

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

Black Student Experience project

OH 2264

STACEY ADGER

Interviewed by

Tilisia Williams

on

October 16, 2023

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Interviewee: Stacey Adger

Interviewer: Tilisia Williams [and Cassie Nespor]

Subject: YSU History - Black Student Experience

Date: October 16, 2023

TW: This is an interview with Ms. Stacey Adger for the Youngstown State University project on the Black Student Experience. This interview is being conducted in the University Archives in Maag Library. Today's date is October 16, 2023 and my name is Tilisia Williams. Hello Ms. Stacey, how are you?

SA: I'm doing well. Excited to be here.

TW: I'm excited to have you here. I'm excited to hear your story. So, where are you from? Where did you grow up?

SA: I grew up on the North side of Youngstown, Briar Hill. Not too far from St. Anthony's Church. So, I've been a North-sider all my life.

TW: What was it like growing up on the North side of Youngstown?

SA: Wow. I guess I had a *normal* childhood. We had, you know, neighbors and whatnot. And it's kind of cool, because I'm still in the house that my parents built in 1957 when they moved in after they got married. Some of the older people are the ones that I sort of keep an eye on now. We've had change in the neighborhood with people naturally passing on, having to move into [nursing care] facilities and whatnot. So, I'm one of the mainstays that is still there, but I've adopted all of them. We range in age in my block from my sister who just turned 51 to a woman that is basically 100 just in my block. So yeah, I'm a caregiver to all of them.

TW: Are you a first-generation college student in your family?

SA: I am. Well, actually let me take that back. Of my parents' kids, I was the first one to attend. But my mother was affiliated with the Dana School of Music on campus. So sitting in the Archives, I would love to go and hopefully try and track something [about her] down. She and Sophia Brooks, who used to do the television show at [WKBN] Channel 27, they were vocalists. So she knew Sophia and they attended Dana's School of Music.

TW: And was your mother a vocalist as well?

SA: Yes. She sang. She played piano, that was her thing. She was more the piano player [accompanist]. [She] played for a couple of [churches], for the CME Church over on Albert Street, which isn't far from campus. But yeah, music runs in the family – music and art.

TW: Did your mother's association with the campus influence your decision to go to college at all?

SA: No, not really. Keep in mind she would have gone to YSU in the [19]40s or 50s. So, it was still, at that point, a little difficult for Black females. She ended up going into radiology and working at what was then Southside Hospital. I look at my association with Youngstown State from like, way back – the Harlem Globetrotters basketball games that my dad would bring me down to Beeghly Center to see. My dad wanted a boy. He got 4 girls. I was the child that got the football helmet. You know, I helped him work on cars and all that other stuff. So, from my being here on campus with Beeghly Center and the basketball games. My parents really didn't travel too much down here.

But one of the things that really exposed me to campus in my school years was the English Festival. The Gay family I am aware of because some of their children. There was another child in the neighborhood and everything. There were affiliations [between the Gays] with the Rayen School, which I graduated from. So, I was familiar with the Gays. I was familiar with their extended family. And when I got the chance to come to the English Festival, my English teacher in high school felt that it would be beneficial. And I think I came three or four years.

TW: Attended here?

SA: Yeah, for the English Festival. And that just really made an impression on me.

TW: And so YSU, from the beginning, was the only school you wanted to go to? You never wanted to go away to school.

SA: Pretty much it was the only one, because I knew my parents were getting older. I knew my sister, the one that is a little slower, was going to need somebody to keep up with her. So pretty much it was YSU. Besides, I was looking at television or radio when I went into that, and I knew that there was a broadcasting - "speech communications" at the time was the word for it. So that was what I went into.

TW: Ok. So, from the beginning you've been a speech communication major? You didn't jump from major to major when you came here?

SA: No, I came in straight Speech Telecommunications. It was Speech Communications with the telecommunications influence is what my degree says, because it wasn't fully telecom or anything like that at the time.

TW: And what was the experience like being a college student the first year you came here?

SA: I was terrified. But anything new, you know it's different and I was lucky because I ran into people here on campus that said, well, why don't you consider this? Why don't you do that? And you know, with the classes I was taking in general studies and everything... I came to YSU taking Honors English. Because I was that good at it in high school, that I went straight to Honors English. And the teacher there pushed me. And several of the other instructors found something in me or saw something in me that they said, "You know, let's nudge her a little bit." As it turned out, my first job in commercial radio was because of the late Dick James, who was an instructor in Telecom here. He was also one of the executives at WBBW Radio, which was my first commercial job. My first job on campus was WYSU FM.

TW: And how did you get your job? Can you go more into what you did at WYSU?

SA: At WYSU, I was a board operator. So, basically you go in and you sit, and you make sure that the programs run properly on time. You meet the network [on air] when you're supposed to and that type of thing. You keep logs and whatnot. That was during the time of the original Star Trek. I'm dating myself. It was out and it had gone to radio, where you could listen to it. It wasn't in the movie theaters anymore. And WYSU [studio] was in the basement of Cushwa Hall at the time. It was a radio station, so they had tremendous speakers and whatnot.

I remember being down there and having to run one of the Star Trek episodes or I'm sorry, it's not Star Trek – Star Wars. And the audio was just tremendous! It sounded like I had jet fighters flying past my head and everything. And naturally with the lights out in the control room, you have flashing green lights and everything. We had serious stuff too, but that was one of the coolest things that I remember.

I remember one time where there was a gentleman, his name was Bill Foster. He was one of the senior announcers on the radio station. I was there with Steve Gursevich and Bob Peterson – he was the director of it and he was the one that kept me on. They hired me and they kept me under their wings and everything. I remember I was on campus doing something with the student organization and I get a call from Bill Foster. And Bill Foster had this real deep, resonant voice. "Stacey? This is Bill Foster. Can you come in a little early?" Now see, I'm a college student, so you don't say no to your supervisor. First of all, I come in early only because he knew there was a major snowstorm that was going to hit. So, I ended up going in to relieve him early and got stuck in the radio station *overnight* because nobody could get in and out. Buses stopped and everything. It was a bad snowstorm. And then the lower end of Cushwa [Hall] facing Lincoln [Avenue] has that little dip in it... that's where all the snow went. So you just can't get out of the building. I remembered slogging home in all that snow, thinking fond thoughts of Bill Foster.

TW: What other relationships did you build with faculty or maybe even some professors that you may have had here on campus?

SA: Wow. That's a good question. I'm trying to think. I was in marching band. I didn't have Tony Leonardi, but I was familiar with him. I used to go to the jazz concerts. I love that man. I had a lot of strong instructors. Naturally, now that you asked me that, every name goes out of my head! But then again, I graduated almost 40 years ago. But I had a lot of strong teachers that took an interest in me. And that was one of the main things. They cared and they pushed. And that was what I needed at the time. So, I was lucky to have the good teachers that I had on this campus.

TW: Now, earlier we were talking about your mom and how she had relations to the Dana School of Music. And you also mentioned earlier that you also have a love for jazz music and classical rock music. Why those specific genres?

SA: Oh, it's everything. Because after I graduated, I had already worked for a classical radio station – the one on campus. There was [also] a college campus station. I, at one point, was [the] president and involved in Alpha Epsilon Rho, which no longer exists, but that was a broadcasting society on campus, and we ran the Underground Sound. So, we played a little bit of everything from classical rock to jazz and blues. It was just an eclectic mix of music on that station. So, it was neat because I got exposed to everything.

After I left here, one of the things I did commercial radio wise, outside of just board operating, was I did the jazz show for WBBW. When David Gray left, I took over his show and it was “Jazz for a Saturday Night.” That was one of the coolest things. I got to interview the late Dizzy Gillespie and the late Nancy Wilson – which were just icons. Dizzy was doing a show down at the Powers [Auditorium], I do believe. And I couldn't go because I was doing the show. So, he called in and I got him doing a buffer: “Hey, this is the Diz. You're listening to Stacey Adger.” And that was so cool! I think I still have that someplace. When I left here and left campus, I worked at a contemporary station, a country station. I did news. So music is music to me. I just listen to anything. If it sounds good to my ear, I listen to it. I'm not one of those people that is strictly this type. You can't put me in a category except to say my listening style is a hot mess because I'm all over the place.

TW: You just mentioned that you were a part of Alpha Epsilon Rho.

SA: Yes.

TW: What did you do specifically within that group?

SA: I at one point was the President. I had been an officer. Once I really got serious and knew I wanted to go into broadcasting, I joined that [group] because it was a national society, and I got involved in it. [During] the May 31st [1985] tornadoes, I was here. We had a banquet that night and I had secured Tom Holden to come in as our speaker. Tom Holden at the time was the #1 television anchor in the market. So, he came in to talk to our group and the skies were looking funny. We're standing outside of Kilcawley and I remember looking at my one friend that was

there and she's saying "Boy, the sky looks a little red." And I'm like "Oh, it'll be all right." So, we start the dinner.

The vice president [of Alpha Epsilon Rho] at the time was a beautiful girl. Her name was Sharon Reed: tall, blonde, thin. Then Jessica Savage, who had been a network news reporter, that is what this girl reminded me of. She's very talented, very focused, and had a wonderful heart. Unfortunately, she had done something for an older couple, may have fallen asleep, a deer may have run out in front of her car, but she ended up getting killed in an auto accident while she was still a student here. But she had just left her house before the tornado hit her parents' home over in Western Pennsylvania.

One of the guys, he still works for Channel 21 as a news photographer, Michael Petruzzi. I loved him. He came in and we're all down in the Chestnut Room in Kilcawley Center. And we were getting ready to have our buffet and everything and excuse the profanity. Mike came in, sort of like burst open the doors. We all turned and looked at him like, what in heaven's name is going on? And he said "*Shit!* I just drove through a tornado." Well, that ended the banquet because Tom Holden had one of those big black phones when the cell phones first came out that weighed 8 tons. He picked that thing up and there were all these missed calls, where the television station was trying to reach him, because of the tornadoes that went through. That was just the craziest experience. Needless to say, him coming through and saying that just sort of ended the banquet right there, you know?

But I lost my train of thought. You asked me something about the broadcasting society. I felt that that would be a way that if I could find a way of getting out of Youngstown and going to another market, maybe that would be beneficial – having been a part of that organization and learning some of the different things that we did. I was lucky because I brought in some of the speakers for that, like Tom and several other broadcasters who came and spoke to our group. So, you know, it was an experience, but it was a learning experience and a positive experience.

TW: What kind of connections did you have to the community outside of YSU and doing that?

SA: Wow. As a student, not much. But the older I got, the more people said "Oh, she looks like she'll do it." I am blessed because I come from family... I was at Third Baptist yesterday and my great-great grandfather founded that church in 1874. So, I've been affiliated with Third [Baptist] for a number of years, stepped away from it. Of all things, my great-great grandfather was [named] Reverend Pleasant Tucker. The new minister that has just been installed is Sean Tucker. So, we're trying to figure out if we're related or not. But, you know, that church is home. I know the history of the church. My family was intimately involved in it. There was my Thomas side of the family - grandfather was a pastor there. Reverend Tucker and his wife had eight daughters. One of the daughters married another gentleman who was a pastor at Third

Baptist – just a long history. One of the cool things is Simeon Booker, his father was a pastor at Third Baptist. His mother was a secretary at Centenary United Methodist, which was on Belmont Ave. Their son [Simeon] went to Covington [Elementary] School, but then later became known because he was a man from Jet Magazine. He was the one that went to Emmett Till's mother and talked about "Can we photograph your son?" And she said "Photograph him as he is in this casket. Because I want the world to see what they've done to my baby."

So yeah, long history at that church. Over the weekend, I spent time trying to pull up more articles dealing with my great-great grandfather and the church. But I kept finding all these other articles about him getting arrested at a funeral for James T. Cheney, who was a doorman at the White House for President McKinley. And my great-great grandfather got arrested because he was accused of removing night soil (outhouse waste) and dumping it. It's a long story. He was a pistol – but then again, you had to be, you know? He was a former slave, so you do what you have to do to support your family. If it's being a pastor, that's fine. If it's removing night soil from outhouses in the Black community... He had the contract initially, but then it was given to a white friend of the mayor and then that person wasn't going into the Black area [of the city]. So, he picked it up and it was just this long legal thing. So the church is very important to me.

I'm also an officer with the Donald Lockett Post, the VFW Post. Back in the day, Blacks were not allowed in predominantly (basically) white VFW Posts. They fought in the same war, sometimes the same unit, but you couldn't go to the VFW Post. So, they [Black veterans] created a VFW Post 6488. And it was named after Donald Lockett, which was one of my cousins. It sits on [Route] 616 in the old Septia Lounge. It was the Lions Motel that was just torn down about two or three years ago and then the Septia Lounge. Those were places where Black entertainers could go or if you were traveling, you could stay at the Lions Hotel because you couldn't stay at the white hotels.

So, you know there's a lot of history there, and we're struggling to try and keep people interested. Although the VFW Post accepts anybody now, I think the significance of the fact it was formed because of segregation is important. I'm one of the officers there and I'm just involved in so many different things. I've had people say "Stacey, you can just say no." And usually when they do that, I say "I'm on it." Which is ON instead of NO. I get it mixed up. So that's just me.

TW: Did you develop a love for history here at YSU or has that always been something that's been a part of you and a part of your life?

SA: I think it was ingrained. When I went through the public schools, it really wasn't. But knowing that I was a great-great grandchild and that was something that was always drilled into

us, "You are a descendant of the Reverend Pleasant Tucker who founded Third Baptist Church." So wanting to know and [having] the curious nature, having been a reporter, you want to know what he did. You want to learn about it. So history and family history has been the impetus for me finding this desire to enjoy history as much as I do. You can put together a beautiful family tree, but if you don't know what's going on around it in society, and what made your family members do what they did, made them live where they lived, you're missing the whole context of that. So, I think it was more the family history aspect of it that really got me nudged towards genealogy and history.

TW: I heard you guys mentioned that you have done projects with genealogy in the past. What got you besides your love for history, of course. What got you more involved in those types of projects?

SA: I was standing still and they needed a President for the genealogy society, and I joined. They said, "You look like a good president." I enjoy helping people find their relatives' stories. I did a talk in Canfield, [Ohio] which was kind of interesting. Canfield for a number of years was predominantly white. Many Blacks did not go through Canfield. Me, even being in law enforcement in 2023, I still hesitate about going through some areas because of what my family members experienced. Girard, which is in Trumbull County not far from here, had a history of [Ku Klux] Klan activity and whatnot. I distinctly remember my mother talking to somebody on the phone when I was younger saying how one of the relatives, and I unfortunately never found the name because I never asked her, owned a car. He would get in the car and drive, pick up a white neighbor and would get as far as the Youngstown line to go towards Girard. He would get out of his car, get in the trunk of his car and be driven through Girard and through Niles by the white man. And then would get out of the car and go to work. And it was the [same on the] return trip, back and forth. That it's just like, wow, you know? And then doing research about different things that happened – the [Ku Klux] Klan rallies that were here, the Armstrong Haberdashery, which was right downtown that was the target of the Klan. You know, just knowing the area, knowing the area's history, that sort of got me interested too. Because, you know, again, it goes back to that, well, how did those external factors impact my family.

TW: Yeah, that's really interesting. As far as your broadcasting career after college, can you go more into detail about some of the radio stations you worked at? You said you worked at a news station as well. Can you describe a little bit what that experience was like when you first started?

SA: When I first started, it was kind of cool. I started with WBBW and at the time it was WQOD, which was an adult contemporary [music station]. That eventually changed to Oldies 93. So, there's oldies radio music that I like too. With Dick James, who had been my instructor here on campus, being one of the managers at WBBW radio, I got to experience work at both stations. And that was such a cool experience because it gave me a lot of confidence. I'm trying to think of what came after that. I spent a number of years there at WBBW and WBBG. Then something opened up at Channel 33, where I became a community affairs type program host because I can't remember who it was that left. So, I took over that and then I got involved in "specials." No, actually, while I was on campus there was a project that came up for the Jefferson Awards, which was an award given to people in the community who did wonderful acts of kindness and everything. And I think that was another Dick James thing, where I got roped into that along with the kid by the name of Ed Winkler. We worked together doing research on candidates who were suggested for the Jefferson Award. It was a banquet, and they've got an actual medallion. The one that I remember the most was Betty. She did the aid to Appalachia each year. She was an older lady, but each year she organized a clothes drive, food drive, and whatnot to take items down to the hollers in West Virginia, Kentucky, that region, because they didn't have [those things]. That was one of her main things. She won the Jefferson Award the one year and I was just so excited for her. Just a beautiful moment. Her and her husband. They're long since passed, but that was one of the different things. And then I started working on the Jerry Lewis telethon while I was at [Channel] 33 and some of the different telethons they did. They did the "Jobs Now" thing during one of the economic downturns in the valley. It's like a telethon for jobs. You know you called in, you say you have this job and or you were looking for this type of job, and so we did that. Then I ended up going into television news there and would do some minor reporting, but I was a producer, which I hated. Can I say that now that I'm out of it? I like to joke [that] I went to television and radio because I talk. You give me math and have me [calculate] back time out of the network thing? No, I'm going to hit the network [spot]. Run all over it every time.

But in radio, it wasn't so stressful. Television, because it was a newscast, we had to hit the network cleanly. I rarely did! I'm trying to think because there were so many other things. I've worked up at WGAR, which is a country station up in Cleveland. But I would drive to and from Youngstown one day a week, and that was on a Saturday, to do news up there. Little news breaks at this major country station. I'm thinking, ok, maybe I'll get a break. Most of the radio personalities at that station did not look like me. But I tell you what, "Rose Colored Glasses" by John Conlee is one of my favorite songs and it turned out that one of the guys that used to work up at WGAR ended up working at WBBG because he lived here. He and I became such good friends and he's still around, thank goodness.

I think the last thing I did in media, outside of some newspaper articles and whatnot (because I did some stringing and writing for the Metro Monthly) was at Channel 33. That's when I decided, you know, I'm getting older. By that time, I was in my early 30s, and I always wanted to go into law enforcement. I initially looked at it, but I want to say it was 1980s. Towards the

end [of the 1980s], just as I was getting ready to graduate, you have this massive spate of homicides here in the city. I went to my parents and said “You know, I think what I want to do is go into law enforcement.” And they’re like “Try it again. Go again. What career do you want?” Because they were looking at all the homicides and everything. My mom went to school with a police officer, who ended up dying. He was shot to death in his cruiser. So, you know, that and just the turmoil and everything. I don’t know, maybe I was just too soft to go into law enforcement, but I’ll do what I have to do. I’m like “Awww” and I think they knew that and they said “No, try again. What career do you want?” So, they discouraged me from that.

And the late AC McCullough, I called him one day and he talked and said, “Why don’t you try radio?” He came, spoke to one of our groups and so I gave it a shot. Him, Tom Holden, and there were several others, Dick James, got me involved in media. But you know mid 30s, it’s like ok, this is nice but I’m going to be here [in Youngstown]. Because by that time I realized I’m not going to be moving to a major market. Because by that time, my parents were getting older, and I still have the sister. So, I said okay, let’s go into law enforcement. And I did. I gave you all the cliff notes version of my short lived YPD career. But I’m at the University now and I’ve been there for goodness, 23-ish years full-time, even with the break in service. I’ve been around. I told you, you come to YSU and you never leave!

TW: And so, when you first started in your law career, you started off as a dispatcher. That’s where they placed you?

SA: No, actually I started off as a Reserve Mahoning County Sheriff’s Deputy. At the time there were some news stories that started to surface about the then sheriff [Phil Chance, Jr.] and possible illegal activities. And at that time, I was working for Channel 33, so it was really icky working for a media outlet that was doing stories on one of your bosses. When the opportunity came up, because there was not a full-time position at the University, I took the civil service test for the City of Youngstown and got hired there. We got sworn in on Valentine’s Day – February 14th of 2000. And I remember that because Rick Alli, who’s now the police chief from one of the outlying areas, he said “I’m going to call this a Valentine’s Day Massacre” because there were several others that got hired that day. He was just being funny.

Two months and a day, I got shot on the job. Two months and one day, and that was Tax Day. So that’s another reason I hate Tax Day. It is not the highlight of my year. Every Tax Day, I get that reminder. So, I floated through a couple of things. Chief of Security of Butler. You get the feel that there’s like arts or entertainment or something all in there. Chief of Security.

All, except when I went to the private prison. I worked there for several years and moved from somebody that never worked in corrections all the way up to Lieutenant. I liked that job; it was tough at times. One of the worst experiences was sitting there holding an inmate’s hand who

was dying of AIDS. Another one was cleaning up a cell after an inmate was assaulted, and there was just blood everywhere. You do what you have to because it's part of the job.

TW: How did you make that transition? Because it's a big jump from going to media to now, you're like a Lieutenant in a private prison. How do you make that transition?

SA: It still comes down to communication. You have to know how to talk to people. And when you are in your mid 30s and you go into a prison setting or even law enforcement, you would rather talk with somebody and talk them down as opposed to fighting with them. Especially if that person's in their 20s, because in some cases, they may beat the tar out of you. And I've just talked your ear off, as you can tell, as opposed to fighting with you. So, I mean, there's skills that transfer. And just knowing people. Everybody has a bad day. Something is going on in their lives. Some of us are really blessed because we've had a mother and father, a family unit. Some of us have only had one parent and that parent was the focal point and raised them. Then you have parents, you could have two parents, you could have an entire family structure that is dysfunctional.

So, the main thing comes down to communications, just being able to talk to people and reason with them and whatnot. But like I said, one of the craziest things is when I applied for the job at the prison, I'm thinking what am I doing? You know, I'm going for a correctional officer. I had where we went in, to fill out the applications at the private prison. You have gates that lock. And you are stuck between the outside gate where the parking lot is and the inside gate before you go inside the facility. I had somebody wig out in between the gates. Because the gates were closing, it's psychological. It's just like, ok, I am in between these gates. If I go in, if that gate closes behind me, what's going on in here? I can't get out. I just can't leave. And you had a couple of people that just couldn't get through the first gate. Because it was just that traumatic, hearing that gate closing behind you and thinking, I'm working at a prison. What am I doing? And that psyches you out.

So, but me? I didn't. I was like, good. I went in, filled in the application, and I made it in a relatively short period of time from a correctional officer with no experience whatsoever outside of the police academy that I took, where some of those skills transferred into a Lieutenant. And that job, if I wasn't aging so much... because by that time, I was 38-39. But you have a duty belt with all the stuff on it. Sciatica, it's bad. So yeah, you have to make decisions, and I left that. But at that time, the University had a position for dispatcher. I've been there ever since.

TW: I know you spoke a little bit about it, like before the interview started. You told us a few stories about your law enforcement experience, like getting shot.

SA: You're laughing at me getting shot. What's up with that?

TW: Do you have any more stories or experiences that are maybe less traumatic?

SA: Less traumatic... Oh, let's see, being on the job only two months and a day, that didn't really give me a lot of time in law enforcement to experience everything. So it was, it was a really short career. Sometimes I have regrets that it didn't go the way I wanted it to. But you know, He's [God] got better ideas and wanted me to go a different route. He was like channeling my parents, going "You want to do what?" He's like "Here, parents, let me help her out, and get her out of this field before she gets hurt really bad."

So, and I know I've been all over the place, you're just like, where do I go with this?

TW: Well, I was speaking with one of my friends whose parents has been working in corrections for a very long time and it's a very traumatic job, especially around here. Seemingly there are a lot of people who have had a lot of negative experiences, but you seem like you've made the transition quite smoothly.

SA: Like I said, a lot of it comes down to communications and I was confident enough going into it to know that I can come in at this time and leave at this time. I was not the one that put you in the cell. Those were your decisions, things that you did on the outside that you could have used better judgement on. You're here. Now let's deal with this and you do your time. Don't pick up any more time and hopefully you can get out. Get yourself straightened out and you don't become a regular in a corrections facility. Not all people are inherently bad or inherently evil. There's something that happens to them along the way that may flip a switch and make them start going down the path. Wrong direction, but you know, wrong things.

But like I said, I wasn't the one that put you there. My goal is to make sure that you were ok, that you were cared for, that you were looked after while you were in my custody and do the best I can to keep you safe. And then after that, it's on you. Because after I leave that day, I'm not staying here all day with them. Not everything was bad. You know, there were these times where I had inmates try and smuggle food out of the kitchen. And there is this one time I'm looking at inmates and by that time we had Bureau prison inmates. So, a lot of Hispanics. And I knew enough Spanish to be dangerous, but I learned all the swear words because sometimes I was called them. And I'm not going to respond every time somebody calls me something other than my name.

So, I'm walking in the main hall, and the inmates are released from the prison to go back to their cells. And I see this one guy, he's walking kind of funny, I'm like, "Dude, up against the wall! What do you have?" Because nobody walks that way. And I didn't have a male officer near me, and I said "I'm going to put you on the wall. You come off the wall and I'm taking you to the floor." I'm thankful that he did not do that, because I was going to take him to the floor. But they must have had a cookout plan for that evening. He took lunch meat. He had lunch meat in his boots, he had lunch meat in his pants. And I'm just like, "Dude, ew!" So you know, you get crazy stories like that.

Then like I said, the ones that really touched me were the knowing that this one inmate was going to die from AIDS and his family was nowhere near him. So, you know you hold their hand, try and comfort them as much as you can. But the worst was, when I was there, we had an inmate that was killed. Prisons can be very brutal places. It was a very violent death, and nobody would go in to clean the cell. We had a shipment of inmates that were coming in and we needed a cell. So, there was an inspector, I can't remember where she came from, but she and I end up cleaning up this bloody cell. And that, that stays with you for a bit. Yeah, because you know that somebody lost their life in there.

TW: How do you deal with traumatic situations like that?

SA: You have to compartmentalize things. When I was a reporter, I cannot tell you how many shootings I've been on, how many drowning I've been on. I was at a house fire, and I think this is even before I became a reporter. The house fire was in the neighborhood and I was nearby. Some firefighters that were carrying... no, it had to have been a coroner investigator. They were carrying somebody, something on a stretcher. And I thought because of the size, it was a child. But it was an adult. The way the heat constricts the body... Yeah, it was shriveled, and I thought it was a child. That was I think the very first. And you would think that would be enough for me to go, "No, I want to do something else." But I mean between the journalism lean towards in my curiosity and wanting to go into law enforcement, I went that way.

TW: Do you, and I hope this question isn't insensitive or anything, but in seeing things like that all the time, do you kind of dissociate or become desensitized by, I guess you can say the violence that you can be surrounded by in certain fields?

SA: In both fields, yeah. You can become desensitized to it because some of the ones that cover the police feed in news and television news, they were like me. I've seen so many dead bodies. I mean, I stood over several homicide victims' bodies along with the police while they were doing

investigations. One of the first things I did as a police officer before I got shot was, we had a call about a shooting in the house and I found the body at the base of the stairs. It does stay with you, but you can't let it eat at you. You have a lot of people that internalize it, but when you look at things you realize that it's not anything you did that put that person there.

Some people need to talk and get counseling and everything and that's fine. I guess I'm not immune to it. I'm not numb to it, but I just can compartmentalize it, I guess better knowing that, you know, it's life. Unfortunately, it's life. And some people make good decisions, some people make bad decisions. And you know it is what it is.

TW: Now after your short time in law enforcement and working at the private prisons and everything, you ended up coming back to campus and working security here. What was that experience like and how did you kind of get into working here?

SA: Well, actually at the time, Chief John Gocala wanted to hire me as a full-time officer. There wasn't an opening, and then [my] injury happened. So, he was still chief here when the opening came up and he reached out to me and said, "Would you like to come back as a dispatcher?" I hated dispatching because I got thrown into dispatching for the [Youngstown] city, and the city pace is much more hectic than the YSU campus. So, there were times where we were 20 or 30 calls back before I even got there. And stressful.

This, on the college campus, I like this. This is my lane. I can be Stacey. I can be firm Stacey. I can be compassionate Stacey. I can be whatever the situation calls for. What did you ask me again? My train got derailed. I came back here, that's what it was, full time as a dispatcher almost 23 years ago. I have very few instances of ever regretting it because I enjoy it here on the college campus. I tend to look at everybody on campus as my responsibility when I am here. You all are my children. I don't care how old you are. You all are my children. My responsibility as long as I'm on campus – and then sometimes when I'm not.

TW: What are some things that you've seen working security here at YSU?

SA: Let's see again. My actual patrol time was really short. When I first started, there were a couple of regulars that would always hang around campus that were not students, that had issues and whatnot. So, you get to learn how to deal with people with different dependency problems, different mental problems, behavioral problems. So, you know, I can't really go into details on some of those, but you learn how to meet people at their need, where you can, as they come from a number of different places, if that makes sense.

TW: I've noticed that from the beginning of this interview, you've kind of been an observer of many things – like growing up in your neighborhood, you watched from the time you were a child up until now so many things change about it because you've never left essentially. And it's the same thing here with YSU campus.

SA: You know, that's funny. I never thought of it that way. I guess I am. I'm too busy watching everything to realize that I'm even doing it because I guess it comes naturally.

TW: Yeah, you seem like you're naturally, as well as being in things with your communication, you can also watch from the outside and observe a lot of things. What are some changes that you've seen on campus that were different, say like when you were a student?

SA: You know, it's funny because when I started here, we had two [parking] decks - the Fifth Avenue deck and the one on Wick [Avenue] - and you could never find a parking space when I started here. Never! You would drive around. You'd be 50 minutes late for your class and it's like, oh, I can't get here! And I remember the first days of school, how you would almost have to leave like an hour or two early just to get to campus to find a parking space. You know, I'm sort of melancholy now because I don't see the traffic that I saw when I was a student here. One of my jobs as a dispatcher is to look at cameras and things on campus. So, I see the drop in the number of people that I see when I work and realize that the campus is changing.

I would love to see more people because I think a lot of people are missing out on a good foundational education here. And they just don't realize it or they don't see that they belong in a university setting. And sometimes they miss out because this would be like an ideal place to be, so you can explore and figure out who you want to be. I mean, there's so many different majors and everything here. You've got all types of chances to figure out who you want to be in a positive, constructive manner. And like I said, some of the people here are just tremendous. You're going to run into knuckleheads everywhere you go, regardless of what job you have. But I have had very few negative experiences on this campus. It's like home to me.

TW: And so with you having been involved so much within the community and also being here on campus, why do you think that the mindset of young people is changing when it comes to how they feel in a university setting? Why do you feel like there's so many more young people feeling like they don't belong here?

SA: Now see, back in the dinosaur days, when I came to school, you didn't have social media, you didn't have some of the distractions that I think a lot of younger adults get caught up in. Not everybody is going to be a social media influencer. That doesn't pay your bills. So sometimes you have to be practical and really look at what you need to do with your life. I tend to think some of the high schools, elementary schools, and even some of the families... and I don't want to say push, but give the student the idea that they can do, that they can be, that they can go to college and become something. I think we're missing something in between that family, high school graduation gap, that diverts the incoming students out elsewhere as opposed to looking at, yeah, it's another 4 to 5 years of school, but look at what I could get out of that. Some of it too has been the job market back and forth with up and down and why am I going to college if I'm not going to be able to find a job? That mindset.

There's a lot of things in play, but I'm a firm believer you've got to do what's best for you. You've got to look at all your options. It's hard to do that when you're an 18-year-old. But I knew I wanted something different. My dad was always a hard worker. He worked in the mills, sometimes he worked two or three jobs a day. My mom stayed at home because he didn't want her to work outside of the house. I knew she had been an X Ray tech and played piano at the church and everything. So, she had some things to do before she became a full-time stay-at-home-mom. I guess I always wanted more. So that was part of the reason I looked at college because I felt that it [college] could direct me better into what I wanted to do. But it's crazy. I'm not at the [television] network. I'm not at a major radio station. I'm not the chief of police someplace. But I tell you what, I wouldn't change my life right now for anything in the world. I'm content where I am.

TW: And what advice would you give to younger students who may be listening to this, and they need that encouragement, they need that sense of wanting more out of life than the constant comparisons?

SA: You need to focus on what is going to be the best thing for you, not how your friends are going to look at it. Because if you've got friends that aren't looking towards college and do a lot of hanging around and everything, ultimately, they don't have their best interest in mind, let alone yours. You've got to do what's right for you because in the end you are responsible for yourself. For me, I found that the best way to be responsible for myself was to go to college, was to learn as much as I could while I was here and hopefully make some type of impact in the world outside of me. So, you've got to do what you've got to do to get your life where you want it to be – and it's never going to be where exactly where you want it. Or else I'd be sitting with a million and a half dollars and just living "the life."

TW: [to Cassie Nespor] Do you have any questions?

CN: Yeah, I do have a couple of questions. You said you were the first to go to college in your immediate family and you have four sisters, or you're one of four sisters. Did your experience at college encourage anyone else in your family to go or over the years have you encouraged people?

SA: Two of the three sisters went.

CN: And you think you had something to do with that?

SA: I would like to think so.

CN: Are you the oldest?

SA: I'm the eldest.

CN: Okay.

SA: So, I would like to think so. The two [sisters] got associate degrees and the one that's at home couldn't go. But at least they went. Because the one got into childcare and that was what she wanted to do. She knew that from the get-go. So, she got her associates degree here and is still doing it. The other one, she's moved from various jobs and everything, but she got a foundation here that has allowed her to move to different jobs and different careers. I can't remember what her associate's was in.

CN: Were you involved in any Black student organizations while you were here?

SA: There was a Black United Students group. And it was so funny because the Broadcasting Society was in with the Black United Students group. They had an office on campus. So, by proxy, I became a member of that group! We had some wonderful people that were a part of it. And I stayed somewhat active in it. I made it a point of going to all the African marketplaces

while I was here on campus, because that was a big gathering type of thing for some of us. I never took Black Studies [classes] though, and that just seems like an anomaly.

CN: Yeah, looking back now.

SA: I was more interested in broadcasting. So, you know it's like, peabrain—I couldn't get two degrees at the same time. That would just make my brain blow up. So, I just focused on Communications, and figured I'd double back to Black Studies eventually.

But I still do a lot of that, even with the genealogy. It's kind of cool, because I'm doing a talk in Warren next year, where there's a lady - we're cousins. She's blonde-haired, blue-eyed. I am obviously not blonde-hair blue-eyed. And we've got a common ancestor, meaning her ancestor owned one of mine. We did that talk for the state genealogy conference. We got a couple of people saying, "I couldn't make it [to the conference]." The Warren Public Library is going to [host] it. It's like, how do you have that difficult conversation with somebody whose family owned yours? I mean, we're blood relatives—it's down the road, but we're blood relatives.

I can say, in spite of slavery, I am so proud of my family. I've got Althea Gibson [1927 –2003] whose kind of a cousin because we have Gibsons. [She's the famous] tennis player out there. *Brown v. Board of Education* [1954], the school desegregation case [included the case] *Briggs v. Elliot* [1952] —that's my family, out of Clarendon, South Carolina. So, in spite of some of the different challenges they faced while being enslaved, during Jim Crow, and everything, they struggled to do what they needed to do to try and make things better for future generations. Hopefully, I'm doing the same thing.

CN: I think that's a great place to end it. Thank you so much for your time today!

SA: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW