THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

Oral History Interview

with

Joyce Rawlings

Interviewer: Francesco De Salvatore

Narrators: Joyce Rawlings

Location of Interview:

Lloyd House, Alexandria, VA, 22314

Date of Interview: April 20, 2026

Transcriber: Robin Reeder, Reeder Transcription Services

Summary:

Joyce Rawlings discusses moving to Alexandria from the District of Columbia as an adult. She chronicles the various departments and organizations in Alexandria where she has worked with children and families, particularly in the 1980s.

Table of Contents and Keywords

Minute	Page	Topic
0:00:46.2	4	Joyce Rawlings discusses her earliest memories, highlighting growing up in D.C. and moving to Alexandria.
0:01:37.8	4	Talks about being kicked out of her family's house when she was 17 and moving in with her boyfriend. At that time, she also was pregnant with her first child.
0:09:45.0	7	Reflects on her mother.
0:11:21.3	7	Reminisces about her father and her stepfather.
0:18:43.4	11	Chronicles the locations where she lived in Alexandria.
0:22:44.4	13	Talks about her children and tells their names.
0:30:21.7	16	Reflects on starting the Yes Group with her friend Hilda Isham.
0:30:21.7	16	Reminisces about the One Love Festivals that were held in Alexandria every year at George Washington Park, and which were organized by Lenny Harris.
0:34:04.4	17	Discusses working at the Alexandria City Jail.
0:36:14.3	18	Chronicles working for the Residential Youth Services and eventually becoming a foster mother.
0:38:15.8	18	Reflects on the programs she was talked with running for the Alexandia Residential and Housing Authority.
0:39:27.8	19	Talks about working for the Learning Center.
0:47:01.9	23	Discusses working for the Family and Community Engagement Center (FACE)
0:52:02.9	26	Reminisces on the Wright to Read program.
0:55:15.6	28	Reflects on the This Way House group.
1:05:24.2	33	Continues reflecting on her work with the Learning Center.

General	African American Resource Center; Alexandria Residential and Housing Authority (ARHA); Drills Dean Band and Bugle; Family and Community Engagement Center (FACE); March on Washington; One Love Festival; Residential Youth Services; This Way House; Wright to Read; Yes Group
People	Diaz, Gaynelle; Ellis, Jason; Harris, Lenny; Harris, Shirley Anntranette; Hawkins, Bert; Isham, Hilda; Rawlings, Dawud; Rawlings, Donnell; Rawlings, Dwayne; Rawlings, Landous Beatrice; Truesdale, William
Places	Alexandria City Jail; Charles Houston Recreation Center; Cora Kelly Recreation Center; Crownsville High School; Evans Lane, Alexandria; George Washington Park; Jefferson Houston; Jireh's Place; John Tyler Elementary School; Learning Center; The Lloyd House; Pohick Bay; Ruby Tucker Family Center (RTFC); Santullo's Market; Westminster Church

Joyce Rawlings [0:00:02.1] My name is Joyce Rawlings, Ma Rawlings. The date is April 20, 2026, and this is at the Lloyd House.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:00:12.6] Awesome. My name is Francesco De Salvatore. Today is April 20, 2026, and we're at Lloyd House at 220 North Washington Street in Alexandria, Virginia. Thanks for being here, Miss Rawlings. I'm really excited to have this conversation with you today. And so, I just want to start out with can you just describe some of your earliest memories?

Joyce Rawlings [0:00:36.0] My earliest memories of Alexandria or my earliest memories of D.C.? [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:00:41.0] Cause you were born in D.C., correct?

Joyce Rawlings [0:00:42.5] Uh-huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:00:42.8] Yeah. So yeah, maybe your earliest memories from your childhood?

Joyce Rawlings [0:00:46.2] Okay. From my childhood, I was ooh—brought up in Washington, D.C. until I was about—gosh, I guess when I had my—no. I was, yeah. I was in D.C. on Benning Road, Northeast, 2nd and F, Washington, D.C., Northeast. And then I came across that river. [Laughs] That Alexandria river when I was about—I think I was 16? Cause I was at 2nd and—I was at 2nd—1st and N Street, Northwest—right across from Dunbar High School. That was my high school years.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:01:37.2] Uh-huh.

Joyce Rawlings [0:01:37.8] And then I got pregnant. [Laughs] I was helping my baby's father with his store, and I'm still in high school doing his books and everything. [Laughs] And then I was—I had a fairly good childhood. You know. I had three brothers, three sisters. We had the things you needed. Not always what we wanted, but we needed. We got it. And mother and father worked hard. But then when I turned about 16/17, you know, you go outside. You see a little bit more of the world. And so, one night I—this is a trigger point. One night, I think I was—ooh—17, finishing high school—getting ready to go to the prom and all like that. But didn't get to go to my prom and none of that. But [laughs] came home one night, and it was late. And I was too scared to open the door. So, I go in the basement to go up. And my brother, bless his soul, he had locked the door, and I couldn't get in the house. I was so scared. I couldn't knock on the door [laughs]. I thought, "Oh boy." I went back where I was at the children's father. Came back in the morning, walked in, and my mother—she meant business. She didn't mince a lot of words, and she was standing at the kitchen sink looking out the window. And she had this box and a plastic bag on the table, and she said very distinctly—never turned around. "Wherever you was last night, I guess that's where you want to be." That was it. There was no compromising. There was no "Let's talk about it." That was it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:03:41.3] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:03:42.7] Got my bag. Got my box, and I was gone. That was it—17. So, I went back to where I was to my children's father's house. So, he was living on top of the store. [Laughs]

He owned it, so we lived on top of the store. And so, I went back, and I said, "Can I stay here?" He said, "Yeah." Reluctantly yeah. That's where I've been, and that's where I stayed out there. I never went back home. Went back home one time, and that was when I had a run-in with a crazy fool—not the children's father now. But he was crazy. He was an amateur boxer. I didn't know. Promised me he was gonna marry me and everything.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:04:36.9] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:04:38.2] [Laughs] Shuck. Huh. [Laughs] Yeah. That was—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:04:42.3] What are your memories of yourself as a child? What were you like as a child?

Joyce Rawlings [0:04:49.2] I don't think I was a difficult child, cause I was on the honor roll. I kept good grades in school. I did most everything I was supposed to do. I even got a beating, and my brother got a beast on him. I got the whipping for it. I was a pretty good decent child. But you know, parents back then, the oldest child is the one they use. I don't say they experiment, but you got to set the course. And they're very hard on you, cause you got to set the course.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:05:25.6] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:05:26.2] But my sisters and brothers didn't see me because it was eight years difference between my age and the one next to me. So, they came up with a crew. I came up with myself. And so there was a difference. You know.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:05:39.8] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:05:40.7] But I don't think I missed too much. We didn't have a lot, but what we had was what we needed.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:05:48.2] Yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:05:48.9] I didn't realize that my mom very strict and followed a very strict hand was what I needed for that time to get through all the mess I've been through.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:06:01.4] What were some of—like as you look back on that time growing up in D.C. in like in what is probably the 1950s/1960s?

Joyce Rawlings [0:06:10.2] Yeah, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:06:12.5] What were events that were happening in D.C. or the country, in your neighborhood, that shaped you? That taught you lessons, or you think you—

Joyce Rawlings [0:06:22.8] You know that whole era with the March on Washington. That whole era with the Civil Rights—that whole era was coming up, coming up, coming up strong. Had a very clear understanding of who you were. "I'm black, and I'm proud!" It was not just words. It meant that. And going to Meridian Hill Park, where all the celebrations and everything, and all the

monumental things that were going on during that time.: The March on Washington, the Poor People's March—all of that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:07:02.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:07:02.5] Being a part of all of that, it gave you a sense of, "I know who I am, and I'm gonna make sure that they understand who I am. I'm not gonna have my head down. My head is up. I got nothing to be ashamed of." And slavery—that's just a tip of my history. That ain't where I started. I started way back—kings and queens. You know. Nuh-uh. Slavery is not where I started. That's what I came through. But it was—I never had a white teacher until I got—I think my last year or senior year of high school. I was taught by blacks. And you know what them teachers told me? "We gonna teach you twice as much cause you got to know twice as much to make it in this world." And they meant it. They meant it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:08:08.3] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:08:08.6] You had to learn. You curse at—you have to do it. It wasn't like, "I want to do this." No, no. You got to. And that's what I came up through.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:08:20.4] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:08:20.7] That sense of, "What you doing in this room?" "I'm supposed to be in here. I have something to say." No stepping back. You step through. You push through. And when they say you can't, you say, "Well, why not?" And you figure out how you can.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:08:45.9] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:08:46.6] That word "can't"—I hated that word. I didn't allow my children—my foster children to use it in the house. If they ever said "can't"—"Hold up here! You can't say you can't. What you can do is say, 'I need a little assistance.'"

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:02.1] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:09:02.3] Because when you say them two statements, you set up a little better. When you say, "I can't," head slumped down. You slump down. But I need a little assistance?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:17.8] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:09:19.0] You set up tall.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:20.7] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:09:21.3] You need that. You got something I need.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:25.2] Did you as a kid, did you participate in some of the marches that were happening in D.C., or no?

Joyce Rawlings [0:09:31.1] Oh, goodness! It wasn't hardly none of them that we didn't go to. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:34.6] Really?

Joyce Rawlings [0:09:35.8] That—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:36.3] What are your memories of it? Like any specific marches or—

Joyce Rawlings [0:09:39.1] Oh my goodness—that March on Washington. We was up in the tree looking at it and everything.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:44.6] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:09:45.0] And when they burnt down them places, after they killed Martin Luther King, wow! That was something. Because I was at home in my—[laughs] it was funny now, but it wasn't then. Second and F, Northeast—that smoke, you could smell it. You could smell it, the smoke, coming through everything. My mother was still working at night. She would get the bus home because you couldn't drive or nothing. She'd get a bus—bus put her off—she'd walk up the street. My father would go meet her. And I tell you that one night my mama got in the house. She took her things off. She said, "Shoot! Lord! I start to grab one of them TVs that boy had running up the street."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:10:37.4] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:10:37.8] She called my—called my stepdad, Shug. "Shug, I started to grab one of them TVs! Good gracious!" My father got so mad at her. He said, "Whoa, wait a minute here? We don't need none of that s—we don't need none of that. Anything we want, we wait, save, and get it. But we don't need none of that mess in this house. You best not." My mother, "I was just joking," she said. "Ain't no joking there." And she never said that again. [Laughs] But she was just joking, you know, she said, "I got to grab one of them TVs running up and down the street." [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:11:14.6] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:11:15.0] Cause he was right at—right after —they was traveling, picking stuff up, everything.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:11:21.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:11:21.3] We had written on the window, and then I was just going up to my children's father's store after school. We had wrote on the window, "Please." We had a bar of Ivory soap. We put it in a little bit of water, and we wrote on the window, "Please do not burn."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:11:46.8] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:11:47.1] Lived through that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:11:48.3] What was your dad's shop?

Joyce Rawlings [0:11:50.4] He was a self-contractor.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:11:52.7] What is this?

Joyce Rawlings [0:11:52.8] Brick mason.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:11:53.2] Oh, he was a brick mason? Okay.

Joyce Rawlings [0:11:54.0] Brick mason. Yes sir. He had his own little business—brick mason.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:11:57.7] Oh, okay.

Joyce Rawlings [0:11:58.5] His imprint is on so many projects in D.C.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:02.8] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:12:03.3] When he died, that's my stepfather, but he's my father. We took the ride. You know that last ride they say? We rode through all the places that he had his hands in building and stuff.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:22.9] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:12:23.7] He put prints on a lot of areas in D.C.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:27.6] What was his full name?

Joyce Rawlings [0:12:28.9] Clarence, Clarence. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:34.4] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:12:34.8] Funny thing about that name. I don't know if we should share it, but I will.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:42.3] No pressure. You—

Joyce Rawlings [0:12:42.7] My stepfather and my—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:44.3] You don't need to if you don't feel comfortable.

Joyce Rawlings [0:12:45.3] —father had the same first name—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:48.6] Really? Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:12:49.8] [Laughs] Figure that one out. [Laughs] But anyway, they had the same first name.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:58.2] Yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:12:59.9] [Laughs] And Clarence was a smith. Yes sir. But he—my mother didn't get married till I was about 8. I think I was about 8—5—8 something between there. But my mom and my natural father and both of them was in the military too. But my father and natural father, they did know. They didn't know each other/know each other, but they did. But my mother, she married him, it was eight years. That's why it's such an age difference between my brothers and our ages. And so, my father—my stepfather—he—my father, I asked him one day. I said—cause I got reconnected with him. I went and found my father. I was 26 years old—26 years old when I found my father. And when I found him, I didn't know what to say. I just said, "Do you remember having a daughter 26 years ago?" And he said, "Oh!" I said, "Oh Lord. He's gonna have a heart attack." [Laughs] "You found me." He found out where I was. Came—was at the mailbox when I was at the mailbox. I looked at him. He looked at me. He said, "Joyce?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Oh?" And we reconnected.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:14:39.0] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:14:39.4] But I asked him. I said, "Why you didn't marry my mother?" And he said, "I'm gonna tell you the truth. I was going in the military, and I said, 'Ain't no way in the world I'm going in the military and get a Dear John letter from somebody at home.'" And that's what did it. My mother just went—she was in—had a nervous breakdown. She was in Crownsville. The old big old Crownsville—ain't now more, Crownsville High School for a year. She was 19.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:15:26.8] Your mom?

Joyce Rawlings [0:15:27.2] My mom.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:15:27.5] Right. Your mom.

Joyce Rawlings [0:15:28.3] She couldn't. She said, "mm-mm." And she suffered from that off and on for years, but she was a functioning person. She was a shop steward at her job—everything. But certain times during the year, you know, things would not go so right. And I think it was snatches of that at, excuse me, Crownsville High School. You know. They was doing them—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:15:59.7] Electric shock?

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:00.2] Electric shock stuff.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:00.9] Yeah. What was your mom's full name?

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:06.4] Landous Beatrice Rawlings.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:09.0] Okay.

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:09.9] Beatrice, yeah. They called her "Lama Bean." [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:14.7] Really? [Laughs]

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:16.8] Seven children that she was functioning, too.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:20.0] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:20.5] Functioning lady.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:23.4] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:23.8] But there was some dark things that happened along our way that the family remembers. But she was always present—present. She would fight through.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:38.4] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:38.9] And my stepdad, he was always there.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:42.1] So you left home when you were about 17?

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:45.4] I didn't leave home. I was kicked out the door. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:47.9] Kicked out. Right. [Laughs]

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:49.6] My brother and sister got me back about that a long time ago, talking about "you left." I didn't leave!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:56.4] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:16:56.9] I was asked to [laughs] —

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:58.9] Asked to leave, right. And so, when did you end up moving to Alexandria? Or maybe—yeah. When and why?

Joyce Rawlings [0:17:09.3] Oh gosh. Got connected with their father. Worked in the store helping him out in the store and everything, and he was industry. He was a big kingpin in the street. He was a—he was big! [Laughs] But he never hit us. He kept that side of his life from us. But I tell you it was about my baby boy was 18 months old, and he said, "We going to Alexandria." No. He said—yeah, he did. He said, "We going to Alexandria." And I said, "What? I don't know nothing about no Alexandria. I had no people out there. I knew nobody. I didn't know how to drive or nothing. What am I going to Alexandria for?" He said, "We going to Alexandria." We fought the night before, but I know the next morning I went to Alexandria cause I didn't want to break the family up. So, I went on to Alexandria. That's where I laid. That's where I stayed. But my baby was 18—yeah—18 months old.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:18:30.6] Wow. And so, what roughly like what year was this when you—

Joyce Rawlings [0:18:35.5] Oh God!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:18:36.0] —moved to Alexandria?

Joyce Rawlings [0:18:36.1] He was born in 1977.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:18:38.3] Okay, so.

Joyce Rawlings [0:18:39.4] So about early 1979.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:18:41.4] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:18:41.5] Something like that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:18:42.5] Okay.

Joyce Rawlings [0:18:42.6] Very early on.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:18:43.4] And where did you move to in Alexandria?

Joyce Rawlings [0:18:45.9] Evans Lane. Evans Lane was our first stop, and we lived there. And then [laughs] one day he come home, and he said, "I think it's time for me to leave." I said, "What? [Laughter] You got me all the way out here in Alexandria. Don't know nobody. Can't drive or nothing, and you gonna leave?" I didn't fight. No, sir. Why you gonna fight when the person done made their mind up? Boo-hoo, crying, and want to kill him. Why you gonna do all that? Let him gone. You know what you did—you know what you got to do—take care of them children.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:19:24.7] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:19:25.1] And you got to do that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:19:26.8] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:19:27.6] And that's how it was. It wasn't no animosity. It was just that—and he was making a move then that I didn't see then. He was getting us away from a situation that was happening in D.C. —1985—them 1980s. Them 1980s was hard. That's when them drugs. Whew, whew, whew, whew. Snatching up. Snatching up.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:19:54.6] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:19:54.7] And he was—I didn't know, but he was moving us cause the man had 10 children. I'm the fool. I had more than one by him. But I'll tell you, thank the Lord, none of them got records. None of them is in that drug scene. It's a blessing from God. That's all it is.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:20:21.4] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:20:22.4] Cause he—he always kept them connected to each other. They knew growing up who they brothers and sisters was. They knew, and that makes a difference. You know, I look at the women that try to use those children as pawns. Don't do that. Don't do that. Step back, slip out, let them children make their own decision about what's happening. Because they will, and you ain't got to poison them or nothing. They will make their own decisions about those relationships.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:20:58.1] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:20:58.6] Let it happen.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:21:00.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:21:00.3] As long as it's not no abuse. Where there's abuse, you got to get up out of there. Yeah. But don't—don't hold that money bag over them. "You can't do that cause you ain't getting this money." You can't. No. Emotional support is very important.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:21:16.1] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:21:17.0] Very important.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:21:18.4] What was it like being a mother? And I mean, eventually, you basically became a single mother. Right?

Joyce Rawlings [0:21:25.4] I was a single mother when they was born. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:21:27.4] Right. Yeah, what was that like for you?

Joyce Rawlings [0:21:30.5] Oh, that was—that wasn't—I didn't have time to think about it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:21:35.9] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:21:36.9] I didn't have time to set back and think about how hard it was. My children asked me, "How in the devil did you do it, Ma? And then you went and had foster children? How you do that?" I didn't have time to think about it. I just had to keep going. I didn't know what was on the other side, but I know I had to keep going.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:21:58.7] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:21:59.3] I couldn't wait for it to happen. I had to try to make it happen. And I used to tell my girls I worked with all the time, "You don't have time to have no nervous breakdown. You don't. You do not have time to have a nervous breakdown. You got to keep moving, even when you don't even know where you're going."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:26.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:22:27.0] Because you got them children looking at you.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:30.3] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:22:30.9] What they do when something hit them? Set back, flop up. "Oh, I give up."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:37.2] Yes.

Joyce Rawlings [0:22:37.5] You don't want that. You want them to keep it moving.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:42.1] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:22:43.1] That's it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:44.4] What—do you mind sharing each of your children's names just so we know them?

Joyce Rawlings [0:22:49.6] [Laughs] You know my oldest son, he's a comedian, Donnell Rawlings. And then my next one is Dwayne Rawlings, but we call him Poopie. [Laughs] And the youngest one is Dawud Rawlings. Mm-hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:23:02.1] Uh-huh. What are some of your favorite memories with them as a mom—

Joyce Rawlings [0:23:07.6] Oh gosh.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:23:07.9] —as they were growing up?

Joyce Rawlings [0:23:09.1] Oh, we used to—if it was a bus or a subway going anywhere, we was on it. I ain't let nothing stop us from going around exposing them. You have to expose your children to more than two blocks of where they live. They have to see something else out there to wonder, "Can I do that?" You cannot set home and not expose them.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:23:38.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:23:39.0] They—how they make a decision? "I don't know if I can be this or that. I never saw it before." You got to be exposing them. The money and stuff—shoot—that was always on empty half the time. I remember we went to—I used to take the kids out to that learning center. This particular day, on a Saturday, we went down to Pohick Bay. I had a broke down Volkswagen bus, the one that had them long stick shifts. I was just learning how to drive that thing. We went down to Pohick Bay. We was going halfway up that hill. I had my kids and some of my friends' children—everybody. Halfway up that hill, me and my dumb self, I tried to change shift. Oh, my Lord! That thing stuck. I said, "Oh God!" Got myself—I said, "Get out! Get out! [Laughs] Everybody get out! Go down to the bottom of the hill! Get somebody to come up here and help us

the rest of the way!" [Laughs] They did—they helped [laughs]. A man come up. He got in. He got us up that hill. Got to the top of the hill. I said, "You all still want to ride with me?" "Yes, Ma'am!" [Laughs] I said, "Oh Lord! [Laughs] We got to get back to Alexandria," [laughter], but we got back. We got back, but you have to be willing to try—to try. That's all that God asks us to do. Just do better than yesterday. Don't keep going back, dipping in the dirt. If he got you out of that, stay out of it. Leave it alone.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:25:25.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:25:25.9] I was one that didn't have to experience everything to believe it. I didn't have to experience drugs to believe that it would hurt me. Shuck. I saw what it did to some of my friends. That was enough for me. I smoked for two weeks in high school and stopped. Know why? What the hell was I getting out of this? I'm spending money I ain't got and ain't getting nothing out of it. Phew! Gone! Never took a drink.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:25:58.7] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:25:59.0] Never.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:26:00.1] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:26:00.2] But you know, people think they got to experience stuff. They think they can get through stuff. You can get trapped. You can get trapped and don't even know how you got there. I don't want to do that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:26:16.1] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:26:16.7] I didn't want to—I didn't want to get stuck.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:26:21.6] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:26:22.0] So I left it alone. I left it alone.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:26:28.5] What do you—when you came to Alexandria in the 1980s, what are you memories of Alexandria? What was it like?

Joyce Rawlings [0:26:39.7] It was strange for me because I was used to a community. And out here—the community is all there, but you got to work your way in them. [Laughs] If you're not a native Alexandrian, [laughs] you got to get your card, okay. [Laughs] And I said my children—I can never be any place where I don't know everything about it when I have children. Cause I got to know where to go, who to talk to, what to do, everything. I got to know it. So how you learn that? You go to your meetings. You go to your community meeting. You go to your city council. You go to your meetings. You go to those places. You go to those community centers. You go to the African American museum. You go to these places to find out about that city.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:27:44.1] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:27:44.7] Because I'm not having my children go somewhere. I'm living on one—when we first moved out, we was going to—Cora Kelly was closed because of flooding and everything. They had to go all the way across town to John Tyler to go to school. And I'm living over here in Evans Lane all the way across town. Wait a minute? I got to know something about this city. I had to teach myself how to drive. Don't ask me how I got a car, but I did. But I had to teach myself because I said, "Ain't no way in the world I ain't be able to get across town and see about my children if something happen right away."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:28:24.1] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:28:24.7] You got to do these things. You don't think you got to do it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:28:28.5] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:28:29.2] That's what you do.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:28:30.3] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:28:30.8] But the 1980s, then when I got my footing in, I got to go to—I went to so many meetings they thought I was an Alexandrian when I would go up there and speak at city council and all of them places.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:28:43.8] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:28:44.0] And then they look at me and say, "Are you Alexandria? You know?" I said, "No. But I know some things." And they said, "Oh." I said—then after a while they didn't ask me no more. They just assumed I was a native Alexandrian.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:29:03.0] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:29:03.4] And so I said, “Okay. No problem.” But you got to know about where you live. Them two blocks is more out there.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:29:11.7] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:29:13.0] You got to go up to your Congress people. You got to talk to the people.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:29:18.5] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:29:19.2] They got to know your name. Your name is the only darn thing you got. Ain't got nothing else. If you don't protect it, tough.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:29:28.8] Right. So, I mean, you've done a number of forms of activism and in the city and been involved deeply with, you know, in your community. So, can you talk a little bit about those programs that you either helped create or supported?

Joyce Rawlings [0:29:51.6] Well, Cora Kelly Rec Center. I ain't talking about the new one. I'm talking about the one that was on them stilts when they used to flood and stuff. Whew! It'd be so cold down there on Saturday, and I opened up. I usually send the kids across the street to the Food Barn Grocery Store to get some bologna, some cheese, and some milk, and come over. And we would make sandwiches which you eat all day long. Be freezing up in that place. Children had their coats on. They were freezing.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:30:21.7] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:30:21.7] But we were there. I remember being a part of the "Yes Group." It was a group Yap. The group that me and my friend, Hilda Isham, started. It was a mentoring kind of group, you know, that give the children a safe place to be and learn homemaking skills, and crafting skills, and all of that. I remember marching Drills Dean Band and Bugle. Every year, we would march all around the area down here by Charles Houston—all down there in Old Town. "Drug-free community when we want it, now. What do we want? A drug-free community. When do we want it? Now." And we would say that all up and down here every year. And we had that going for a while. We did. And then I remember—whew—my Lord. So many memories. So many memories. And then when they went, and we went over. We go over to Charles Houston. That was our archenemy football team. [Laughs] We had arch enemies, Honey. Good God. Them children were—oh, we had fun, and we would scream and holler our lungs out. Then the One Love festivals—Lenny Harris—the One Love festivals at G.W. field every year—that was a day. That brought everybody together. Yes, it did. And all those things—they don't happen now. You know. I mean, it's still community, but it's not a tight community because, you know, we used to get flyers. We used to go around knocking on doors. Yes. Face to face. Anything going on, we make a flyer. Stick it in your door or talk to you about it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:32:28.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:32:28.3] All around. Wasn't no, "I don't know how to get there." Sometimes we had to take them there. You know. You got to expose people.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:32:36.9] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:32:37.3] And the—I miss those days really, cause I—we miss out on a lot of information now. Because there was a time where all this—one person telling, and it be gone all over the community. But now it's not as much as that. You know. Not as much.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:32:54.2] Can you describe what was the One Love Festival that was at George Washington?

Joyce Rawlings [0:32:58.6] That One Love was a community. Oh, that was a festival! All parts of the city came to that. Lenny Harris was a great—he got killed years ago. But he was a great community organizer, and he would—they would have vendors, crafters, food, bands, just a day of just joy. And it was free. Oh my God! And we would be there from sunup to sundown. Sometimes it'll rain, but it never really completely rained us out. [Laughs] But it was—in fact, it was right down

there, right at G.W. Field—the whole doggone field. We had a ball. Used to look forward to them! Yes sir. Yes sir.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:33:52.5] Yeah, wow. And so, was one of the first things you did was to create—help create the Yes Group? Was that one of the—

Joyce Rawlings [0:34:02.8] That was one of the very first things.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:34:04.4] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:34:04.4] Because me and my friend, Hilda, we did that thing over there. And then I worked at the City Jail eight years.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:34:12.6] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:34:13.1] And then I said I got to get on the other side of this. I'm seeing too many coming in and out—residual. You know. Just going in and out, in and out. [Inaudible 0:34:22.5] other side. That's when I went into foster care.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:34:25.1] What were you doing at the City Jail?

Joyce Rawlings [0:34:28.2] I was where the bars was on the [laughs]. I worked on that side [laughs] on the right at Princess Street. Right up there. And I saw when it—I saw them when they would book them in, book them out, take them through to the bars in the jails and all like that. But administrative, but it was—I saw a lot of up close personal kind of things because I was on the side where they had the bars. It was a real jail.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:35:00.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:35:00.4] I mean, this thing they got over there now, that's a jail. But ain't nowhere near what that thing was. That was a jail. You heard the clanks. You heard the clanks. That day when [William] Truesdale got shot over there—that deputy sheriff. You heard that. You know. But and it was more of a sense of knowing. They knew each other in them jails. You know? The [inaudible 0:35:32.3]. They knew the community. You know. And but now it's not bad like some of these prisons are and jails are. Cause they got a lot of programs that inmates could get into if they wanted to get into. But it's a little different. A little different.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:35:54.6] Yeah. And you were saying that you worked there for eight years, and what you saw made you want to go get into being—

Joyce Rawlings [0:36:04.0] Other side of that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:36:04.8] —and the other side of it, like—

Joyce Rawlings [0:36:06.0] Prevention.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:36:06.3] —so what, yeah, like what did you see that made you want to shift and change?

Joyce Rawlings [0:36:14.3] I just kept seeing guys that I knew. They were my children's age, you know, and older. But I saw them keep going in and coming out. Keep going in and coming out. I said, "Wait a minute? It's got to be something before that." And that's when I started looking at, "Well, what can I do?" And that's when I got into residential services—Residential Youth Services. I worked at group homes. I worked at—whew—I had children—foster children. I wanted to try to prevent them from going that route, you know, if I could. If I could. Some I did. Some had to learn the hard way, but so far, some of them are doing well.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:37:13.6] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:37:13.9] You know. Yeah, yeah. I'm still in contact with some of them jokers.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:37:18.7] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:37:18.9] Old as they are. [Laughs] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:37:22.6] Who were some of those children? Like what—are there specific people that come to mind?

Joyce Rawlings [0:37:30.2] I don't know if I can say their name, but they—the children—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:37:33.1] You don't need to. Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:37:34.0] Yeah, yeah. But there's one that he calls me—that he keeps in touch with. It's about three of them keep in touch with me, and they'll still call me "Ma Rawlings."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:37:45.8] Yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:37:46.1] And "Just wanted to let you know I'm doing okay." [Laughs] "I had a few bumps, but I'm doing okay." But they want you to know that they heard some of the things you was saying along the way. That I did hear it. I didn't understand it, but I did hear it. And I took some of that with me.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:38:12.2] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:38:12.9] And they want you to know that. You know.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:38:15.8] And so you mentioned doing residential services. Could you talk a little bit about the programs that you helped run for the Alexandria Housing Authority?

Joyce Rawlings [0:38:25.2] The one that—Residential Youth Services—that was a group in itself.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:38:30.4] Okay.

Joyce Rawlings [0:38:31.9] Bert Hawkins was the program coordinator for all of that. They used to be in the church up there—Westminster Church used to be their offices. But they had group homes throughout the city. Now there's not one.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:38:44.3] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:38:45.0] It's not one group home. They had a group home on Mount Vernon Avenue. They had a group home on Hume. They had a group home out of Fort Hunt. They had a group home up there, Oakwood. Not one.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:03.3] Not one.

Joyce Rawlings [0:39:04.2] You know. They might still have Oakwood, but they've got none in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:09.8] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:39:10.2] How do you reconnect a child to your community if you're so far away from them?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:15.1] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:39:16.4] How do you do that?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:17.3] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:39:18.0] It's difficult. Very difficult.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:20.3] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:39:21.5] But yeah. But at ARHA [Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority]—now what was your question about ARHA?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:27.8] Yeah. What—cause you helped to run learning centers at ARHA?

Joyce Rawlings [0:39:31.9] Yeah, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:31.9] So yeah, could you—

Joyce Rawlings [0:39:32.7] Two of them. Mm-hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:33.3] Yeah. Could you talk about those that you helped?

Joyce Rawlings [0:39:35.7] Well, [laughs] that Montgomery Street, 913, that was the one. I'm telling you, that was a safe haven up there. I wanted to feel like it was safe haven for the families and children. Them children got hot meals every day.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:51.7] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:39:52.0] I cooked. It wasn't out of a package. It was food/food—stick to them. You know? One-pot meals stick to them. Sometimes their parents would come in. "What did you get—what are you cooking today, Ms. Rawlings?" I said, "Food." "What kind?" "That you eat. Set up and get yourself a bowl, and sit down, and eat." [Laughs] And they would eat, and I'm telling you. Them children—if they did—I mean that food, I mean. There's something about where you converse around food. You know. It's calming. You know. And it was a hot meal. It wasn't like stick this in the microwave. Stick that—no. It was a hot meal every day. I didn't know what they may or may not have been getting at home, but I know what they had when they was there. And the programs—we had all kind of programs. We had a writing—you know the children at Ruby Tucker, they wrote a book. They wrote two books, maybe three. They authored poetry books. Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:41:00.3] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:41:00.9] They authored them.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:41:02.4] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:41:02.9] They had them—you know, and then the group we had over there at the Learning Center, they was a writing group. Lisa and Jennelle—them children had a group of writers, and they would meet through the week. And they put this little booklet together, and I'm telling you them children can write too. They got thoughts. They got thoughts. But we had the sewing. We had the crafting. We made things to sell. We even had our little entrepreneurship going on. We were selling yellow cake and yellow chocolate cake, and lemonade. We made money to go to the pool down here on Cameron Street for the [inaudible 0:41:59.8]. "We ain't got the money." I said, "Hey, hey, hey—we don't use that word 'can't,'" I said. Got in that kitchen, and made that stuff, and they were buying that cake [inaudible 0:42:09.8].

Francesco De Salvatore [0:42:10.4] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:42:10.6] Took our money down there and put it right in front of them. "Okay. Here we go." That is a sense of empowerment that you give to people's children.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:42:21.1] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:42:21.6] I can pay my way. You know? We can do this. We ain't got to depend totally on what you give us out. We can do this. Then we had the—Good God! We would have walking tours on our own. Walk all around the community. Look at the different flowers and whatever, and I'd point out the things. They had to tell me what it was. We had walking/learning trips. Children don't learn inside of a book all the time.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:42:54.6] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:42:54.6] You got to see everyday things.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:42:57.4] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:42:58.1] I took them to plays in D.C.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:43:02.1] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:43:02.5] Way up there. One night, we got so turned around in that parking lot, I couldn't get out. [Laughs] Finally, we got out. We got back down [inaudible 0:43:14.3]. [Laughs] Way up, up, cause there'd be a road. We went to plays. We went to Capitol Hill. We had May Day. We took the children to the girls and stuff to these groups and stuff—exposure.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:43:29.6] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:43:30.4] You have to expose them.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:43:32.1] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:43:32.2] How they gonna know what they can and can't do? What they can and need assistance with?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:43:36.6] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:43:37.0] You know. But everything happened inside that little 913 Montgomery Street. One night, a little girl—not a little—she—they'd come there. "Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom." I said, "What's wrong with you?" "Boom, boom, boom, boom." Opened the door. She said, "Miss Rawlings! Miss Rawlings! Can I please come here?" I said, "Come on in, girl." They thought I lived there. [Laughter] [Inaudible 0:44:00.0] It was like, "Come on in." She said, "Can I just come in and read?"

Francesco De Salvatore [0:44:06.5] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:44:09.1] "It's so much happening at the house that I just want to come in and read."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:44:14.5] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:44:16.0] "Come on in, girl. Stay as long as you want. Come on. It's safe haven." What if I hadn't been there? Where would she have gone? To the streets. But you've got to have some [inaudible 0:44:34.8] places for these children.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:44:36.5] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:44:37.6] Where they can get some relief.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:44:40.0] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:44:40.3] Without judgment.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:44:43.1] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:44:43.6] You can't judge them all the time.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:44:47.1] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:44:47.2] You help them figure things out. That's what psychiatrists do. They don't give you the answers. They set there listening, listening, listening. Then they throw in this and throw in that. Listening, listening, listening.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:44:58.5] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:44:59.1] Help them. That's what we're missing. God, we missing it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:45:07.0] How many years were you at the Learning Center? Like how many years were you there?

Joyce Rawlings [0:45:11.9] Ooh. Altogether, how many about? [Inaudible 0:45:17.4], 9, 10, 11 years altogether, maybe, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:45:20.7] Long time, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:45:21.6] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:45:22.4] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:45:23.1] Yeah. And some of them children, their children came to the Learning Center.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:45:31.4] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:45:31.4] You know?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:45:32.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:45:32.2] It was family. It was family.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:45:36.0] Yeah. And during this time, you were doing other things in the city while you were also there. Like, what were some of the other things—what were some of the other projects or programs—

Joyce Rawlings [0:45:43.9] Oh my God!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:45:44.9] —you were also supporting?

Joyce Rawlings [0:45:46.5] I caught myself running for the school board twice and didn't get on there, but I ran.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:45:52.0] You were—yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:45:52.7] And I was at the—a part of the Concerned Citizens up there—Hamlin—a group at Hamlin. I was a part of that, and at Jefferson Houston. Oh my God! I just dibbled and dabbled in everything. You know? If there was something that was going on in the city that dealt with families and children, I wanted to be a part of it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:46:22.0] Part of it.

Joyce Rawlings [0:46:22.9] To help. To help. Not for glory, though to help. I was part of a group. My son, he started a young man/gentlemen's group. [Laughs] And my daughter-in-law is a pastor, so she had Jireh's Place. So, I would help her with the girls over there. It was just what I've said—I don't want no titles or nothing. I just don't want no titles cause titles don't get me. They don't. I got to really believe in what you're trying to do. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:47:01.9] You were also involved—so like now with the schools, there's a program called the FACE [Family and Community Engagement] Center.

Joyce Rawlings [0:47:07.8] Yeah!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:47:08.5] And so you—

Joyce Rawlings [0:47:09.7] Yeah!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:47:10.3] If you could talk a little bit about—

Joyce Rawlings [0:47:11.1] Initially, yeah!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:47:12.2] Yeah. What your work? Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:47:13.7] I was a coordinator over there at G.W. Middle School for the FACE. And I was up there at T.C. [Williams] for a little while at the FACE program. Yeah. That's a good program. People need to take more advantage of that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:47:28.4] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:47:28.8] But—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:47:29.3] Can you describe what the program was?

Joyce Rawlings [0:47:31.4] It's FACE is a program that it mentors the children and also mentors the family, I feel. Because families can go there and find out about immigration. All these things that's in the city, but they get a better understanding of it at the FACE. They do workshops. They do trainings. They do how to work with your child who has special needs. They do those—they get—I say they do entry routes into those streams of things that's out there in the city, where you got to sometimes hold their hand and get them through it. You know? It's difficult getting through all these bureaucracies that's in the city, especially when you're dealing with a special needs child. You need some help along the way. I'm telling you, but I had an experience—my son was—what 11th Grade up there at T.C., and they wanted to put him in special needs. I said, "No, you will not." And you know why I did that? It wasn't because I [inaudible 0:48:37.3]. It wasn't no—it was like, "Here you wait till he get in 11th Grade, and then you tell me that he's special needs. And you gonna put him somewhere and plug him in that for the rest of his school year? No, you're not!" So, I fought. I fought. Because special needs means different things to different sets of parents. A white parent, it might not be altogether true, but I feel they know such a need to get their children special services and additions, and all of that. And their children can get out of it. But black parents—some of them feel like once their child in there, they can never get out. And there's a difference. So, I fought, but I got 504 accommodations where my child could get some accommodations, but not have that title that got him—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:49:33.5] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:49:33.7] —stuck. Not when you get to 11th. You know what kind of mess he would have had to go through with his friends and everybody? No, no. We're not doing that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:49:43.1] Oh yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:49:44.0] Mm-mm.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:49:44.1] Wow. You also—I mean, I know you also helped start like a garden program.

Joyce Rawlings [0:49:51.0] Oh!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:49:52.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:49:52.5] Oh!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:49:52.5] Can you talk about that a little bit?

Joyce Rawlings [0:49:53.9] Oh. That garden program was it. We ate out of that garden. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:49:59.0] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:49:59.4] That wasn't just no experiment. We grew our food, and them children knew where their food came from that ground. We went out there, and we got that soil right and put—and my friend, Shirley Harris, put—we got some—I forget that stuff she put in the soil to make it rich and everything. We beefed that soil up in the back of that Learning Center. We just

threw the seeds out, and we just let it grow. And they grew. They have fresh stuff come out the garden.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:50:30.3] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:50:30.8] And they knew. I said they picked up tomato, and then it was one in the back of the African American Center, too—the African American Resource Center. It was one—we had one back there, and then we had one behind the Leaning Center.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:50:44.5] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:50:45.2] And we grew that—oh, we grew everything.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:50:49.1] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:50:49.2] We had a little bit of everything. Them children ain't know what a—what do they call that thing? That long thing? Purple. I can't—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:51:00.5] Eggplant?

Joyce Rawlings [0:51:01.7] Eggplant!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:51:02.1] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:51:02.6] Oh God! They didn't know half the things. They said, "What?" I said we would take it, pick it, harvest it, take it over to the Learning Center, and cook it and everything. And they said, "They was growing so big!" [Laughs] And then they said, "You ain't get that out of that garden." I said, "Yes, we did!" I took them over there. They loved going over there, watering it, picking it, cultivating it, and bringing it over—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:51:28.3] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:51:28.3] —to see what we could fix out of it. And we set down to eat it. It was good. Fresh food.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:51:32.5] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:51:33.1] Yeah. Knew where their food came from.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:51:37.7] Wow.

Joyce Rawlings [0:51:38.9] Wasn't a package.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:51:42.3] Right. Wow. Are there other programs or like efforts that—I mean, you've done so much. [Laughter] You know. Like, I mean, we've already talked about so much, but—

Joyce Rawlings [0:51:53.7] You know, you know. I just—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:51:55.5] —but is there anything like that I've—that we've missed or that in terms of like—

Joyce Rawlings [0:52:00.0] I just—I just went where God sent me.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:52:02.3] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:52:02.9] The reading program, the "Wright to Read"—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:52:05.3] Okay.

Joyce Rawlings [0:52:05.7] —that was a good program, though.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:52:07.6] What was that? Can you tell me?

Joyce Rawlings [0:52:08.8] The Wright to Read. It was a—the lady—oh—Wright to Read—that was a good program. We got books from them, and they would come to our centers and do storytelling—all of that. And we would have a little thing right back around there—back of one of these buildings. And during the spring and summertime, and they'd bring them all together. And we had books and everything for them. That's how the—that poetry got started with the books—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:52:45.9] Right that—

Joyce Rawlings [0:52:46.2] —that they made.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:52:47.1] —the poetry group—

Joyce Rawlings [0:52:47.5] Yeah, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:52:47.9] —that you talked about.

Joyce Rawlings [0:52:48.0] That they made.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:52:49.0] That's cool.

Joyce Rawlings [0:52:49.6] But all we had.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:52:52.4] Who are—and I asked, but like are there—you've mentioned some staff, but could you like say like who were some of the specific staff members that helped at the Learning Center? Like, do you remember who like—

Joyce Rawlings [0:53:05.0] Oh, man!

Francesco De Salvatore [0:53:05.4] —some of the names?

Joyce Rawlings [0:53:07.1] Well, Gaynelle was instrumental. I tell you, Gaynelle.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:53:11.0] Gaynelle Diaz?

Joyce Rawlings [0:53:11.8] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:53:12.2] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:53:12.6] I mean, and Jason Ellis. He does the plays and everything now. I told him he better get on up to New York to Broadway. He's an out—he got to get out. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:53:23.9] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:53:24.1] Okay. But God. If I see them, and then I don't call them. We had so many that was volunteers that just came, and they helped wherever they could. And my friend, Shirley Harris, Anntranette Harris, she helped so much with—we had a thing up there at Whole Foods. We did a show up there at Whole Foods and raised the money. You know. We—God—we did so much.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:53:53.4] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:53:53.8] But and then ARHA wouldn't even know about it. They just, "Why you didn't tell us?" I said, "Oh, oh, oh. I'm sorry." [Inaudible 0:54:00.8] and then they'd say, "Well, why you didn't tell us?" "Oh, I'm sorry."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:54:06.8] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:54:07.2] But I knew they were might be trying to—I don't want to stop. I just got to keep on going. They'd tell me I couldn't do something, I'd say, "Mm-hmm." Let's figure this one out. [Laughter]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:54:17.4] [Laughs] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:54:19.2] You play dumb. [Laughter] But you keep on going.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:54:24.0] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:54:24.3] Because the kids need you.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:54:26.0] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:54:26.4] The kids need you. And if somebody don't push for them, who gonna push for them till they advocate for themselves? You do it, but you show them how to advocate for themselves as you're going along the way.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:54:42.1] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:54:42.4] Yes. Because you can't be there all the time.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:54:46.2] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:54:46.5] They got to talk for themselves. Speak up. Hold your head up.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:54:50.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:54:50.4] Look at them in the eye—them straight in the eye and say it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:54:55.7] Yeah. I mean, I'm just curious. You've done so—you have so much experience in doing this work. So, I'm curious now as you look at the existing programming in the city for young people. What do you hope continues into the future? Like what do you—yeah?

Joyce Rawlings [0:55:15.6] I would say recover. I would say recover some of that energy. I would say recover some of that energy that was there. Across from Hammond School, there was a house. It was called "This Way House." I didn't even tell you about down at the Campagna Center the thing that we did down there. Oh, we did Post Point. We did—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:55:45.1] What was it?

Joyce Rawlings [0:55:46.0] Post Point.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:55:47.0] No. But you're saying at the—

Joyce Rawlings [0:55:48.3] Campagna Center.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:55:49.2] Yeah. Can you describe what—

Joyce Rawlings [0:55:51.3] Post Point—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:55:52.4] —what the—

Joyce Rawlings [0:55:52.6] —was a program—another kind of mentoring program for teenagers. They had a young mothers' program. They may still have it. I don't know. But they had a young mothers' program that met weekly, and they discussed if their children were having a problem. They discussed it into the—they had "This Way House" across from Hammond. That's not there no more. That was a place where a child could be there for about two weeks, and they would let their parents—we would let their parents know where they were. But they could be there for two weeks—get themselves together, and return back home, or some other setting. But that was a safe place for them. They had—what they call the—house parents. Where they had people that opened their home for children for a period of time. You know. Something like fosters that was there. Open their home for a period of time until they was in another kind of placement or whatever. But there were nets around the children and family, but I don't see as many nets that can catch them anymore. There were nets that caught them.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:57:10.5] Yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:57:11.2] And maybe prevent it. You know.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:57:14.2] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:57:14.6] But we seemed to feel like this—well, if you got Internet, you can find out about everything. Everybody don't have Internet. Everybody don't want Internet.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:57:30.7] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:57:31.1] Everybody don't want it, and they don't—and the older people, they kind of shy away. I sometimes do cause I—some of it I take. I Facebook. I check that, but some of it I look at it, and I say, "You know what? This is removing that one-on-one contact."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:57:53.0] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:57:53.4] That one-on-one contact. People need bodies.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:57:57.3] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:57:58.2] They need somebody to say, "How you gonna get there? You need a ride?"

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:03.7] Right, right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:05.5] You need to help them out a little bit. Then they become helpers.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:09.8] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:10.4] I've seen a lot of that happen. The ones that we help and assist, they helping and assisting others now.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:16.9] Right, yeah. Exactly.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:18.4] A lot of it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:19.7] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:20.5] But you don't have that ladder—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:23.7] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:23.8] —that rotates back.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:25.1] That's missing, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:25.8] As you did. You still got it, but it's not like it was. It was deep. You walked down the street. You see someone, "Hey! How you doing?" You don't see that now.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:40.2] I think it's missing, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:41.0] Cause the communities are gone. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:43.4] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:44.0] "How you doing?"

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:45.9] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:47.0] You check the temperature of the community that way. You cannot check it if you're not there.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:58:57.3] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:58:57.7] You can't. It's no way.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:01.8] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [0:59:02.5] And once they shut them doors, you don't know what the heck is going on inside those doors. Look at this stuff that's happening all around us? "Well, I never thought."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:15.3] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:59:15.8] "Well, [inaudible 0:59:16.1]. Somebody knew but didn't say nothing.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:21.6] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:59:22.4] They didn't say anything. They saw some signs, but they didn't say anything. And here you go. We got all this boom, boom. And a gun? I didn't allow my children to have them—not even a toy play gun. Not even a water gun. I didn't. I didn't want that because that is not conflict resolution. That's what they're used for now.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:57.3] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [0:59:57.5] You're dead. And you don't come back like them cartoons in TV shows. You do not come back. You're gone. That's what they don't understand. It's real. And if this whole world don't do something about guns, it's regular work now. Every day, every second, somebody losing their life.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:00:28.2] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [1:00:29.0] And you're saying you can't—no, you won't. You won't.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:00:34.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:00:35.4] Your rights. What's my rights? You're right. What about my rights? NRA [National Rifle Association]—what about my rights? They still hollering and screaming about not taking the rights away from them. All these mass shootings, and you still got to holler like that? It's something absolutely wrong in our thinking.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:04.5] Is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to share before we close out? I have one last question, but I'm just curious if there's things I haven't asked you that you want to share in this recording?

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:18.2] I've just been running my mouth so much. You just got [laughs].

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:22.0] You've been running it well!

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:23.7] [Laughs] You guess—

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:24.5] Yeah. No.

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:25.3] It is—

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:25.4] This has been great to—

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:26.6] It is—

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:27.6]—to listen.

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:29.7] You know, I look at what I've seen change in this city. You know. Santullo's—you hear about Santullo's?

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:37.9] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:38.1] I look at the things that's changed.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:40.5] Santullo's was a market, right?

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:42.8] Yeah. Everything you want you could find there.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:45.4] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:45.4] Everything you want. That man tried to hold on to that spot for the longest.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:50.7] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:51.0] Then they got him—eminent domain.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:01:54.7] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:01:56.4] We got to help people understand what all that means—eminent domain. What it mean? You don't own crap. You own the building, and you might own the land under it if you got a good deed, but—

Francesco De Salvatore [1:02:11.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:02:11.2] —other than that, you don't own that land that that building is on. And so eminent domain can just jump in. You got to understand that and what it means to your family. "Oh, I got a house." "Oh? Oh? Is it really your house?" If you can pick it up and take it somewhere else, it's yours. But if it stay there, you better own that lot up underneath of it.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:02:39.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:02:39.3] We have to help them understand that—what it really means when you're talking about wealth and families. Because you find yourself in a situation that you don't even know about.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:02:54.0] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [1:02:54.6] Just for the lack of knowledge. But they see my people perish for lack of knowledge, and that's it. If we don't educate each other, how will we ever grow? We as a people—that Oklahoma, when they burnt down that whole town. Was it Oklahoma? I think Tulsa, where they burnt down that whole town because black people owned it. You know what I'm saying? Why you just—you act like we don't know how to do things. We know how to run our own business. The Nation of Islam, Chicago was a jewel. They owned property. They owned businesses. They owned them. We got to—I mean if—look at all the groups we've lost. Look at all the groups: SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], [Black] Panthers. Those groups that held us. Where are they? They pssst. I get too emotional with this because I used to do programming for ARHA and over there at Charles Houston. And we would do plays during the Christmas time, and one year we did it on Civil Rights groups. And we listed all the Civil Rights groups we had, and where are they now. And the children had to read about them—talk about all of them. The kids ain't even know about them, but these were the things that held us up. But where are we now? We got to be able to see them. They got to be able to see them. The kids—after a while kids ain't gonna know who Martin Luther King was. They're not. We got to stop waiting for somebody else to tell our history. Tell it yourself in your own family.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:05:17.7] Yeah. That's great.

Joyce Rawlings [1:05:20.3] Don't expect it to come from nobody.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:05:24.2] I have one last question for you to conclude. If there's a memory you could hold on to for the rest of your life, what's that one memory from your life that you would hold on to?

Joyce Rawlings [1:05:37.4] That Learning Center. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [1:05:39.4] What did you say?

Joyce Rawlings [1:05:40.3] That Learning Center.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:05:41.6] Really?

Joyce Rawlings [1:05:42.0] Oh my—that was home. I stayed there more than I stayed at home. [Laughs] Yeah. That was—I needed help from the neighbors to watch [inaudible 1:06:00.1] while I had to go to do this and do that. They come on in and watch the kids for me. It was—you saw their faces. It was—

Francesco De Salvatore [1:06:12.5] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:06:13.2] —it was day to day.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:06:15.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:06:15.6] And we gonna get through this.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:06:18.0] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:06:18.9] And I don't care how many times you shut the door in my face. [Laughs] We gonna get through this.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:06:25.9] Yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:06:27.8] But that—I've always worked with children and families—always. Because that's the heart of everything. If you can get a child, you got the family. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [1:06:48.1] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [1:06:48.8] But you've got to work at it. It ain't easy.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:06:52.0] Yeah. Well, Miss Rawlings, I mean, you're an incredible person and—

Joyce Rawlings [1:06:58.3] No, I'm not.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:06:59.3] Well, you might not think it, but you are. And you've done so much for your own—I mean, obviously for your own kids, but for everyone else's kids in this city. And it's just—yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:07:08.8] And I'm thankful. You know what I'm thankful for?

Francesco De Salvatore [1:07:11.6] What?

Joyce Rawlings [1:07:11.9] That I didn't lose my children along the way.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:07:15.9] Oh yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:07:16.2] Cause that can happen.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:07:18.2] Right.

Joyce Rawlings [1:07:19.2] God, that can happen.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:07:20.7] Yeah, yeah.

Joyce Rawlings [1:07:24.4] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [1:07:24.5] Well, thank you, yeah. Thank you, Miss Rawlings, for sitting with me today and sharing all of these memories. Yeah. I'm really honored. So, thank you. Thank you.

Joyce Rawlings [1:07:36.1] You're welcome, honey.

[End of interview] [1:07:38.4]