THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

Oral History Interview

with

Mary Jane Ward

Interviewer: Francesco De Salvatore
Narrators: Henrietta Johnson
Location of Interview: Charles Houston Recreation Center, Alexandria, VA, 22314
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Transcriber: Robin Reeder, Reeder Transcription Services

Summary:

Mary Jane Ward discusses growing up in Alexandria, including the schools she attended and the housing projects where she lived.

Notes:

This recording is part of the Samuel Madden Public Housing Community History Initiative, which was conducted from 2023-2026. This Initiative collected ten oral histories from current/former public housing residents, and other community members connected to public housing.

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General	ARHA (Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority)
People	Pancoast, Irene L.

Places	Andrew Adkins Project; Cameron Valley; Del Ray; Fort Belvoir; G.W. High School; Jefferson Village; Jefferson-Houston School; John Roberts Homes; Lyles-Crouch School; Minnie Howard School; Parker-Gray Middle School; Pendleton Street Recreation Center; Uptown

Mary Jane Ward [0:00:00.0] Okay. Mary Jane Ward. This is February 18, 2026, and at the location of Charles Houston Rec.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:00:11.9] Great. My name is Francesco De Salvatore. It's February 18, 2026, and we're at the Charles Houston Recreation Center.

Mary Jane Ward [0:00:20.2] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:00:21.1] Thanks for being here. I'm excited to hear—

Mary Jane Ward [0:00:23.2] Thank you.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:00:23.8] —about your memories. So, I just want to start with—can we start with you maybe sharing some memories about your childhood here in Alexandria? Like what—what are some standout memories for you?

Mary Jane Ward [0:00:35.3] Well, I'm saying I don't always that—when I was growing up from the south side of Alexandria on South Washington Street, I was—I went to Lyles-Crouch School for preschool. Then I went to—we left there and went to Robert E. Lee School on our way from South Washington, moved from—up to uptown of Alfred—what I think it was 216 Alfred Street, I think we was on. And then it was—my childhood was—it was okay. I mean, for being a child, but you know, I was always, you know, was always into stuff. I was the only one like do the opposite. When Mama tell you to do one thing, I do another. It was pretty good. It was pretty good for me. I felt that it was. Yeah. Other than that, you know, that's pretty much, you know, it was like everybody had their trials and tribulations. That's what you need to grow up with it and, you know, if you don't listen to your parents, you wind up in hard knock times. So that's what that was about with me.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:01:38.6] When did you—so when did you move into public housing with your family? Like how old were you and like what—

Mary Jane Ward [0:01:44.9] I was 12.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:01:46.4] [inaudible 0:01:46.4]

Mary Jane Ward [0:01:46.8] And we were living—12 cause we lived at 222 Payne Street first. That was a house. That wasn't public housing. Me and my mom we lived—could afford that for the rent. But then when she [inaudible 0:01:58.4], that's for public housing. I was 12 going on 13 when we moved off of Payne Street to 97 John Roberts.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:02:06.1] And what year was that, though? Do you know?

Mary Jane Ward [0:02:09.8] Well, when I was—okay. I was born in 1960—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:02:13.1] Okay. So, it was—

Mary Jane Ward [0:02:13.9] —so it was just like and like—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:02:15.9] 1972/197—

Mary Jane Ward [0:02:16.8] 197—yeah. Like stuff like that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:02:18.7] So when you moved into the public place, so what was—what did you guys call the public housing unit? Does it have a name, or did you just call it the project? Like what?

Mary Jane Ward [0:02:27.4] We just called—well, we really didn't thought that John Roberts. It was like a barrack. You know. The housing looked like barrack, like—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:02:35.5] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:02:35.8] —army barracks. So, we just said we used to call John Roberts cause that's what the name of the place was—we used to call that—our nickname was "The Ponderosa." Because, you know, we're like—we—it was like down in the hill like that when you coming up off of West Oronoco. That's when you come down a hill, you're right in the valley like a—see how the drainage is? Well, that's how John Roberts was. And so, you know, we used to call that "Ponderosa" because that was like—that was our playground.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:03:09.1] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:03:10.5] And we named each place we was at. And so, like I said, Jefferson Village was just Jefferson Village. Then right by the Jefferson-Houston School, that we used to call that Las Vegas cause we used to go up there and shoot crap and play like we was on stage singing and, you know, like we the Supremes and all of that. That's what I told her childhood was—and it was a swimming pool right next to it. So, this is what we called our neighborhood was all that. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:03:36.4] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:03:37.0] See it's a—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:03:37.9] No. Things are just great and—

Mary Jane Ward [0:03:38.7] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:03:39.8] —what—can you describe more of what John Roberts like looked like? Like, you know, like—

Mary Jane Ward [0:03:45.8] It was like I said, like army barracks. But it was housing, but it was like army barracks. And we lived right in 97, and in front of that house, we had a basketball court. We had the playground, and we had a big field cause the train track ran straight across. And we had the tenant council, where there be—everybody would go up into them, you know, meeting or have a little activity for the kids and stuff like that. So, but it was pretty, but we had a playground. We had a basketball court. So, we didn't have to really go somewhere else, and we had enough field to play baseball at. So that's what our little village right there. That's what that was.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:04:24.8] Can you like—what did your house look like in the inside? Like do you remember what it looked like?

Mary Jane Ward [0:04:29.1] Yeah. It looked like a barracks. [Laughs] Like one row of houses and had an attic. We had an upstairs, and we had three bedrooms. And we had an upstairs and downstairs, a front door, and a back door. It was pretty much like because the train run by all the time, so we could hear the train track. You know. Hear the trains and stuff like that. But it was nice cause we was like a little maze something like, you know, cause you can go all the way up in each row up here like a hill. Each row had houses, and they had the alleyway that, you know, where you can drive through. You come on in like that, but it was—that's what it was like.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:05:08.8] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:05:10.1] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:05:10.5] Is it—so it was you and your mom, was it?

Mary Jane Ward [0:05:12.8] It was my mom, my dad, my oldest brother, Gregory, and my second-oldest brother, Dwayne. I'm the third oldest, and my middle sister, Sharon. Then my baby sister, Jeanine, then my baby brother, Freddie. It was six of us—three boys and three girls. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:05:28.8] Do you remember the neighbors who lived there? Do you [inaudible 0:05:32.4]—

Mary Jane Ward [0:05:32.6] Yeah. I even remember Miss Smith—Miss Geraldine Smith. She was my next-door neighbor. I remember—what was the twins' name? The twins—Miss Louise cause she was my other side of me. So, she has little twins. The Shepherds, Miss Bobo Harris, Venetta Harris, [laughs] who else? The Turners, the Carrs, Chuckie Moore. Who else? The Wrights and Costello—all of them. We all lived in a row.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:06:24.8] Right.

Mary Jane Ward [0:06:25.1] And the Hunters, and the McDuffies, all of them and—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:06:29.4] So it sounds like—

Mary Jane Ward [0:06:29.6] Masons, all of them.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:06:30.6] Sounds like you—

Mary Jane Ward [0:06:31.9] Yeah. Where everybody—yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:06:33.2] —knew everybody.

Mary Jane Ward [0:06:33.6] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:06:34.1] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:06:34.3] [Inaudible 0:06:34.3] all of them. Yeah. We all was kids in the village. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:06:37.7] What are some of your memories with that, like at that time growing up?

Mary Jane Ward [0:06:40.7] Oh, at that time, we were—at that time, we was cool, but we was always fighting each other then.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:06:46.6] [inaudible 0:06:46.6]

Mary Jane Ward [0:06:46.6] You know. But they would go back in the house and come back and be friends. But then we go back out and get mad and fight again. So that—but our mom always tell—but even if we fought when we got in the house, we got a whooping too because our mom would say, "We got to live together. We ain't supposed to be fighting, cause they all was friends." And they—we wasn't supposed to be fighting each other, but we did. And then my mom say, "Well, you're gonna get another whooping cause I told you not to go out there and fight nobody."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:07:08.3] Right.

Mary Jane Ward [0:07:08.8] So that's what—but she kept, and they kept it like a village. Cause, you know, we—if she wasn't out there whooping my butt, one of their parents was, because if I did something, my mama gave them permission to do that. So that's how we was raised up as—as a village.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:07:22.4] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:07:22.6] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:07:23.7] Yeah but—

Mary Jane Ward [0:07:24.0] Pretty much.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:07:24.6] Do you remember there being any like—like did the community get together for like holiday—like was there any like social functions or like events?

Mary Jane Ward [0:07:33.6] There was like okay. Well, I—but no. Most of who did all of that was Miss Moore and them. They would like I said, we had a tenant council where we'd go over and play

like recreation. And then they'd make plans for us, you know, to do stuff—the activities after school. Also, Miss Earline, she was—she was teaching us on baseball. We was play—she was our pitcher then our coach. She was, you know, out there with all of us showing us how to play baseball. And we was—we had cookouts and stuff like that. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:08:03.8] Yeah. Who is Miss Earline?

Mary Jane Ward [0:08:05.8] Miss Earline Smith, God rest her soul. She's dead now. Well, she was one of them—one of the ladies that my mom grew up with, and she was the one kept us out there in activity cause she was into sports. And she, you know, taught us something we didn't really know how to do. So, she taught us well with that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:08:22.9] You mentioned the tenant council. Can you say more about—

Mary Jane Ward [0:08:26.8] Like I say, it was like—like this. It was like a [inaudible 0:08:29.0], but you know, but it's something for us to go into and throw when—that the parents was working or the parents wanted us to go somewhere else and play. That's where we used to go to—to the tenants council. They used to do dances for us. We'd do cabarets. You know. We had a pool table up there. We had—each one had a class or something for a kid to do. And that's what our activity for that whole community right there. So yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:08:53.5] That's good. Where was it located? Was it—

Mary Jane Ward [0:08:56.1] It was up—where it was? Well, you know where Braddock Metro Station at?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:00.4] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:09:01.0] Right there. Like when you come all the way around, cause that's how that was. That was our main office, but you had to come all the way around to Oronoco Street to get into John Roberts [inaudible 0:09:11.5] to come in. But it was another side way off West Street that you can go in and come down the alley and get into your place cause we didn't have a really no really main place to park the cars at. Cause it was like I said, like a little snake [inaudible 0:09:27.9].

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:28.4] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:09:28.5] And cause getting let off of what you know what Braddock Metro Station, that little—when you go on to the path to go toward GW, that's all was John Roberts.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:09:40.0] Oh, okay.

Mary Jane Ward [0:09:40.3] That's where all the townhouses at, they were all [inaudible 0:09:42.4]. That was amazing. The tenants council and all of that. That's what we had there. So, we didn't have to come to this rec or to Jefferson-Houston—not Jefferson. But we had Lyles-Crouch and all of that. But when we had this one, there was another one on Prin—what was it? Payne or something? No. Prince—no. Pendleton Street. With the Pendleton Street Rec, we had that. Then we had this right. Well, those are the two ever we had the same tenant council. They were—we didn't have to

come all the way up this way, but we still came cause they took us out to other shows and stuff up here at Pendleton Street Rec then.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:10:18.3] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:10:18.6] So that's what—well that's what—the main thing was those kids wasn't allowed to come out of John Roberts. They would—they stayed and played there till they got old enough. Then they came up to these [inaudible 0:10:26.9].

Francesco De Salvatore [0:10:27.0] Right, right.

Mary Jane Ward [0:10:27.3] So that's what—that's what our, you know, fundamental things was going on.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:10:30.5] And so you lived there when you were 12, and then—

Mary Jane Ward [0:10:34.2] Then I moved from there to where I'm at now.

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

Mary Jane Ward [0:10:37.5] Cause my mom lived at seventh—that we moved from 97 John Roberts. We moved to 730 North Fayette. Then my mom had a stroke. We lived about 14 years or 14—and I would like go 18/19. Then we moved from there when she had a stroke. We moved to 1229. And after we moved from 1229, cause she had six kids, so we had a five-bedroom house. Then, after we—everybody rolled out, they moved her to 1216. And that was just her and my dad, and then I stayed there with them and my mom's grandkids—Jeanine's grandkid—Jeanine's kids stayed there with her. And after my mom passed away at 1216, my dad was still there. But they wouldn't give him—they wouldn't let him put my one—one of my mother's—one of my baby sister's daughter on his lease. So, they would—[inaudible 0:11:30.8] moving with my younger sister down in Lynchburg for a minute. Then my dad got a place down in the [inaudible 0:11:36.2] Building. I stayed with him cause he had got sick after my mom died in 2004. Then my dad wound up dying in 2008. So, but other than that, there—we moved from John Roberts into up where I'm at now. So, I lived on Fayette Street. I lived on Wythe Street. And I wound up living up on sixth on—Madison Street. And then after that, I finally over the years, I finally got my place where I live at now at 1251. Cause that made a whole circle for me, cause that's where I came from.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:08.3] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:12:08.8] So yeah. I'm still at 1251, Lord, thank you. [Laughs]

Francesco De Salvatore [0:12:11.9] Was it—I mean, as you like sort of reflect on this whole sort of journey of your life, what's been—like how would you describe your experience in public housing?

Mary Jane Ward [0:12:21.4] Crazy. Crazy. Because it was a lot of things going on. It was like, you know, it was a lot of fight, a lot of people, you know, shooting and killing each other. And then saying, you know, like I said, "Well, when we lived on Fayette Street, we could say that we come out—we'd come out our door, there's somebody been shooting at somebody—they trying to run up

in our house." And my mom, she ain't gonna see somebody trying to get her—she'd let them come in. And I'm like, "Mama, you don't know who these people is running after them." And, you know, what she said? "I'm not gonna see them get killed out there cause they got to shoot them. They gonna shoot them here, then we can report what they did." You know what I'm saying? Cause they would every time you turn was all somebody shooting at somebody. And that's what the court yard Adkins was. Everybody was shooting at each other. It's like we used to call that "the Wild, Wild West."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:13:07.6] Right.

Mary Jane Ward [0:13:07.9] Yeah. But then, when we named the Adkins, well, that was a new project. It was a new building, so we called that the new project. And then we called "uptown" is "Uptown." We called "The Berg" is the "The Bergs."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:13:21.0] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:13:21.1] So then we called Cameron Valley is out on Duke Street. So yeah. So that's why we gave each one a name, cause that's the way we said. It was just so many kids shooting at each other, or somebody come from somewhere else in our community and start shooting at each other, and stuff like that. So, it was like a while.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:13:37.8] Was it—did you see a—I talked to other folks too about this. From your perspective, was there a shift to—you know, was there a period where it wasn't like this when you were living, or was it, or was this always your experience since you were little or—

Mary Jane Ward [0:13:55.8] No.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:13:56.1] —was it [inaudible 0:13:56.2]?

Mary Jane Ward [0:13:56.5] No. It wasn't—it was cool for a minute. It was cool. But then, like I said, when you bring in other people from other places, I mean, I'm saying that's a big [inaudible 0:14:03.1] to live in in their community that we're in. But like I said, we had people coming from D.C., all over the place, coming to our community because we would, you know, whatever was going on they would feel like, you know, they was running from somewhere. Whatever they running from something they did in D.C., they run to Alexandria. And like say, "We all cool kids." Like I said, we had our own clique, but we had that clique with each other. We might all go with each other. Might even fight each other. But like I said, we always came back with a [inaudible 0:14:31.4], and when somebody trying to come into our community and take over our community, we fought for our community. Whether we liked each other like Del Ray—like the Del Ray, Arlington, whatever. But we stand for our ground because we all that, but we're not gonna let somebody from another place come in here and think they're gonna roll over top of us. And take over the community that we have and make us feel like we feel for and scared to be doing something cause we got new people taking over doing their drug activities, or whatever they was doing. And that we were gonna take off—well, if we wasn't doing it, you all are not gonna come over here and do it. That's how we were. We were defending our own turf.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:15:07.2] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:15:07.4] That's how that was.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:15:08.8] Yeah, yeah, yeah. We haven't talked a lot about your family. Like can you share more about your parents, like—

Mary Jane Ward [0:15:15.3] Well, Mom, like I said, my dad—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:15:17.1] Like what are their names—what are their names?

Mary Jane Ward [0:15:18.4] Well, my dad was named Chico. My mom's name is Margaret, but they call her [inaudible 0:15:22.8]. And my dad, you know, he was all, you know, he's Spanish. He rode the [inaudible 0:15:28.0], and he's a painter. He helped build some of Alexandria's stuff. You know. He painted and helped build stuff. He [inaudible 0:15:35.5] stuff like that. He was a drinker. You know. He liked to drink his wine, and smoke his cigarettes, and stuff like that. Ride his bike, take his paint, and go everywhere—D.C., Maryland, everywhere, and go paint. My mom was always in the house taking them—she was the bread [inaudible 0:15:50.2]. Take the money, and take his check, and pay the bills, and give him a little bit of money so he could splurge. And then she was just the household manager. She took care of everything else while he, you know, and we were just little rugrats running around like we owned the place.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:05.6] Right.

Mary Jane Ward [0:16:06.1] But other than that, you know, she didn't go out places—you know what I'm saying? She always stayed in the house or outside on the porch or something like that. But she never partied, or she was not like that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:16:15.1] What, like, what are some of your favorite memories with your mom?

Mary Jane Ward [0:16:18.7] Oh, it was probably laugh and joke with each other. And she tend to like I say, it was like she always tried to explain to me cause she couldn't understand why would I go if she tells me not to do something and I did it. She was like, "You like—you think you got—you think you're grown, and you think you can handle this big world out here." Then she said, "Let me see." You know. She said, "If that's what you wanted to do is be on the street with these fools, then just you do just that." And I took her at heart, but, you know, I knew as well. I said I had to come home, and so she would let me learn the hard way. And I did learn the hard way, and I bless her for that because if I didn't, I wouldn't be here today. Cause I'd be one of those kids being killed or being raped or being murdered somewhere cause I went somewhere I wasn't supposed to be. You know what I'm saying? So, the values that she was trying to teach in me I learned it hard, but I would listen. But not listening. And so that's where—and I mean we had jokes. I mean, she would tell me about the real life and everything. And I was—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:17:18.9] What were some of your jokes? You said that—

Mary Jane Ward [0:17:20.5] Cause she was like—she was like, "Oh, I give you a quarter if you rub my feet." And I'm laughing, and we were little kids. And we said, "That's a lot of money." I said,

"Okay, Mom. I'll rub your feet." And when I rub her feet, she's like, "I was lying. I ain't gonna give you no money." [Laughs] Then I'd be mad, but she'd give it to me. You know. It's just like any little something that she would come out with, and I'll be laughing. Or she would do something, or she argued with one of my other brothers. And I be like, "Aha, they getting in trouble. They getting in trouble." Cause I'm always the one in the trouble. But they ain't—they don't get—they don't get like I get. But when they do get in trouble, I'll get—I'll be laughing at them. I said, "Cause now for a change she putting the belt to them and not to me." So yeah. That's pretty much what we did. We laughed and joked, but she also talked seriousness with me. And then when I was learning out going in the street and doing some crazy stuff, and but she was always concerned cause she'd always say—when the police would come cause if I would skip school, and she would say, "What," she would say, "Let me ask you something, girl." I said, "What, Ma?" She said, "What school do you go to that you go in the morning at 8 o'clock, and you come back home at 6 o'clock the next day. What class—what school are you going to that I don't know nothing about?" Cause I would skip school that day and don't come home cause I know I'm gonna get a whooping. So, I stay out all night long, and then she would call the police. And then when I come home, the police like, "Miss Ward, we found your daughter." She said, "Don't worry about it." Cause she'd say, "When you all leave, she's gonna get a whooping." And they were like, "Well, don't whoop her." But she'd say, "You all aren't tell me how to beat my child. Cause if she's not gonna do what I say, then you all can take her with you." That what she told them when she went to Miss Pancoast and—Judge Pancoast. She'd say, "Miss Pancoast," [inaudible 0:18:56.2]. "You know what? You're not allowed to whoop your child." She said, "Well, I tell you what. If you want her to live with you, cause she's not gonna be at my house and not do what I say, cause I'm the mom and she's the child. If she don't got a job, she's not paying no bills." And she said, "So if you don't like that, you can take her with you." I said, "No, Mom. I ain't going with that woman. I'm staying with you cause you're my mama." I said, "Because that woman, she could put the police on her own mama. That was the judge." I said, "I ain't going with her." So, I went back home with my mom.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:19:24.1] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:19:24.7] Cause she would like saying, "You're not gonna tell me how to punish my child. If she's gonna do something I told her not to do, and she completely doing it, then she needs to get a whooping."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:19:33.0] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:19:33.4] And that's what she told her.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:19:34.6] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:19:34.9] And I been—I saying, "Oh, I'm staying with you, Ma." So, I—that's what I did. And I learned—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:19:38.8] It sounds like you—it sounds like she coped with a lot?

Mary Jane Ward [0:19:41.2] Yeah. I'm telling you. Because she was like—I'm telling you, she would—when she say something, she'd mean it. But this what she do, though. She might not beat you right then and there. She would let you say, "I'm gonna get you for old and new. I'm gonna let it

build up." So, when she do get me, she'd say, "You remember the last time I let you slide." She said, "But that—I told them to let it build up." And that's what she did. And I said—and I still went out and did the same thing [laughs] again. So, she said, "The more I whoop you it seem like the dumber I get." I said to myself—I never said it to my mom. I said, "Well, why don't you stop beating me?" But it wasn't nothing that she didn't supposed to do because it was me not being, you know, being obedient to her. I did what I wanted to do, and took the, you know, the repercussion afterwards.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:20:22.8] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:20:23.6] Well, I would never—she never beat me to break me down or break my legs or nothing like that. But she gave me some whoopings.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:20:29.3] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:20:30.2] And I still, you know—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:20:31.0] After you—do you when you look back on that time, like do you have any regrets or do you—like how do you think about that time? [Inaudible 0:20:41.5] is it?

Mary Jane Ward [0:20:42.8] I think those was the best times of my life.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:20:45.4] Really?

Mary Jane Ward [0:20:45.8] The best time. Yeah. Because she was teaching me something I needed to know, and I wasn't trying to pay attention. And now, as I see what's going on in this world today, oh yes. These kids needs—not no beatdown, but they need spanking. They need order because these kids are not living. These kids dying before the old people die. And this world is not—it's just so much chaos. And kids ain't learning, I tell them, because ain't nobody you know did that—the government is telling them that you ain't got to listen to your parents. You can do this and that, but as soon as they get in trouble, you're going to their parents about them. But you always told them that they ain't got to listen to their parents. So, they doing what they doing while saying, "Well, we got this freedom. We ain't got no—we can emancipate ourself from our parents." It's all this stuff, but we need our parents.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:21:32.8] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:21:33.6] Whether we like it or not, but we need them cause they've been here before us. So, we need to know what they know so we can [inaudible 0:21:39.1] deal with whatever go—what comes our way.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:21:41.6] What were like—so I mean it's interesting you say that. It's like what were lessons that you learned from your mom or your dad? Like what were lessons that you still now—

Mary Jane Ward [0:21:52.3] Not to be—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:21:53.3] [inaudible 0:21:53.3]?

Mary Jane Ward [0:21:53.6] —not to be smart mouthing your parents. At least listen to them and take what they say at heart because that's your tools for life. Because then you won't be naive to what's going on now. You won't be like you don't have a knowledge and know what's right and wrong and what can be corrected and what—you know what I'm saying?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:10.9] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:22:11.0] That you have a right to live, but you have a right to live accordingly. Not to live where you think you can have it, cause nobody have a life to live that they can do anything they want and can't, and nothing gonna be done if they did—if they commit crimes and stuff like that. That's not what we supposed to be doing. We supposed to be trying to prevent violence and stuff to live peacefully and to have a life. And to grow up and not to just live and just die.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:34.3] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:22:34.4] We gonna do that anyway, but why would you—why would you want to rush it?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:37.0] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:22:37.5] You know what I'm saying?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:38.3] Where is the—you haven't shared a lot of your dad. Like, what are some of your fondest memories—

Mary Jane Ward [0:22:43.8] Oh, my dad—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:22:44.3] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:22:44.4] —he took us—he taught us how to swim in the Potomac River cause he would took us in the water. He's doing [inaudible 0:22:50.1] and say, "You gonna learn to swim or sink." So, we start going in the water. We was like he did stuff. Like we went fishing. My dad would tell little jokes cause when he was in Puerto Rico, when he was in San Juan, he swimmed in a big ocean. He swam across the Potomac River. And, you know, he was just sharing his history cause my dad got here, he was in—he was living—his father was stationed at Fort Belvoir. And he came here when he was 11. And but he wound over the years, he wound up and he met my mom. And him and my mom got together.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:23:18.5] He was from Puerto Rico?

Mary Jane Ward [0:23:19.6] Yes. He was—he lived in Puerto Rico. But when he came to this country, he was 11 years old when he came to this country with his dad cause his dad was stationed in Fort Belvoir.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:23:27.7] Got it.

Mary Jane Ward [0:23:27.8] And then after he came and grew up here, he, over the years, he met my mom. And my mom and him hooked up together, and they was together ever since. And he was a [inaudible 0:23:38.4], but he wouldn't beat us. He was like, "Enough of that. Leave them kids alone, [inaudible 0:23:42.0]." And she was like, "You shut up, Chico! You just mind your business. Drink your bottle of wine and shut up like that and smoke your cigarette." He said, "Don't beat the kids! Don't beat kids!" But we know we needed it, but mostly I'm the only one really got the whooping. Jeanine and all of them, they was underneath Mama so much. I was the one who wanted to be adventurous and want to find out what the world really had for me. And you know like that, I was that eager. And so that's why I was the—I call it the black sheep of the family cause I was the one being so stubborn.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:24:09.9] What are your memories—so like what—which schools did you attend in Alexandria?

Mary Jane Ward [0:24:17.2] I went to G.W. High School. I went to Parker-Gray Middle School. I mean—no, I went to Minnie Howard, but I skipped Parker-Gray to go to Minnie Howard cause I was skipping school. Then, when I went to Minnie Howard School, I was doing classes over there when I wasn't even in that school. But I was supposed to be in Minnie Howard. Instead of being at Minnie Howard, I was skipping class from Parker-Gray. And I started taking classes, and then they didn't even know I wasn't a student there.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:24:40.3] Oh?

Mary Jane Ward [0:24:40.6] But I took my—finally got my grades and everything. I went to—I went to Jefferson-Houston, Robert E. Lee, Lyles-Crouch, that's the main schools I went to.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:24:50.7] And so after you graduated, did you graduate high school or—

Mary Jane Ward [0:24:54.3] No. I took a GED class—night class at T.C. Williams to get my final credits.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:25:00.0] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:25:00.4] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:25:01.1] Did—so like did you—so what happens after you're 18? Do you stay—you were still staying in Alexandria, right?

Mary Jane Ward [0:25:09.3] Yeah. I went and got—I finally got a job. I was a school assistant at Jefferson-Houston with Miss—what was it—what was his name—the lady. She was married to a police officer, so I was at Jefferson-Houston School was assistant teaching to preschool for her. Then I went—I started working at McDonald's. I started working at 7-11. I also worked at Roy Rogers. I worked at Wendy's. I worked at Holiday Inn. As a matter of fact, what I had—when I really had a good job, I was 12 years old. I started working at Value Inn and Motel with my Aunt Netty and Miss Berline. And then I wound up going to Eisenhower at Holiday Inn. When I got off, I used to be able to get a, you know, get a really good check, I went to Holiday Inn. Then I worked

at Virginia Lodge. Then I went, you know, to—what else I did? Oh, I also went to—took care of aid. I started getting into aid. I had all kinds of jobs. I never—when I didn't have one job, and I always went to another job. I did daycare for Flagstone on Columbus Street. So yeah. I had all kinds of jobs. I never not had a job cause I needed the money.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:26:27.7] Yeah, right.

Mary Jane Ward [0:26:28.5] And so that was pretty much what I did.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:26:30.6] And so, where did you—so after you're 18, walk me through. Which public housing units were—

Mary Jane Ward [0:26:38.5] Well, after I turned 18, we had just moved into 97—not 97—I lived at 97 from 12 all the way up to about 18. And we went to—when I moved to the new project, that's where I was able to ever since.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:26:55.4] When you moved to Adkins, right?

Mary Jane Ward [0:26:56.7] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:26:57.2] Okay.

Mary Jane Ward [0:26:57.5] Andrew Adkins, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:26:58.6] So, talk a little about Adkins. Like, I know you lived there too. But like, since you lived there, like can you describe what your experience has been like at Adkins?

Mary Jane Ward [0:27:09.2] It's been—at first, it's like I said, when I lived on Fayette Street, we had people shooting people, coming—people running in our house trying to run from bullets and stuff. And I was—like I say, when I was on Fayette Street, I seen this person shoot—came over and shoot this boy. He was trying to get in our house, but he didn't get it—he didn't get a chance to get in. But the dude cause it was a mechanic place right across from where we lived at, and it was a dude that shot the boy. And then the crowd came—the police came. The dude is standing in the crowd with a gun—a long shotgun, and the police asking everybody what happened. And the boy on the ground crying and hollering—"He shot me, he shot me." Then they're saying, "Who shot you?" And the boy was trying to say something, but he couldn't get it out. So, I said, "That one." I said, "He shot him. That's cause he was trying to get in Mom's house, but we didn't let him in." But [inaudible 0:28:03.5], the boy was still standing there with the gun. So that's how they know who shot him. And I said, "This is why I say people to come out their doors you got—you scared to come out because you don't know who's gonna be trying to run in or what's going on. And you hear them—bullets flying everywhere. So that's what I told the police that he shot the boy. And then he standing in the crowd like nobody—everybody know that he did, but nobody not saying nothing. So, I said something, and I told him like that. So, then they, "You know you can get shot." I said, "Yeah. But you know what? He can get shot, too." That's just how mad I was, that's because [inaudible 0:28:37.6] nobody be running in my mama. She don't—she's a big woman. She ain't gonna be able to get out of the way. And you know what I'm saying? And anybody shooting at my mama's house, we gonna be shooting back at their asses. That's bottom line.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:28:49.6] How—so wait? How old were you when this happened?

Mary Jane Ward [0:28:51.7] I would say I was 17. I was 17. I was 17.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:28:56.3] What's it like to remember—I mean, what's it like to remember these memories that you're telling? Has it been difficult? Is it just—

Mary Jane Ward [0:29:04.4] No. It's a part of my journey. It's a part of me learning how to survive. You know. I'm saying because there wasn't like—it wasn't like no every night, but it's every other—mostly with the weekend. Then, when we get the blackouts, everybody—that's when everybody's house is dark, and that's when they really want to start shooting their guns and everything like that. And so, we got candles in our house so we can see, and we already cause everybody know everybody. So, we know who got guns. We know what they're doing. So, you know, you remember like I say, "Well, you remember to pass my mama's house. Cause if you shoot my mama, it's gonna be a problem cause she ain't the only one going in the ground. Cause it's gonna be your family going with it. That's just how it was. So, they learned not to shoot at 730 North Fayette. Anything, yeah, they could do what they do. But other than that, that's what I learned.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:29:51.1] So when you moved to Adkins, was it similar to like or—

Mary Jane Ward [0:29:55.5] That's where everything was.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:29:56.4] —that's [inaudible 0:29:56.6] yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:29:56.6] I'm telling with the shooting. Yeah. So, John Roberts, we was just like everybody fighting everybody. Wasn't nobody shooting nobody in John Roberts.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:30:01.8] [inaudible 0:30:01.8] said it like—
Mary Jane Ward [0:30:02.2] Yeah. Was nobody—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:30:03.0] [inaudible 0:30:03.0] there's more violence [inaudible 0:30:04.6].

Mary Jane Ward [0:30:04.3] Yeah. Cause it was more of that more [inaudible 0:30:05.2] shooting finally up into the new project, cause it was a new building or new project built. So, you know, then everybody want to come over and want to run to [inaudible 0:30:15.0]—how they gonna sell their weed or do this and that at? And wonder who got that [inaudible 0:30:17.2] "If you selling a bag of weed and you not from there, then you can't come in my hood and sell your stuff in my hood, man, because this is—you don't live here. This is my customers. This is my village." Like that. So that's what they would try to do. But see, I always say, "When you're going over to D.C. and [inaudible 0:30:34.3] thing go over there, you didn't think D.C. was gonna come back over here and try the same thing over here?" And that's what made [inaudible 0:30:40.1] made it more violent because D.C. people was coming over here acting like they gonna really regulate the new project. And we like saying, "We're not having that."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:30:48.7] Oh yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:30:49.1] We not having—that's when The Bergs, Del Ray, Arlington, Cameron Valley, all of us. We pulled together on that job. You know what I'm saying? We pulled together as a unit, you know, as unity. We weren't gonna let you just coming in and do what you think you're gonna do now. We might whoop each other's butt, but we ain't letting nobody here coming and do nothing— none of us. So that mean even I might not like you, and I might fight you. But if I see somebody gonna try to hurt you or do something to you, and it's not from around in our community and everything—no. We got your back. We got you, but we the only ones that whoop your butt. Nobody else can do that. So that's it, child. We did it.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:31:27.0] Yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:31:27.2] Yeah. But it got worser now. You know what I'm saying? The kids?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:31:30.8] Like now? Like—

Mary Jane Ward [0:31:32.2] Yeah. Cause it's like when that boy—back when their boy on [inaudible 0:31:35.8] the Frazier boy. When they came, and them youngins came in there just shot him—killed him? He had just left my house. He was just in my house—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:31:45.1] When was this?

Mary Jane Ward [0:31:47.3] What—three or four summers ago. Remember? Three or four summers ago. And he was up at the—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:31:53.2] So like 2020—

Mary Jane Ward [0:31:54.9] 2020—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:31:55.9] 2023? 2022?

Mary Jane Ward [0:31:57.9] 2020—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:31:59.5] During COVID?

Mary Jane Ward [0:31:59.7] 2020, no—2023.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:32:01.2] Okay.

Mary Jane Ward [0:32:01.8] No, it wasn't when the COVID.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:32:02.5] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:32:03.0] No. Because he was just in my house. It was the summertime. We in my house. He comes all the time cause he always calls me up cause I grew up with his family. I grew up with his mom when she was a baby and everything. So, he came through, and I was telling him. I was hanging on—all of them hanging on the playground. All of them want to smoke, and they

wanted it—little kids couldn't play on the two playgrounds. They have to get off the playground or they running around, why everybody out there sitting in a chair making their sales, smoking their blunts, and all this and that? So, when I moved to 1251, that's when a lot of stuff changed. Cause I said, "No. You all are not gonna be sitting on this playground and smoking in front of these kids. And the kids got to get off the playground because you all there. You all grown. Go on across the street and go wherever that little park right there, and go do your thing over there." I said, "Because I live right here, and I've said that that was the pressure of me moving there because I could watch kids play and, you know, have—be kids. But when they start coming up in there smoking and then putting the chairs like they're living there. And then—and everything having a party like, you know, every night, every day, and then they all would then pass anything. Then they want to argue with each other, and the kids still around then. And I said, "No. We're not doing it." So, nobody spoke about that. But I said, "I don't care about what you all do, cause I've been out there—did my own thing. But not like on their playgrounds. I never did that." So, I said, "This is where the kids got to play at. If the mom—if your mom and them—if you all don't care—want your kids in the house, then why do you all got your all men and all them all on the playground like that's a job they're doing there? And the kids right there, and they smoking in front of the kids, doing whatever they do with the kids, and got nowhere to play?" So, they're coming in. I got the ice cream for them. I got the water for them. What they need when I see them out there playing. I make sure they don't run in the street. I make sure if they fighting, I break it up and say like, "You all know better. You all mom is in the project. You all—what you all gonna do when your mama get put out? You all can't afford nowhere else." This is what I was doing. So, it got so bad, they know that nobody was doing it, then the police be walking. They just sitting right there, or they sitting in the car right there seeing exactly what I see. But as soon as something go on, they come with, "What you see?" I said, "Why you asking me what I seen when you sitting right here? When I'm looking at you in your car, and you looking at me, and we both looking up there up in the playground seeing the same doggone thing? But you're not getting out of your car to go see it. Cause half of these people that's in this playground does not live here. They visiting people here, but they does not live here. And this is where the trauma come. So [inaudible 0:34:26.4] left my house. He went to go to get him something to eat. He put his soda and half of his food in my ice box, and you have to look. "Don't go around that corner." I said, "Don't stay on that playground." I said, "Because you all—whoever you all are beefing with or whoever beefing with you all, you all are in open space. They got plenty of way to shoot you all," and, you know what I'm saying? And that's what happened. So, he say, "[Inaudible 0:34:47.7], I'm okay." But they wasn't trying to shoot at him. They were trying to shoot at some other people. These are young kids, and I've seen. So, we sitting in my yard. [Inaudible 0:34:56.9] uncle was one. He was at my house too, and so we got out the house. We sitting in my front yard. All of a sudden, we hear something go pop, but we thought it was fireworks at first. But then there wasn't. So, everybody—when it started getting closer to where I live, then it was coming down the alley in the mid alley with—the alley right between Fayette Street and Wythe Street. Because the little alley that goes around the square, they was coming down there cause he walked over to the end house up there when you going from the playground—what is 720—what is it 1223? It's where the green box was where they wasn't anything on it. That he had walked up there, and he was there cause they was all of them [inaudible 0:35:39.0]. All of them were sitting up there. That's what they do—hang up there and smoke their weed and everything. So, he went there. So, when the guy came from the alleyway, he was shooting. And then somebody was shooting back at him, but he was coming from the alleyway and, you know, he was coming up hitting Wythe Street side. And that's where I could see some young guy shooting like wow, wow, wow, wow—like this. Before I can know, everybody running in my house. They was running so fast they knocked me out my own

door. And so, and I'm like, "Wait a minute, Mister, I'm trying to get in too." But they kicking me out with their feet, pushing me out with their feet. So, I got mad. I ain't gonna lie. I got mad, and I went up. I say, "God so and so." I said, "How you all gonna be pushing me out of my own doggone house?" And I said, "Who the heck is out here shooting?" And I seen the boy with dreads, no shirt on, and he was up shooting like this. And he coming around right past me—he done passed Wythe Street to turn on what's—turn on Payne Street. And they was, you know, so but at that time, you know, that's who I seen. Well, I didn't see the [inaudible 0:36:41.7] with whoever was shooting back at him, but he was the one shot the boy and shot [inaudible 0:36:47.6]. And it wasn't meant for him. It was meant for somebody else. But still it was a lot of people standing there, but he started that—they shot him. And then I seen the boy run away—running. When the police came, I told her what direction they went in. I explained what they look like. And they were—they were like I think it was about five cause they had one. They were shooting on one side, and they were trying to like cover the alley—cover what we got. So that's why I'm saying so, they—I let them know that I think they caught about three of them. I don't know if they caught the other two. But he lost his life because what the kid beefing about. You know. Whoever they was beefing with him, or whether he was doing something or not. I don't know. But the point was when he left my house, he wasn't doing nothing. He just went up there with the crew. [Inaudible 0:37:37.0] was home, and I told him. I said, "Dudes you hanging with you needing to cut them loose." I say, "Because if they got beef with somebody, they ain't gonna care if you're with them. They gonna shoot you cause you're with them, and that's the seventh shooting of what they supposedly shot. They shot him and killed him." And that's what hurting her because he was just in my house. And if he had never left out of my house, he would have still been living. But he wanted to go hang out with his homies up the street. And I said, "Just be careful, baby." And next thing I know, we all outside my yard. His uncle was right in the yard with us. And everybody falling to the ground and—you know what I'm saying? So, I said, "No." I said, "You all get the hell out of my house." I said, "Because all you all kicked me out of my own just for me to get killed when you all don't even live here. This is my stuff. You know. You could have pulled me in there instead of just pushing me out, but that's what happened." And I after I [inaudible 0:38:21.9] all the time, they was shooting more before that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:38:25.5] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:38:25.9] But I wouldn't leave—I wouldn't let them go in my yard. I said, "I'm not running nowhere cause you all don't live here." So, I said—when I told them, "When the police came but not ask questions, you all keep asking the same thing, but that's you all see this. And then you got cameras out there. Why you all not looking on the cameras seeing what's going on?"

Francesco De Salvatore [0:38:39.8] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:38:40.6] You know what I'm saying? Because they know I'm not afraid of nobody, and I don't mind telling them what I seen. Cause I said, "Because it's not about me. It's about these little kids that's out there. You all shooting in front of these little kids. If these kids get killed, you all—what you all gonna do?" You know what I'm saying? Then I said, "Now let ourself blame the parents cause the parents have company in the house with their boyfriends or whoever. They let them come up there and play house and do what they do in there. You all not watching your kids. As soon as somebody hurt your kid, and you—then you want to run around the corner and ask all these questions. But I'm the only one not—that's sitting there watching everybody kid, and I don't even know half of these kids cause their mom and them don't never come around on

their playground. But so, I'm [inaudible 0:39:17.2] cause I got a front yard. I got a back yard and enjoy my house." And I said, "That was the first time I ever had a house of my own." You know what I'm saying? "So therefore, I got to watch out for their little ones, cause who else—if I don't, who is?" And that's what that one—this is what I saying. Like, I don't know what's gonna be happening this summer. You know what I'm saying? So, I say, "I will sit back and see who gets put out of here. And warn you whoever you put—whoever they letting move in there, but they just—when you got some D.C. people living in there, bringing their trauma over here."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:39:47.7] Right.

Mary Jane Ward [0:39:47.9] And I let it be known, "This is not what you all gonna be doing." I said, "Cause if you don't want me to see you do it, don't show me." Cause I said, "I'm gonna be the one to tell it, and I don't care if you want to come for and show repercussions to me, you got a problem. Cause I'm gonna give it to you as you give me back."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:40:02.4] What do you hope should be—what do you think needs to change?

Mary Jane Ward [0:40:05.8] Maybe the change they needing is to be evaluating these people—these young—I said, "You got young mothers in there, but, you know, they fall in love with these no—deadbeat. And having in their—ain't even their kids father." You know what I'm saying? You've got to evaluate the people that you gonna let them really know what they—this is what they need. You know what I'm saying? The new public housing will make a step forward. Not to be coming in here acting like you gonna be here forever cause this is nice. It's a stepping stone. You know what I'm saying? But people here living—all the people like Miss Rose and all of us. We all living—the Miss Mathews. That's [inaudible 0:40:35.8], but Miss Rose. But I said, "We all in this row. I don't care if you're Pakistani, whatever color you are. Your kids gonna be able to play safely, or I will have to fear that they can't come out on the playground and play. Or other people—when people walk on other people that got to live in the place—in our community, but there's a playground, and you got kids. People come, you know, want to come up—one of the kids want to come and play on the playground. They so scared to come." And I said, "Now this ain't just for this community, baby. If your son and your child want to come and play on that playground, bring them on over here. Ain't nothing gonna happen to them. Don't worry. I don't want you to be feeling like you got to be in fear of us like we some animals and wild, and you all—they're walking by and so scared that we gonna attack you. Cause that's not what I do. I speak to everybody, even if they don't speak to me. But my mom always say, 'Show your respect,' and that's what I do."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:41:24.6] Is there anything I haven't asked you about in this interview that you may want to share? Is there anything like from your life, not just about now, but is there anything that I've missed or—

Mary Jane Ward [0:41:37.3] No, not really. Because we hitting the main subjects. Because I mean, even if I'm saying, if I'm not gonna be—if I'm gonna say what I know is when it's time for me to move on. But if these—but it ain't gonna be a place for somebody to be there, cause you [inaudible 0:41:52.3] and giving us a bad rap. You know what I'm saying? That you—oh, you can't go to the new project because all they do is kill them and rob everybody. You know what I'm saying? This is not what we do. It's a good community, but us saying, but see I tell them once I say, "I'm not"—I

say, "I'm speaking up for everybody that don't want to speak up." I said, "Cause they are scared, and I'm not no bad." I said, "I'm not bulletproof." But I said, "If I [inaudible 0:42:16.5] say something, then it's never then gonna change, and it's all we feel like, you know, we're the ones that causing problem, dragging people into this community to do bad things to other people who, when people got to walk to the train station, people got to walk down the street." Like I said, "When you are in my house, or you're on my—and my [inaudible 0:42:33.2], and the [inaudible 0:42:33.8]," No, I said I took that back. Because one officer told me that I had called about a complaint about—they say, "You not supposed to have people here—people that's not on your—if they're not your company, they shouldn't be out there being rowdy and leaving being nosy. The lady on the end, Miss Carol Barbara. So, she was my niece's grandmother. She never would complain. She'd be out at 5/6 o'clock in the morning taking my trash out. She—you know what I'm saying? She worked—she would—she went to the thrift store down on King and Alfred. And she worked—she walked to—she jogged every morning. She'd go in, and she go pick up the newspaper, bring [inaudible 0:43:13.6] pull my trash out. And this woman was in her 70s then—but she [inaudible 0:43:17.8] she 83 now.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:43:19.1] What was her name again?

Mary Jane Ward [0:43:19.9] Her name was Carol Patricia—Patricia Carol. Miss Carol was what we call her. And so, I'm saying so these people was in her—out in front of her yard laying in on her gate, drinking, loud. She's not gonna come out of her house cause she lives over top of me, and she's in her 70s/80s. So, I said—well, I'm coming from a friend house up on Alfred Street, and I'm coming out of the cab. And I see all these people laughing, and some of them, people I had never seen before. So, I'm like, "Excuse me, but who are you all here to see?" And they look in there [inaudible 0:43:54.5] and laughed at me. And they turned their head. And I'm like, "Well, excuse me, but if you don't live here or you're not visiting this lady, you all are not supposed to be out here being loud in her yard. Because we're responsible for our guests, and you are not her guests." They kept on it, so I called the police. The police came. They are getting ready to go talk to them, laughing and joking with them. They come and ask me, "Did I make the complaint?" I said, "Yeah. I called you for them. I didn't call for you to go talk or laugh with them. I'm calling you because of them." So, she was like, "Well, what's the problem?" I said, "Well, they not supposed to be here because Miss Carol doesn't have company, and they are too loud. And they leaving their trash in her yard cause she don't [inaudible 0:44:35.4] the flowers and everything in the garden." You know what I'm saying? So that lady told me. She said, "Well, tech"—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:44:42.2] Which lady?

Mary Jane Ward [0:44:43.1] The police officer.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:44:44.1] Oh, okay.

Mary Jane Ward [0:44:44.8] She gonna tell me, "Well, ma'am, you all don't own this property. ARHA owns this property." So, I said, "Okay. Well, since ARHA owns this property, but they telling us we got to be responsible, or we gonna get a ticket, or we will be, you know, reprimanded on something that we didn't report." So, I told her, "But since you said that I don't own this property," I said, "Well, I tell you what. You get out the yard—out the property that I don't own, but I pay rent for." And I said, "And you go take it your officer." So, when the chief came the next day, I told on her. I said, "Because regardless was I paying rent—I own this house or not, but I pay

rent here. I'm trying to go by the rules. But you telling me that the rules doesn't apply to me, so I need to mind my business," then that made me feel like I was being nothing. And why would I make them make the effort to try to make this community safe? But they got a badge, and the chief got a badge and reprimanded her and everything. And then when she see me, I told her—I say, "Don't come in my yard that I don't own, but I pay rent at. I didn't call you over here. So go and find you somebody else to talk to." Every time, that's what I say. "This is the place I don't own, but I pay my rent." That's what I always saying, asshole, you looking—she made it clear to me that I don't own nothing here. But I'm living in this house, paying rent every day and every month, and I'm not bothering nobody. And I'm saying so, you know, if I'm saying somebody being loud and they're not there, they don't live there, and then she—so the girl that did live there, they just moved from D.C. But she lived up on the other end—on the other end where the first playground at. So, I'm saying that's where you supposed to have your company at. You're not living here. So, you go make your noise—you make your noise where you stay at. Not where somebody else—and Miss Carol is not [inaudible 0:46:40.1]. And you know what I'm saying? She shouldn't have to. So that's what I caught myself doing. So after then, you know, I tell them. I said, "No. Don't come for me cause you ain't gonna like what you gonna get." So that's what made me say, "I don't care about the police no more—too much." But I still called them and do my duty, and then when they come and ask me questions and stuff, I say, "Well, you already know. That one ain't doing nothing. He's sitting right there partying. All of them out—one girl came from—people came from D.C." All of them fighting and just pepper spray. The police sit around laughing, watching them fight." And I'm like, "Ain't you all supposed to do something?" I said, "They don't even live here!" "They ain't bothering nobody." "But you the police officer. And if you got cameras there, why you all not saying nothing? No," I said, "Well, I tell you what? You better get them away from this spot that I don't own because you gonna find a body there." I said, "Cause I'm too old. I'm gonna defend myself. So, then, but don't come for me and try to lock me up for something you see yourself, right there, and it wasn't that didn't see it cause it was right there watching what I was watching." That's what I said, but I still let them know what's going on even though they see it themselves. So that's why I said when the mayor came and talked to me and all, I let them know. I said, "I'm not—no. And I'm not scared of nobody. And whoever the guy is—the white guy that live over by—wait—the building on [inaudible 0:47:56.7] and got the camera on his head, well, he's filming everything too." They were getting mad at him. I said, "He got the right cause he live in this—he's in this community too. He want everybody to be safe. You know. He live in his own house, but he worried about what's going on over here too, and seeing nothing being done about it." So that's what I said. You got to fight the rats, you know, you got the mice and all that stuff. So, you got enough problems to go with. But then to deal with somebody and then come out and go in and you watching and you the law, where we got justice at?" That's the only thing I be [inaudible 0:48:30.2], but I still fight for. But like I said, it changed a lot. But I was waiting for some of them to come again cause they all will know as long as I live and got breath in my body, we ain't caring of you. Anybody coming over here doing nothing up in this [inaudible 0:48:41.8]. I don't care. You better take a [inaudible 0:48:43.8] but not here. And I meant what I said. So that's why I say, "You know cause it's all about the kids cause we still got kids coming here. We still got family, got kids. They got to play somewhere." You know what I'm saying? Nobody want to be stuck in the house scared to come out. And then you [inaudible 0:48:57.9] when bullets, cause bullets they were shooting. The bullet went up in Miss Rose house. If her daughter hadn't not came out of that room, her daughter would have been shot in the bedroom cause it went through the back—it went through the bathroom window, went into one of the bedrooms. And the other guy went into his kitchen window and then—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:49:16.0] This is when the shooting happened?

Mary Jane Ward [0:49:18.1] Yeah. That's when all the shootings started happening. They be like—now this was [inaudible 0:49:21.5] they were shooting in the back alley. One of the guys shot in the back. Then it was where what is across from me at 12—what was it—1207? Was it 1207 [inaudible 0:49:38.0]—1207. They was arguing. They came out shooting. The dude came out the back, and they were shooting. The person at the post office was standing there, and the people across the building—the apartments across from me, they seen it. So, they called the police. But the bullets hit the mail lady, she was trying to [inaudible 0:49:55.2]. But my door was locked. And so, she was trying to get up in my house, and I tried to run from my bedroom to go open a door so she can get in. They was shooting, and it hit my building. It hit the wood—the corner of my building. And then it ricocheted off Miss Carol's building. Cause, you know, cause [inaudible 0:50:15.2] letting us up and then the porch right there, it hit her. The bullet would scrape my wall, but it didn't come in my house. But it scraped my wall, and so the people called the police. And then—so yeah. But the person that they was arguing with, the boy, had a gun. He didn't go anywhere. He sit there, and he told—they explained that he explained to them. But said he was defending himself, which he were. But still, that lady—that post office lady never came back. She was too scared, too frightened for her life. And I said, "Who got a weapon? We got the mail coming. You got to worry about somebody shooting the mail lady." So that's why I [inaudible 0:50:52.9]—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:50:53.7] Yeah. What do you hope for, for the future at Adkins? Or what—

Mary Jane Ward [0:50:57.1] That there be less—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:50:57.8] [Inaudible 0:50:57.8]—

Mary Jane Ward [0:50:58.2] —it be more police doing their job. Doing—you know what I'm saying? Doing what they doing, instead of just sitting there letting it happen and expect for the people—the residents tell you what you already know. Cause that's why they not opening up to you, cause you already know what you seen. So, what more can I give you if you already seen the whole detail yourself? And you all supposed to be law enforcement defenders, but you all coming in acting like we're the criminals instead of taking the criminals and taking the people that does not belong there out of the equation.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:51:25.7] Yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:51:26.3] So if I got to fight for that, that's what I got to do.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:51:29.0] I want to be conscious of time, but that—yeah. There are—

Mary Jane Ward [0:51:32.5] Well, I know it ain't gonna happen overnight, but I'm just saying. You know. Because what it is, the same people you took out of there, these younger that you done took out of these people houses, they right back setting up again. And you all watching. I know you bought them off. You know what I'm saying? You know you arrested them, but they right back and setting up—so, like setting up in that house again. And I said, "Now if that's gonna"—I said, "Then put those people out that keep letting them come up in there. Cause they don't think they housing is

that important than move them and let a family do need it and really would do—that needed help go come in there and try to thrive. Because you just sitting there because you think you gonna be here all your life. This is not for you to be here forever. It's for you to try to get your life together, try to build something for your family, work and make sure that you got something. But you just think because it's public housing that everything is free, and you can do what you're doing. Lay there smoking all then. Your kid—you don't got to work because everybody out there trying to watch your kid but you. So there. That's what I'm saying—that's what need to be done."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:52:31.1] Is there just—but before I end the recording, is there any last thoughts you want to share?

Mary Jane Ward [0:52:37.0] I just want to pray on the world how God has let everybody see something different is better. Cause so these kids that is coming in, and these kids that still got a chance get a chance. I don't want to keep on going to. I'm going to three today day was a funeral. Tomorrow is a funeral. Friday is a funeral. Every day, I'm so tired of going to funerals. I'm so tired of going to funerals, and this doesn't make any sense. It's just because there's nothing being changed, and everybody want to put in computers. Everybody want to say that the mayor and all them, they come and visit us, but we don't see no different. So don't give me that smack if you ain't gonna do something about that. And if I try to do something about it, don't come at me aggressive because I'm only trying to do what you are not doing. If I've got to do your job than you need to give me your paycheck, and I'm not even a police officer. I just want this craziness gone. And, you know, take it back. Take it—well, I don't want to be like D.C. I don't want to be like every time you turn around, somebody getting shot. Every time you turn around, and then you know as to [inaudible 0:53:38.8] got mental health. You take him, and you put him somewhere, but you bring him right back into this community again. And when you see that he's not supposed to be here or she's not supposed to be here, you walk around like, "Ain't nothing we can do about it." And then every time when you make a complaint, you still holler. "Ain't nothing we can do about it." So, what do you all policing for? Then you get the police, and living in our community, and what's it—it's like a police officer there now. Now Officer Ern, Officer Jim, Officer Evans, [inaudible 0:54:14.1] some time. You know. He was all right, but he—but those are the ones were doing the job for us. They wasn't judging us. They was helping us to help keep the people from—keep the outsiders coming in. We don't got that no more. This is the police officer live in the same place that all the other officers that lived there. She don't even come out and saying—speak to us. She don't come to the communities. We see her. She's up there wiping her car down, whatever. She don't even acknowledge that we are acknowledging her cause we don't know who she is. Instead of she's saying—but Officer Ern and all of them, they came out and talked to us and say that, "I'm the police that's living in your community. Anything you need or anything you want to discuss with us." They gave us a number—gave a private number. You know what I'm saying? You come and walk the beat and everything. They know that wasn't, you know, it wasn't supposed to be there. You got ID. If you—who were you visiting? They don't do none of that no more. And this is what this was lacking. I just want to say this stuff is gonna be a whole of shooting again, and this is what I don't want. But it's like we living the same life over and over and over—repeat. It's not good. It's not good. Cause then you got to know the kids want to play pow, pow, pow. Or I want to shoot you or cussing at you like you a grown—like they grown. And I had to put [inaudible 0:55:35.3] here. "You all not grown. So go get you mama so I can tell her what you do, or I'm gonna whoop your butt. And I'm gonna make your mama come around the corner, and she ain't got [inaudible 0:55:45.5], I'm gonna whoop her too." Cause that's what I'm saying. This is where you got to come for let them

know, "This is not cool. You all are not grown enough. You know. You ain't living. You're not living."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:55:55.2] I have one last question about, I mean, maybe it's like a shift. But if there's a memory you could hold on to for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Mary Jane Ward [0:56:05.3] Memory of where I live at?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:56:07.4] Or just generally. Like, is there one memory that you want to hold on—like hold on to for the rest of your life. Like what—

Mary Jane Ward [0:56:16.5] Yes. Cause I remember—the memory I like to hold cause the kids come to me and say, "Miss Mary Jane, I love you." And they'll be saying they don't saying and they come for ice cream and everything. And they listen. They listen. Cause I can say when they—I say, "Hey, did I tell you about that cussing?" "Okay, Miss Mary Jane." "Okay." I said, "Cause I can do—want me to whoop your butt and make you go get your mama?" "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no." Or something. Say, "My mom not gonna do nothing." "Would you just—well, now you got a new mama here. When you around this corner, this is what you gonna do." And they do. And I don't have to like, you know, grab them up or nothing. I use my voice. They all [inaudible 0:56:51.3]. They already know. I said, "Okay. Get your ice cream. Put the paper in the trash. Don't throw it on the ground." Ain't nobody fighting nobody cause nobody got nothing more than the other person. That's what I miss—that's what I will—my memory of cause I feel like I'm putting something in the community. And somebody is listening. If they not getting what they're getting at home, they'll get it from me. Cause they'll come running to me like I'm their mom or grandma. They all will call me auntie or grandma. I don't mind. Cause I feel they know I'm there for them heart, and it's not to hurt them. It's to try to protect them and stuff like that. So that's what I do.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:57:29.3] I just want to say—yeah. Thank you for all you do.

Mary Jane Ward [0:57:31.8] Yes ma'am—yes, sir. I appreciate that.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:57:34.3] Cause it sounds like you've been—

Mary Jane Ward [0:57:35.0] Yeah. Cause to me it's all about—it is. Cause I seen how my life was coming. You know what I'm saying? How it could have been crazy and stuff. You know what I'm saying?

Francesco De Salvatore [0:57:41.8] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Jane Ward [0:57:42.2] And I don't want to see these kids. Cause they don't have the education, or they're not gonna have taken—[inaudible 0:57:47.9] time I say they don't even send their kids to school. You know what I'm saying? What you gonna learn? Nothing but to be around with everybody shooting over top of your kids heads, or your kids on the playground. And the bullets don't have no name. They don't have a name, and then you got the kids all out all hours of the night till 1 and 2 o'clock in the morning. I got to send them with a [inaudible 0:58:07.6] around that corner to go into your house. After 8 o'clock it's dark. Get on around the corner. That's where you need to be at. Because I did—that's what grownup doing grownup stuff, and you in the—and

they right there. Cause anything can happen, and you not knowing what's going on until something happen to your child. Then you want to come out to be a concerned mom. No. I say, "Take care of your kid while you can." And that's when they around here, they at my house. I said, "Go tell your mom you're at Miss Mary Jane's house. She gave me this candy. She gave me this money. Bring your mama so I can meet them, so they will know who I am." And some of them has come around there. You know, they say, "I appreciate you." I say, "Like I say, whatever you all got to do in your house, okay. But take time for your kid. Don't be putting your kids outside for no man or no other activities. Cause they need to be in the house. If you want to do something, have a babysitter or take them to your other parent's house. And then you can party all you want. But don't have them in the street, why you in the house doing what you need to be taking care of them of."

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:05.1] I just want to—great. Yeah. So, I'm just—

Mary Jane Ward [0:59:09.4] Good.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:11.5] Great. I just want to be conscious of time and, yeah, I just want to thank you for—

Mary Jane Ward [0:59:14.5] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:15.2] —talking with me today and—

Mary Jane Ward [0:59:16.3] I appreciate—

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:17.1] —sharing difficult memories, sharing good memories, and—

Mary Jane Ward [0:59:19.8] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:20.4] —and I think you've added a lot to your community and [inaudible 0:59:24.9].

Mary Jane Ward [0:59:24.7] I try to. I try to.

Francesco De Salvatore [0:59:25.7] And you do your best and—yeah. Yeah, thank you.

Mary Jane Ward [0:59:27.9] Yeah. I really appreciate that cause I've been saying, cause we ain't got but one—

[End of interview] [0:59:31.5]