

Methodist University Community Oral History Project
Methodist University
Fayetteville, NC

Shamar Johnson

Interview Conducted by
John Alan Felton
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Study Room A
Fayetteville, NC, Methodist University

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Interview of

SHAMAR JOHNSON

Interviewed by

JOHN ALAN FELTON

0:01

FELTON: Hello, this is John Felton. We are at Methodist University in Fayetteville, North Carolina, in study room A of the library—Davis Memorial Library—and I'm here with Shamar Johnson. And he's going to introduce himself shortly. Shamar, would you like to introduce yourself?

0:21

JOHNSON: Hello, my name is Shamar Johnson. I'm a senior here at Methodist University studying psychology with a concentration in clinical counseling, and my minor is military science.

0:31

FELTON: Okay, great. So what kinda led you towards that that major, and what made you come to Methodist University?

0:42

JOHNSON: Well, I knew that I had to pick a school close to a military base because I was going to join the military and commission after my senior year of college. What led me to psychology was—actually, a funny story: when I started out, I wanted to be a lawyer because no one could win an argument against me. But there are so many loopholes within law, so I switched from that to becoming a English major, and I was that in my freshman year. But within doing that, I would pick up every grammatical error

when I hear my friends talk. So I said, well, what can I do that will make me happy here and I love to give people advice and help them with their situations, so I said, psychology.

1:38

FELTON: Great, great. So, did anybody in particular inspire you to become a psychology major, or was there someone you knew, close family [or] friend, that, you know, led you to that decision?

1:52

JOHNSON: No one close. Growing up, I would watch, like, Dr. Phil and, like, Judge Judy and things like that—shows that most kids don't watch. [*Dr. Phil and Judge Judy are syndicated daytime television shows.*] I would watch those shows and it got me interested in it.

2:06

FELTON: Okay, nice, nice. So, we're going to talk about kind of like your background and information like that. So, where's your permanent home outside of Methodist University?

2:20

JOHNSON: Well, my permanent home is in Wilmington, North Carolina, but I'm from New Jersey. So I was born in Jersey and then in the eighth grade my mom's job move her to Wilmington, North Carolina, and that where I've been since eighth grade.

2:36

FELTON: Can you tell me a little bit of the differences between Jersey versus Wilmington, North Carolina?

2:43

JOHNSON: One would be the temperature, of course, but the—. I would say the atmosphere that I grew up in Jersey is completely different than the atmosphere in Wilmington, North Carolina, on the grounds of up North you had to fend for yourself. But here, it's like everyone wants to be nice and lend a helping hand. You don't have that up North. You have it, but down here, like, in the South, it's more of, "hey, how are you?" and people actually talk to you, as opposed to up North, where it's like, "oh, you need help? Well, you didn't ask me." It's like down here they lend a helping hand without you even asking, so.

3:24

FELTON: Okay. What about—could you go into more detail about what kind of part of Jersey did you grow up?

3:34

JOHNSON: Okay. I grew up in East Orange, Jersey, which is a little up North but not so much up North. My mother was actually born in Jersey City, and then she moved to East Orange, and then there it was, I'd say that it was, like, a little bit rough part of town, and having to—well, being an African American growing up in Jersey, you had to fend for yourself. On the terms of going to and from school, you're always on guard, going to the park or just walking down the street just to get some fresh air, you're always on guard because you never know what's going to happen, when it's going to happen. Opposed to when I moved to Wilmington I would walk up and down the street, and people would just honk the horn, just wave at you and smile at you and it's like, "okay, this is different down here. We don't have that where I'm from."

4:33

FELTON: So, what was early childhood like for you?

4:38

JOHNSON: Childhood was great. Just me, my mother, my two brothers, really. My father, he was in my life but not in my life, meaning he was there, I could call on him, but my mother and father were never married. They were together for eighteen years but never married, on and off for eighteen years but never married. Growing up she always worked to put us through school and take care of us, so my older brother Mitchell, he would step in as that father figure. He's six years older than me; he now currently lives in Florida. He would take care of me and my younger brother; he would be our—I guess—big brother-slash-father, whatever, take care of us. And then there will be times where I would rebel against him because he wasn't my father, and I guess I was, I guess, acting out because my father was not there. I knew where he was; he just wasn't in our household. And there would be times when we would, like, fight and just go at it all night, and she would come home and she would see that things were, like, broken and whatever and she would ask what happened, and then we would all get in trouble because we were fighting, and she said as brothers we should not fight.

6:00

FELTON: So, did you have any close relation with your extended family—so, grandma, grandad, anything like that?

6:09

JOHNSON: Yes and no. So, they—like I said I always knew where everyone was but never, I guess, reached out to them. I'm more close to my mother's side of the family, talked to them from time to time. My father's side of the family, it's like, since he wasn't in the household, I guess I didn't feel the need to reach out to him or his side of the family as much as my mother's side. So I will say I'm more close to my mother's side of the family than my father's side.

6:47

FELTON: So with that being said, can you describe the people that were around you growing [up]—both in Jersey and Wilmington?

7:00

JOHNSON: A lot of women. Like my mother, aunts, grandmother, they basically raised us. I have a meemaw, a meemaw is, like, she's my godmother. So when my mother would go to work, Meemaw would step in, take care of us, make sure dinner was cooked, make sure we did our homework, this, that, and the third. And then when Mitchell would get home, he would take over, because he would be at football practice, basketball practice, and it would be me and my little brother. When we moved to North Carolina, it was different. Neighbors would help. I'm like, "well, you're a stranger; I don't know you, so." But I would always respect them because that's one thing that my mother taught us: respect others that are older than you, especially, like, grown-ups. So I would respect them, do what they say, this, that, and the third. There was a park across the street from our house; we would go over there when we did our homework, when the house was clean—we all had chores. The one thing that she harped on was, if the chores are not done you can't go outside. So, homework done, chores done, then we could go outside and play. People in the neighborhood would come around and just have fun with us and play with us.

8:20

FELTON: Great. So what was school like growing up to you? I know you said you spent some time [in] Jersey and you spent your other part of your education down North Carolina.

8:31

JOHNSON: I will focus more on North Carolina, because Jersey—first through eighth grade is really not that hard. But when I got here I went to Williston Middle School in Wilmington, North Carolina. It's on Eighth Street, I believe. [Williston Middle School is on Tenth Street; it abuts a park that extends to Eighth Street.] It was different walking in; came in in, like, October, so school had already started, so I was known as the new kid in school, whatever. And as I am right now the same way I was then in high school, meaning same height—still 5'3"—so I automatically knew that people were going to try me, which they did. So I guess having to fight my way to prove myself in a education environment is something that I had to deal with for, like, my first year of school down here, and that was something that I did not like. But, I mean, I couldn't help it. What was I supposed to do? Let them hit on me? No. So my mother would come out to the school house, she would talk, and she would find out what's going on. And I would tell her, like, "it's not my fault that I'm being attacked by these people." I'm not going to sit and let someone assault me and me not do nothing about it. My mother always saw the good: she would always say "well, tell the teacher, tell the principal." There's only so much of that that you can do until you're, like, just fed up with it. But as far as the education part, it was okay, I guess. I found myself in one of my math classes actually teaching my math teacher, and that was one thing that I thought was weird: she go over problems and I would be like, "No, that's not correct. This is how you do it," and she was like, "Oh, okay, that's a different way" and I'm like, "no, it's not a different way; it's just the right way. Your way didn't work the first time." Making friends, that was a struggle for me, which is hard to

believe because I am a very friendly person, a very outgoing person, but I guess being the new kid, no one wanted to be my friend—which at the time, it did hurt, but looking back on it, I’m like, “okay, life goes on.” But, yeah, so making friends was extremely hard. I joined the track team. I ran track for eleven years. So I decided just to pick it back up when I got down here. And through the track team, that’s how I made friends. Because we were with each other every single day from 3 to, like, 5:30-ish, so we had no choice but to talk to each other, so yeah.

11:29

FELTON: If you don’t mind me asking, when you said that you were being picked on in school, were those—what kind of people were those people? Like white, black, or—.

11:41

JOHNSON: Mostly African Americans. So the school, Williston, was a predominantly black school, and I guess I was picked on because one I was the shortest person in the whole class, like, the whole eighth grade class, I was the shortest person. So I guess I had to prove myself of being worthy to walk down their hallways or being worthy to sit in their school or eat with them at lunch. And that was perfectly fine with me, and I proved myself, so.