's], and I put together a list and kind of ran it by him to see if there was anybody I’d omitted. You know, you’re talking, I don’t know, a little more than seventy-two hours. I sent telegrams inviting everybody.

The funny part was I got a call from Suzanne de Passe, and she says, “You know, Diana Ross wants to come.” And I said, “Oh, great!” I was so thrilled, I didn’t know what to do. And she said, “But you’ve got to seat her properly.” I said, “I’m going to sit her right next to Bishop Tutu. Not to worry.” So that was a lucky break, and I just remember we had a nice turnout. One of the Osmonds was there. A lot of people were there. But Angie Dickinson was there, the actress, and after it was all over, she called me over and she very graciously said, “Don’t you ever get on stage and behind the mic again without introducing yourself before you introduce anyone else.” And I’ve always remembered that, and that was such a kind, giving thing from someone I didn’t know, but it was a heads-up mentoring moment there from a complete stranger to me. Yes, I

get teary-eyed when I think about people that will help you without ever being asked just because they see how you can improve.
CLINE
But also because she really must have appreciated—
JONES
What I said, and me, yes, and the whole bit. And it was lovely to meet, you know, the Bishop. [laughter] Totally out of my league, okay, but that was fabulous. ` Another gesture that I remember was Klymaxx, which was known for their ladies' band, which was known for their song "Meeting in the Ladies Room," and there was "Menopause." There were other ones, but anyway, Bernadette Cooper, who was the real glue behind the whole group and everything, one day came into the office, and I admired her lovely jacket. It was a fabulous, like, poncho-type jacket, and the next day when I came to the office, it was lying on my desk with a note, "For you."
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
So I have a lot of happy memories from Dick Griffey's, the experience there, even though I wasn't my own boss, and I remember Ray Harris, who was the president of the company, of the record company, one time I asked him why he always things to say to everybody else and he never really said much to me, and he says, "You sure that's what you want?" And I said, "Yeah." So the next meeting we had, and he was all over my butt behind something I didn't do or he didn't like, and I said, "Oh, it's okay, Ray. You don't have to say anything to me." He said, "Well, you were doing fine, so why do you want to be—." So it was a good experience for me. I have no negative memories about it or anything at this point. I'm sure when I first left there I did. I had a lot of them.
CLINE
I was going to ask you how you decided to leave that job.
JONES
Well, that whole thing was kind of a funny situation, because Dick courted me to hire me by taking me out to dinner and saying he wanted me there, but to negotiate my salary and stuff, I had to meet with his head of legal, Virgil Roberts, who was chronically late,

and waiting an hour, and I think I talked about that. But I basically responded always—my report-to was Dick, and then for record business it was Ray. But when it was time for me to leave, Virgil came into my office and said they were having a cutback. They didn't have the money, but I could stay on and start my own PR business and keep my office and my support staff, but that would be my money for working for them, having their clients and bring in other clients. So, "Take your time deciding, and we'd love to have you here as your home business."

All I could think of, no salary, I've got to start a PR firm. Dick should have talked to me. There again, the ego. Dick hired me. Dick should have fired me, and I remember saying something to Virgil to the effect, "Well, you've basically fired me." He said, "No, Regina, that's not what we're doing. I have to cut back," blah, blah, blah. And within an hour, I had packed up again that belonged to me in my car and I was gone.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

That was my response, because I was devastated. I was hurt. I didn't see it coming. I know that was Dick's way, though, of—he did this to you, a lot of people there. He pushed you out of your nest. He'd provide a nest, he'd provide an environment, the whole bit, and then he'd kick you out on your own, and most people stayed with him for life, with him as an account or whatever, and then being resentful. I just fled. I don't know. Months later, he asked for a meeting and I went in and he wanted me to handle a separate PR job, and I told him I would do it, but I would only work with him and directly with him, and if he ever did something like that to me again, you could forget it. And he quite understood, and we worked on that one account. I didn't really want to work as an independent with him, because then he was grinding you down on what he was paying you, and he had been the mentor, in a way, and the teacher, but still, I didn't want to do it. But it was amicable and it was fine and we went our separate ways. Forced me to start my own PR firm, which was a blessing, which is what he said in the first place, but I had to do it my way, not his way.

CLINE

So what year was this, then?

JONES
Eighty-six. Yes, I started with him in ’83, and then ’86 I was gone. I was devastated, and I smile at people when they don’t get it. For me, being told I’m not wanted anymore, is all I hear is I’m not wanted anymore. I don’t care what the reasons are, nothing, and it emotionally is very debilitating to me, and I went into quite a little funk for a minute, but then I came back out and was very successful with my own PR firm, again with divine guidance, though. I can’t say it’s me. Here’s a funny little side story, and I’m not positive about the sequence, but a friend of mine lived in Hawaii on Maui on a protea farm, okay, and they were going to Costa Rica for a month and they asked me to housesit. Bad, hard job. [laughter]
CLINE
Sweet, as they say.
JONES
And I’m unemployed and I’m in a depression, so I accept it and I went. There was an eclipse there, and I’ll never forget sitting on the front porch with this protea farm right out in front of me. It was broad daylight, and then all of a sudden it became completely night, and then light again, and to me, that was such a spiritually incredible experience. Up in their loft they had—there weren’t computers yet. There were—
CLINE
A little word processor.
JONES
Word processor, and there was a little window out into the tree like you were in a treehouse, and I sat there at that word processor and God gave me a poem, and it was the first poem I had ever written, and it was called “Sisters Wake Up,” and I’d like to read two things from it. “Sisters, wake up. Call your mothers. Call your daughters. Call every sister you know, not just your black sisters, but your brown sisters, your yellow sisters, your red sisters, and your white sisters. There’s something going on. Sisters, wake up. The misogynistic lyrics we hear in songs, the misogyny we see in the movies, it’s part of the conspiracy. Sisters, wake up. It is a conspiracy. With some, it’s conscious. With many, it’s unconscious. But nonetheless, a conspiracy is going on.” And I go on like that for I don’t know how long. I tried to rewrite it, and there was very little I could change, and I don’t know where it was coming from. It’s not

where my mind was, nothing. It was just given to me all at once and I wrote it down.
I started then worrying about, okay, when I get home, I'm broke. I don't know what I'm doing next, what's going to happen, blah, blah, blah, blah. Then it was getting close to them coming back, but it wasn't close enough, and I couldn't just pack up and leave. And finally I get a call—I call home, I get my messages, and I call the lady back and it's some woman that I don't even know from a PR firm that I don't even know and they have a movie coming out and they need a unit publicist on it. I've never done unit publicity, and they needed a meeting with me to talk about it, but the meeting had to be Monday because they had to make a decision. I figured out how to cover the little bit of time and how I was going to drive their car to the airport and where I would park it and how I would pick them up at the airport when they flew through Los Angeles, my friends going home, and give them the key to their car and, you know, this whole thing.
CLINE
Logistical—
JONES
Yes, and I came home and took the meeting and got hired on a movie called South Central as unit publicist, and Janet Yang [phonetic] and—oh, God, he's famous for his controversial films, did the movie. He's done kind of documentary-type movies before. I can see his face. I see everything. But anyhow—Stone, his last name.
CLINE
Oh, this is a—
JONES
Motion picture.
CLINE
Famous guy?
JONES
Famous, very—
CLINE
White guy?
JONES
White, famous guy.
CLINE

Oliver Stone.
JONES
Oliver Stone. It's an Oliver Stone movie. Thank you. So here I am with no knowledge, but Karen had done some unit—my daughter—unit publicity, so she's helping me, okay, guide me through it, and I'm working on this film. And then what comes around is that because Oliver Stone is doing it and he's white, he gets hit by a group of black protestors that are protesting that he's doing this film, and he asks me and Karen to be at the meeting, and so we're at his office in the meeting and the people come in for the meeting. Well, lo and behold, it's Leroy Robinson, who had been my jazz editor and the editor of SOUL Illustrated, and Bernie Rollins, and John Forbes [phonetic], and the meeting begins, right.
I immediately say, "Well, you guys know who I am and where I came from, and he hired me." [laughs] And everything was fine and it was over. There was nothing else they could say, or they didn't want to say.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
Yes, and I enjoyed working with Oliver Stone, but at one point he did in the meeting not with them, but he used the term "girls," which I corrected him. [laughter] But it was a pleasant experience, yes. So I don't know where we were going when I went there. I went to Solar and then I went on my own, and there I am working on a—when I talk about divine intervention, I have to laugh, because, see, I couldn't write this script. I wouldn't know to want to work on an Oliver Stone movie, and it was a good movie. It was Carl Lumbly, who ended up later marrying my friend, the actress Vonetta McGee, and Glenn Plummer and Reggie, who's still an actor, running around. But anyhow, it was really some good actors on the film. An actress, Larita Shelby, who had been a radio personality, did her acting piece. So it was comfortable, and learning what I had to do on it, but I also realized I wasn't adapted to do that kind of work, because it's a lot of hurry up and wait.
CLINE
Oh, yes, that's the whole movie business.
JONES

And the downtime was what do you do? I mean, you are stuck there and there's nothing to do. You can make chit chat just so much, and my head's off somewhere else wanting to do something else, yes. So it was a good experience, though, and it paid the bills for a couple months while I then started to decide I was really going to go into PR and set up a firm.

CLINE

What solidified that idea for you? Do you have any sense of that?

JONES

That I did it. You know, I'd been doing it for Dick, and here was a client, and I could go from there. There still was some raggedy time in there that I was not doing that well, but I wasn't—I was okay, but I was driving down Crenshaw one day and I saw my cousin standing out in front of his restaurant, Stevie's On the Strip, which was new, and I pulled over and I hollered at him. He said, "You want to make a little cash?" And I said, "Doing what?" And he said, "Work for me sometimes when somebody calls in sick or whatever." And I said, "Okay." Little did I know that, I think, the very next day, which was Valentine's Day or something, he was going to call that two people called in sick, so on Valentine's night I'm at the cash register in a restaurant in a business I know nothing about. I ended up working for him, I don't know, maybe a year, maybe six months. I have no clue.

CLINE

What is his name?

JONES

Steven Perry [phonetic], and he was an actor in movies as a child. He was a child actor in some of the Twilight Zone and stuff like this and had owned a liquor store, and now he owned his first restaurant, which was Stevie's On the Strip, and it was right at Jefferson and Crenshaw. He later opened Stevie's Creole Café in the Valley. But I went from his cash register relief to managing the restaurant, and then within a week or two I'd been there, his cousin, Eric, that had been working for him doing the payroll and stuff disappeared, so suddenly I'm doing his payroll and dealing with his taxes and getting all that junk straight for him, and then he made this decision to open a second restaurant, which I told him was a bad idea, because half the clientele where we were was coming from the neighborhood where he was opening it on

Florence. But he's stubborn, and he's my cousin and we love each other. So anyhow, we opened the second restaurant, and I ended up overseeing a lot of that and enjoying it, learning about racks have to be six inches above the ground, and not understanding why the consultants who do this for a living couldn't tell you this upfront. You had to wait until an inspector came and told you.
But one day I was at that restaurant, and another thing which is funny, the sink had gotten clogged up. He serves soul food, fried chicken that was delicious. He had chitlins, which I don't eat and have never eaten. I've tried to taste them once drunk and still couldn't do it. [laughter] I don't like tripe either, so it's not—okay. But the sink is all stopped up, and I'm mad at one of the helpers there that's not unstopping the sink and I'm reaching down through those deep kitchen things pulling chitlins out of the sink with my naked arms, no gloves, and I'm going, "This swine, people who should never eat swine," and I'm pulling it out and I'm mumbling and muttering, and, "These dummies and this swine." And then I had this brain thing that said, "You need to bless these chitlins and you need to bless these people who eat these chitlins."
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
So now I'm, "Bless these chitlins. Bless these people who eat these chitlins. Bless these chitlins. Bless these people who eat these chitlins." [laughs] And I'm cleaning out the sink and I finish and everything's okay.
The next day I get a call from a friend at Geffen Records that Bryn Bridenthal wants a meeting with me, and they hire me, and they're an account with a nice amount of retainer per month to handle all the Geffen Records artists. So as soon as I was able to make that transition of humility to picking chitlins and blessing it, I was saved. [laughter] I was literally saved.
CLINE
And you didn't have to—
JONES
I didn't ever have to pull chitlins again—
CLINE
Out of a drain anymore.
JONES

Out of a drain. It would never occur to me to call a plumber. You stick your hand in and you clean it out. Now, if it still doesn't work, then you call a plumber. But I went to work for Geffen as an independent contractor. I only had to show up for an hour meeting once a week and do a report and do the work, of course. So I couldn't work at Stevie's full-time anymore like I had been, had moved from relief to full-time, but I still continued to do his payroll and keep his taxes straight and stuff for probably a few years after that, for quite some time, yes, until I went to work for Crystal Stairs in 1994 when I—between trying to do the Crystal Stairs work and the publicity and Stevie's payroll, became a bit much, so I turned—no, I did not turn Stevie's over to Stevie. The accountant that I'd hired—I went out of town. Steve was mad I was out of town, so when I asked where the payroll was, he didn't tell me. He played games with me that he'd left it on my porch. This is his little style. And the accountant had actually done it, because he was punishing me because I had actually taken a week's vacation.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

I was mad at him, but like I said, we love each other, so it moves on. But that was a big relief I didn't have to do that anymore, and I think after I went to Crystal Stairs, I did one or two more NAACP shows, and then I resigned from that, so that I became a full-time—now I'm a real employee at Crystal Stairs, the nonprofit.

CLINE

So how long, then, altogether did you have your own PR thing going?

JONES

Probably '87 to '94. Yes, but somehow in the midst of all that I did thirteen NAACP Image Awards shows. I handled the publicity, and there were thirteen over a course of fourteen years, and I know that because before the last two or three I did, one year they decided to hire someone else, and it was great, because I was under so much personal stress that year, it would have been a bit much. So the next year they came back begging me—

CLINE

Well, that had to feel good.

JONES

—to come back, and I was able to demand a whole lot more money. [laughs]

CLINE

Oh, even better.

JONES

Even better, and my work became so light, because we had gone from NBC to FOX, and FOX had their own PR machine that wanted to do everything, so they basically did most of the work and I was basically consulting, but it was their machine, where before I'd had to build the press tent from scratch, buy the seats, rent them, do everything. Now they did all that, so it was nice. It was much easier. When I got tired of the NAACP—and I'll be really blunt and honest. Working for Kweisi Mfume was the most unpleasant experience of my entire career doing anything there, and I don't know if he didn't like me, but I definitely didn't like him, and I didn't like him.

Back to "Sisters Wake Up," which is interesting, because we were doing a press conference to announce it and he—we had Diahann Carroll there and a whole bunch of people, posing them and staging them for photos and all this, and I asked him to take a photo with something and he read me the riot act, that, "You're without preparation. I'm as important as these people. You don't move me around to the stars," and this that and the other. And I said, "Yes, sir." And then about a few minutes later, his—I'm really telling it—his personal PR person from the NAACP out of Baltimore, Maryland, came over and said, "President Mfume wants to meet that young lady there. Do you know who she is?" And I turned around and all I could see was leather over a big round butt, and I said, "I don't do procurement." [laughter] He said, "Well, he just wants to take a picture with her." So I introduced myself to her. I don't remember which little starlet she was, but he took up with her for a while. It was in the press. She took the picture and I introduced them, and I had such contempt for him that I couldn't work anymore. I don't know if I resigned that same year, I think at the end of the show. I mean, I finished the show, but that night after the show was over—and it could have been that one or next year, I don't know for sure—I remember telling the head of the Image Awards Committee Board, "I won't be coming back. I'm telling you now so you can start now finding someone else to do it. It's been a nice run, but I

don’t want to do this anymore.” I knew I couldn’t work with him again and be able to be professional. I knew it was going to get quite ugly.

I don’t know for sure if that was the same year that Michael Jackson was supposed to come, and he did, and the press that had always been very respectful for me and to me and I had always been respectful to them were literally hiding in the bushes to catch Michael as he came in or out, and when he hit the stage inside—he never came to the press area, even though I was told he would come—when he hit the stage, my friend at the time, the producer, Hamilton Cloud, cut the sound feed to the tent—no, he cut the visual feed to the tent, the press tent. No, he told me to go back in and turn it down, and when I reached to turn the thing down as I’d been told to do, one of the press guys that was—with respect, he put his hand gently but firmly on my shoulder, and I knew that if I continued to turn the switch, I was going to be down on my back, and I just let it go. Then he turned it off from the truck. It was a horrible night. That whole experience had been so horrible, and I was at Crystal Stairs and I was totally off into nonprofit and women and childcare and helping those that didn’t have. I was just—okay. That was it.

There was one other real highlight at the NAACP Image Awards. One of the first shows I did at the Wiltern Theater [phonetic]—and I have to talk about him. Willis Edwards was the president of the Beverly Hills-Hollywood branch of the NAACP, and he was a student advocate at USC and graduate of USC, had been in the military. God bless his soul, he’s in hospice care at Veterans out in North Hills now. But Willis had been after me for years to do the PR for the Image Awards and I wouldn’t do it, and he finally hired me. Even when I was going through my bottoms, he used to would call—and I wouldn’t answer the phone—and just leave me kind messages every week, every two weeks. No matter how I ignored him, he would call.

So they were out to get his head. They said he was too controversial. The NAACP was after him. Other people were after him, and we had a meeting, he and I and [unclear], and decided that it would be best for the branch before the national shut the branch down, for him to resign, and so we didn’t tell anybody, but we put it in the program. So there’s picketers across the street

picketing, "Willis Edwards, Willis Edwards," and the whole bit, and the news is there and people are there, and then you open the program and Willis has written his—
CLINE
His farewell.
JONES
His farewell. Then in the keeping of the NAACP and the importance of the work that's done, he was resigning. I think that was a bad decision to help ask him to resign. That's one of my regrets, is he was both, again, a strong leader and could be very crazy the other way as well. The way he got the NAACP Image Awards on TV is he accosted the guy in charge at NBC in the men's restroom and asked him why he didn't put the show on the air. They'd been doing it without televising, and he got it televised. Even recently, all the news about the guy, Dr. Head, at UCLA that's in the media, I met Dr. Head when I first went out to Veterans to see Willis, would come in to check on Willis, and I learned then and after that he was helping, from his dying bed, helping consult with Dr. Head to help him not be silent and be hurt and be destroyed, but to fight, and Willis orchestrated everything that we've seen from the deathbed.
CLINE
Wow.
JONES
The second time I went to see Willis, sitting there with him when I walk in the room is Ben Jealous, who is the head of the National NAACP now, the young man. So he's sitting there in counsel with Willis. Through Willis I met and had lunch with Rosa Parks. Met with Rosa Parks again down in La Jolla and had the privilege of hanging out with Deepak Chopra. So Willis has always been a catalyst. Like I teased the actresses that were there while I was there. I said, "Did Willis ever promise you anything? He always told me if he hit the lottery, he was going to marry me, buy us a big house, and we'd have separate wings. Did he make you the same promise?" One said, "No, he promised me a condo." And I said, "I just want to make sure. I want it on record before he dies what's up here." Willis helped a lot of people. The fact there were no black women in film, we waged PR campaigns on that. He totally was about fairness and he was a good NAACP person and still is, still is on that board, yes, and, like I said, counseling from his hospice care. Yes, it was a

shock to meet Ben Jealous sitting there like that. The people that have crossed my path are kind of phenomenal. I don't know how or why. I just get thrusted into these things and I kind of go with the flow and I try my best to do what I can do, and that was something I really wanted to kind of—my experience doing the NAACP Image Awards from never having done anything like that in my life, a TV show, and at that time literally using a restaurant adjacent to the Wiltern Theater as the press room, where before me, they'd done it in the lobby of the Wiltern. And hiring people and learning how to completely build and secure stage and get your sound equipment and all that.

The first time I did it Willis actually had some consultant or person who worked for the White House come out and help direct me on how to do that, so I had the best show me what to do, and once you show me, I can duplicate or replicate, basically, and it grew from that to a whole press thing at the Convention Center, Pasadena, and the other area. It became big. From one room, it became several rooms. Experiences—there's just no way on this earth. Just like Dick giving me an opportunity to grow and learn, Willis gave—you know. So I've been very blessed in many areas with some good—I never thought of them as mentors before, but they mentored me. Even in my personal life, moving here into this house in 1966 right out from 119th, 118th and Central Avenue, this is a large house, and my taste was turquoise blue mixed shag carpet, is what I put in the living room, and I had a cement or a pottery stand with a marble top and this statuesque lady thing lamp and the whole bit, and I remember one of my neighbors who was pedigreed was here. Her kids were my kids' age, and somehow one of the kids bumped the lamp. The lamp fell and, oh, she laughed that that lamp needed to go, and I remember being so hurt and so crushed. Not until many years later did I realize that shortly after that, I was taken under wing by Norma Harvey, who is the daughter of Paul Williams, who lives not far, and her son went to school with my son and they were Cub Scouts. I believe we were co-den mothers, and I'm trying to work and do this. Norma very quietly, without ever telling me—and I didn't realize it until, I think, my forty-ninth birthday when I first connected and thanked her—she literally, without ever criticizing me, exposed me to the more bourgeois or the well-trained, well-taught ladies, everything from

how to eat, set a table, what wines to order off the list, okay, all the little finer nuances that give you away when you've never been exposed to this before. I never thought about it or had a clue. I just thought she liked me and we were friends, but she was teaching me, and she had somehow or another decided to take me under her wing and done this, and could be because Anne [phonetic] had laughed about my lamp or something. I have no idea, but gave her pity on me. But she literally pulled me into that society very naturally and very easily where I was very comfortable and I had no awareness, and so I could literally now transcend from wherever I—chameleon. I could go wherever I had to go, and I thank her to this day for that kind of loving mentoring that she gave me, yes, and the people that I met through her and just a whole 'nother eye for things in life, another awareness.

CLINE

You had said in an earlier session, for example, that your husband, Ken, liked to play the horses and that he actually wanted to, I think, get much more seriously involved in that world, a world that had essentially closed the door on people—on someone, well, Berry Gordy, in this case—the way you told it, and that can be an extreme high-society sort of world. How much further interaction did you have with that world and how comfortable were you in it? I'm asking because I got the feeling you were not particularly down with that.

JONES

I wasn't down with the horse racing, but I would go with him to the Hollywood Park racetrack, and Marge Everett, who was the owner, had befriended him, and we would be the only black people in the Turf Club, and I got to meet Mervyn LeRoy, who did Wizard of Oz, I believe, if my memory's correct; Fay Wray from the original Tarzan.

CLINE

King Kong.

JONES

Yes, King Kong, not Tarzan. Cary Grant was walking me out one time and put his hand on the back of my neck and kissed my check, and I still feel it. [laughter] I thought I was never going to wash again. Danced on the floor at Everett's husband's, Marge's husband's, Webb's seventieth, I think. Could have been seventy-ninth—seventieth birthday party on the floor with Fred Astaire, a

few people over dancing. It was a wonderful—Walter Matthau hung out there, his son Charlie.

CLINE

But how prepared were you for that?

JONES

Norma had prepared me somewhat, which I didn't know, so I was basically pretty comfortable. It's interesting. I basically have never tried to get in closer to celebrities or wealthy people or any of those people when I meet them, and I see it all the time when somebody meets them and they get all excited or they start worming their way in. I've always been a bit aloof and kept my distance politely. Yes, there were parties besides the racetrack or Marge at the Beverly Hills Hotel, party for Webb, trainers. I'd meet these people. Dick Enberg and his then wife, he was on the air. Jerry, we'd go to parties. Ken was sought after, and with my rude little ghetto self sometimes, like I told him he was Marge's Toby [phonetic], which totally hurt his feelings something awful, but it was an awful thing to say, in retrospect. But I always suspected, had a suspicion about Caucasians who would pick a black person to be their black person and what their motives were. I didn't feel it was sincere. I felt it was tokenism. So I didn't roll over and let you scratch my belly. [laughter]

CLINE

Interesting.

JONES

I kept my distance politely, but I loved the Enbergs, and Jess Marlow, who was a television anchor. Now, Jess and his wife—and I don't why I can't remember her name—loved those people, okay, really loved those people. I knew we weren't tokens. It was a friendship. Ken was reportedly the first black anchor in Los Angeles, and I've read it and seen it. I don't really know. In addition to doing the news, he did a little bit of acting. He was in, I think, All the President's Men or something with Robert Redford. My end of that was it was filmed in Northern California or San Francisco, I believe, and he made the mistake of wearing this blue shirt or whatever, and he had to wear this shirt every day, so that meant every night he had to bring it home or something and wash it. I had to wash it and starch it and iron it for him to have for the next day. That's my intimacy with it. [laughs]

CLINE
Wow.
JONES
We're talking a transitional time. I was a career woman, but I was also, as Ken introduced me, the "little woman," and that it was his advocacy that had become my career. It was another time. I mean, I thought I was independent, but basically I was owned, in a way, and it started with him having to sign for my driver's license because I was a minor and he was my husband.
Going to buy a car right down here at Western and Pico, and we'd leased cars and bought cars from there, and they said they couldn't give me a car without his signature, and I knew I was the one that managed all the money and handled that and I was the only sensible one, so I stormed out of there and I ended up going and getting a car somewhere on Figueroa where they would let me drive it off with just my signature. So I don't know why I was fighting for my independence, and we're talking late sixties, early seventies, that it just—I didn't think it was a fair setup, and I kicked the side of the barn over and over again, no matter how much it hurt. Yes, Ken was—I mean, he was chauvinistic and he wasn't chauvinistic, which I see also in my sons and in most men, even the more evolved ones.
CLINE
The system is set up that way. It's really, really challenging.
JONES
I've rebelled against it.
CLINE
Well, you had a lot of help when the seventies rolled around and the Feminist Movement started up. How did that sit with you at the time?
JONES
I considered that a white woman's thing, that she didn't have a clue what it was, really, that was going on. I felt that the fight for black freedom and equal rights opened the door for the Women's Movement, and it was interesting how effective the Women's Movement was and how Civil Rights and the Black Movement never quite attained the same status. I was very proud of Gloria Steinem and the leadership that was there and read about them and paid attention, but at the same time, was always that edge of militancy

there with me. I don't know if we called it militancy. I did, and I guess that's what I'm going to stick with.
But I had lunch with a young woman yesterday, Yvonne Chavez [phonetic], who is going to be forty. I met her at Crystal Stairs, she said, in 1996, and she came to Crystal Stairs through other people in the childcare development because she was a young woman with two children and she needed childcare and she was going to school, and she went to USC on scholarships and that whole thing, and I'm proud to say that I was at Yvonne's master's graduation, and she gave me a lovely note and a bouquet of flowers yesterday. She said I was one of her mentors, that I was always very honest with her, and I talked her about her and we ended up hiring her at Crystal Stairs as her first job, and then we honored her as a person whose life evolved and changed. When I got to know she and Sam, her husband at the time, I learned that he only worked at, like, Jiffy Lube or something, so we ended up hiring him at Crystal Stairs in an office environment. What I learned from Yvonne yesterday is that Crystal and Christian—Crystal is going on nineteen and she's a freshman at Cal State, Long Beach. Christian went to ministerial school right after high school and now he's at LACC about to graduate to go into a state college, and her kids have done very well, and she's, of course, the first in her family to have a college degree, young Latina from Huntington Park, you know, and she was just thanking me for my mentorship and how honest—but then what I'm hearing also from her [unclear] is she kicks the barn door and she says, "You know, you helped me be free to be who I am, and even when they tried to constrain me at work," when they tried to cubbyhole her, she wouldn't do it, and I would tell her, "That's okay. You don't have to fit into slots. You're not fit into a slot, anyway, by who you are."
So I'm glad that I've always shared that. Whoever shared with me, I'm giving it back when I see the thing. We haven't seen each other in six years. She just, out of the blue, reached out to me on LinkedIn and we set up for her to come over and give me an update on her life, and we had a lovely day yesterday. I teased her. I said, "I've got to tell you, that independence that I've always had has not served me well career-wise, professional-wise, or fiscally, but I do sleep at night very well." And she says, "And money can't buy that, and I'm the same way." There will probably be a big story coming

out. She, basically, where she'd been working, saw some malpractices of things.

CLINE

Oh, golly. Wow.

JONES

She said, "I couldn't not look at it." Well, that's me. [laughs] I can't look at wrong and just close my eyes and go along with the program. I'm incapable of doing it, no matter how hard I try. Yes, so I'm proud of another little brat that's coming along who happens to be brown and not black.

CLINE

Maybe this would be a good time to ask how you got into Crystal Stairs and your involvement.

JONES

Maxine Waters, the congresswoman, I worked for her Black Women's Forum helping with publicity and stuff over the years and I've known Maxine forever, and I was at a big luncheon one day—and again, this is spirituality, and I don't mean to keep going there, but maybe that's where it is—this little voice came on in my head and said, "Go over and say hi to Maxine and tell her whatever she needs, you're there." And I said, "Now, you know Maxine's going to get you doing something you don't want to do." [laughter]

I can't do that. It wouldn't shut up. So finally I stomped over to where she was and said, "Hi, great to see you." And I said, "I don't know why, but spirits put it on my mind. I'm supposed to tell you that I'm here to do anything you need. Just let me know what you want and I'm here for you." She said, "I will remember that, Regina. Thank you." And I left and went back to my table. Maybe a month later, I get a phone call that, "Regina, remember you said—there's this childcare development agency called Crystal Stairs and they need help with PR, and I want you to help them." And that was in 1994. I don't remember what the big controversy of something they were doing. It was a big government fight and they needed to heighten their visibility and the whole bit. But I met with them and I took that on. When I found out they had a childcare center in Nickerson Gardens, the housing projects which was named after my grandfather, so I start working with SAGE and got really caught up in the children there and seeing the need and what was going on. I still thought Crystal Stairs was a tiny little childcare agency and

they had this wonderful little childcare center and nice little childcare ladies.

CLINE

Wow.

JONES

Come to find out it was run by Dr. Karen Hill-Scott and Dr. Alice Walker Duff, who co-founded it, and it was, at that time, a $40-million-a-year childcare agency, which basically meant government funding to help pay for childcare for the poor came through that agency, and their job was to find the people and give it in their area, and there was about seven agencies throughout the L.A. County and they were one of them.

So I started doing more and more for them, and then they started asking me, "Why don't you come in and work for us." But I was doing my other Stevie's and my NAACP Image Awards and I had a couple other clients. Finally one day I said, "Okay," and I went in and became an employee. Something said it was time for me to give back of what I'd learned and share it there. So that was over a decade. I don't know if it was ten or twelve years, but it was a long haul and a long fight. It's another whole world coming out of entertainment to go into nonprofit childcare development, government-funded regulations and rules and structured corporate, even though it was nonprofit, because they were so big, they were very structured. I still consider Karen and Alice friends for life, fabulous, phenomenal women, brilliant. I learned an awful lot, but one of the things that I left feeling—and it's not because of them, but by learning too much about nonprofits and government funding—government funding, to me, on many levels, is nothing other than the business of poverty. People who work in nonprofit tend to be a little bit self-righteous about the work they're doing and a bit tight and inflexible and not necessarily that creative, and that's not everybody. I'm talking about the mass numbers, not the necessary leadership, and the cubbyholes and the loops that you have to jump through, I'm sure, induce much of that, like, I'm sure, like a UCLA environment.

While I was there, we went from 40 million to 180 million, and then the rug got pulled out. They're still doing okay and existing. While I was there, I—again, learning spurts. I ended up bringing my entertainment in there because they wanted to do fundraising.

CLINE
Yes, I was about to ask. You spent a lot of time fundraising.
JONES
Yes, and started out PR. So I created their first—they were twenty-some years old. They had never done an annual report, so I created their annual reports, both hardcopy and video, and their first big awards dinner and training videos. Awards dinners, there'd be a video on each of the honorees. So I got to play with all those—again, I got to learn, get paid and learn and be creative in some weird fashion and put together a team. My team got up to about—there were five on my staff not including me, so it was six of us before the cutbacks, and they started pulling my people off then, dispersing them to other areas. It was a hell of a learning experience. It was probably the hardest thing I've ever done in my life, because I even fought horribly with Alice. Alice is a true believer in equality for all, equal pay, no matter if you're outstanding or poor. I remember screaming at her she was a socialist and that's no way to run a company and people should be rewarded for extra work, and, "You're stymieing people and you're killing their creativity," and the whole bit. Alice didn't like to do interviews or anything, and I got her doing where she, on this moment now, she's heading a foundation out of the East, a big one, and she just finished a five-year stint with another huge one. She could do an interview out of her sleep. Got her to get rid of her glasses and get new ones. You know, she thanks me. Karen always had media-savvy, but Alice had become the president now, and Karen stepped off just as I came in.
Was an incredible experience. I have no regrets, but it was the hardest work I probably ever did. It was really, really hard, and I think more than anything is learning that it's all just business, not that it was business, just business, for those two women. They filled a need and they helped people like Yvonne Chavez, but, say, out of every fifty people that are being helped—there's no mechanism and they're not allowed funding to investigate or check who the crooks are versus the real people, and because I'm an in-the-trenches person, I get to see behind stuff. So I was in a lot of the childcare providers' homes, and some of them were incredible, but it's like one rotten apple, to me, spoils the whole barrel. How do you clean the barrel out? And I get to see how I feel big government, Big

Brother, both aids you and moons you at the same time, and, no, I don't have the solution for how it could be done better, but it encourages crime on many levels of people that are pretty smart—outsmart, they think, the system, and they hurt everybody else. The fact that the money that used to be given was not protected in any way by giving people the tools and the freedom to protect the money, it's like it's just throwing it through there with qualifications. But that's, I guess, as I'm getting an older person, I see it and just everything down to I use Access sometimes, the public transportation, for disabled, and just how poorly it's run, and in talking to the drivers, that if they complain, they're told, "Well, go get a job somewhere else. So nobody wants to hear that things aren't fine. Status is status quo. Keep it rolling.

And these are all government-funded things. These are my money, your money, everybody's money, and I don't agree with the Republicans. I totally disagree with them. You don't just stop it and kill it. You work out some solutions to refine it and improve it, because it's all necessary. But I just see that, and my time in nonprofit opened my eyes to more than I ever wanted to know. I mean, I knew there were criminals in entertainment with the talent, but to see it everywhere is kind of harsh. I like rose-colored glasses. I'd like to be able to just keep them intact and not have to take them off. Yes, so I learned a lot at Crystal Stairs. I really and truly did. Yes, it was a good opportunity for me. It was a good way to bring my—whenever that phase of my career to—it's almost like I kept getting reinvented, and I just do this whole different thing with this whole different kind of bunch of people, and people are basically just the same everywhere.

CLINE

Interesting.

JONES

Except, give me a brilliant asshole any day over a flat-lining asshole. I can give you a whole lot of alliances for creativity and brilliance. I can put up with a lot more, but that's what I guess I was raised on with my husband. [laughs] That wasn't very nice, but he was a very bright man and a hard worker and pioneer in many ways, and he was an asshole, but I think it kind of goes hand in hand somewhat, and I'm sure some people would call me one that have worked for me, because I always call it working with me, not

for me. Bottom line is I may ask you to go do something, but it's a direct order.
A funny joke, the other day I had to have a meeting with the guy that takes care of the pool. He's Korean. He doesn't speak very good English, and basically I fired him, but I did it explaining he was good, he never missed, but he wasn't able to handle the new equipment, and, "My son-in-law, who I'm letting be in charge, wants someone else, and I'm sorry. Goodbye." He nodded and we hugged and whole bit, and then he shows up for work Tuesday, so he obviously didn't understand one word I said, which is what my son-in-law's complaint is, is that—
CLINE
He can't communicate.
JONES
He can't communicate. So here I think I'm the communicating queen of the world, and there I just fell out laughing, because I'm like, "What are you doing here?" He understood that. He said, "I took Monday off. It was the holiday, but I'm here Tuesday, right?" And I'm like, "But—." And then I realized it's not going to do any good. What am I going to do? So I have between now and next Monday—
CLINE
To figure it out.
JONES
To figure it out. [laughs]
CLINE
Wow. Interesting.
JONES
In the meantime, the new person has started, so they're here. I consider myself a good, clean, clear communicator, and this was a real eye-opening thing that I knew, I knew I got through with—that goes back to the beginning. Whenever I've been dismissed or let go of, it has really hurt me, so I have this awareness that we all don't like to be told "no" and ended, and it does hurt, no matter how little or what the level is. So I thought I did such a fabulous, compassionate, kind job, and now I've got to do it again somehow or another. What's the lesson there, okay?
CLINE

Wow. Well, a couple of things I meant to ask you last time. You told the horrible story of being served with a subpoena at your mother's funeral. How long was your father around? We didn't get the—
JONES
Two years, maybe, after her.
CLINE
After, he was still alive then?
JONES
Yes, he was still alive when mother died. He was a little bit of a lost soul. Then he just decided he was going to move to Atlanta. Some people had been kind to him back there and he knew from school. Some old lady, I guess, had befriended him and he'd known her for years, and I kept convincing him he didn't need to go, and then one day I came home and his car was out front and I thought he was here and there were boxes on my front porch and there was a note saying, "I've gone to Atlanta and I'll call you." I was devastated from the standpoint, my God, what has my father done? Well, he was devastated once he got there, too, because once they found out he didn't have money—they figured, I guess, that he was a Nickerson or something. I don't know what the figuring was. I can't read their minds, but he was no longer welcome like he thought he was, and he got himself a senior apartment and everything, but then he called saying he didn't have winter clothes and he had put them all in storage, so I had to get all his storage boxes brought here, go through, pack up, send him winter clothes. Then next thing I knew, he was missing, and I got them to go into his apartment and he had had a stroke and was paralyzed, and I made arrangements to bring him to California to put him in a home here, got it all worked, and the day they were supposed to come he died that morning. So he never made—his body made the trip and not him. I'm sure he was brokenhearted. Stroke was a real shock, because he's never an obese man. He didn't have high blood pressure.
So it was less than two years after my mother had passed. I was astonished at the kindness of the people in Atlanta, because I was able to take care of all the business by phone. Like, someone was going to actually bring him, just things that you don't get out here.
CLINE
Interesting.

JONES
People were really kind. I'll never forget that. Funny thing about that is that my mother had already paid for a mausoleum thing out at Inglewood Park, so, again, the voice told me when I was making arrangements for him to ask about putting him in there, too, and they said, "Oh, no, that's been sold out for years, but we have this new one." And I said, "Please check for me." "Oh, no." I said, "Please check." Well, there was a slot that had just fallen through—they had fallen in default—right next to my mother, and I fell out laughing. I said, "You two—." Talk about a sick love, because as a child growing up, she used to tell me the only reason she stayed with him was because a daughter needs her father, so I thought for thirty-some years of my life that my mother had suffered with this horrible man because a daughter needs her father, and it wasn't till I was thirty-something that I got it that they just had one of those screaming sick-love relationships, which I had no comprehension of it.
I laughed. I said, "Mom, even in death you want him next to you, huh?" [laughter] So they sit right there, right next to each other, I mean, not in the same wing, I mean, literally next door. And he wasn't a bad man, it's just when he came back from army, he was never—I guess they call it post-traumatic stress or something now. But as a child and as a person, your father growing up, I mean, I had no comprehension of this. I just knew he was a man who could go off screaming at any time about something, about a ballgame, about the newspaper. He just would rage, and he shook. His hands just shook all the time. Everything he did, he just shook, shook, shook, and he was always washing those hands and blowing his nose. Now I know those are all—
CLINE
Yes, obsessive compulsive disorder and all those things.
JONES
Yes, and he loved to play the horses and he loved to walk to the bookie joint, but at the same time, he helped develop some of my fat cells, sautéing shredded wheat in butter with sugar and milk on it. [laughs]
CLINE
Wow.
JONES

Helms donuts off the truck.
CLINE
Wow. There you go. The Helms trucks.
JONES
Pound cakes.
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
Yes, he loved his Pendleton-labeled shirts from Desmond's or Harrison Frank's [phonetic]. [laughs] He was a very—
CLINE
He knew what he liked.
JONES
He knew what he liked.
CLINE
Interesting. Also somewhere in here—you can tell us where—you get involved in this book project.
JONES
Oy vey.
CLINE
We danced around it a couple of sessions ago, but we're back to Marvin Gaye.
JONES
Okay. For the record, John McClain, who I'll call Dude, okay, Dude is the kid at the corner, three years older than my oldest son, who basically spent a lot of his time here, and I always laughed and referred to him as my oldest son. He called me in and said Jan Gaye, Marvin's wife, wanted to do a book, and, "Why don't you write it?" I said, "I can't do that. I don't want to do that." So he went to some other people and the whole bit, and a few months pass and he came back to me. Now, background, this is the same person who called me that Vibe magazine wants to do a story on Michael Jackson and they've been told by Michael that he'll only talk to Regina Jones for the story for Vibe, and at that time it's before he broke loose talking to everybody. He was going to talk to Oprah, Regina Jones, and one main newscaster. I don't remember who it was, but there were three people. John and I haven't written or done anything in so many years. "Regina, you've got to do this." So I went to Neverland, I did the story. It appeared in Vibe. I know I

told that story already. So now here he is with this book. So he comes back, and it's the third time he's come back to me, and I said, "Okay, not that I'm going to do the book. I'll take a meeting and see how I feel." So he set up a meeting over at what's called Marvin's Room [phonetic], a studio in Sunset that had been Marvin's old studio that Dude now owns and has owned for a long time and has made it a state-of-the-art studio. There's a meeting with Jan Gaye, myself, and her grandson, Nolan [phonetic] was there and John was there, and we hit it off really well and decided we'd move forward. Thus begins the book. The book was, according to Dude, the first steps in making a Marvin Gaye motion picture.

CLINE

Yes, I was wondering what the relationship was with at least one of the many rumors you hear about, attempts at making a Marvin Gaye movie.

JONES

Yes, and there had been many attempts, but this one's going to happen because we got the book. So we begin and I start interviewing Jan, and we sit here in the house and do a couple interviews and we start doing it all on tape by phone. Six years later, you and I are sitting here now and the book's at the publisher. It's at the Amistad label for HarperCollins, which HarperCollins, I think, is about as big as it gets.

CLINE

Right. It's big.

JONES

Dawn Davis is the publisher of Amistad and our editor/publisher, and a complete manuscript is there that—I'd say about three and a half years into it, I got gobs of transcriptions and tapes and hours and hours of interviews, very close to Jan on multiple levels. I feel that it's a woman's story, and if we could bring it to a happy ending of some sort of recovery for her, it would be a good book. I'm not writing it fast enough for Dude, so he wants someone else to write it, and I admit, I don't know how long it's going to take. Might take ten years.

So he wants to bring in our friend Steve Ivory, who worked for SOUL, was a writer, began his writing career at SOUL, and Steve, at first, doesn't want to do it, but John, Dude, coerces him to do it and he writes a manuscript. In the meantime, I get an agent, David

Vigliano, to sign Jan, get Jan to get signed by David, and manuscript's finished. Dawn saw it, was going to read it to write her blow-off letter, liked it, read the whole thing, signed the deal. Understand, everything takes months, because Jan can disappear, and as she related to me recently, I do, too, and I did. I completely have remodeled the house in the last two years. But Jan disappears on you. Somebody dies, she's gone for a month, two months, any celebrity-type person. She may know them well or not well. She's a very emotional woman, very bright woman. She was seventeen when she met Marvin. She's now fifty-something, and she survived Marvin Gaye, which, in itself, to me—he was thirty-four and she was seventeen, and basically he took her under his wing and trained a young woman, like I imagine many men have a fantasy of training their woman the way they want to raise them, primarily sexually. She was smart enough that she learned how to get even for all the punishment and hurts he did, and she's held her ground. They were only married for ten years, tumultuous marriage and relationship, but she is still in love with Marvin Gaye. When he was killed, they had divorced. She knows she made a mistake in divorcing him, but it's what she had to do at the time for her own sanity, because he was driving her crazy. She doesn't like Steve's manuscript, even though the publisher loved it, and she wants to rewrite it. We've been working on it, and we are a little bit estranged now, and my efforts are to reconcile that, because I dearly love her. I don't necessarily like her behavior. She's very upset with me, and some of what she said is justified. I accept it.

So I hope by the time this is transcribed it will have been resolved, but I don't know. We're very polite, talking to one another thing honestly, very honestly, nothing held back. We've built too much not to be able to go there. She feels very betrayed by me because I shared a confidence that I didn't know was a confidence with Dude, which I figured he was in all of it, and I shared something financial. I just hope it gets resolved and we get a book out there. I never really thought she wanted her book out. I thought it was something she just always wanted to do, figuring it would never finish, because she'd been trying to get it done for twenty-some years when I met her, and two other people had worked with her on it. So I thought it was a major miracle we had come to where we were. I, as a woman, have mixed feelings about her book and her honesty in her

book, which has to be in order for it to be a book. When Khalilah Ali, the second wife, I believe, of Muhammad Ali, when we got to know each other pretty well many, many years ago, she was writing a book, and she read some of it to me and I remember telling her, "Khalilah, a man can fall in the gutter and get pissed on and he can get up in the morning and take a shower and go back out and he's still a man. It's fine with other men. A woman can't really do that. You're tarnished for life, and I don't think you want to expose all of these things for your children and your grandchildren to see." I know things have changed considerably in the thirty-some-odd years since I said that to her, but I still am concerned for Jan's grandson, Nolan. He's about thirteen. I'd hate for one of his cruel little peers, because kids are cruel, to read about his grandmother and make a comment to him, but I don't know how to do the book without it being completely honest.

So I have a lot of mixed feelings. I'd like to see her—she swears she wants this book out. I've never felt she really did. I want to be fairly compensated for my work, and right now what we're dealing with is she's concerned about me getting a profit from her life story in perpetuity, and I got it. I never thought about it before, but I got it, because this is her story, and so I'm trying to figure out how to work out something that's equitable for all concerned. I don't want her life. I mean, this is not something I signed on to to get rich or make a killing, but I do believe in fair compensation. Six years is a long time. So we'll see. We'll see where this goes.

CLINE

Well, Marvin Gaye's story is one of an incredibly, I would have to say, troubled person, incredibly complex, phenomenally talented, I'm sure pretty severely wounded person. You were publishing SOUL and you had a lot of interaction with people coming into the scene. He lived here for a while.

JONES

Most of the time.

CLINE

Before his European relocation.

JONES

Yes, Belgium.

CLINE

Did you ever meet him or have any interaction with him?

JONES
Yes, I met him. My first knowledge of Marvin Gaye was through Elaine Jesmer, who was a publicist for Tammi Terrell, and Elaine brought Tammi up to the SOUL offices. I knew who she was, with the duets with Marvin and the whole bit, and as recently as this year, in seeing Elaine after thirty years, Elaine said, "You know, everybody thought I was having an affair with Marvin. I never had an affair. We were just friends."
She wrote a book called Number One With A Bullet that sold very well, but we couldn't really find it around here. The rumor was that Berry took it off the newsstands and the bookstands. We liked drama and intrigue. The man probably never did half of what everybody believed, you know. But it was quite a revealing book about Marvin Gaye, and Marvin never spoke to her again after the book. So I knew back then a lot of the things that didn't get in print about Marvin in talking. He was just this very young, talented, arrogant singer. I met him at a party one night—and I'm told it was a SOUL party, but I don't remember a SOUL party that Marvin was at—and I remember someone introducing us, and he looked at me and he said, "Oh, you're one of them smartass educated women." And so that was it for me and Marvin right then and there. I did not like Marvin Gaye. [laughter]
CLINE
Interesting.
JONES
So I thought it was interesting that I ended up writing, and I told Jan this at the beginning. So I had no fan feelings.
CLINE
Yes, you weren't gaga.
JONES
I was not gaga. He was not cute to me. When she talks about how fine he is, I'm like, "Eh." [laughter] But I give it to him. He was a musical genius and he obviously got a lot of his lyrics and stuff from another world. He read Carlos Castaneda and went off into the mountains and he did all those things.
CLINE
He was spouting a lot of kind of new-age philosophy before he was killed.
JONES

That's right. Well, they hooked up, I think, in 1973, and I think he died in '83.

CLINE

Yes, '84, I think.

JONES

Eighty-four, okay, a day before his birthday or something. But there was a Marvin Gaye that I would have known before Jan through SOUL and through the stories we wrote, but he's been erased, because now all I have in my head is Jan Gaye and Marvin Gaye and their stories. Throughout a lot of the book I would say to her at the very beginning, "Jan, you know you were an abused woman," and she'd blow me away. Maybe a year into it I said, "Jan—." She says, "I know, I know, I was an abused woman." She was psychologically and physically abused by him based on the fact she wasn't his peer, but she was a child that he was basically raising.

CLINE

Yes, training.

JONES

Training. But at the same time, there's something very—I could see someone wanting to love him and protect him and make him happy and soothe his demons. I could see it, yes, this big giant who's really a damaged soul on so many levels, and it blows my mind that almost forty years later, what's going on is an exact—I mean, if you just transcribe, look at the lyrics, it's our world now. [laughs]

CLINE

Yes, that's right. It's at least as relevant as it was when it first came out.

JONES

Yes. Then it was misunderstood somewhat.

CLINE

Well, Berry Gordy didn't even want to put it out.

JONES

Didn't want to put it out.

CLINE

And yet aside from shining a light on the artistic control issue at Motown, it, if nothing else, paved the way for all those subsequent Stevie Wonder albums and all those other works that have musically changed—

JONES

Stevie's Secret Life of Plants, I mean, come on, that would have never been done before Marvin. [laughter]

CLINE

Right. It changed the face of music and the way we think about it.

JONES

Yes, and it did lay the tracks for a lot of the new-age stuff that has come out since, which I could have been more of a fan of his, I guess, with his new-age philosophies, but I think it was even a little premature, in a way, for me. But that would have been the Marvin that I would have been attracted to, who that man was, not the man I met prior to that. He was a hell of a talent, and just the stories that I've heard from Jan about Belgium and Hawaii and who he was in Hawaii, he was just such a tortured soul, and so much has been written about him, and that's another thing. His wife's view of him, to me, is very compelling, because this is the woman who knew him the most, the best, and what's even funnier, even though she exposes herself, she's still protective of a lot of things about him that she still never shared with me, wouldn't talk about, would not give up, direct questions that had been intimated or brought up in other people's writing about him, and she flatly one day said, "I'm never going to tarnish his image like that."

So that kind of love, I understand it, at seventeen. I mean, I was fifteen when I got married. It's a whole different young thing. But she'll tell her own, but she won't sell Marvin out.

CLINE

Interesting.

JONES

It is very interesting, and there's things that, because they're in the book, I don't want to go on tape about it, but there's some real beautiful, sensitive moments with Marvin. There's some sexy moments with Marvin. He was quite a—oh, what was that movie? Calligrapher?

CLINE

Caligula?

JONES

Caligula. [laughs] He was quite a man, okay? [laughs]

CLINE

There you go. As indicated in much of his music, in fact.

JONES

Yes, yes, and it's interesting, because that wasn't there in his early music. He evolved into this more worldly man. I don't know what to call it, but he was, yes, very curious, very in depth, very open.
CLINE
We'll look forward to that.
JONES
Well, I hope one day it comes out. We'll see.
CLINE
I wanted to mention something that you didn't really connect when you said that you were invited by Dude to get involved in this, and you actually did at one point, certainly in the early nineties, a fair amount of writing that appeared in magazines and even the L.A. Times about a lot of different topics, actually, and I wondered how your involvement in that developed.
JONES
I just decided I wanted to be a writer. I decided that I had always been a—not Louise Hay. You know, I was doing my own healing work. Julia Cameron. I did quite a few of her workshops, retreats, and so I was a shadow artist, always pushing other people's work and not my own. So I decided I was going to do my own, and it was put on my heart to write the story of the Watts Riots and I did. And again, the miracles of things, my friend Karen Grigsby Bates Talamon, married to Bruce Talamon, the photographer, was a writer for the Times, and I told her I had written this story and I wanted to submit it to the Times and would she look at it. I learned later she went, "Oh, my God. How am I going to tell her she can't write if I get the story?" [laughs] You know, your nightmare when somebody wants to send you their work and you don't know them like that?
CLINE
Yes, I've been there.
JONES
Okay. So I send her the story and she was shocked it wasn't bad. So she made a few suggestions, sent me back to my drawing board. I did some more rewrites, and then she took it to one of the editors there, and then they contacted me and went over with me their editing, and then there was a piece in the L.A. Times. It blew my mind. I think I got $700 for that piece. After that, everything was downhill.
CLINE

Boy, those were the days.
JONES
Okay. No, everything after that was downhill, a hundred and fifty here, a hundred and a quarter, okay, three months' wait to get paid, and it wasn't with the Times, but it was with smaller publications. I did a lot of writing. I was really enjoying it until one day the business part of me said, "You're not earning enough to pay the electric bill to type these things, to send these stories in. What are you doing? You've got to go back to the real world again." I was writing poetry and reading at the World Stage and hanging out there every Wednesday night, hanging out in the jazz in Leimert Park and at Fifth Street Dick's before the World Stage.
CLINE
So you know Kamau Daaood.
JONES
Oh, yes, Kamau is a friend.
CLINE
I figured.
JONES
Like I said, when I do these phases of life—so here I am reading poetry at the World Stage, and then next thing I know, I'm working across the street for Crystal Stairs in childcare, okay, and rarely did I walk across the street once I was doing that to do anymore poetry or anything. Poetry just stopped, the reading just stopped, and Kamau broke my face one night when he critiqued one of my pieces. He said, "That's not poetry; that's prose." Oh, I was so hurt. I was just devastated, I mean, from the mouth of Kamau.
CLINE
Wow. Interesting.
JONES
I might have stopped when he said that, writing the poetry, because I don't write the metaphoric beauty of the poetry that he writes or that a lot of my poet friends that are still my friends that are fabulous poets write. I don't have thirty-five words to describe the sheerness of the softness of the drape. It's pretty much it's a white drape. [laughter] I'm pretty straight with my writing. I try to be flowery and put adjectives in, but not that many go in.
CLINE

So you aren't at Crystal Stairs. You've got this book in the works. What else is happening for you right now?

JONES

Well, I'll be seventy in September, and I decided a few years ago that I needed to finish up my business, and I wanted to donate SOUL, and through Susan Anderson [phonetic], ended up donating as full a set as exists that I know of of SOUL newspaper and SOUL Illustrated to UCLA and boxes and boxes of photographs from the photos and huge number of clippings, because we clipped on every artist. Anything we saw in any other publication went in that—I don't know. I guess we had our own library back then. All those files are at UCLA, and that's why we're doing this oral history. So I just want to get that finished. The remodeling is almost finished. The book is almost published. I don't know what the next phase is. I'm trying to figure that one out right now. I see many things that need to be handled or helped or worked on, but I'm trying to be clear about what gives me pleasure. I've been a machine producing most of my life. I don't really know what gives me pleasure. Last week, cleaning the garage gave me pleasure. Now, that's kind of—it's a little sick, okay.

CLINE

I understand.

JONES

Yes, I'd liked to find something—like I was talking to someone and they said, "Oh, I get facials and massages." I did all that. That's how I kept going while I was being a machine. I'm remembering that I used to love to be at the beach right at sunrise and sunset, but sunrise. I liked the mornings, and I haven't done that in a long time. I want to kind of—it's so easy to get right into something else that has a deadline and whatever.

I hit the "send" button yesterday on a piece for the newsletter, the neighborhood association newsletter, that I could have made into a labor, interviewing a man who was eighty-seven who lived in this neighborhood from 1925 to 1950, something like that. He moved out in 1950. He lived here twenty-some years. What the neighborhood was like then. Milton Page [phonetic], who I'd seen a piece on his father, Milton Farmer Page in the Times, and mentioned that he had grown up in Country Club Park, so I tracked the guy down, interviewed him by phone, and submitted the piece, and I

could just see—I hated it. The writing's horrible. Supposedly I really want to write, but writing is so painful. I don't know if I want to torture myself like that. I really want to be happy. Writing is very self-torturing for me, process, and many of the people I know, the writers I know. There are some stories I'd like to get out. One's a fiction piece, two are fiction pieces that I've written major pieces on, but need to be now—the hard work is the rewriting, needs to begin on both of these pieces. Mostly concerned about women, even though my compassion grows daily for men. I was just telling my daughter this morning, my son-in-law has worked his entire life, had an injury work and he had to have knee surgery, and so he's been off for three, four months, I don't know, right now, and he's never not worked before, but he's working, because he's helping with this construction. He's taking the kid to school and back. I said, "You know, he's not wired to be a housewife."

And I'm beginning to see our society now, so many men are at home, and the wiring, the multitasking things that we're hysterical about, but we're hysterical creatures anyway, now you see men are becoming hysterical creatures because they're trying to multitask. It's much safer to know you have to be at work at nine or seven and you're going to work this many hours. I'm watching him become a little bit forgetful and distracted, and that's not who he is, and I'm laughing, because we're talking and she's talking about many of her peers, the husbands are now—the women are vice presidents and the husbands are now running the houses and the children and the whole bit. It's a new phenomenon, and I was just telling her—and I just sent this to Yvonne yesterday. Yvonne had a relationship, and I knew her husband and I knew her relationship afterwards. She said after that relationship, she made a promise to herself she would not bring anybody else in that would meet her kids and get to know her kids and put her kids through that, so there were going to be no more relationships till her kids were grown. Well, they're in college now. Now she's about to move it till after they graduate, and she's almost forty, right. I mean, she's a baby, and I told her, "Even if it hurts, you need to risk it, you getting your heart broken, and get back out there. You don't have to put on a hoochie skirt and go out looking. You just have to take the wall down that tells them, 'Back!' And I'm giving you that from personal experience, that my wall is up like, 'Don't even look over here.'" And they can pretty much take

it, and the ones that'll try to penetrate that are the ones that you need to run from. [laughter]
I think it's important for women to understand that we were created as man and woman and there's a reason we need each other. I feel sorry for guys right now, because we can reproduce without them. I mean, we can bring home the bacon. I mean, what's the man supposed to do? What's his role now? So those are some real concerns for me as I look at my grandkids and I look at—
CLINE
And you have four men now.
JONES
I have four men and I see their weaknesses and their strengths and the vulnerabilities of them. Men seem to be much more fragile than we ever gave them credit for in all the years growing up. Those kind of things are just—if it's nothing more than helping elders remodel their homes without being ripped off, and how many levels there are that they can be ripped off and what a nightmare it really is. There's no exaggeration, but saying, "Oh, yeah, that's the way it is." I don't get that. If that's the way it is and it needs a change, why aren't we changing it? Why don't we do something? So is that something I want to deal with, or do I want to just go swim in the pool and trim the roses type thing? Then I have a neighbor across the street. She's ninety-nine. I watched her come out to get her newspaper this morning, barely moving, but she's walking, and then I watched her think before she bent over, and then I saw her go back in the house, and she does that every morning. I have another ninety-nine-year-old friend that I just adore, Mildred, who'll be a hundred this year, and then there's—oh, God, what's Naguchi's first name? Anyhow, the corner that was so famous for the stars, Marilyn Monroe. He lives right across the street over there. He's still traveling worldwide doing lectures and talking and the whole bit. These are elders that are still—they're my senior, twenty, thirty years, and they're still chugging out there. So I don't know. I don't know what the future holds. I do know that I said to Theresa—is that her name—Varnet [phonetic]?
CLINE
Yes.
JONES

I said, "If there's anything you need, let me know." So part of me wants to do something, just don't call me and ask me to. It's kind of like Maxine Waters. Don't offer, because somebody might ask, and then what do you do? So I have no clue. It's kind of a weird—economically, I couldn't possibly live on my Social Security, okay, so I do need to generate some income. I'm not ready to just fold over and do that. I just ordered myself a tricycle, bike, a three-wheel bike. I can't walk that far, but I keep pushing myself to walk to the corner and back and a little bit further, and I was thinking about a motor scooter or a golf cart to get around in the neighborhood, and it occurred to me that I still have a lot of strength and I need to build my strength, so if I succumb to that, I'm giving up, in a way. So I ordered the bike to see if I can ride a three-wheel bike and feel safe on that. I'd like to be able to ride around my neighborhood, since I'm on the board of directors and the communications block captain, head of, whatever I'm in history. I'd like to be able to get on my bike and haul butt around wherever I want to go. So we'll see how that works. I'm not ready to roll it in at seventy, nowhere near, so I don't know.

CLINE

We, for the last four years, have had an African American president. That's different.

JONES

I love it. When I met with Yvonne yesterday, my thought was, I wish I knew somebody who could pay her on payroll from now to the election and let her work for Obama dealing with the Hispanic population here in Los Angeles, Southern California area. She'd be fabulous for going up, drumming up things. I wish I had that kind of connection. I don't want to get out there. I don't mind volunteering a little, but I'm not ready to become consumed. I've been consumed all my life. I have a compulsive personality. I get consumed. If anything I start in, I get consumed. I'm sure Susan can attest that I'm being very gentle, but I'm constantly nudging her, asking her, "What's next at UCLA? What are we doing next? What are you going to do, wait till I'm dead before you get started on the oral history? You better do it while I still have something left." So I don't know how to just half-ass do things, but I don't want to get involved, because I think that's a good place for me to hide, is by being busy and productive and making a contribution. I don't want to do that. I

do want to go back again to Dude only because I don't know where else he's going to be written about. Kept harping to me over the phone I needed to read this Thelonious Monk book that's out.
CLINE
Oh, is this the—I just blanked on the guy's name. Do you want me to pause it for a moment? Are you okay with the chord there? You're doing well so far? Is this the Robin Kelley—
JONES
It's Robin Kelley's book, and I was very surprised, because John T. McClain, the father, is mentioned in here on three pages in the It Club and the jazz, Thelonious Monk, but it also alludes to John T. being one of the—in addition to the club, he supposedly was one of the largest drug dealers in Los Angeles, and it's here in print. With Dude, we had a deal when he went to work with A and M Records. He was going to work there for a while and I was going to work at Solar for a while and then we were going to start a business, and he got sucked in and stayed and went from there over to Ted Fields' company, record company and rap music and all of that, and now his people know him because of the Michael Jackson trustee thing. I was always very disappointed and angry with him on some levels that we never started something, because I thought it could have been phenomenal. I see how come he wants to do this movie on Marvin Gaye. It would be a wonderful high for his career to have crossed from—he was the heir apparent to be a big drug lord, and instead he became a paid employee at a record company producing the hit on Janet Jackson and a whole lot of other things musically. He's had a couple strokes and he can't play anymore, and he was a fabulous guitarist and never laid down anything on tape in his own studio, where he could have done it, because it was no big deal. He played the guitar at the funeral home, Conner-Johnson, at fourteen when he used to sit there and babysit and stay overnight, dead bodies, and watch the place, and that's where he perfected his guitar playing. His mother was Dorothy Donegan—
CLINE
Oh, really?
JONES
—musical genius, pianist. He is a genius, and along with being a genius, he's as crazy as they're rumored to often be, but he's also a

loyal, incredible friend who made a choice to live a straight life versus a gangster life, so I'm really surprised that he's saying, "Read this book. This is great," and it talks about what his dad did. I mean, he and I've always talked about it, but he's kept his life really private. Hardly anybody has any photos of him. He teased me, when I find a photo of my stuff, if I send him a copy of it, make a copy and send it, and he says, "You probably have more photos than anybody on this earth of me." Well, I got him as a kid, but I don't think there's but two or three photos out there as an adult that people have gotten to many places.

We're put here on this earth, we come here, we're born, and some people say, "Oh, I want to be a doctor when I grow up," or, "I want to be a musician," or, "I want to be a ballplayer," and they do something different. I've never known what I wanted to be. All I ever knew was I wanted to have a lot of children and I wanted a house with a white picket fence and I wanted a kitchen window that picked up the southeast sun. Well, I never had the southeast sun or the picket fence. I did have a lot of children, but to me, that wasn't a lot, five. So at this stage I'd like to find out who I am, which is obviously who I am, and I know I'm making no sense at this point.

CLINE

No, I'm with you.

JONES

But why I would end up moving in a house with a kid down the street and become so close to him and know him and be involved in his life forty-seven years later still, why the things that have happened have happened, I just don't know. To me, it's an honor to have met Bishop Desmond Tutu, to have done a little luncheon for him, to have been in his presence. It's also an honor to have met Jimmy Carter and shook hands with him, been invited to the White House, kissed by Cary Grant on the cheek.

I mean, I have no idea. I don't understand it. I'd like to understand it. I hear so many people, this is what they're doing, this is how they've set it. I just don't get it, and the things that are important to me was, like, sharing with you about Bernadette Cooper, or a real celebrity moment was being at the Black Caucus and meeting the Congresswoman Barbara Jordan. I have that photograph of when I met her, and I was tongue-tied and speechless. To me, to meet her was—see, you talk about the president. I have not made

any endeavor to meet our president, and there have been luncheons or different things that I could try to go to. One of the ladies that handles a lot of those worked on my volunteer committee at Crystal Stairs, and even Nicole Avant, who was an ambassador to the Bahamas who was brought back to work on his campaign, she's the daughter of Jackie and Clarence Avant, who were friends in the music business. I've still never made any endeavor for Michelle or anything. I've never put myself out to want to meet these people, these kind of people, even the President of the United States. I never thought, I could not have imagined, I would never have believed there would be a black president in my lifetime. It's a shocking surprise to me, even having worked with Jesse Jackson in '84, '85 when he made a bid to run for president. Maybe I wasn't as cynical then as I am now, so as I got older, I mean, I'm still in a point of surprise that we have a black president. I don't know what happened. But I'm not at all surprised at the attacks on him, and the attacks are because he's a black man, and I think they're really ugly, and I think this is the signaling of the last eras of the white man ruling the world, and I think the fight—

CLINE

He's not going to go down without a fight.

JONES

He's fighting. He's fighting. He will throw everything in, and the millions coming out of, what is it, Texas—I can't even remember the guy's name. I want to say Kelly, but it's not Kelly, fourteen, sixteen million, these uber dollars to fight, and these politicians sit together and they don't try to come up with solutions. They fight each other and they posture and block things. Our country is no longer—it's a very painful country to me, though there's nowhere else on earth I would want to be or live. But historically we're going back to being just like every other country. Independent, free America is basically not that much. We're still ahead of most places, but it's still not that much. So there's a heavy sadness, because my children, to me, are already old, but my grandchildren—and not just my grandchildren, my grandchildren meaning all the grandchildren in the world—what kind of world are we setting up for them? I feel so insignificant in that there's nothing I can do personally other than to try to be the best Regina I can be. That hurts me. That hurts me. My kids, three out of the five graduated from college, two have master's degrees,

one almost finished the master's degree and was about to go back and get it recently, but work overtook my daughter. Neither Ken nor I graduated from college. He had a first cousin, Agnes Jackson, who's a professor out of the Claremont Colleges until she retired, was the first one of his family, and then her brother Darius [phonetic]. I had cousins on my father's side that went to college and graduated, a lot of them southern universities, possibly one on my mother's side, and that's it.

So the generational changes have taken place, and I lived through the changes of the sixties both as black and as a woman, but I don't see where we've gone anywhere. We're going backwards right now, and if I had downtime—maybe that's why I like to stay busy. If I set up and contemplated my navel and thought about it, I'd probably not get out of bed ever again. It's that scary to me. As an elder and an aging person, I have difficulties dealing with people I love who are my peers and my friends for life because they don't want to rock the boat, they're here, and I still want to rock the boat, even though I don't have the physical, emotional, or mental stamina for it. I just want to rock it to make it right. I just can't ignore it. So it's going to be interesting, and why we're doing this now I don't know, but I'm glad we're doing it, because for me, I want to close off all this. I don't dwell in the past, so this has been quite a painful process. I'm exhausted most of the week after we finish, because it's opening up stuff that I've closed up. I really live in the present and I've learned to do that, and I don't really live in the future. I'm really in the now. So I have no clue. I feel like this and what we're doing is I'm ending a chapter, another chapter, just like the SOUL chapter, which I don't know why I'm having to revisit that, but that wasn't ended. The PR chapter was ended. The writer chapter, maybe that's what's supposed to happen, but I can't imagine one word I want to write that anybody give a damn about reading, which is—so I don't know what to tell you, Alex, other than I'm going to look at my list and see.

CLINE

Can I ask you one thing?

JONES

You can ask ten.

CLINE

Okay. Very few people I've met were born in Los Angeles and have experienced probably most of what the city has to offer, in that you started in a neighborhood, South Central L.A.; you've been living in this neighborhood now for decades, Country Club Park; you've interacted with people in every echelon, probably every race that L.A. has to offer, including celebrities in the music business, in the movie business, in politics; and here you are, still here, went through all that. You talked a lot about what you felt was the real beauty and the real assets of having the experience growing up and living in Los Angeles. What do you see for the city of Los Angeles, your birthplace and a place that also gave birth to SOUL, the first newspaper of its kind in the sixties that informed the whole country about what was going on here?

JONES

I'm fierce about Los Angeles. If you don't like Los Angeles, you should just pack up and leave, and I wish that everybody that has a negative thing to say about my city would just get the hell out and it would be my wonderful city that it was before, and it's probably way too late for that. I live in Country Club Park, and we have to continue to exercise our voices to make sure they know it's Country Club Park and not Koreatown, but I embrace the Koreans, but I don't think you have a right to rename my neighborhood Koreatown any more than you have a right to rename some other portion of the greater Los Angeles something else ethnic.

CLINE

Or you can have it like in Hollywood where they have Little Armenia and Thaitown kind of superimposed on each other.

JONES

Yes, yes, that greatly bothers me. The newscasters and reporters that come here from other places, I want them to come here and do well if this is really where they want to be, but learn how to pronounce our names and our streets correctly and learn our layout. That bothers me.

I'm the one that wrangled to get the first Korean on our neighborhood association and kind of courted him, sort of, convinced him to become a participant, Earl, and now we have a second one. It's appropriate, because there are a lot of Koreans in the neighborhood now. I hate to hear racism about Spanish people, Latin people here, because basically they took back what was theirs

without a war. How can I fault that, okay? How can I fault that? I'm black. I'm a black woman. How can I fault Hispanics for taking back what's theirs? And they're posturing just like we did as proud blacks in the sixties. They're pissing on people just like we did. We're entitled. The only thing that hurts me is they don't understand that blacks paved a lot of the way, and there's dissention versus a commonality. That bothers me. God, I don't want to be a racist, but it gets back to the white man separating people and keeping people separate from let's take away the color and let's peel our skin off and let's just deal with all of us being human beings with human needs. I live in probably, in my opinion, the most culturally proficient neighborhood probably in all of Los Angeles, Country Club Park. My block, I've been on it so long that I've watched it go from being ten houses, eight of them were black, now there's three of us, and young white families have moved in, a lovely young Korean family, three generations, across the street. Gentrification, which supposedly is dead, is alive and well. We can look at downtown Los Angeles.

It's a new breed of people moving here that don't mind moving in racially less successful neighborhoods and reclaiming to own homes that they otherwise couldn't afford somewhere else, and I think that's great. We're mixing it up. We're really mixing it up, and I love that. I think culturally we're becoming one hell of a city, if the people with the blinders could just take their blinders off and accept that we're just here together. Los Angeles is becoming that, but we still have another phase to go through, I think, before we get here. I am concerned about blacks, because our census numbers dropped and we're popping up in places like Idaho and all over in these places that were non-black before. I understand it, but it's a little disheartening. I still think Los Angeles is the most wonderful and the best city in the whole country, in the whole United States, and how they used to make fun of us not having culture, we've got all kinds of culture out here. New Yorkers used to put us down, "You don't have enough culture out there." We've got museums, we've got art, we've got theatre. We're not missing anything other than financial solvency. [laughter]

CLINE

Well, we're not unique in that.

JONES

No, we're not even unique in that. I don't know. I love Los Angeles. That's why I wanted my collection to be at UCLA here. I love California, and that's not to put down any other state. This is just where I was born and have raised my kids. My grandkids are my third generation of Californians and Angelinos. A young man came over to help clean the garage ,and he was recommended, referred, by two doors down, one of my neighbors, and within thirty minutes I said, "You were not born and raised here." He was working hard. I said, "You look like somebody from the Midwest."
And he said, "I'm from Wisconsin. I've only been here four years." He came out here to be an actor, and to subsidize himself, he hires himself out to do manual labor and works hard, furious, and fast. Well, he's obviously corn-fed. He was not Los Angeles-fed. I don't know a lot of Los Angeles guys who could break their butts like he does and with the attitude. You had to have been raised getting up with the cows in the morning, and as a teenager, not screamed at because you weren't up. You just knew you had to get up. It's a whole different—we're culturally warm climate, so we're a little slower.
CLINE
We're more relaxed.
JONES
We're much more relaxed.
CLINE
Except when we're on the freeway.
JONES
Except on the freeway. That's when we get all our anger and our aggressions out, when we're in our private palaces [unclear]. Yes, I love L.A. I can't see anything bad happening to L.A. I only see good. I'm constantly impressed by people like Eli Broad who continue to support and contribute financially to the wellbeing of our great city. Who's the other one that's always doing it, Annenberg?
CLINE
Right. And in other areas, people like Herb Alpert.
JONES
Herb Alpert, these people that are wealthy that give back, and there's a bunch of them that do it, and they give back hopefully mostly here. Left to me, they'd do it exclusively here, because this is where they prospered and they grew and they made their wealth.

I just can't say enough good stuff about Los Angeles. You know, we had a black mayor forever, and I don't dislike Villaraigosa. I mean, he's been pretty okay after they blasted him about his infidelities, which that's just from Adam and Eve. I mean, stuff is—and I'm not approving it. Don't get me wrong.

CLINE

I understand, but, yes, this country gets very upset about that and then, of course, very excited by it.

JONES

Yes, okay, is why we want to watch it on TV and read about it and the whole bit. I think I'm blessed to live in probably—when I'm sad or when I'm down, I ask myself, "What is wrong with you? Because you have an incredibly wonderful life. You've been given a wonderful life. Yeah, you've had lumps in it and you've had pain, but bottom line, you're blessed." I'm not a victim. I make choices and I believe all of us have an opportunity to make choices, some more lucky than others, more blessed than others, but to me, the greatest blessing would be for me to go out today and buy a lottery ticket and win it. Now, that would be the—I don't know if it would be the end or the beginning, okay. I wish I had money, because I'd like to help people, and if I took a job, you know what I'd like to do? I'd like to run a foundation or be part of a foundation that determines who to give money to to help them move their stuff along. I believe with my experiences, I can spot the real people from the false ones and can see the twinkle of genius that might really effect change. I would like to do that. To me, that would be—you know, you see it on a TV show or something, and I don't mean just go give a person a patch-up thing; I mean fund them in a way that they could really try to make a difference. That would be fun. Now, that would be real fun, because I would be going both on the research and the visual planes of who they are, but I also would be able to go on instincts based on my life and who they are and where they can go. That would be a fun job. If you hear of something, I'm going to apply. [laughs]

CLINE

And what about the music now? How much do you stay in touch with that? We got your feelings a little bit about rap and hip-hop and that whole wing of the development of black music.

JONES

All I'm doing is shaking my head no. I can't even tell you the names right now, but I want to drop them on you, Liebert. When I discovered New Age twenty years ago, Liebert—you know who I'm—Ottmar Liebert.

CLINE

I don't know. I may not know this. It's possible.

JONES

There was a record label out of Santa Barbara, and I wish I could tell you the name, Robin somebody, and it was a New Age label, and I loved the music they were doing and I still love it, and if I were still driving, those are the CDs I'd be playing, and music, if I were driving, would be relegated more to in the car. I don't want to hear news while I'm driving. I want to be in harmony and peace. So I don't play much music at the house. Every now and then I'll put a CD on, and what's over there, the last thing was Lou Rawls, oh, and then Joe Sample. Then I'll put those away and then I'll play something else for a while. There's Alex Cline listening, and it reminds me of some of the new age stuff that I was into. I mean, yes, I knew who Adele is. I mean, I'm not living in another planet, and I love hearing here sorrowful blues about her life, hard knocks. I actually liked Amy Winehouse. I enjoyed her music, but again, this is their stories of their long suffering. I couldn't tell you who's number one right now. The black artists, I don't have a clue. Yes, of course I know who Beyoncé is.

CLINE

Right, or Rihanna.

JONES

Rihanna, Norah Jones. But, no, no desire to go to a concert and hear—I'd rather go to the theater and see a play, and let's face it, I mean, I love movies very, very much and I love to see them in a theater, in a movie theater. I don't like the little theaters. I like larger theaters. But now you can get them at home, so it makes it hard to force myself to go, but I do enjoy that experience of being in a theater watching a movie, but I can't tell you when I've been. I've been to one, maybe, this year, where I used to go to a minimum of one a week, no matter what was going on. So I don't really know. I thumb through the L.A. Times every day and read at it, but there's no desire to read every part of it. I'm dismayed at the lack of in-depth reporting and the PR handouts that they use at a

daily metropolitan newspaper, but yet I wouldn't want to labor over The New York Times. Yes, so I don't know what to say. I enjoy the fact that my street, when I tell you it's changed, that we have a little bit of a nice community, that we all know each other and we wave at each other when we drive by and we speak, and we might come into one another's house and break bread, and our kids all play together. That's the cause of it. It's the people with the young kids the same age, and there are eight children and there's five families, and so we're all very, very close, and I think that's incredible. I never had a chance to really have that as a young mother, because I was working, and I know communities hardly have that now. People are all separate and to themselves, but the miracle of this shifting— [End of June 1, 2012 interview]

Date: 2013-10-25