

**SARASOTA COUNTY WATER ATLAS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA – FALL 2012**

Alice Faye Jones Interview at Robert Taylor Community Center
10/25/2012 at 6:30 pm

Interviewer:

Nicholas Manting-Brewer is a Florida Campus Compact AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer Coordinator at New College of Florida. He is also a 2012 alumnus of New College Of Florida, who focused in Cultural Anthropology. Nicholas is interested in revealing counternarratives through documentary film. Nicholas has plans to pursue a PhD in Anthropology and to do fieldwork on poverty in American cities.

Interviewees:

Alice Faye Jones

Randy Jones (her son)

Mrs. Alice Faye Jones was born and raised in Sarasota, Florida. Her mother was a maid in Longboat Key, who worked tirelessly throughout Mrs. Jones's childhood. While Mrs. Jones spent significant time at Lido Beach as a child, she currently runs a free tutoring program called Brothers and Sisters Doing The Right Thing at the Robert Taylor Community Center in North Sarasota.

Nicholas:

I'm going to start out by asking you to say your name and tell me a little about your life in Sarasota, up until this point—where you've lived and a little about your experiences. And then, I'm going to ask you some questions based on what we spoke about last time...about your childhood at South Lido Beach during the Fourth of July. I'm also going to ask you to talk about Brothers and Sisters, a little bit. So, whenever you're ready.

Mrs. Alice:

Is it going?

Nicholas:

It is going!

(Both of us laugh)

Mrs. Alice:

I'm sorry.

Nicholas:

No, you're fine!

Mrs. Alice:

Okay, my name is Alice Faye Jones and I was born and raised here in Sarasota, Florida. I was raised here in the community—which is called the Newtown community. Growing up here in Newtown, it wasn't hard. It was more like a family-oriented type of community when I was growing up. Everybody watched over everybody. I don't know if you want to talk about my schooling?

Nicholas:

Absolutely!

Mrs. Alice:

Oh, I went from Alta Vista and during that time I went from Alta Vista to Sarasota Junior High, which is now Sarasota Middle—it used to be directly across the street from Sarasota High School! So you had the Sarasota Junior High and the High School, directly across the street from one another until they decided to move Sarasota Junior High out on Ashton Road. And, I went from there to Riverview High School. I graduated and walked down the aisle in '85. And from there, I was just working. I started a family in '87. Got married in '89, still married. And, um ask me questions.

Nicholas:

Alright, so we're in the Robert Taylor Center right now. Can you tell me a little bit about what you do here?

Mrs. Alice:

Oh, right here? We're located right now at 1835 34th Street. This place is now called Robert L. Taylor Community Complex. Years ago, it used to be called the Newtown Community Center; the Rec, is what we all called it. What I do here is that I offer a free after school homework assisting program free of charge to students from seventh grade to high school in various studies and subject areas, based upon their need. It's a program called Brothers and Sisters Doing the Right Thing. We've been established since 2002 and it runs on volunteers. We do not have any paid staff or anything like that; hopefully in the near future we will. Right now, everything is run strictly by volunteers.

Nicholas:

What inspired you to start this organization?

Mrs. Alice:

Well, I was working at a place called G.G. Schmidt—a job that I really thought I was going to retire from. After they laid me off in 2000, I had to determine what it was that I wanted to do—did I want to go back into the workforce or what? So, I decided to go back to school. I started attending Manatee Community College, which is now called State College of Florida. I decided to go back to school,

undetermined as to what it was that I wanted to do. But, during that time, I had time on my hands, so I started going to my son's school, visiting and building a rapport with the teachers and things like that. I guess I became a parent. And I was concerned about my child's education because I did have time on my hands. And, with that being said, I just had an interest in working with him and I, in turn, had a passion for wanting to help other kids, who may have working families and didn't have the spare time, just like I didn't, because they're trying to make ends meet and keep a roof over their head and just trying to make sure things were happening around the house. I just started having a passion for it, and I asked my son if there were any other kids out there, that may need some help, you know, academically. And I had this big blue van, and at that time there was no library in Newtown. What there was, was the Selby Library, and with permission from parents, I had got some kids, about 10 of them, and loaded them up in my blue van and started carpooling them to the Selby library. And that's where that really began because it's like a light bulb went off in my head. Getting their homework done, and there was just someone there to be sure that those things happened. And then, especially when their grades started changing, you know, that's what basically happened with my son. His grades started changing, and he had seen the improvement and he had seen where he personally came home showing he had a B. It really touches you. That's where it all began.

Nicholas:

What year was that?

Mrs. Alice:

That was, let's see, around about 2003. Might have been 2003.

Nicholas:

So, you've lived here your entire life?

Mrs. Alice:

Oh, born and raised!

Nicholas:

Born and raised...in the Newtown area, as you said. I believe you told me that you lived in the 21st Street Projects.

Mrs. Alice:

Yeah, that's the projects.

Nicholas:

Can you tell me a little about that?

Mrs. Alice:

Well, it was more family-oriented. Everybody knew everybody. The projects are still there—still under the Housing Authority. We stayed in a corner apartment,

right where there is Roy McBean. The corner apartment was right there and right before they built Roy McBean, there was just a basketball court there, And all I had to do was walk out the back door and the basketball court was there and they had a baseball diamond on the opposite side. But when I say that it was family oriented, I mean that everybody took care of everybody. The elders took care of everybody else's kids. They knew each other. All the neighbors knew each other, so if anything happened the word was going to get around really fast, and there were no cellphones. If you were doing wrong, your mother knew about it before you were home. So that's what I mean by family-oriented. If mom wasn't there, your next door neighbor was basically your mom until your mom got home. And they cared for you—and I'm not saying no one cares right now in today's society, I'm pretty sure they do, but back then, you knew...it was a village, that's the way I see it. I can't speak for anyone else, but it was a village. When you have people just loving and caring on other people's children and, um, my mom could go to my next door neighbor—and let's say she had to run to an appointment—and my next door neighbor would watch me, feed me just like my mother would feed me. It was nothing like it. Nothing.

Nicholas:

What did your mom do for a living?

Mrs. Alice:

She was a house cleaner. She was a maid. She worked out on Longboat Key. She was a hell of a maid, too. She was a real good maid. That's what I thought I was going to be. Because, you know, we have people we kind of mimic—or, our role models. A lot of times, your role models are those who are in your home. Well, in my home it was only my mom, there was no Dad in my home. And I respected and looked up to my mom, so I wanted to be like my mom and I thought that's what I was supposed to—was a maid. We didn't have table topics, or roundtables where you would (talk about) "What do you want to be when you grow up?" "Oh, you're a good dancer! I'm going to send you to dance school!" There was none of that going around the table. It was basically what you saw is what you got, and I saw my mom and she was a hell of a maid. And I thought that maybe one day that's what I was supposed to be because nobody ever asked me what I wanted. And one day, I didn't go to school and um, one thing about not going to school was, you wasn't going to stay home. There was no staying home because you didn't go to school. You were going to go with your mom to the job, and my mom took me to the job with her. And that's when I can say she was honestly a hell of a maid. I watched that woman clean the house from top to bottom... never seen it done in my life from anybody else, but she did it, and I thought that was what I was supposed to do. And, that was the first time—during my younger years, it wasn't often that we'd miss school, but when we did, it was an honor to go out there and travel on Longboat Key because it was a whole other world out there. It was just so...

Before my mom got a vehicle, we would catch the city bus to Longboat. When you'd leave one area and go into that area, everything became green. The grass was greener. The landscape was just beautiful. The trees were trimmed to... oh my god, just evenly and everything—and the flowers—and it smelled different over there, it was just a whole different world and so it was like, wow...where are we? We're on a different planet! But it was just across the bridge. But you see how other people live when you enter into a whole other area, which you're not exposed to. You just go over there. And my mom worked at a place called The Islander. And The Islander had, I guess you would say security—where you have to stop at the front desk and let them know what apartment you are going to. These people were in uniforms. Even the lobby smelled different. It was so clean and spotless, and then you would go up the elevator to the owner's condo, I guess you would call it a condo, and you would go inside the home. It was totally different from where I was raised. And I never knew if I wanted it because I was never asked what I wanted to do, where I wanted to go, what I wanted to be. But, I knew this world was totally different, and I was curious about it. Once we left the island and came back to the Newtown area, it was back to okay, I'm back home. Now, I can get out of this fantasy world. I'm back home now.

Nicholas:

So, you said Longboat was green...

Mrs. Alice:

Oh, it was beautiful!

Nicholas:

... if Longboat was green, then how would you describe Newtown?

Mrs. Alice:

It was like a faded-out green. It wasn't as green. When I say green, the color green stood out on Longboat Key. You knew the color green. When you came over here, the landscape was nothing compared to Longboat. Whereas, some yards were cut, some yards wasn't. Some yards were manicured, whereas they put the sprinklers out. Some had dried out and had turned brown—that's what I mean.

Nicholas:

So your mother took you out to Longboat on days that you did not have school and that was it, but did she take you out any other times, or where else did she take you?

Mrs. Alice:

Well, besides that, we didn't go to theme parks. I don't know why! We didn't go on family trips. I don't know why! I guess the highlight of going out with the families was around the holidays, Fourth of July, Memorial Day, days like that. Whereas, we didn't go to Longboat, we would go to Lido. Longboat is a private island for very wealthy individuals. And those are private beaches, and you

cannot just go over there and go to the beach. But my mom would take us on the opposite side, which is Lido. Lido is the area where there is a public beach. It's South Lido, and you can go have picnics and things like that. You can enjoy the water. There's an area called Siesta, where I like to go as an adult. She didn't like to go to Siesta because the water was so much further from the picnic area and she couldn't reach out and touch us because she wasn't a swimmer. But, you know Lido on the other hand, the picnic was closer to the water, so that's the way she liked it to go.

Nicholas:

Yeah... What kind of food was there for Fourth of July?

Mrs. Alice:

My mother would cook the best ribs and chicken, and she loved to make special salads—it would be like Tuna Macaroni Salad, we would have that with baked beans and cheese and those were—god, you got me licking my lips, Lord! Those were the days where your tongue would reach out and slap you in the back of your neck! It was just that good! (Laughs)

Nicholas:

I hear that! I hear that...(laughs)

Mrs. Alice:

Wake up and taste that and you couldn't wait till it came back again. But, those were good times because those were times when our families would come together and we would party. The adults would sit around and reminisce on the old times. All of us kids would be around...running around and glad to see one another and playing. Just enjoying each other. Those were good family times.

Nicholas:

So, I think I asked you this before (on another day) but who had the best ribs?

Mrs. Alice:

Mama! My mama. And I'm not just saying that because she's my mama, but my mother, she was a cook. Not only was she a maid, but she was a cook. And, in our house, I don't know why, but she didn't do fast food. Not like today. In today's society one would be quick to (go to) McDonald's, Wendy's, you've got all these fast-food restaurants. It had to be a very, very—I don't know if I want to call it a special occasion—my mother did not go to fast-food restaurants. She cooked food everyday...

Nicholas:

Even when working?

Mrs. Alice:

...Everyday! Even if she didn't cook a full course meal, she would cook something or we would have sandwiches or whatever at home. If we wanted a burger, she would take the hamburger out and make us burgers. There was no going to Burger King. There was no going to McDonald's and things like that. So, when I look back at my life and I say, "Wow, we didn't do a lot of this!" Although, Burger King was there. McDonald's wasn't as close. Burger King was the closest that I could remember, as far as fast-food goes. Burger King is still in the same place off of [US Highway] 41, same place after all of these years! They just remodeled it. It used to be where there's a Chinese place on 41 that used to be Kentucky Fried Chicken—that was one of the popular places. Every now and then, she would go get a box of chicken, but make all of her side orders. But, she would go there. She didn't do restaurants—I don't know why, but I guess she didn't trust a lot of people behind the scenes preparing your sandwiches and your food. She was a cook. She would get out there and she would cook...she would cook—that's I guess, when I look at it now, because I met a friend of mine, from Africa and when I think back my friend told me "In Africa, they have a feast in their homes, as a number of people, all of the family and friends would come together and their feast would have all types of food, but that's what they do to prepare to bring families together. And to show their closeness and their love for one another and it is celebrated with food. And I think my mom—maybe in a different sense, but sort of like that—celebrated through food. You know a lot people say that today if you want to bring a family together, you bring food. You want to get things started? Bring some food around. And, I think that's what she—that's the type of mentality she had. And we had people coming around the house, just about every Sunday because our relatives and our friends knew if she don't have a big meal Monday through Friday or Saturday, she's definitely going to have one on Sunday. And one thing about her, she welcomed everybody! She would cook enough, whereas it was like as I started growing up—we had to go to church every Sunday, but when I started paying attention and listening, I learned that Jesus had fed 5000 with what, was it three loafs and two fish or five fish and two loafs, however that went, that's just how my mother was. It may not look like a lot, but nobody was hungry. Everybody got fed. Everybody got fed that came through our door, got fed and the majority of the time, we had leftovers.

Nicholas:

So what years did you live in Newtown?

Mrs. Alice:

Years?

Nicholas:

Yeah, so you grew up there, but what were the years?

Mrs. Alice:

I've been staying in Newtown as far as I can go back and remember (all of this Newtown) from here at the Robert Taylor Center, when I go all the way back my

remembrance, we stayed on 33rd street. From 33rd Street, we moved to the projects. I didn't leave the projects until I was 32. I moved my mom out of the projects, but I was back and forth in her home. So, I'll say we were in this area, as far back as I can remember, I was born in '66, so as far as I can remember, we've been in here since I was basically born. Early '70s is as far as I can remember.

Nicholas:

Okay, and one final question: Now there are all of these developments out there on South Lido, were any of that there before when you...

Mrs. Alice:

Well, I haven't been out there in some time, it is like I said... I know out there on the Point, back then boats couldn't come up to the area, where they had the picnic area, there were no boats—although they had a lot of shells. Now, I hear them say boats can come up and dock somewhere near the shore and from there, I'm trying to look back because I know, I don't even know if the pool is still there. I know if you come around Lido, the front area where they had the concessions stand, I don't know if that is still there.

Nicholas:

Okay and then, I'm sorry, I know you need to leave, but just one last thing. Now you say you love Siesta. What's your favorite thing to do out in Siesta?

Mrs. Alice:

Everything... and I say Siesta because when I started going to Siesta was when I got a little older and I was more free-spirited then, I was driving and feeling my oats and exploring a bit. I like the sand. I love the sand. Compared to Lido, there's these little bitty- they look like little combs out there, although they aren't as bad as Lido. The area is in the water. I love the water. At Lido, when I was going, when you go from the edge and you take 3-4 steps there's a drop from the edge. Whereas, you don't have that at Siesta. There's a sandbar further out. And I love people. And it's not like there weren't a lot of people out in Lido, but at Siesta there's so many people out there. And as I started growing up, and taking classes and meeting different people, it was networking. And I love talking sometimes. A friend of mine can start up a conversation and teach me things. I learned out in Siesta that there are so many people of different nationalities out there, I mean everybody from Hispanic to African American to Caucasian, I mean there's so many people you can meet out there. And there's so much to do out there. It brings the people, and if they can get together and just enjoy the different events and functions together.

Nicholas:

It kind of sounds a bit like—maybe jumbling this a bit, but you were describing your childhood everybody coming together and it sounds a bit like that.

Mrs. Alice:

And I guess that's what I like.

Nicholas:

Well thank you!

Interview with Randy Jones (Mrs. Alice's son):

Nicholas:

What's the first thing you remember about your childhood with your mom? What do you remember the most?

Randy:

I mean, my mom was always there for me. She was like my best friend, you know. She never missed a game. She was like the crowd. Everybody heard her voice. Screaming. That's what made me do my best out there on the field or wherever I played. She's inspiring. She's a friend. She's been everything to me coming up. You know, she's always been there for me. There's nothing like her. She's a good woman.

Nicholas:

I agree. Tell me a little about what you remember about growing up. You said you played sports. What kind of sports did you play?

Randy:

I played Basketball. I played Football. I did baseball. I ran track. She took me to swimming classes and lessons and... a lot of things. She kept me busy. Nowadays, what a lot of kids' moms should be doing. I was like year-round (involved in) sports. I always had something to do.