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# Johnson, Ben

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Ben Johnson

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Gullah Project

Ben Johnson

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David Slutzky: Hi I'm David Slutzky, with Portia Morgan, and Zakiyyah Bergen, it's Wednesday, July 25th, 2012, and we are very blessed to be joined by Mr. Ben Johnson, resident of St. Helena Island. Mr. Johnson, thank you for inviting us into your home—

Ben Johnson: You're welcome—

DS: We'd like to know how long you have lived here on the Island?

BJ: Ugh, all my life outside my military time.

DS: Okay and, we're here to hear your story of growing up. What was it like as a little boy until now?

BJ: Well when I was growing up back in the middle 50s, that's when I was born, and through my childhood, you know, we had a lot of respect during that time for adults and we used to um…do a lot of farming, my parents used to plant tomatoes, cucumbers…you name it, peas, corn…we used to also take the food out to the corner—there used to be a corner, a corn mill there, and we used to see them grind their corn into grits and stuff like that and we used to also raise like, cow and hogs and pigs and chicken and you know, produce our own eggs and we would have okra prepared to cut and can okra and tomato and also with the hogs and stuff like that, back then when I was a little boy we didn't have no refrigerator and stuff like that you know, they used to kill the hog and put it in the smokehouse, hang it up with the meats and stuff like that…cured with the salt and…it's a lot of things you experience, with the field peas, we had to pick that and they used to put it in a bag and beat it with a broomstick so the peas would come out of their shell and…also, just with every vegetable we grow in here, and just you know, preserve it in a canned jar and stuff like that, and later on, you know, things just start changing, you know, they cut out a lot of farming for the small farmers and stuff like that, that's when we went into the food stamp age with the welfare and all of that, that's when I think they interrupted you know, the community with that because they start issuing food stamps and cut farming and only the big

farmers were able to continue on because the methods of farming have changed so much but…it was fun, we had a lot of fun, lots of things to do back then, there was a lot of excitement after doing things in the fields, or during the school period where we would come home. It wasn't a lot of…in the house like the kids do now, we would have to go in the fields and do the sweet potato, pick the peas, and when fun time come we would go out in the woods and stuff and we would have mulberry trees, blackberry trees, ugh, persimmons tree, the pecan tree, or we would go in somebody's watermelon field (people in room laugh), somebody's cucumber field or tomato field…there were so many things to gather and eat and we would stay outside and have fun and stuff like that! And it wasn't no in the house all day, nothing to do, and in that time we had to go get the wood, in the winter time and stuff like that, the winter would be peaceful and fun, they would cook a lot of lima beans and use the whole meat and then they would do the same things with the peas and cabbage and that's when all the meat would come in with the hogs in the pot and—and it used to work out. Happy, healthy, and had a lot of fun. We heard different stories and stuff. We weren't allowed to go into Beaufort because there was really no transportation there and stuff like that. I remember my father had to row the boats and stuff different places and stuff, I remember as a little boy I heard you know, like a bunch of people got drowned because they had t go early in the morning, but God was good to them, every now and then there'd be a boat and stuff like that, and there'd be a bunch of guys, they used t work on Parris Island, and they had their own business, Mr. Jack Johnson and Mr. James Washington, and another man from Lansing called Diamond, they had a big old school bus, I guess they got a good option, and that's when the busses start running and they open up Beaufort Bridge in the late 50s and those busses would pick them up and take them to Parris Island and drop them off into Beaufort and different things like that. A lot of the farmers, they used to take, when they went to Parris Island, on Beaufort they would take the butterbeans and the corn and all of that downtown and all of the wives and stuff, they would be there to buy from them the okra and this and that. It would be fresh and they would like that, so they made some extra money like that. Also when we had a tomato field and a cucumber field, we used to have some guys come down from up North with the tractor and trailer and they used to be, over there behind me used to be a man named Mr. Saintgastin (?) and over there Ms. Plum Haywerth (?), she got a little store. These tractors and trailers- one would be there and one would be there. And when we get up early in the morning and pick the tomato out the field and stuff like that, we would go down and get the boxes and stuff, forty to fifty boxes and stuff, and we would fill those boxes with tomato and stuff like that, the kind that they wanted. And somebody back then would have trucks and stuff so when somebody get through with their field, you'd lower the stuff up on the truck or the buggy or whatever, take it down there, and they would give you a certain price for a box and that was the time you made your money. During the tomato time you made your money doing that. And when we're not picking tomatoes from our own fields, we're out on the farm picking tomatoes for Mr. D Jones (?), John Crass or Sanders (?), he was a big farmer- I had a cousin, my father first cousin, Jack Johnson, one of the only black farmers- he was pretty good too. He live right down the street. And those are the places I would sell to make my money and you know,

farm year round. With Dave jones, he worked with my mother. Down in the 60s, my mother, she started working for Ms. Mafferd (?), black school teacher, she came down here in the middle 60s and I remember when she started working, three or four days a week, and she didn't have to go on the farm but we would still have our own fields and stuff like that, that's when she started becoming a homemaker and it was really…that's when they started hiring black women to take care of the home and iron and cook and stuff like that. Things gradually just changed—

ZB: Gradually. You said Dave stopped the farming-

BJ: Yeah, you couldn't really compete, because, they wanted you to…the trucks stopped coming. The big tractor trailer that would come and sit in the yard, that kind of branched away and the bigger farmers…they wanted you to use the plastic (? Placket?), and for one roll of plastic was like a hundred and something dollars and these guys would have rows running from the back of here all the way to my neighbor across the street. One row like that. They couldn't afford it anymore. So, you know, like I said, things change and stuff like that. People still plant their garden but nobody does it anymore big like that. The big farmers, what they do now is allow us to go in the field once they're done farming- some of them- and you know, they got really nasty about stuff like that-

ZB: Really? How so?

BJ: I mean they don't allow you, you can go out after the field is done, you have three or four days to pick as much as you can. If you don't know them personally, they're not going to allow you to go in their field. So that kinda changed, so. Every now and then a guy down here sends…he allow a lot of people to go in every three or four days and they burn it up. Same with the watermelon. They had…fields and fields of watermelon and once they get through pickin' they poison it.

DS: Unbelievable.

BJ: Yep.

ZB: Did you have siblings growing up, brothers and sisters?

BJ: Oh yes! There were…six boys and five girls. Six boys and five girls…up until the year 2004 to 2011, I lost all my brothers. So I'm the only one of the brothers. My oldest brother passed about seven months ago. And I lost a brother in 2010 and one in 2009 and one in 2004. It was just like that- boom, boom, boom, boom. I lost two sisters in the 90s…It's three girls still living and me.

ZB: Are you all living here?

BJ: Yes. My older sister lives next door and my baby sister lives down there, you know where you guys came from? And my other sister, she lives in Burton, that's across town. We're all right here.

ZB: And you've been able to keep your family property at St. Helena's?

BJ; Yes, yes. We've been able to maintain…you know. It's about a five acre track here/ Everybody has their own lot and when it's tax time they pay the tax.

ZB: And so you've been taught to value this land?

BJ: Oh, yes. Absolutely. But you know, every two or three years, Allan Galloway, he's a film director and he showed a lot of concern for the land and the surrounding island. A lot of the land has been taken by taxes, you know, you go to the court house and see who hasn't paid their taxes. And so they took the land…and you know, you have a year to redeem it but some of the people, some of the elderly people, they couldn't read what was going on…but he got really involved, he's pretty serious about it, and the churches here are pretty much involved. If you don't have the money to pay the land tax you can go to the church ahead of time, they'll make sure it's done, you know. Or at least put it in the hands of someone in the family so that they can maintain.

ZB: What was it like going to school here?

BJ: Going to school? Well…in the early…I can remember my older brothers and sisters, they had to walk to school, go to South Pines School and later on they moved them to Penn School. And then they built St. Helena School. When I came along in the 50s, pretty much the same routine, the bus come and pick you up and stuff like that, the class sitting was nice, and we used to get our lunch break and go on the jungle gym and stuff like that. Where I went to school, it was so closely knitted because everybody knew everybody. And that went on from the 50s to I guess the late 60s, when everybody went up North and had children, in the North like in New York and stuff like that—and when New York got kinda rough they'd send their kids back here, and then you're comin' along and you don't know who is who. After the growth and stuff, I mean you could walk to the grocery stores downtown, the Piggly Wiggly or Red and White, and you look at a person and could go, "Oh, okay. You're Sister Sarah's daughter." And you know who you're related to. It's changed so much you know, and I always say like this, I was born in a split-generation. I gotta deal with the older people and I have to deal with the new generation. I prefer the older way. Because I always remember when you used to say, you would walk down a road, you'd do a little shopping, "Yes ma'am, yes sir," We had respect and manners. But now, the little- I have a little cousin, he goes, "Hey John," Just a dry John, no Mr. John or Mr. Johnson. Just dry- these parents don't teach their kids nothing. A lot of them don't. So you know, I kinda miss the old way…time change and stuff like that but I think people should still respect each other. I really stand strong on that.

PM: Is that the biggest change you've seen in the Island?

BJ; Well, you know, developments and stuff like that. When you can't stop people from coming in. Big developments and big houses and stuff like that, it runs the tax up and a lot of the people, they lose out on it because they can't afford it. Eventually they end up losing it if we allow some builder to come into this area, like they wanted to build some homes over their but we protested and once they come in the area and start building homes, if you live in a single wide or perhaps a double wide or a small home, and everything is going up outside your paycheck and everywhere around you, it gets hard. It gets real hard. A lot of people lost their homes and their property. You just gotta really buckle down and have your priority in the right place.

DS: You talk about how the church will help you out in that regard as well—have the residents banded together as a collective unity to fight off the developers that are coming in?

BJ: Yes, in this area. I know that for a fact.

ZB: Would you say this area…you're not just talking about your family?

BJ: No, no, in this area…every time they come and try to bring something in [unintelligible]…I know he wanted to put in houses and apartments and stuff but I know he's cutting the land into lots and selling it like that. So you know, we prefer, if someone's going to come in and be a homeowner and stuff like that. No one's going to come in and go boom—and make everything go crazy, go sky high.

ZB: So we hear continuously about a connection to the land…did your family have a connection to the religion here?

BJ: Yes. Very strong.

ZB: What was that like?

BJ: It was awesome, it's still awesome. My mother was in Holiness Pentecostal my whole life and all my sisters and all my brothers and so am I. We believe in God and we believe in that strong and we believe in, you know, having that respect and care and love the lord…and we prescribe on that. That's just something that keeps me going every day, you know, reading my bible, going to bible study. I did my thing when I was younger, partying and drinking and smoking and all of this, but after 1989 when I received Christ in my life, he took away all of that, you know, the drinking, the smoking, the chasing women. It makes a difference having Christ in your life. It makes a big difference.

PM: So staying with the religion idea, did any of your family attend praise houses, do seeking...

BJ: Oh yes, yes. My parents, they seeked. My sisters, they seeked. Praise house down the street, at Scott's praise house, yeah you know, they used to go to praise house on a regular basis. Just about every little community has a praise house and they would go and pray at the praise house and all of that. They used to tarry for the Holy Ghost, they used to call on the name of Jesus, speaking in tongues. They drifted away from that but you can tell they're different-- so my family is real, real strong on that and we bank on that.

PM: Before coming, we saw Gullah as just a language. We now can see it's much more than that.

BJ: Oh, yes, yes.

PM: So growing up, how did you see the "Gullah" culture?

BJ: I feel great about it because it really prepares you. When you go out, you would go and move to a different place—we learned to make just about everything. Take little and make much. That's what our parents taught us and stuff like that. Living here, you need to know certain things to make it in life and that's a very strong background. It's something people just take…just take as a waste and we take it and make something out of it. It's just a…good experience, 'cus you know, you can teach people a lot of things. I know people who come from the North, they come down here and go "How y'all do this, How y'all do that," they taste the cooking, you know, when you cook and stuff like that and people come and just enjoy…we never had places to go out and eat and stuff like that. In the 60's and 70's we used to do everything—we would have rabbit. Someone would go and catch a rabbit. Those mothers and stuff would know how to prepare it, make you bite your lips and stuff (laughs). They knew how to do rabbit, they knew how to do possum, the 'coon, some people knew how to do the possum too, deer meat, um, just about anything. They knew how to prepare it and stuff like that. And the fish and stuff like that, the whites wouldn't eat catfish back in the day, in the 50s and 60s, but now…but now. And with the pig feet and stuff like that, oh no…(laughing) but once the sisters got a hold of it, they would take the hogs head, the chicken feet, the pig's foot, and they just love it. The collard greens, mustard greens…they just make it work, just pull it together. And make it work, and you just enjoy it. That culture, it saves you a lot of money, you enjoy your meal, you're eating healthy from just producing your own stuff. It's a good thing (laughs), you know. It's a good background.

ZB: We're teaching Gullah culture now in our schools. We are amazed at the connection of this region and Gullah and North Africa. How does that make you feel?

BJ: It makes me feel good. It's a good thing. It's good.

PM: So how did you get into the construction business?

BJ: After I got out of the military I went to college for a while…I was doing well—just like I said, you know, messing around…going to school, using my GI…just hanging out. Then one day I decided, you know, imma get me a real job (laughs). At that time I was doing some dock work, and I saw these big homes and buildings and there was maybe two or three months and I said I'm tired of doing this. So I went over and talked to the guy and one of the guys said "you can come in as a helper," and I came in as a helper and I you know, picked up on it real fast and in six months I had a two man crew with me, and we stayed on that project for two years and then I went with some friends and we went from jobs to jobs, Hilton Head and different places like that, and in 1989 I worked for Climoth (?) Construction, a local contractor from St. Helena, and I worked with him up 'till 95-96. And then I said, "That's enough, I don't work for nobody no more," and I stepped down. I don't know, the law was dealing with me because I had a dream I was doing downtown allies (?) and so I got laid off, and I said, "I'm not going to work for nobody anymore." Put my little Nissan truck—I had a new Nissan truck—I bought me a lawn mower, I said, "I'm gonna do landscaping" with my name on it, and this should work, and it sure enough did. By the grace of God. This lady, this young lady, she used to do interior home decorating for the house we built so she found out I was laid off…and I started doing the floors and stuff, redoing the wooden floors, bringing it back, doing a trim and painting, I put my sign up…and as I went along and stuff, I've been doing a lot of work for Cal Waters…and after I had the dream, about three weeks after, I got a set of plans, they used to be allies—downtown allies—in Beaufort, right down Bay Street, a guy from Montana, Tony Renolds, he bought it, and he sent me a set of plans. I looked at it, and I gave him a price and everything, and he sent that money like boom, just like that, and I got in there with my helper and we built that. I did the whole inside, redid it all over, and it's Bay Street Outfitters right now. It's downtown. Everything is still there, it's still standing, still open. I used to do a lot of cabinets and stuff…thing called a flier rod showcase (?), it came out of the ceiling, it came out of the ceiling and went down like this and when it got here it was shelves in and on the side door where you keep your stuff, fishing rods and…the whole store, it's just beautiful. It's standing right now.

PM: I may have to go inside!

BJ: Yes, go inside there. I did that, and when you look in there I say "why…did I do that?" You know, after that I went into the same construction and stuff then went into renovation and remodeling and stuff…I did Penn Center…[unintelligible] and the cops cars and stuff, yeah I did that about two years ago, about two or three years ago. I renovated that, and the handicap ramp that goes around…I was in that place for seven and a half months, I don't want no more jobs like

that. Because they want you to have the original stuff and put everything back but…they stole a lot of stuff from out of there too. But yeah that's what I do, remodeling. I did one this time last year, I ran into another one. A big house, the bathroom floor and everything collapsed. But I like to bring the dead back. It's awesome. It's nice.

PM: So having the construction background, and doing the construction here, there are two ideas of thought here. Some people would like to see Walmart and some big stores come on the island, and those who would like the island to remain as it is. Which side do you stand on?

BJ: Well…I'm probably in between. I could see one or two more stores here, you know, like a Walmart. And…pretty much, that's it. That's it. I can see a Walmart here and I heard they have a big set of plans for a jail house down there on the other side but that's it. I don't want nothing else to come in. They can do a Walmart, that'll be fine.

PM: So you'd like to keep the island the way it is.

BJ. Yes. Yes. Because Walmart would help a lot of people not going into town, especially with the way things is, people can't afford to ride back and forth. That'll be a good place, and stuff like that.

DS: I've seen so much Gullah pride from anyone on the island that we've spoken to. I see a strong work ethic, no matter what occupation you're in, I see such a strong work ethic. Is that sort of thing passed on to the children of the island?

BJ: I think after this…people [no less] that 45…it's getting weak. It's getting weak because…I mean, they don't put nothing in anymore. It's just hard, you don't see the younger people…you don't see them show no concern…those who leave and go to college or join the military, sure, but you got a lot here and I kind of blame it on the parents a lot. Because I don't feel like I'm gonna keep nobody in my house, once they graduate from school, unless they're working or going to school here and doing the right things, because a lot of these parents here…I guess…they love the children so much that they won't kick them out the nest. All mine had to leave. You got to go. You got to leave. I think that's what's really…you got grown people in the house at 35, not working, not going nowhere. And it's a lot of that going on now. And their child

don't ever do nothing wrong, so. I can see a lot of it comes from single parents, the mother just raising the child and stuff like that, that causes a lot too but I think you can be strict enough to let them know…nip it in the bud before it starts because if you skip school in my house, it's gonna mean something. I have one…I have a great granddaughter. And my granddaughter, she's 19. And she has a little girl. She hardly comes around because…she knows the deal here. There aint gon' be "stop, get off of there, don't climb up there"—there ain't gon' be none of that. It's not gon' be, "stop Johnny, stop Johnny, it's too much, stop it." If you can't control your child, you know…you know…you can't do that here. You gotta teach these children discipline, a little discipline. Make sure they're on the right track. It's hard, you know. It's hard. All we can do is pray and lead them in the right direction.

DS: We've heard about food, tradition…What are some other Gullah traditions that have been passed down to you that A), you learned from your parents and grandparents and also those you would like to see passed on to your children, grandchildren.

BJ: Um…well you know, some of the things that passed on were like, they taught us how to can our own tomatoes and stuff like that. They taught us how to preserve food…different food and stuff. And how to plant stuff. You know, what to use and what month…the collard greens and the okra, you have two seasons for okra, you have collard greens, your watermelon and all of that. That's still passed down. How to hand pick your crabs, clean your fish, go into the river and get your fish and clean it…it's a lot of things that you pass down. Also when you have a peach tree or pear tree, when to prune it and what to use…so yeah, it's a lot of things.

DS: Can you share a favorite story from your childhood?

BJ: Well…it used to be about the horse man down at Lands End, there used to be a light that comes out at night, used to be an old fort at Lands End, and…his neck was cut off. And when you go down there a certain time in the nighttime and stuff like that, the light, it would be a bright light that comes out. So, we had some…it's quite a few, we had 8 to 10 marines got killed running from this, you know. They go down there and they're drinking and partying until 12 o' clock at night or whatever…and they proclaimed that they saw this light. And um…that's one of the stories. They had a bad bus accident…I guess it was in the…early 50s. One of the guys who live here, they got in a fight on the bus, and that was a tragedy. I think it cut the guy's throat and I guess the blood shot all over the place, bus got out of control, and I think a couple people got killed. The bus driver, Mr. Brown, he was left limping all his life because of that.

PM: We've heard…Dr. Buzzard's stories.

BJ: Oh yes, yes, yes. Dr. Buzzard, he was well known. People used to come from all over.

ZB: We heard as far as New York.

BJ: New York, yeah, Atlanta, Georgia, Florida, and they would come, some would come for…if they have a problem in their relationship and stuff like that. Some would come if they had a desire to go after someone… Some would come for numbers and stuff like that, what number to play. Some would come, you know, to do evil. To do evil stuff and stuff like that. Someone say but moss on a person's car and things like that, or it would cause different things to happen to them. It was kind of spooky. His son graduated with me, we were classmates.

PM: Did he feel bad that people said those things…

BJ: (Laughs) No, no…he just…you know, he reaped the benefit from that.

PM: How so?

BJ: Well, he used to tell us, I think it was in the 11th or 12th grade, he said, "if you want a girl…" (Laughs)

ZB: Tell the story, man!

BJ: (Still laughing) He said, "If you want a girl to stay with you, stay with you forever, take a piece of her hair and put it in a little cup with some manure in it, and burn it. And she would never leave you."

ZB: Did you try it?

BJ: No! (Laughs) But I mean they used to come down to him for lucky numbers and stuff like that, you know, what's the best time to play the number…he was very popular. He'll never die.

ZB: Who took over?

BJ: His son. He does his stuff now on the down low, you know it's only certain people…it's still going on. There have been a few doctors here in Beaufort. One in Beaufort and what's that…the Old Jenkins (?)…about three or four. And some of the old people, the old mothers and stuff, they'll put mud on you, they call it mud You know, if you're disrespectful…you're not doing the right thing by your parents and you're staying in trouble and stuff like that, and they try to talk to you and you won't listen, they'll put mud on you. That means…nothing good's going to happen for you. And it used to stand! It used to stand.

DS: So they would take their kids…the parents if their kids were misbehaving, they would take their kids to the root doctor?

BJ: Oh, no! No, no, no. Not on the root doctor part but on the children. You could get advice from the root doctor, he could tell you what to do…but it's nothing mischievous. Just about everything, he had an answer for you. Because you believed in him! So.

ZB: How far does this land…how far back can you trace it to your family?

BJ: Um…it would have to be back to the 1800s.

ZB: That's wonderful. Do you have the deed to it?

BJ: I have the deed to it.

ZB: Can we see it?

BJ: …I'd have to dig for it.

ZB: Well you let us know if you can get it before you leave. We would love to see it. So you can trace this link back to the 1800s?

BJ: Yes, you know, I don't have the papers but from my sisters and my aunt…my aunt is 80 years old, she lives in New York, and she tells us about granddaddy and all that. My great granddaddy, he used to own a little store and stuff like that. And they were telling us how mean he was and stuff like that.

ZB: How mean was he?

BJ: He was so mean. My mother…what happened was, I think my um, my mother's father married my grandfather…no…let's see. He got married again. My mother and my (unintelligible) had different daddies. They had different, um…they had different daddies. What he would do is he would work them on the farm and they would pick cucumbers, potatoes and stuff like that. When it's time to go home they had to stay somewhere else, they couldn't stay there. He was so mean and nasty he would give them a bag of sweet potatoes to take home and stuff like that. My mother and my aunt…they had to defend…they were so close and stuff. My grandfather, he was something else. When he got ready to die, he was wanting to jump in the fire place. That's how much…how evil he was. Yeah, that was back in the…in the…yeah, late 1800s, and stuff like that, when he died. So yeah, all of this was family heir. I mean, the lots of Johnson and Smalls, and Chaplain, and this one married to this one, and connect this cousin to the one down there…first cousin and all of that. The Johnson family, my family, is real large.

DS: What's the oldest story you remember being told about this land here from a grandparent or…older person?

BJ: Well, it was told that we had…we had about 20 acres. And um, my father's mother, when she was living, she sold about five acres to Smalls, which is our first cousin. And after that, when

she died, in the late 50s my father sold about 5 acres and then after that he sold to—right there, my neighbor (points behind him)—about two acres. And that left us with 5 ½ acres. So there ain't no more selling. Unless my…sisters and brothers do…no telling about the children. We're trying to hold on to everything, to what's left.

PM: So this area is known as Lands End area?

BJ: No, this is Orange Grove.

PM: So was Orange Grove a plantation too, at one time?

BJ: Yes. Orange Grove Plantation.

PM: Every time I think I know where I am, I'm lost.

BJ: Well you know, they kind of split the names up the last 4-5 years, they started naming it…instead of Orange Grove, Storyteller Road. But you know, here, we still consider it Orange Grove. And then from Orange Grove, once you get up there it's Scott Plantation. And then from Scott Plantation it's Capers. You come in, this is Orange Grove over here (points), this is Scott over here, and this is Capers over here. So we're right in one big circle.

PM: Another thing I heard a lot about was baseball, softball.

BJ: Oh, yes. A lot of baseball back then, they used to play a lot of baseball. This guy…they used to call him "Sporty Roach" (?), this guy used to have a club, and people from all over, Grace Hill, um, Burton, Gale, they would all have teams and they would come, and they would have their time out there. They would have their little beer, he was a guy like…he would cook a lot. The peas and rice, and potato salad, and whatever it is, Sunday afternoon, baseball, baseball. And then they would go to Scott, Scott baseball field, and they would have Scott hall, which is a community center right now and still is, and they still have baseball there now. They have

baseball up on the hill, on Scott hill, and we used to play against those guys, James Johnson, everybody had a little shop here and there, and once you get that crowd they'd sell beer and coke and it used to be real fun. I mean, good clean fun. Maybe a fight now and then, the worst thing that would happen was someone would pull a little knife, a little pocket knife, broke a beer bottle or something like that. There was no violence or something like that. But um, used to be a lot of baseball games.

PM: Were there any stars that would come out of this area, people to come out and play professionally?

BJ: Mmm…no, no, no. But you know, recently they have scouts come and look at certain guys. But you know, there were some of those guys that were good enough. Mhmm.

ZB: Did you have an opportunity to play?

BJ: No, no. But it was good.

ZB: But you said scouts come here so, is there a sports program in the schools down here?

BJ: Every now and then, someone will go to college and they'll be pros. Greg Johns, one of the running backs for Jacksonville Jaguars, I forget…Stump Mitchell…yeah. Couple of those guys from Beaufort. And you know, you got some with the CFL, play college ball, and stuff like that. It's more opportunities now than there was.

ZB: How do you define Gullah? What does it mean to you? It means so much to us, on the outside. What does it mean to you as an insider?

BJ: To me, it's a strong…it's a strong…how do I put it? It's a strong culture where people come from all over and once they understand where we came from, and the things that we went through, what we used to do and still do today, it's a lot of fun to let people know and see them

excited about the history, especially in this area of South Carolina, what we used to do with the cotton fields, we had to go through the cotton fields. So many things have come out of this area that we had to do hands on. A lot of people didn't get the chance to see that or do that and there a lot of things we hold onto, the baskets, the cotton. It's just so rich, it's a rich history. It's a lot of things that you learn from, doing the nets, the casting nets, I saw a lot of that coming up but it's drifting away so I'm happy I saw it and can talk about it, seeing it hands on, and stuff. It just makes me feel good about it. I don't mind telling the stories that I know and that I've seen and seeing people enjoy it and are still interested to learn about it. It's so rich and respectable. People appreciate hearing where you came from and the things you've tried to grasp onto because this world, this world is changing so much, every time you turn around, it's tragedy or this or that. I just thank God I was born at that time, in this area. Share with the young, and the old, and not ashamed of it….the younger guys and stuff like that, they don't want to take time .

ZB: That would be very sad to lose that.

BJ: Yes.

ZB: The same method he uses, we see in Sierra Leon. You can't even tell the difference.

BJ: Right.

PM: Well Mr. Johnson, we're so happy we were able to talk to you and catch up with you because you shared some things that we haven't heard, as we've talked to other people. We are hoping to get funding to come back next year and hoping we can talk to you again next year and get even more of your life story.

BJ: Alright!

ZB: Thank you. Thank you so much.

BJ: You're welcome.