

Speaker 1: You ready [crosstalk 00:00:00]?

Speaker 2: I'm ready.

Speaker 1: Okay. Great, cool. I'm just going to read you a little bit off the page about the project, a few instructions. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate. It's definitely gonna benefit many communities, both now and in the future. The goal of this questionnaire is to produce a really detailed account of your life and-

Speaker 1: ... phone but I'm also ... It's just almost like clock work when you walk into a space, you just turn it up.

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: Like I don't ...

Speaker 3: We're ready.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 3: We're rolling.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: Oh cool.

Speaker 3: So just a conversation with her.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 4: Okay so this first set of questions is just gonna be about your early life.

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 4: Tell me about of your place of birth and about what was going on there when you were growing up?

Speaker 2: Well, I was born in Salisbury, North Carolina. Which is just north of Charlotte, about 40 miles. Born back in the dark ages around 1941. What was going on in Salisbury when I grew up? Well I always say and bring up that it was ... I was born in a community and community was important. And I was born and nurtured in a black community that was surrounded by and very much impacted by the times. And this was a time of segregation and a time of white privilege. And my life was very much impacted by those things.

Speaker 1: Okay. Vincent and I got serious about one another in 2010 and he always used ... I'll just read you this language and you'll just get to see. This is ... you'll see.

This letter says, "My beloved sister with no danger of incest, companion, friend, and co-worker, what a multi-talented woman. It's now two am Denver time, instead of getting some sleep before an eight am appointment and a 12 noon flight, I'm sitting at the dining room table, which I would like for you to see and eat from one day not too far away, and writing to you and to your sister. What a crazy thing. But how can I avoid crazy things when I keep company, what an old fashioned phrase, with someone who's magnificent scent and permanent images will not leave me.

"So good morning dear, I see you, I taste you, I receive you. Thank you, thank the giver of every perfect gift, that's what you are and I am very grateful. Flooded by gratitude and deep desire, I am writing my first letter to you, as I promised, as you requested, as I need to do at two am, my my. Will you accept a few more during the 76 days that lay ahead?" That was til my birthday.

"I promise not to write them all at such a strange hour, but is it really strange to us? Isn't two am a familiar time to be together? I hope you're well when this arrives. The other materials are part of your initiation, dedication, consecration, into the role of southern representatives for the Veterans of Hope Project. Please let us know what else you need sister [inaudible 00:01:43]. Of course the supply of love, admiration, joy, and great appreciation is limitless, so just ask and they will be available. Indeed, even before you ask, they are available. And you don't even have to be an official rep to receive them but I think you know that. We've lived together at a two o'clock hour, we know what's available.

"Now, since this is the first letter, I'll leave many lines unfilled, they will be filled, you will be filled, we will be filled. Isn't that marvelous? To be held, to be loved, to be filled is such a gift. Thank you for filling me joy, with pleasure, with laughter and delight, and with food, especially soup. I shall return for more. I shall bring more when I return, I shall receive all you have to give before 76 days have passed. I shall give all that I can. What joy. Thank you my beloved, I see you. See happy baby, your beloved Vincent, the older fellow who cherishes you, just in case you've forgotten the name. Me for you."

He wrote many, many, many lovely, lovely letters. And sometimes we'd be in the same place and he'd write me a letter and have it on the bed if I'd gone someplace and came back. So you can see, I can say, he was the love of my life.

I have to this thing, a Halloween card. Oh, look at this picture and see if you can find me. See if you can find me on there. Talk about my childhood.

Speaker 2: Oh my gosh.

Speaker 1: See if you can find me. He sent me this Halloween card. "You give me the Halloween shivers and the moans and the groans. Well, well my beloved. Did you ever get a Halloween card before? Well I've never sent one before and who would have think that

I'd ever send one like this. Obviously it's all your fault or do you have any fault to spare? I'll share the scare and the pants and the jump. See what happens when we've been apart for such a long, long time? I'd like to scare the pants off you and jump your bones, but not really, just loving not scaring, maybe some jumping. With love, love, love. Me."

Did you find me?

Speaker 2: I don't think so but I'm going to guess. You?

Speaker 1: No, that's me.

Speaker 2: Oh wow. I was wondering if you were one of the ... because you guys are a little older, right?

Speaker 1: Yeah. That's a community picture that someone took and that was our neighborhood, before I was 12. I lived in that neighborhood and those were some of the kids in my community Lakewood, and there was a lady who came in and who did various things in terms of encouraging us and whatever. And she got that picture together and that was in the newspaper and a classmate sent it to me not too long ago. So those are a lot of kids that I grew up with from birth to about age 11, 12.

Speaker 2: It's interesting, in your interview you talked about how ... well you talked about childhood being a difficult time for you but also how your mother [inaudible 00:04:54]

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 2: Not smiling in this picture.

Speaker 1: There are no pictures of me smiling before probably 2010. All my pictures have this like ... I'm serious that Vincent helped to change my life. There are no pictures of me smiling. First, he would tickle me. If we were together he would tickle me in the side and that helped. And then I'd always say, "I can't smile, I can't smile." And he helped me learn to stop saying that. But I too have no pictures, all my childhood pictures, I'm looking tragic. I didn't smile in any of my pictures growing up.

I was just caught up into the ... truly, I was almost a suicidal child, truly. I just thought ... I didn't understand that other people had problems, I thought I was the only one who was unhappy and you know, youngest by 10 years, my mom had her own complications, my dad was never with us on holidays, he was in and out of my house two or three times a week and then as I said, I saw him in church, I saw him at school, I have a half sister who's two months older than I am.

So he truly had parallel families but as I look back, he was never there on holidays and then we didn't have a phone, so he couldn't really let my mother know when he was coming, so she therefore kept her life very restricted without friends and people coming into the household so that he could drop in. And I didn't realize it for years and years about why my house was so cold and so unhappy and why she was so unhappy and why

I was so unhappy. It was a lot revolved around the relationship with my father and the shame she carried about being the other woman but it was a loving relationship. She died at 86 and she loved him until the day she died and he loved her. His wife died maybe 15 to 20 years before my mother did. She would not marry him then. She said he was too controlling and whatever. She said she'd probably have to hurt him.

Speaker 2: You have two older siblings.

Speaker 1: I had a brother. And my mother's children, my mother had two boys.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: One at 17 and one at 19. So my two brothers and they were 10 and 12 when I was born. I consider then full siblings. My brother, my bubba and my loving relationship with him and then a challenging relationship with my younger brother who died young but who supported me in college and sent me beautiful clothes and introduced me to people who would take me to New Hampshire and showed me New York and all of that. Those were wonderful experiences that I had with him. And I later got to be friendly with one of my siblings Mary, that Vincent mentions in the letter. After we finished college we decided we would declare each other siblings and we would be sisters.

But I was never acknowledged as my father's child on paper or in public until the year 2000, two weeks before he would have been 100 he died. And at his funeral, or in the obituary the family put my name there as a daughter and at the funeral I was sitting in a position in church with the family, so that the people who came to greet the family got me first, that happened to be where I was seated. It was the year 2000 where I was publicly acknowledged as my father's child. He died two weeks before he would have been 100. But he never signed my birth certificate. I asked him when I was 50 and he was 91 and he never signed my birth certificate.

Speaker 2: What did he say?

Speaker 1: He said, "What will people say?" That was his whole thing, "What will people say?" So he kept that split between his public life and whatever, he could never bridge that contradiction, "What will people say?"

Yes, there I am.

Speaker 2: It's interesting how you talked about in the interview you talked about how Dr. Heidi helped you heal and it's interesting that you've mentioned your mother never smiling in the photos but not until just a few minutes ago you talked about yourself not smiling in photos but it was sort of a generational thing that was finally broken.

Speaker 1: Yes, very much, very much, very much. He helped me to smile and I think, even though we were that old and we were in this very intimate relationship, that we decided at that old age to get married. He wanted me to carry his name and to be his wife and so we only had a short time. That was what he wanted and that was what I wanted and that's

how it ended. I'm his wife forever, right?