

**AN INTERVIEW WITH
CLARA JOHNSON**

by

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Interview History

Jacqueline S. Reinier interviewed Clara Johnson at Johnson's Forest Service office in Gainesville Georgia on May 25, 26, and 27, 2002. Dr. Reinier is a former professor and director of the Oral History Program at California State University, Sacramento. She has taught Oral History Interviewing in the Capital Campus Public History Program at California State University, Sacramento and at Vista College in Berkeley, California. She and her students have done previous interviewing of Region 5 USDA Forest Service employees in California. She also has conducted interviews with women in the Forest Service, including Wendy Herrett, Geri Vanderveer Bergen and Leigh Beck. Prior to these interviews she was able to conduct research in materials furnished by Linda Lux, Forest Service Historian for Region 5, and in the library of the Pacific Southwest Regional Office of the USDA Forest Service in Vallejo, California.

The interview was conducted in Johnson's office on the Memorial Day weekend when other employees were not present. Johnson is a delightful storyteller and reveled in relating tales of growing up in a family of eleven children near Natchez Mississippi. Her eyes alternately softened and twinkled as she spoke of the important role that her mother, Leola Johnson, has played in her life. Beginning her career in the Forest Service as a temporary employee while she was still in college, Johnson experienced both difficult and rewarding times as the only African American in small Northern California towns. She received a great deal of visibility in the agency, however, and was propelled forward in promotion by the consent decree in Region 5. Yet she candidly admitted that attaining the line position of district ranger placed her in a position of authority that also could be lonely. Johnson evaluated honestly the trials she has experienced as an African American woman who has risen to the position of forest supervisor in a federal agency undergoing change. At the Chattahoochee as well as the Angeles National Forests, where recreation has largely superseded timber production, she has wrestled with issues of urban forestry. Throughout her career, she has benefited greatly from training opportunities provided by the Forest Service. And throughout the interview she talked joyfully about her daughter Cydney, who has provided emotional stability and richness for her life.

Carol Niehus transcribed the interview in Berkeley, California. Reinier edited the transcript, first checking the verbatim manuscript against the original tape recordings, and then editing it for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling and verifying proper names. Insertions by the editor are bracketed. The interviewer also prepared the introductory materials and names list. In September 2002, Johnson was forwarded a copy of the transcript for her approval. She provided proper names of individuals, but made very few changes in the transcript.

Johnson's personal papers are still in her possession. The original tape recordings of the interview, the draft transcript annotated by Johnson, and additional copies of the final transcript are located at the Forest History Society, Inc., 701 Vickers Avenue, Durham, North Carolina, 27701.

Biographical Summary

Born in Indianola Mississippi in 1959, Clara Johnson grew up in a family of eleven children. After her father's death when she was very young, her mother, Leola Johnson, moved the children to a four-room house in the country near Natchez. Leola Johnson, who worked as a maid, raised her children with strict discipline. Boys and girls did the same chores, and were expected to do well in school. Yet the children delighted in roaming in the woods around the house and swinging on vines across a pond. And all of them eventually went off to college. After attending a de facto segregated grade school with white teachers, Clara graduated from North Natchez High School close to the top of her class. At Alcorn State University she was exposed to African American studies, and decided to major in agronomy. While still in college, she took part in a Forest Service program, which placed her temporarily as a forestry technician on the Mad River Ranger District of the Six Rivers National Forest in northern California. Living in the small town of Bridgeville, she quickly became acquainted with the community and continued her reading at the local library. After a stint back in college, she continued her assignment in the co-op program at the Six Rivers National Forest, working as a soil scientist.

On her graduation from Alcorn State University in 1982, Johnson accepted a permanent position with Forest Service as a soil scientist on the Lower Trinity Ranger District of the Six Rivers National Forest. As a young African American woman, she had a great deal of visibility and was invited to serve on a number of committees and reviews. Encouraged by her district ranger, Larry Cabodi, she accepted detail assignments as a resource officer on the Orleans District of the Six Rivers National Forest and assistant district ranger on the Hay Fork Ranger District of the Shasta Trinity National Forest. Aided by these experiences, she overcame her initial shyness and developed self-esteem. Benefiting from the consent decree in Region 5, which mandated hiring and promotion of women and minorities, she moved into a line position as assistant district ranger on the Hume Lake District of the Sequoia National Forest. Johnson loved living in Fresno, where she bought her first house, and continued her training plan with a detail as district ranger on the Green Horn Ranger District of the Sequoia National Forest. But within a year she accepted the position of district ranger on the Tujunga Ranger District of the Angeles National Forest and moved to Los Angeles.

On the Angeles National Forest Johnson worked hard at building relationships with the founder of a mining company located in her district and with the owners of recreation residences. She was able to work with members of the Los Angeles African American community in the Opportunity L.A. program instigated by the Forest Service after the Rodney King riots in 1992. But she found that being the ultimate authority in her district brought her into more conflict with staff members than she had previously experienced. Nevertheless, she stayed in her position as district ranger for seven years, spending the last six months on detail as deputy forest supervisor. During this period she became well acquainted with the issues involved in managing an urban forest. She also had the opportunity to participate for two years in the California Agriculture Leadership Program, doing classroom work at various California universities and traveling within the United States and to Southeast Asia.

After her daughter Cydney was born in 1994, Johnson was eager to return to Mississippi to be near her mother and to provide her daughter with the rural childhood that she had experienced. In 1997 she jumped at the opportunity to become deputy forest supervisor of the National Forests in Mississippi. There she particularly enjoyed working with State and Private Forestry rural development and economic recovery programs in the Delta of the Mississippi River. She also went to Washington, D.C. through the Legis program and gained further knowledge about rural issues by serving as a staff member for Congresswoman Eva Clayton. In 2000 she

moved to Gainesville Georgia to become forest supervisor of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. Although Johnson still served in that position when her oral history interview was recorded, in the fall of 2002 she returned to her beloved Mississippi to take a position in marketing and development with State and Private Forestry.

SESSION I, May 25, 2002

Tape 1, Side A: Growing up in a large family in Mississippi—Influence of her mother.

REINIER: Clara, I understand that you were born in Indianola.

JOHNSON: Indianola.

REINIER: Mississippi. And you told me that was February 6, 1959.

JOHNSON: Um hmm.

REINIER: Would you tell me a little bit about your background and your family?

JOHNSON: I am one of eleven children, five boys and six girls. I'm the fourth from the youngest and I have a dynamic mother whose name is Leola Johnson. Our father died when we were very young, so she was left to raise all of us by herself. I'm amazed that she was able to do that, and I think she did an extremely wonderful job. I was born in Indianola, but we were not raised in Indianola. My mother looked around and saw the opportunities there were very poor and she immediately moved all of us. It took her two days to drive an old Chevy truck--as she tells the story--back and forth between Indianola and Natchez, Mississippi. She set up house there for us eleven kids in this four-room house--not four-bedroom house--but a four-room house, just a little house that she built herself. That was all pretty amazing for me.

REINIER: She built the house herself?

JOHNSON: She built the house herself, with some help of course. She built the house herself and at the time her youngest kid was three or four months old. My mother, right now, she's 78 years old and doing great. But she built this house herself, this little white house that still stands and of course is dilapidated by now. But the incredible thing about my mother is I always hear these words about women being strong. I think my mother was strong within herself. She has a very high self-esteem and she invoked a lot of that in all of us. She also ruled with a strong will. And that is punishment. She defined punishment; she wrote the book about punishment. And I think it was important that she made sure that we were punished and disciplined so that she could control how we turned out. She had basic rules that we all just knew; she didn't have to say them. You won't smoke, you won't drink, you will go to school, you will study, you will do these basic things. And, by George, all eleven of us did it, and to this day none of us smoke or drink or use profanity--definitely, not in her presence--those kinds of things. And those are key things that I see missing with some of today's kids. I could go on and on and on and talk about my mother forever.

REINIER: Well, talk about her more! I think she's fascinating. For example, how did she punish you?

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: She definitely didn't do it the way kids are punished these days. Putting you in the corner was not one of the things that she did. She definitely used belts...

REINIER: She did?

JOHNSON: And switches off of trees. I think most parents used that type back in those days to make sure that their kids stayed in attention. The other thing too is, you know, [Senator] Hillary [Rodham] Clinton just wrote this book about "It Takes a Village..."

REINIER: Yes.

JOHNSON: When my mother moved us to Natchez, we lived in an extremely isolated area by ourselves. There were no other people around us, no other people. We lived way out in the country, as they call it, meaning there was nothing but a gravel road that came in. There was literally a gravel road that came to our little house. It probably went a few feet further than that, but we were the only house down that road. So the village had to be my mother at that particular time. But the way that she was assisted in raising us, was when we went to school, she allowed the teachers to make sure that her rules were carried through in the schools. So if you acted up in school, you were punished, right there on the spot, right there on the spot. And then on top of that you were punished again when you got home. That's part of what she [Clinton]'s talking about as being a village raising people, definitely, that was the extension that she granted to these people. And you can't do that these days, in school.

REINIER: No.

JOHNSON: You cannot do that these days. But my mother worked really, really hard every day. She was a maid, and she worked hard every day, cleaning houses and those kinds of things and taking care of us. We knew, just by watching her work, that we did not want to do that job. Not that we wouldn't do that job, because the other thing that was instilled in us was there's no such thing as too much pride. You do what you have to do and know what you can do, and so you just do those things, and you don't view it as punishment or anything like that. So she worked every day as a maid. The way we made sure we had plenty to eat, we had this garden that extended forever. You could never see the end of one of those rows in this garden. And there were tons of gardens and we raised peanuts and tomatoes. My sister [Verester Johnson] and I were talking about this the other night, Carter peas and okra and sweet potatoes and everything that you needed to raise. And of course we raised our own pigs and cows and things and consumed those products for meat and all that. We really just hung out by ourselves. My mother did not allow us to play with other kids, especially in the neighborhood, because there were none. When you went to another section of the neighborhood, there were other folks who lived probably five or six miles from us. That was the closest we were to other people. She wouldn't allow us to play with them. They would ask us to come to their house, but she would not allow that. They had to come our house. And so I thought that was good because that was an ultimate control thing again. At the time of course we didn't like it, as kids, but looking back on it, it definitely worked to position us the way she wanted to position us. So I take my hat off to her in everything that she did in trying to make us who she thought she wanted us to be.

REINIER: There must have been quite a range with eleven kids. What was the range?

JOHNSON: There was. My oldest brother is now 61 or 62, and my youngest sister is now 38 or 39. The youngest sister was born in 1962, so there was a range. As a matter of fact, one of the ways that my mother helped with the control thing is the older kids had responsibilities over the younger kids, and so of course they became parents very early on. They could discipline us or whatever was necessary. And it worked. That's one of the ways that she passed on her expectations. She would instill in the older ones, and the younger ones automatically knew. You didn't have to ask; you didn't have to question. And if you remotely got out of line, you were put back in line one way or the other, either by them, my mother, teachers or somebody like that. Pretty interesting.

REINIER: Were there siblings that you were particularly close to?

JOHNSON: You know, because of how we were raised, I think we all jelled pretty closely. We're just now beginning to know my older two brothers. Because they were so much older than we were, twenty years older than we were or more. But there were always nine of us in the house, always nine of us. Two, of course, were adults by the time we came along. I'm closest to--I would say all of them about the same, the nine about the same. We all have the same discussions, the same arguments. [Laughing] We shop together, we get together at least once a year, we call each other often, talking about whatever we need to talk about, making silly jokes. I do have a fondness for my youngest sister, my youngest one. She later told me when she got older, she was always trying to follow me, and I never knew that. I never knew that at all, but she's a great kid. She works as a computer technician for Books A Million and she's [snapping fingers] real quick witted, very quick witted. Cracks a joke on anything, she's just quick. So I do have a kind of a fondness for her, but to make sure that I'm fair across the board I like all of them equally. Everybody bonds with one of the other ones, and I couldn't speak for my brothers or my sisters as to who they may have bonded with more.

REINIER: So did you have jobs that you had to do at home?

JOHNSON: When we were all growing up, you all had a job to do. I can't remember the day that I wasn't doing something at home. Everybody had to clean the house because my mother worked. Everybody had to wash their clothes. We didn't have all the great technology that we have today of course. We had the old tub, the round tub and the scrub board. I can remember when we first got our washing machine. It was one of the old wringers, where you had to wring the clothes through.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: And we were excited! We thought we had made it!

REINIER: My mother had one of those. I remember that!

JOHNSON: Oh, we just knew we had made it then! When we first washed the clothes your hands and your elbows and everything got all rough. You got used to that; you did what you had to do. We were always clean. Everybody did the exact same chores. Girls didn't do anything different than boys. Boys cooked; girls cooked. Boys chopped wood; girls chopped wood. Boys hauled wood; girls hauled wood. If there was a time when you had to kill a hog or something, everybody participated and did it. Everybody chopped the gardens. Everybody did the same thing.

I can remember when we had the old tin tub, where we had to take baths. And we would heat the water on the wood heater and again--boy we were just talking about this--it was heated on the heater and we'd pour it in the tub and you'd take a bath. And there was an hour set for when everybody had to take their bath. And you couldn't take forever because there was eleven of us who had to get through that plus my mother who had to take this bath every day of the week, every night. When that hour came everybody had to go into another part of the room, so everybody'd take their bath. That was kind of interesting how we did that because we only had four rooms. One room was a kitchen, one room was what we called a living room, and two bedrooms.

REINIER: So how did you sleep, like girls and boys?

JOHNSON: We had boys in one room and girls in another room. We had a lot of beds in each room. It was like bunk beds and things of that nature and maybe one big bed and then some bunk beds and we just shared the beds and you slept.

REINIER: Um hmm. So where did your mother sleep? In the living room?

JOHNSON: My mother slept in the living room on the couch. It was an old, green couch that we had, and she slept on the couch. Later when we grew up, we were able to send her some money. Now the old house has six rooms, and we knew we had made it then. It's got six rooms in it and she for the first time in her life got her own room and had her own stuff in her own room. That was kind of exciting for her.

REINIER: Does she still live there?

JOHNSON: No. We were able to raise enough money amongst ourselves and buy her some property--ten acres--and two houses on it and she lives in her new house now. But the old house is still there and we've been thinking about salvaging it if it's salvageable. It probably wasn't built out of the best materials at that particular time and it may not be salvageable. We've been contemplating how we could do that.

REINIER: Did you have an outdoor bathroom?

JOHNSON: We had an outdoor bathroom. We had the indoor pots, too, for each room, and we had the old outhouse. Periodically, we had to go out and dig holes and put it somewhere else. And that was an experience within itself!

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: Eh! But yeah we had that. We had everything that I guess one would have in the old, old days. As a matter of fact, we didn't have television until I was either fifteen or sixteen, so most of us had not seen television all that time. When we got one, it was really my aunt who got the TV and we would go to her house. Our favorite show of course was the Beverly Hillbillies!

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: All of us would rush up there to watch the Beverly Hillbillies! But we didn't have any of that stuff. So we had to learn to play with each other--softball, had great softball teams and kickball teams--just with us.

REINIER: Uh huh.

JOHNSON: So we had a lot of fun with each other. That is not to say that we didn't have our cat fights and all that kind of stuff. But we had to learn to have fun, living out there all by ourselves where there was nothing but a great forest. In those days we called it woods; we didn't call it a forest. But it was just undeveloped behind our house, and we would spend half of our time--the kids--down in those woods swinging on vines. There was an old pond that's still down there, with green stuff on top of it. I don't know what that stuff is to this day, but we would swing across that pond. My mother had already declared, "You better not drown!"

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: So you made sure you didn't drop off that vine. We'd swing back and forth on the vine and hike through the woods and just discover on our own. So it was a good life. It was a good life; it was hard. It was probably the hardest because my mother had to work so very hard for such a small amount of money. And she had to do it every day. And it was even more difficult for her because—well, it was difficult for us; when we talked to her, it was just something she had to do—she had to walk to work every day. Us living way out in the country and she had to hitch rides into town until she was able to get our first car. I'll talk about that in a minute. But she had to hitch rides every day and go in and slave all day long and then come home around 9:00 or 10:00 at night. It was just hard.

REINIER: She did work hard.

JOHNSON: She worked extremely hard. There is no way I could possibly describe it. But she did it! And then she got her first car. Of course, we as kids, me being in the ninth grade at that particular time, it was the worst looking car I'd ever seen in my life. Green. Now today, it's an antique. Today, in today's terms it's an antique and everybody's trying to get these kinds of cars. In that day it was horrible and none of us wanted to ride in it. I can remember being at school one time and I saw my mother driving up to pick me up to take me somewhere, I don't know where. I saw this car coming and I just went, "Oh God, I cannot let my friends see me get in this car." So I tried to hide. Of course my friend sees my mother coming also, "Clara! Your mom! Here comes your mom." I was so embarrassed, but I got into the car anyway. And then just learned to live with it. But I think every kid goes through that stage where they're embarrassed about something.

REINIER: Oh sure. What kind of car was it?

JOHNSON: I have no clue what the name of that car was. But all I know it was an old, green car and it had the worst shape I've ever seen in my entire life. I have no clue if it was a Chevrolet, a Pontiac, I don't know what it was. All I know is it was horrible looking and that's the only thing that sticks in my mind. We gave it to a dealer and he had it just sitting outside in the weather. Now I've gone home several times looking for that car just to let it know that I appreciated it! [Laughing] And I did. And then we got another one. Now this one I do know. We got a white Chevrolet. It was long and classy. So we rode in style!

REINIER: Oh!

JOHNSON: I was so silly. But being young, that's what we went through. Funny to think about all that stuff. And then of course we all went off after we grew up. My mother stayed there. She's still there in Mississippi, in Natchez. We went off to college.

The other thing that happened in my mother's house is she protected us from a lot of stuff. And I didn't realize that she had protected us until I left the nest, so to speak, and went to California. I didn't realize the protection that she'd given me. When I went to California, when I first got there, people would ask me, "Where are you from?" And I would say, "Mississippi." And I would say it proudly, "Mississippi." And they would always ask me, "Well, you must really know about racism." And I would say, "I do? What should I know about it?" "Well, don't you know about Jim Crow?" And I would say, "What do you mean, Jim Crow?" I didn't realize that my mother had protected us from all of that stuff. Remember, we didn't have TV; we didn't have any of that stuff. She didn't allow it in our house; we didn't discuss it in our house. So when I get outside of her constraints, then the outside world opens up a whole new thing for me to start thinking about and becoming aware of. It sounds so crazy having lived there in Mississippi and not having experience with things. My mother experienced them, but she wouldn't allow us to. I don't know when I realized that or started appreciating her. It was probably five or six years

after I left her house, that I kept hearing these kinds of questions asked and I would look back and they would start registering in my head. My God! What else did she protect us from? This is amazing! She shouldered whatever there was; she was shouldering it in order to make sure that we didn't have to deal with it.

REINIER: That's remarkable.

JOHNSON: It was incredible! So I make sure that she knows I'm aware now because I sit down with her and I talk about it now. "How could you do this? Why didn't you tell us? This is amazing! Wow! You just dealt with it. Incredible." And so I gained even a bigger respect for my mother at that time and still do. And really appreciate who she is. That does not mean that she and I don't have disagreements. Not by any stretch of the imagination. But I really just appreciate the person.

REINIER: She sounds like a remarkable person.

JOHNSON: If you meet her, you would think she's the nicest person in the world because she really likes to help people. She goes out of her way, you know, that kind of stuff. Remarkable. Is there a bigger word than "remarkable?" Remarkable is a good word. She's a good person. And all of my sisters and brothers know also. And we all talk about it. The one thing about my mother though is, she has a sense of amnesia. When we get home, especially at reunion times, my mother does not like to bring up anything negative. Nothing. And we'll get home and we're all talking about how we were raised and the "whippings" as we called them. And we'll turn to my mother and we'll say, "You don't remember when you did this?" "I don't remember anything." And then she turns on me. She'll say something like, "Well, you turned out okay, didn't you?" And we all know then, that's the end of this discussion! If we're going to have it anywhere, we're not going to include her to have this discussion with us. And we just go on by ourselves and have the discussion. But it's good for us to reminisce about what went on and what happened. Everybody has a different piece of the story. We haven't captured any of this on paper or anything.

REINIER: Oh, you really should.

JOHNSON: We talk about it, but we haven't...

REINIER: You should put it on tape. It's a remarkable upbringing.

JOHNSON: Yeah. We're having a reunion this year again. We have one every year and maybe we'll start talking about it.

REINIER: Take a tape recorder and just tape your different reminiscences.

JOHNSON: I have one brother [Allen (Bone) Johnson] who's just incredible. He remembers stuff none of the rest of us remember.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: And so we're not sure where he's getting his stories from. We just look. Your story does not match up with the rest of us, the other ten of us--or the other nine of us because I had one sister pass away--does not match up. Where are you coming from? Well, that's how I remember it. Okay! But anyway, that's probably enough about my mother.

REINIER: Did you work outside the home?

JOHNSON: When I was twelve years old, my mother got me a babysitting job, my first job ever. First job ever. I was babysitting the most wonderful little boy, Adam [Trudell Gwin]. He's the only one I ever babysat, the only kid I've ever babysat. And I babysat him until I was seventeen or eighteen and moving into college, graduating from high school and moving into college. I had a great time. As a result of that, I was able to save enough money, because my mother would save all of our money for us. We would work and then we would give her our money and she always knew where it was. She would always have it in something, some sock with our name on it or something. She did not believe in putting money in the bank, and she still does not put money in the bank today. But she would have it in some sock or something, and she always had everybody's money laid out for them. And she would never use any of it. I've never seen a mother who would not use the kids' money to help. Today, you make it, the mothers or fathers have it. She never used a single penny of our money. After about five years of my working, she had every dollar I had earned. She had every dollar, and I was going, "Wow! You do?" She was using her money still to buy shoes and clothes and things like that for us. But she wouldn't use our money. And so she had every little dollar that I had earned, that I'd given her. I used that money to buy my first car, a Ford Maverick, a great little car. I was so proud of it!

REINIER: I should say!

JOHNSON: I was so proud of it!

REINIER: Well, you earned it!

JOHNSON: Yes, I earned it! And the only reason I used the money is because the Forest Service had called and said would you like to enter into a co-op program with us? And I said, "No. Absolutely not." Because I had started getting extremely attached to my mother again. Here I am now eighteen or nineteen, and I'm getting extremely attached to my mother. The reverse usually happens, but I don't know. Maybe that's what happens; I don't know. And I didn't want to leave. I was very comfortable there in Natchez. I knew everything and I knew everybody. And I'd had experiences in my temporary assignment out in California, and I just said no, I'm not going to do that. So I told my mother that night, I said, "I'm not going out there! I'm not going to do this." And she said, "Just fine. Okay, you don't have to." And I purchased this car, and she said, "I just need you to know that I'm not paying for that car. You have to get a job because I can't afford to pay for your car." I said, "Gosh. Well, I can get one here." And she said, "Well, you just need to make sure that it's a long-term job so you can take care of yourself." And I said, "I'm not going out there." And she said, "That's fine with me. You don't have to. We'll just take the car back." So I called these people up about a week later and I said, "When do you want me to start?" And that was my start into the Forest Service. It was my mother's encouragement in her own way that got me working for the Forest Service. Not the Forest Service, but my mother, who refused to take care of me anymore at the age of eighteen or nineteen. I kind of thought it was unfair myself, but she didn't think so. She didn't think it was unfair. I look back and I thank her for that also. So that was my only job outside of the [babysitting] when I was young.

I had a sister living in Atlanta, Georgia at the time. Jean [Emma Johnson] is her name; we call her Jean. And she was living there and she called me and she said, "Why don't you come up to Atlanta, Georgia, and I'll get you a little job." Then she got me a temporary assignment with Better Business Bureau. And I went in and this was the first time I'd ever been anywhere big. And went in there and we had to learn to answer the phones and those kinds of things. I never had to do that before because, for one, I didn't have a phone. And so I didn't know how to answer the thing. And this sounds so silly, because what I'm talking about is, if I'm born in '59,

and seventeen years later, and still haven't done these things. Most kids have done much more. Have much more experience than that.

REINIER: Yeah, but other kids haven't slaughtered a hog!

JOHNSON: Well, no! Or for that matter, milked a cow or even slaughtered a goat.

REINIER: Yeah!

JOHNSON: I got them on all that stuff! I can handle that! I know how to do all that! I clean them up! I had to do all that stuff. So yes! That's my one up'm if we have to have a one up'm. Those experiences, I think, that my mother instilled in myself, being okay with yourself, learning to take care of yourself, learning to persevere in spite of the situation, you always see it as something that just is. A lot of people see things in a negative way, so much so that they become victims. They absorb it in a very negative way. I, like my mother, absorb it, and view it as a challenge. Or, it's viewed as something that's there, and you have to figure out how you're going to deal with it.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

Tape 1, Side B: Attending school in Natchez—Settling her daughter Cydney in school in Gainesville, Georgia—Going to high school in Natchez.

JOHNSON: I was talking about how my mother instilled in us very key things that I think helped shape me for the future and helped shape, I think, my sisters and my brothers. One of the things she did, when I was talking about how I see how some people absorb things and they absorb it the point where they become victims, whereas when I absorb things I deal with them as challenges that have to be overcome. And so I focus my energies on that. And I've noticed that throughout my entire career. I've had people make comments to me when they think something should have taken me out and I'm still standing and they'll ask me how can you withstand that? I would have died! It's really still in my mind a shock to me when they ask me those questions. Because I never think of them as things that are trying to take me out although they may be. I think of them as little tiny challenges that I can surely figure out and I can overcome.

And I've seen that even in this job [Forest Supervisor, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest]. I've had a tremendous amount of challenges in this job, challenges I think nobody else would ever have experienced. I was just talking to some people the other day and they were all asking, "Poor thing," they said, "How can you handle all of that controversy?" And I had to really stop and hear what they were asking me, and I said, "What controversy?" They probably thought I was in denial. I am totally in the frame mind of saying, "There is no controversy; it's all in how you look at it. It is a challenge and simply something that can be overcome." And again, I've seen that throughout my entire career, these challenges. I'm not saying that I take it lightly because every challenge has this degree of challenge, and so you focus on that and then you try and figure out how you're going to do it. And you move forward. That is not to say that I'm not up at two o'clock in the morning trying to figure out, okay, what's the next step, how am I going to figure this out? But I never have ever taken the role of a victim. I never have. I won't say, never will because you never know what's going to happen in the future. If I continue the way that I'm going, I probably never will. Because it's a defeatist attitude. I'm not one where a position should overcome everything. And so those are some of the things that my mother instilled in me.

And I also work under another principle, too, which is one of the other things my mother did. She made sure we were in church every Sunday. There were no exceptions. Flu, you have the flu? We'll figure out a way to get you down there. You were in church every Sunday, and I still continue with that. I have two objectives in life right now and they're very simple objectives, very, very simple objectives. One objective is to raise the healthiest kid in the world, with a high self-esteem. I'm working on that.

REINIER: That's your daughter, Cydney [Alexis Anderson].

JOHNSON: That's Cydney. That's Cydney, my little helper. And the other one is, of course, entering into the kingdom of Heaven. Those are my two objectives, either in that order, or separately, or together. Those are my two objectives, my only objectives in life. People have asked me, "Well, Clara, what are you going to do in your next career?" I have no clue because I do not focus on that. Do not focus on that. I focus on those two things. And with those two simplifications, life becomes even much easier. And so I owe that to my mother also, being able to simplify things. Not complex if you don't want it to be complex. Although this is a very complex job, I've worked very, very hard to make it simple. So I owe my mother a lot, basic things that I didn't even know I was getting from her. They just happened.

When I was seventeen or eighteen, I went to Alcorn State University. And this is where I'm going to leave my mother. But I never left her there. I went to Alcorn State University and my mother took me there. I had a full scholarship to go to college, and by George, we didn't have any money to send me, so go where the money is. And so we did. I wanted to go to Grambling State University, that was my dream. And I didn't make it. My youngest sister went, but I didn't. Anyway, when my mother took me to school, my aunt went with us, her aunt, my great aunt. My aunt went with us and my mother was so excited because this was the first time that she had taken one of her kids off to school. My other sisters had gone out of state to college. One sister was always on the Dean's List and all that kind of stuff, and she's going to school somewhere else. It was just expected that we would go to college and so we did. And so when my mother took me to the university to get registered and find my room and everything, and when she got ready to leave my aunt said--I'll never forget this--my aunt said, "Are you going to trust that girl here by herself?" [Laughing] And my mother said--and I was surprised because my mother had really never expressed any emotion, one way or the other, with us or toward us, or anything like that--and she said, "Yes, she'll be fine. I trust her." That was the first... I stood there and I was just shocked. "Wow, she trusts me." And she did. And she said that, and they drove off, and of course I cried. [Laughter] Because I was there by myself, I didn't know anybody, and I had to make friends and all that stuff. I made friends very quickly. But that was the first time that she ever told me that she trusted me. That stuck with me for a long time because that is so important, to hear her go against my aunt, who was trying to instill negative in her mind, and she wouldn't have any of it. She stood up against my aunt, who was a very strong lady, stood up against her and said, "I trust my girl." So I felt very good about that.

REINIER: I bet.

JOHNSON: And I did. I did. And my sister, my youngest sister, told me later--because, when I graduated from college, I graduated in the Who's Who section and all that--my mother was so proud she made this three layer cake, my mother made it herself for me. I had my nice white dress on and all that stuff, the dress you had to wear under your gown, and my mother made this cake. And I was so proud! My youngest sister, when she graduated, she didn't get the cake. And she called me, maybe a month ago and we were talking about this, and I don't know how we got on the subject, and she said, "I just want you to know"--Ola is what we call my mother--"she favored you." I said, "What? What are you talking about?" I said, "No way." She said, "Yes she did. She favored you! Because you remember when you graduated?" I said, "Yeah." "And she made you this three-layer cake." It's a hundred years later! I said, "Yes, I remember this." And I said, "She was proud of me." I said, "That's all that was; she was proud of me." And she said, "No, she favored you, because when I graduated, I didn't even get a card! I didn't get anything!" [Laughing] I said, "I am so sorry!" She said, "As a matter of fact, nobody was even at my graduation." We had all left and we did not come back home to my youngest sister's graduation. And she was only four years behind me. And so none of us came to her graduation. She said, "So you were favored; that's just not fair!" So there was a little jealousy in there. I didn't know it existed, but there was a little bit in there. But we laughed through it in talking about it. I think she was serious though.

REINIER: Yeah. Well, sibling rivalry, you've got to have that.

JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah. She was serious. But we were able to laugh about it and get through it. We talk about it every now and then, and it's just comical to hear some of the things that are being said now that we're definitely older and adults versus the perceptions back then when we were kids. But the thing is, again, we can laugh about it and talk about it. And we do, at least once a year when we all get together, and kid each other about any of it now. The other thing we do is every holiday, major holiday, New Year or Christmas, we all make sure we get on

a conference call. We spend about an hour or two hours just telling jokes back and forth and all that stuff and talk. So that's our other way of keeping connected.

REINIER: It's wonderful to have all those brothers and sisters.

JOHNSON: It is. And you know most people ask, "Well, did you guys have enough food?" And "Who ate the most food?" And "Did you have enough clothes?" and all that kind of stuff. We had what we needed. We didn't have what we wanted, but we had what we needed. We went to school clean. The clothes may have been a bit tattered and all those kinds of things, but we were clean. We had more than enough food although we were not able to take lunch with us. If we did, we had a biscuit and I remember a biscuit and some jelly that we took and it was...

REINIER: So did you skip lunch then?

JOHNSON: We did. We skipped lunch. We had breakfast before we left home because my mother would get up every morning before she went to work and made sure we had breakfast--every morning. Grits and eggs and fresh pork or, you know, something, every morning--homemade biscuits--she would do this every morning. Every morning. And every evening either one of us cooked or she cooked. So we always had those two meals, always. I can never remember missing a meal. I can remember though, at school, I wanted to have lunch like everybody else.

And one day I was in the lunchroom... When I was in school, most of my teachers were great. They really pushed me into a lot of stuff--music, into the choir, piano--just different things they really moved me into because for some reason they liked me. Older people always liked me. I don't understand why, but they always did. And so they would gravitate to me, or--vice versa--I would gravitate to them. And as a result of that, the teachers and I really connected. So they were nurturing quite a bit. They really did. All the way up until fourth grade, fifth grade, and I ran into this one teacher, and it's not her fault. Well, yes, it was. Yes, it was. I will not forgive her because she was older and she should have known better. I was in the lunchroom and I didn't have lunch, or I had gobbled down my jelly and biscuit, one of the two, I cannot be clear on that. And I was sitting there and I must have been looking awfully hungry. She must have been watching me or something, and she got some food from somewhere and she gave it to me. I just consumed it like I'd never eaten before. And I'll never forget her, pulling another teacher over and saying, "Look at that. Isn't that just a shame the way she's consuming that food?" That was my first experience of people doing one thing and having a different meaning behind it. And I'll never forget her. Mrs. Hickombottom. That teacher saw me about five years ago because my sister had just passed away and she came down to share her condolences. She came up to me and said, "I'm sorry, Clara." I don't think she was saying, "I'm sorry" because of my sister. I think she was saying, "I'm sorry" because she remembered that experience. I really do. I didn't forgive her at that time.

REINIER: So she knew?

JOHNSON: She knew, absolutely she knew because she saw my facial expression when I looked at her and all of that. The only other bad experience--real bad experience--I had in school was by a teacher named Ms. Fleming. Notice how you can remember these two out of millions of great ones! Ms. Fleming believed in us paying attention in class. I had a tendency to wander in my mind, and sure enough we were supposed to be reading and one student would read and then another one, we were supposed to pick up where the student left off. And I also had this skill, or so I thought, it worked all the other times, where I could easily listen to the story, do whatever I was doing in my head, and then when I got called on, could pick up right where that student left off. Well, I must have gotten too engrossed in what was in my head

because I was way off somewhere and had really tuned out everything. And I heard my name, "Clara! Can you read from..." from where somebody left off. [Whispering] For the like of me I couldn't pick it up; I could not pick it up. And I thought, "Oh, God." Could not pick it up. And she said, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" She didn't ask me why couldn't you pick it up in the book, what was going on, she said, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Never had been asked that question before. And so I said you better come up with something real quick--quick, quick, quick, quick--so I looked at her and I said, "Oh, a teacher sounds good. Teacher, I want to be a teacher." [Laughing] She was a teacher--translation. And I thought, okay, I'm off the hook. She said these words, "If you don't do any better than you're doing, you'll never amount to anything." And I was crushed. I was really. I told my mother when I went home. My mother said, "Don't listen to her; she doesn't know what she's talking about." So I told my mother, but I'll never forget Ms. Fleming saying those words. How horrible! Why would you ever tell a person that? That was so mean. And then she just dismissed me and she didn't let me read anything, just dismissed me. And I had troubles in that class. I got an A out of that class, but I had troubles in that class from my being able to relate to her. That was the first time I'd experienced not being able to relate to somebody in authority and somebody whom I should have been respecting. That was bothersome. I got over it. Never forgot the experience, but I got over it. But those were the two worst experiences in my entire twelve years of being in school.

REINIER: Were you in a segregated school or was it an integrated school?

JOHNSON: It was supposed to be an integrated school, but it was not. It was all African Americans, well, Negroes at that time or blacks, which ever the term was at that time. I was attending all public schools: Central High, North Side, Thompson, North Natchez [High School]. All of the schools were African Americans and in Mississippi although they were supposed to be integrated, they were definitely segregated. And it was just like an understanding that this should be the case. The district put schools in communities to make sure that took place.

REINIER: So the Civil Rights Movement was well underway.

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, absolutely. But I was very young at that time.

REINIER: Yeah, because of course Brown v. the Board of Education was 1954.

JOHNSON: Before my time.

REINIER: Yeah, so it [school integration] didn't happen in Natchez.

JOHNSON: It happened in theory. You could always make things happen and then make it not happen. You could always do that however you choose to. You can always show that on paper you've accomplished what you say you've accomplished and then have the reality be just the opposite, and that was the case in Mississippi.

REINIER: Do you think that was negative or positive?

JOHNSON: I didn't see it one way or the other. Well, two things happened. One, I didn't focus on it. The one thing I did notice was there were all white teachers at our school and all black kids.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: In the schools where the white kids went, they were all white teachers and all white kids.

REINIER: So you didn't have black teachers?

JOHNSON: If we had one, it was probably one or two at the most. Such a minor percentage. There was another school. Now I did go to a school where there was a black principal at one time. It's very minor. Very, very minor. One, two, three, I would get five. Five in a student body of 400 or 500 kids. And so proportionately--do the math. So yeah, it was built in. People were trying to deal with it and trying to work through it, but in that town or in that state or in the South it was understood. People talked about it in their homes. Some people tried to push against it. But the politics--I didn't see it this way when I was growing up--but the politics and the reality of what existed, and to a degree it's similar now.

REINIER: Really? It's still that way?

JOHNSON: Yeah, and I started school, '65 when I first started to school. The schools now have more African Americans in them. I'm saying that now because the positions that are held in authority are mostly held by non-African Americans or other minorities.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: Yeah. The mayor. The city council, they had one or two African Americans on it. The governor, definitely, his entire cabinet probably has one or two and that's it. They're similar to Georgia. Those things just are. We have another three or four centuries to go.

REINIER: Still hasn't changed.

JOHNSON: It's changed, yet it hasn't. It's changed a lot. African Americans no longer have to hoe the cotton and work those extremely long hours and those kinds of things. But, they still have to work the extremely long hours with the reduced salaries or the disproportionate salaries. Most of the maids are still African American women. And the doctors' offices, I've now seen aides in there who are African American. I don't know if it's anybody's fault as much as it's almost like part of the existence. I don't know how to describe it any better than that. Yeah.

REINIER: What about your daughter's school?

JOHNSON: Here?

REINIER: Um hmm.

JOHNSON: Oh! Cydney. When I came here, I tried to put Cydney in a private school because I believe in giving her the best if I can afford it. And I was willing to strip all of my savings to do that. I was prepared to do that. So I tried to enter her into Lakeview Academy here, which is a private school. They gave her some tests and called me at home and said, "She cannot go into first grade because our students already know what she does not know on this test. We could put her back in kindergarten and she can enter this school." And I thought [sighs], it's amazing. Cydney has always been a good student. Now that is not to say the private schools are teaching their kids a grade and a half above public schools. And I thought, was that the reason? Because when I visited the school, there were no African Americans there in the private school. There may be one. But I did not see them. I saw none. And I thought, is that the reason? I did not return the call. I did not call the school back like I said I would but rather I went to the public schools. I spent a lot of time learning about those schools and have

made some very major demands on the schools here. Language that they put out, the way they write letters. I've been pushing real hard on changing that.

For example, when I first got here a letter came out that said, "You should join the PTA because the PTA benefits minorities and kids with single parents." And I thought, I will not tolerate this anymore. So I got a letter and I wrote it and I said, "Dear Principal: I am an African American woman who happens to be single, raising a wonderfully fantastic child and here's what I expect of this child and here's what I expect. I don't expect her to get anything anymore than anybody else." And I said, "In your letter it stated the reason I should join the PTA is because I'm single and I'm a minority. Is that the only reason I should join the PTA?" And I said, "Are you telling me that other people are getting less than me because I'm a single parent and I'm a minority or are you telling me other people are getting more? Which is it?" I said, "I suggest that you take that language out and just invite all of us to join the PTA on the same level for the same reasons." They called me and they said, "Ms. Johnson, thank you for bringing that to our attention. That was not our intent." And I said, "Your intent may have not been that, but this is how I interpreted it." And I said, "If I was to allow that to continue, I would not have been doing what I thought was right for my daughter and for other young kids, young minorities, and I would not have been doing any other parent who is a single parent justice." And I said, "So thank you." And they changed it. They changed it. I am at their PTA meetings. I am involved with them and by George, when the issue comes up, and I think that people are thinking that they're being nice out of their mouths but it continues to provide a stigmatization, I go after it right away.

REINIER: Good!

JOHNSON: And those kinds of things I don't think should continue. Right, wrong, or indifferent, it should not continue. Out of your soul you may be 100 percent pure. There are other ways to do it.

REINIER: Are the public schools integrated here?

JOHNSON: They are very integrated here. Very, very, integrated. But it's interesting, when I moved here, I called and I did a tremendous amount of research before I moved here because I had a kid that I had to look out for. Normally, I would just plop down in the town and figure it out. When I called to ask about the schools, and I called very prominent people in the community, the mayor's office, these kind of different offices. I called and I said, "Talk to me about the schools here." "Oh! Lakeview Academy is just outstanding!" "Oh! These public schools are just outstanding." And I said, "Would you mind sending me the stats on all these schools, the racial make-up, the financial make-up and all those kinds of things, and their scholastic scores and all that?" And they sent me all of this. All of the schools that they said were outstanding were where most of the non-African Americans went. And I said, [whispering] "God, I cannot believe this." So I purposely chose other schools. I chose to put her in the public schools right here in the city. Now these had good reputations. It's extremely diverse, huge Latino population, I would say, followed by African American population, I would say, followed by a very small Asian population. The white population is probably bigger than the Latino population. So it's almost equally diverse, and that is what I had been looking to put my kid into because the world is diverse.

REINIER: Yes.

JOHNSON: The world is not mono-cultural, it's not a mono-culture. So I'd been looking to put my daughter in where things are real and they are not make-believe. Life is not make-believe. So that's where she is now. And I just got the report cards and she has all A's. I was

very, very proud. Of course, she knows how to work the system. She came home last night and she said, "Mom, are you proud of me?" And I said, "Oh, absolutely." And she said, "So how are we going to celebrate?" [Laughter] I said, "We'll talk about it, Sweetie." She said, "When?" I said, "We'll talk about it. When you get back, we'll sit down and talk about how we're going to celebrate this wonderful occasion." (When she moves to third grade). She has a wonderful teacher, in from Canada, just a wonderful teacher, just fantastic. She just fell in love with her. "Can I move in with her?" So the school that she goes to is providing her what she needs. I'm in there as often as I can, going in and helping the teacher, going on field trips with them, taking Smokey Bear in, and doing those kinds of things. And the kids, they just love it. They're great kids. And she has a good personality where she's been, made lots of friends. They always want to come to my house, and I allow it. So schools are truly for the most part here, at least in the city, integrated schools. Kids are doing pretty good in the schools.

REINIER: Now what about high school? What activities did you [participate in]?

JOHNSON: I was a very, very, very shy introvert. I processed internally. I had friends. I did not have lots and lots of friends. I had probably one or two friends when I was growing up. I was not involved in anything from an extra-curricular activity in school. I was extremely shy, so I didn't get into band or any of that other kind of stuff. My sisters and brothers did; most of them were in something. I was not. I didn't play baseball or that kind of stuff. I did gym because it was required. That's not extra-curricular. But I didn't do any of that. The things that were quiet—the glee club, I was in that—it was a quiet thing; it was a singing club. And I got in that because I didn't do solo; I was just part of it. So I didn't step out that way in high school, and that was the way it was all the way through school.

REINIER: What subjects did you like?

JOHNSON: I loved English. I loved reading; that was fantastic. Math I was pretty good in, was something I just did because I had to do it, but I was pretty good at it. I'll include trig[onometry], I couldn't believe it. Calculus took me out. I did like history, but I couldn't connect with history. There was nothing relevant.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

Tape 2, Side A: Attending Alcorn State University—Working in California as a Temporary Forestry Technician on the Mad River Ranger District, Six Rivers National Forest—Returning to Alcorn State University—Working as a Soil Scientist on the Six Rivers National Forest.

REINIER: Clara, we were talking about your high school experiences, and then after that you went to Alcorn [State] University. Will you tell me a little bit about Alcorn?

JOHNSON: Okay. I was mentioning earlier that history was not one of my interests until later. History became very, very, very important to me when I moved to California. Before I go there, let me back up and say I graduated out of high school, got a four-year college degree. I went to Alcorn State University, which is a historically black college and university, one of the oldest land grant colleges in the South. At the time that I was going we had approximately 2,500 kids, predominantly African American kids, but kids in from Africa and kids in from probably India went there also. Most of them of course came to study agriculture. We had a diverse program there, biology and all the things that a university would normally have. This is when I first sort of left my mother and was off on my own, although I went home every weekend because the university was very close. It was in Lorman, Mississippi and that's approximately 45 minutes to an hour from Natchez, so I was able to go home every weekend. I took advantage of that, at least for my first two years until I got a little bit more comfortable with being out on my own. In my mind it was a good thing that I went to Alcorn. This is where I started learning about African American culture. For the first time I started learning about African American culture. We didn't talk about it in my house, the culture. We knew the history, but we didn't talk about the beauty of the culture, and Alcorn exposed me to that. Very fascinating.

REINIER: Would you explain that a little bit? That's fascinating.

JOHNSON: Alcorn is again an all African American college. It's a historically black college and university. Anybody who wants to go there can go there. I have not seen any non African Americans other than the people I mentioned earlier who choose to go there. Academically, I think it's just fine. Of course, when you leave home you're just totally naïve about a whole bunch of things, and I definitely was about the culture and the African Americans. At this university I didn't know about some of the traditions of African Americans. I didn't know about African American history as it related to Africa and the South and in Brazil and in all those other places such as Haiti. I entered an African America history course. First time ever I thought, well, this just doesn't exist. And so I went into this course and we had a fascinating teacher, who taught us about all the greatness about African Americans. I mean just things that I had never, ever been exposed to, and those are the things that I'm pushing into Cydney right now. As a matter of fact I've just bought her a book. No, I didn't buy the book. A lady who is the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians gave me the book. The book is entitled "Black Indians." And so Cydney's in awe of that book. Huge words in it, but she's trying her best at seven years old to get through it. "Mom, what's this word?" And those kinds of things I did not know about.

REINIER: Yeah. That's very interesting.

JOHNSON: Although my mother kept telling me, "Clara, part of your heritage is Cherokee." And I kept saying, "It is? Well, who was?" And she would tell me the people who were and that whole history and those kinds of things, but I didn't connect any of that with the whole beauty of African Americans or Africans or Brazilians or Haitians or any of those people--Jamaicans or whomever or whatever we are. And that's the stuff that I learned when I was at Alcorn State

University although I was majoring in agriculture at the time. That's the stuff that stood out the most. That's when history started becoming a little important to me. I still didn't totally absorb it in my system. It was fascinating, you know, peripherally. But I hadn't absorbed it in my system, the total beauty of it. So throughout college I studied in those courses and I wanted to learn more, I wanted to learn more, I wanted to learn more. When I finished college and graduated with a B.S. degree in agronomy, I hired on with the Forest Service after my mother took care of that. I hired on with the Forest Service and the location that I first started in was Bridgeville, California.

REINIER: Bridgeville?

JOHNSON: Bridgeville.

REINIER: Where is that?

JOHNSON: That's exactly what I said. Where is that? Never heard of it. I'd heard of San Francisco and Sacramento, you know, those kinds of things but never Bridgeville. Bridgeville is in extreme Northern, California, extreme Northern California. The biggest town up there is Eureka, California. Fortuna. Arcata. McKinleyville--those areas up there which is very close to the Oregon border, and then you have to drive another two and a half hours to get to Bridgeville, going west or some direction. I never figured it out and I lived there for a whole year and a half almost. I just never figured it out that you just drive and drive and drive and there it is. When you get there, it's a wide-open area up in the mountains, beautiful, little place. Ruth Lake. It's a beautiful lake up there and when you get there the population is, at the time 300, and all Caucasian. And I said, "Okay. Why am I here? Why am I here?" And the Mad River Ranger District was the district that I went to.

REINIER: This is the Six Rivers National Forest.

JOHNSON: This is the Six Rivers National Forest, Mad River Ranger District. My first exposure.

REINIER: And what was your job?

JOHNSON: My job was temporary. Temporary Forestry Technician at the time. And this was my first summer [1979] of going up there. And the experience of just getting there was interesting because it was myself and another young man from Alcorn going out there. We took the bus because we couldn't afford to fly or anything like that. Our parents couldn't afford to fly us out, so we took the bus, three days on this bus. He and I became friends and got out there. They said, "Well, we will meet you in Eureka, California." And we went to Yreka, California.

REINIER: Oh!

JOHNSON: We didn't know any difference. We were two kids and nobody spelled it for us, or anything. We had the tickets to Eureka, but I don't know what happened. We went to Yreka, and got to Yreka, and we said, "So where are the people? Where are all these people who are supposed to be meeting us?" And there was nobody there. And so we called the Mad River District and said, "We're here, where are you guys?" And they said, "We're here, where are you guys?" So we hollered, "Where are we?" And the guy told us, "Yreka," and we said, "We're here, Yreka!" They said, "We don't think so! You need to get back on the bus and come to Eureka." So we did that.

REINIER: Were you still in college?

JOHNSON: I was still in college at the time. The Forest Service always sends to universities [announcements of] jobs. You apply for these jobs and they select you, and [you] go on and you do these things. And they sent these applications to the Agriculture Department where I was studying. And the professors there asked us all, "Who all want to go to California?" Back of my mind it sort of took a leap. I'll never forget it. I didn't say anything. I didn't say anything. But my mind was saying, yeah. So later in my own privacy I went up to the professor and I said, "Can you tell me more about these jobs?" And he did. And I said, "Is anybody applying?" And he said, "No, nobody wants to go." He said, "Do you want to go?" And I said, "Sure. I'll go." And I hadn't asked my mother or anything. I hadn't told my mother. But I called her up, and I said, "Hey, I got a job in California. What do you think?" And she said, "You need to think about it." And I said, "Well, I don't know anything about it, but I'll go out and I'll find out and then I'll let you know." And she said, "Okay." And off I went! Off I went along with this other young man who also volunteered to go. That was my first introduction to the Forest Service.

REINIER: Was it a summer job?

JOHNSON: It was a summer job, temporary summer job for three months.

REINIER: So what did you do on that job?

JOHNSON: When you go out as a Forestry Technician, you do everything that they want you to do. So you're at their whim. The whole objective is for them to bring people in to get work done. That's about the situation, to get work done. And so when I got there, what they wanted me to do was oversee the operations of a recreation crew, which meant keeping the toilets clean, cleaning out grills, cleaning the tables, keeping the grass cut, those kind of basic things. They also needed a person who could drive a standard vehicle, and I could not drive a standard vehicle. Matter of fact, I couldn't drive. I'm eighteen or nineteen years old, I could not drive. I didn't buy my car until later. And as a matter of fact, when I bought my car I had just started learning to drive, and so it was the car that I bought that I learned to drive on. [Laughter] But anyway, when I got there, they wanted a person to drive a standard. I was not able to do that. So what they would do in the morning times is take me out to all these campgrounds and then I'd carry all my materials with me and just clean these campgrounds. It worked out okay because another person went with me. But it exposed me to a lot of the people in the communities because a lot of people would come to these campgrounds. They would talk about what I'm doing and would say nice things, "Oh your work looks real good." You could work at your own pace.

The other thing I did was timber-related work. We would go out into the field and we would mark these timber sales. Put paint on them. Getting them ready to cut. And so we would go out and we would mark them. We would take the tree height. We would take the tree diameter, DBH [diameter, breast, height]. We would document all this information. We would record it and take it back in and somebody would punch it into the computers, or we would punch it into the computers. And I couldn't use the computers. I had to learn how to use a computer. So we would punch it into the computers and they would use that data to help them put their documentation together. So we did that.

And the other thing I did was range transects. We would go out on the ground into these wide open fields, these grasslands, and our job was to take samples because what we were trying to determine was what kind of vegetation existed out there, what kind of grasses, grasses and shrubs and herbs and those kinds of things that existed out on the ground, so that we can make recommendations on whether or not we need to reseed these areas or what kind of cows or horses or whatever you wanted to use out there could utilize these lands. And so we would go

out and do range transects. We would throw the hoop. We would do random samples. We would throw the hoop and wherever the hoop landed, we would literally have to go in there and look at everything that landed in that hoop. And record the name of that grass, not only its common name, but its scientific name. So you had to have these books out there with you looking all this stuff up to get the accurate data. That was the favorite. I liked that part. I liked that part.

REINIER: It sounds like fun.

JOHNSON: That was fun. That was also the first time. So those were the three jobs that I did. I saw them as exciting jobs. They were exciting because one, it was brand new stuff that I was learning. First of all, I'm learning about the Forest Service that I'd never heard of before. And I'm learning about all these different things that they do in the Forest Service and why they do them and why they're important. I was also learning a little bit more about history because people were starting to let me know how the Forest Service organization worked, with the chain all the way up to the executive branch. The fact that I worked for the President of the United States, and I was going "Wow, I do all that?" So here again, there was a little bit of history. You know, we'd go through all this stuff in school and it means some things to you, but then it means nothing to you until you can actually start applying it and seeing it. So those were the three things that I did there.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: And I did that for three months before I would return back to school. While I was there a remarkable thing happened. One, I sort of was adopted by the community. I was there by myself. Alan was there, but Alan was no help. Alan Smith, I'll never forget him, was the guy who went with me.

REINIER: Uh huh.

JOHNSON: But he was no help because he was more of a baby than I was. I mean, he was a real baby, crying every day, "I want to go home." "You got only three months. We can do this. We can do this." So I became like a mother to this person who was the same age as I was. And so he would tag along everywhere I went and I literally just took care of him. And he never returned. He never returned. I returned to the Forest Service; he did not. But the community adopted me. I cannot think of one day where I ate at my own house. I was always at somebody else's house. They would all invite me over to eat, to just hang out with them, to learn about me, to talk, to chit-chat, those kinds of things. So it turned out where I had a different exposure to a different set of people than I would have normally had, or that I had experienced in Mississippi.

REINIER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And it turned out to be a very positive experience. I got introduced. You get introduced in that community real fast, very, very fast. And so I was. The other thing that happened is because I was so far away from anybody who sounded like me, looked like me and acted like me, my norms, I had to seek it a different way. And so anytime we had an opportunity to go to the library in Eureka, because that's where we all went, I would tag along with them and we would go shopping in Eureka or they would hang out on the beach and I would go with them. Or they would stay over night on the beach and I would hang out with them on the beach. And the other thing that they would do is they would go to the library. And so I went to the library. I gravitated and I'm not sure why I went there, but I gravitated to the African American section. I consumed every book on African Americans in that library. History all of a

sudden was very relevant to me. That's when I became extremely excited about African American history because I saw where we fit in, in all of the things that had taken place here in the United States and outside of the United States. And it was just remarkably amazing. It was like nourishing food. It really started making me whole; it really did. The other thing that happened is the other outlet that I sought was reading the Bible. Every chapter I consumed. Not just reading it to be reading it, to say that I read it, but reading it for substance and understanding and meaning. And between those two things, I think that was the beginning of me becoming okay with me. I can remember reading this book, *I'm OK, You're OK*. About the parent/child and adult and tying all of that stuff together and it just all jelled for me. I'm twenty or twenty-one by then. Nineteen or twenty, I don't know what it was, nineteen or twenty. I had to be about nineteen or twenty and coming into myself. All the other times I had been leaning on somebody, leaning on the people at the university, my friends, leaning on my mother, my sisters and my brothers for support, not having to really engage with me. And here I am out there, having to do this. It was like discovering. It's almost like an electrical shock that goes through your entire body, and the only thing you can say is, "Eureka! I have arrived! I am here! I've made it! I know who I am." And that's what happened for me then. When I went back to the university, I was different. I was different. I was very different. And my friends noticed it.

REINIER: Was it hard to go back?

JOHNSON: It was not hard at all. I wanted out of Eureka because I wanted to get back to what was comfortable. I needed to see people like me. I had to get back and I wanted to get back so desperately. When those three months were up I was happy to be leaving Mad River, California. I was very pleased. Well, before I left, they said, "Clara, we really like your work." Because I was, you know, a kid, energetic and excited about anything. Anything good. But I say that for a reason. When I was out there, there was some kid that I hung out with who smoked pot. I never did. "Clara, why don't you? Why don't you? Why don't you?" "No. That's not what I want. That's not what I want."

REINIER: These are kids in the community?

JOHNSON: These are kids in the community who did this. And the parents knew.

REINIER: Well, I'm sure it was available up there.

JOHNSON: Oh! Plentiful. Oh, plentiful. The parents would say things to me like, "Oh, you're such a good role model for my kid." The kids are almost the same age as I am. "You're such a good role model." And all I'm doing is just being me and saying no to things that I didn't want to be involved with. But anyway, before I left, coming back to the university, back to Alcorn, the Forest Service asked if I would be interested in going into a co-op program as a soil scientist because they were looking for soil scientists. And they were also trying to diversify the organization. Back then I think there was maybe one or two or three, a handful of African Americans in professional series. Most of them were in clerical series or in administrative series. And thinking what my mother had said, you know, "I'm not paying for you; I'm not paying for the car." I said, "Sure, I would be willing to take this on." And they explained everything, you know, when you finish school you'll have a job and all that kind of stuff. And I said, "Sure." Well, "Sure" came out, but it wasn't in my soul. The words came out, but the words didn't match my soul. I went home and this just hung over me. And they would call. You had to maintain a 3.0 average and all that kind of stuff and I thought, well why don't I just drop the 3.0. [Laughter] I won't have to do this. But I didn't.

REINIER: [Laughing] A way of getting out of it!

JOHNSON: That's right! But I didn't. I finished up college. I struggled with the idea that I had to go back. I had to go back to the same communities although the people were very nice. I struggled with that. I went back after I graduated from college; I went back. Took me an extra year. Well, actually, I went back before then. I went back on a nine-month assignment, which meant I missed a semester so I had to pick it up the following summer. In the co-op program you're required to work with the Forest Service one summer and then another term afterwards to complete that portion so you can get the experience that you need to come back in to the agency. And I went back and did pretty much the same thing: consumed, consumed, consumed the Bible, African American history, Bible, African American history, consumed it. Hung out on the beach, consuming. Love the beach. Just love it. They got the greatest beaches out there. And I did that, but I wasn't happy. But I knew that I needed a job, and I stuck with it. And then I did a good job. I did a good job. As a soil scientist, I came back for those nine months in my co-op program as a soil scientist. And I worked for a guy named Ward Fong, a really neat guy, really neat guy. Knew his soils. I liked the work, but it wasn't what I wanted to do. I knew that.

What I was supposed to do at that particular time was a couple of things. As a soil scientist you're supposed to be able to map soils. What you should be able to do is dig this pit and describe the various horizons within that pit. And you do these samples throughout a plot that you set up. And these samples, once you're done, it gives you a real good feel for the soil types that are out there. These soil types then can help you decide the kinds of vegetation that will and will not grow on this site, the kind of trees that will and will not grow. Whether or not you should be harvesting from this particular area or not, and whether or not if you do a certain type of operation, whether or not you're going to impact the soils, meaning whether or not you're going to cause massive erosion and those kinds of things. And so you do that.

The other thing I was supposed to do was be able to take all the soils information that I had gathered and make a recommendation to other team members. Based on what I'm seeing here's what I recommend. And of course you rattle back and forth and people either listen to you or don't listen to you and you rattle back and forth. And I would watch Ward doing this and I thought, gosh, not what I want to do, but this is what you just signed on to do. We did need more soil scientists in the agency, and so I stuck with it. And I did that. I came on permanently.

The co-op assignment was a good assignment because again, it provided me the same kinds of opportunities that the temporary assignment did, and that is exposure to different people. Now I'm back in Mad River [Ranger District] also doing this co-op assignment. Exposure to different people, an opportunity to learn the people that I was working with better. It gave me an opportunity to see some of the nuances within the agency. It gave me an opportunity, too, to work with some really dynamic women. There were two women there who I will never forget unless I get Alzheimer's or something. One's name was Diane Stittgen and the other one was Lisa Uertuitz and they were so sharp too. They were so sharp. Diane was the recreation officer there and Lisa was the range conservationist there. And they were just so sharp too. Ward was very sharp too. So I'm working with a lot of professional women and they knew their stuff; they knew their business and they did a quality job.

The other thing I picked up from them was the amount of stress that they were under. Stress from--at least this was what I got from them just watching them and listening to bits and pieces of comments--it was just stressful working in that world, the man's world; it was stressful for them. Working in the Forest Service culture, whatever that culture is, was stressful. And I kept thinking. God, I don't want to be stressed out like that. What will I do about it?

REINIER: Can you say what was stressful about it?

JOHNSON: I think what was stressful was they had a tremendous amount of work. It seemed like they had to prove themselves over and over and over again. Whereas some of the guys would say something that's like, "Oh, yeah." And I see that today; that's nothing new. I see it today; I see it every day I make a recommendation on something. Who's talking out there?

REINIER: So they don't listen to you the way they listen to...

JOHNSON: Oh, no. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. We'll get to some of that, just based on this experience here and others. Those stresses are mainly what I saw with them. I knew that I did not want that kind of stress, and I knew that I wanted to be able to manage it, if it should come my way. But I also knew that I didn't want to continue to dig holes. And that drove me; that definitely drove me. I did not want to go out in those woods and dig holes anymore, nor did I want to go out there and look at a tree, take its height, take the DBH, those kinds of things. Especially when you're in snow this high, six feet high, and you've got to tramp out there. Just thought there's a better way of living here. So I knew I didn't want to do those things. I could have done the range con[servation] work for awhile but it would have been monotonous, you know, monotonous. I'm not sure if I would have wanted to take that path.

What I started learning was I liked to be involved with a variety of things. I didn't have to be an expert. I just liked being involved with a lot of different things, just a lot of different stuff. I still like that to this day, which is probably why I'm in this job. I don't like being single focused although it doesn't hurt to be that way sometimes; it helps me if I am! [Laughing] And I can become very single focused if I need to be, but I don't necessarily like that. I like being able to juggle multiple things at one time. But that co-op assignment was a very good assignment. It again started helping me accept me more as a person. It helped get me exposed to the agency, the ups and down within the agency. The ups and downs meaning you work for the president, this is your level, you work for the man above, you do what the man above states, and how that whole bureaucracy works within there, not that I'm an expert on it by any means. It was a good exposure. So that was my co-op assignment that I had as a soil scientist, which prepped me to come into the agency. I went back to school, came back to Mississippi and continued my schooling, finished up. And then I went back to California.

REINIER: Let me just ask you now, were you going into agriculture?

[End Tape 2, Side A]

Tape 2, Side B: Majoring in agriculture in college—Permanent hire as a Soil Scientist on the Lower Trinity Ranger District in the Six Rivers National Forest—Visibility for an African American woman—Working on detail as a Planning Forester—Working on detail as a Resource Officer on the Orleans District, Six Rivers National Forest—Working on detail as Assistant District Ranger on the Shasta Trinity National Forest—Living in Hay Fork, California.

REINIER: Clara, I was asking you at the end of the last tape, what did you expect to do with your agriculture major when you were in college?

JOHNSON: When I went to college, I had no clue. Well, I did have a clue what I wanted to major in, but Alcorn didn't offer it. I wanted to get into journalism because I really liked writing.

REINIER: Um hmm.

JOHNSON: Not the media part of it, but writing because it was secluded within my own mind and I could do my own thing and be creative and that's important. And so they didn't offer journalism. I was determined to be in journalism when I went there and they didn't offer it. So I had to come up with something really quick.

REINIER: Uh huh.

JOHNSON: I ended up with agriculture by default. I looked at all the things, doctor and lawyer and all that--now lawyer I did want to be--all that stuff and nothing appealed to me. And I thought, well, I'll just enter something that I didn't know. I didn't know what agriculture was because we never referred to farming and all that stuff, as agriculture. We referred to it as farming. And hoeing the garden and...

REINIER: Yeah, you grew up doing that!

JOHNSON: That's what we referred to. So when I got into agriculture and discovered, I can't believe what I just went into, I refused to change my major because I wanted to go ahead and finish college. What I chose in agriculture was agronomy. What agronomy does is a curriculum that teaches you about crops and how to grow them scientifically: how to do research on them and splice and cut and all that stuff and graft this and do all these different kinds of things. And that was interesting. That was very, very interesting because we didn't do that when we were growing up. We just hoed the garden and had apple trees and all that stuff, but we didn't graft them. Didn't do that. Now I know how to do all that stuff. And so when I was in college, I thought, "Hey, this is great." It was working out pretty good and I was learning a lot of stuff and got into auto mechanics and poultry production and all that stuff. And statistics and all that and had fun with all of that.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: It still wasn't satisfying because I wanted to be in journalism.

REINIER: Um hmm.

JOHNSON: But I stuck with it. I didn't change. Until this day I still want to do something in journalism. So I had no idea what I wanted to do with this degree when I finished it. I wanted

to finish it, but I didn't know what I wanted to do with it. Nor was anybody necessarily counseling me on the many opportunities within this degree and there are many. So the Forest Service was by default. I had no plans. I had no clue what I wanted to do with the degree, any of that. I knew I wanted to be in journalism. I knew that. And that's where my mind was. I want to do this. I'm doing the other thing at the college. That's really how that came about.

REINIER: So then you came back to school after you'd been in California on the co-op program.

JOHNSON: Came back to school, finished up. Thought about going Greek, that is joining a sorority.

REINIER: Uh huh.

JOHNSON: Too shy to do that.

REINIER: Uh huh.

JOHNSON: At the college I was too shy to walk across the campus to go to the cafeteria, so a lot of days I didn't eat. Lost a lot of weight as a result of that. But I was so very shy and would not go and eat unless I had one of my friends with me. Then I would walk between the two of them [laughing] to go and eat. I would sit with them. I wouldn't bother talking to anybody in college. Even after I've come back from California, I was still very, very shy. I still am. Still am to a great degree.

But anyway, I'm back at the university, finished that up, and it was time to make a decision because I had signed an agreement with the Forest Service saying once I graduated--and I did try to prolong that graduation. I pushed it as far as I could. I'll only take one subject this semester. Oh, I shouldn't do that. But anyway, I'd signed an agreement with the agency that said I would come back upon completion of my academic work and work with them. Again I tried getting out of it. Again my mother would have nothing to do with that. And at the age of twenty-one I came on permanently at the Forest Service and have been with the agency ever since. I came on permanently and I was assigned to Lower Trinity Ranger District on the Six Rivers National Forest.

REINIER: Uh huh. So Six Rivers.

JOHNSON: I was not on Mad River [Ranger District]. I had left Mad River. I moved from a population of 300 to a population of a whopping 2,500.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: And all of those towns up there in the North, they're small towns. I shouldn't say all of them. But all of those towns that are inland from the coast are small. Population 30. Population 10. 100. All those kinds of things. And they were usually made up of people who'd grown up there and lived there and they were family-oriented towns. And the town is named after some family member or something like that. And the mayor is the father of somebody and all that kind of stuff.

So I moved to Lower Trinity. And my sister, my sister Jean, helped me drive out there. We drove across country from Mississippi in my Ford Maverick to Willow Creek, California, was the name of the town where the Lower Trinity District is. And we drove forever. It seemed like forever and it was hot. There was no air conditioning in my Ford Maverick. We drove and drove

and drove and we got tired and almost fell asleep at the wheel. Well, we made it. The one thing my sister remembered was us driving up these little windy roads that had no guardrail on the side and if you didn't pay attention you were over the side.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: And my sister was going, [whispers] "You've got to be kidding." But that was extremely nice of her to travel with me across country and help me get set up. And we got there. All of the time that I was on the Six Rivers [National Forest] I was not happy. But nobody knew it. I mean, I didn't go home and cry. Well, yes, I did. Yes, I did. I didn't go home and try to do anything stupid. Tearing up and making long distance calls to my family, I would have \$400-\$500 phone bills all the time. I had to have that outlet. My family. So I was not happy there. Somebody called me and said, "Hey, would you like to come back to the Six Rivers? We all miss you up here." I said, "Nope. Been there, done that, don't need to repeat it."

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: One of the reasons I wasn't happy was it always seemed cold there. It would rain, rain and rain and rain. And for the first time in my life I understood how so many people would kill themselves in the wintertime when I was living up there. It rained one time and I thought, "Now I see why," because you literally get depressed. You don't have sun coming in and renewing your soul. And you literally get depressed. And if you just allow that to dwell on you, it takes you out. And a lot of people would take themselves out up there. It was pretty sad, pretty sad. So I didn't like it—the weather. But in the summer times it was gorgeous. Hot. Hot! Hot, hot, hot. It was gorgeous. So I found in order to escape that I would spend all of my time in Eureka. My work time was there. I had no social life in Eureka and that did eventually change, but I spent a tremendous amount of my time in Eureka. I chose to be in Eureka. I found a gym and the gym became my best friend. And I would go to the gym and would be in that gym for three or four hours a day. Every day.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: I was in shape. I was in shape!

REINIER: I should say!

JOHNSON: Could I do that now? No, I cannot do that now. Do I need to do that now? Oh, yes I do! But every day, and this went on for about six years.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: Six years. Great stamina for everything, endurance, I could go forever.

REINIER: So what kind of work were you doing? Not soil?

JOHNSON: A soil scientist because that's how I came on. My first part of the time that I was on the Six Rivers, I was still doing the soils work.

REINIER: Still digging holes.

JOHNSON: Still digging holes. But I also started getting a lot of exposure because I was the only African American professional up there. And so anytime they wanted to have a representative at any meeting and they wanted to make sure that African Americans were

included, there I was. I ended up in meetings that I had no business in. I ended up in meetings with the chief of the Forest Service. I ended up in meetings with the district rangers, facilitating district ranger meetings. I had no clue in what I was doing, but I was there.

REINIER: Well, they gave you a lot of visibility, because you were African American.

JOHNSON: Tons! Tons of it, I mean tons. It was in our regional office, which was located in San Francisco, talking to the regional forester, just tons of exposure.

REINIER: Now was the consent decree in effect yet?

JOHNSON: Not yet. It was not in effect just yet.

REINIER: Almost.

JOHNSON: It was almost in effect, and so I got all of this exposure. My name was known throughout Region 5. Everywhere I went I was known. Clara Johnson. My name was definitely known amongst all the African Americans. I was called on for a lot of things from them. I was known by everybody up there.

REINIER: About how many African Americans were there?

JOHNSON: Shoot, I don't know. I'm thinking of the region as I try to answer this.

REINIER: Yes. Yes.

JOHNSON: I would say 100? I don't know. And I'm thinking clerical, professional...

REINIER: ...yeah.

JOHNSON: ...whatever.

REINIER: ...all the way through.

JOHNSON: ...all the way through.

REINIER: Um hmm.

JOHNSON: So maybe that's a high number. No, it could have been that many. It could have been because a lot of them were in clerical jobs--receptionists and financial things, those kinds of things, so it could have been.

REINIER: But few professionals?

JOHNSON: Very, very, very, very, very few. I cannot think of another African American professional when I was there. I cannot. The one I can think of was not in Region 5; he was in Region 6. There may have been one. There was another one and he was an engineering tech. Technician. So I can't think of any more.

REINIER: So you were unusual?

JOHNSON: I wasn't unusual. [Laughing]

REINIER: The situation!

JOHNSON: The situation was unusual. So it did allow me to get that exposure. I don't know if I took advantage of it because I just thought that's what it should be. It was just normal. People assume or will later point out to you that they think you're getting special privileges and all that kind of stuff, and I just never saw it that way. People would call and ask me to be involved with this committee. I understood why they wanted me there; I didn't see it as anything negative. I said "Sure." So off I went. What that did is it moved me out of Willow Creek quite a bit. So I was flying everywhere. Single and flying everywhere. And just learning. Up in Washington, D.C., just flying everywhere.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: Um hmm. And here I am a GS5, 7, or 9. That's how I came into the Forest Service, as a soil scientist, GS5, 7, 9. And doing these things. They moved me out of Eureka away from the soil scientist job, gave me tremendous exposure, and opened my eyes to a lot of other things. I enjoyed that. I enjoyed the traveling and seeing and being involved in different things.

REINIER: Could you maybe just tell me like an example of some of the meetings that you went to?

JOHNSON: There was an annual district ranger meeting. I was asked to come in and facilitate that meeting. "Clara! We think that you're a great facilitator; you're a great communicator. Would you like to come in and facilitate this meeting?"

REINIER: When you weren't a district ranger at all?

JOHNSON: When I was just a GS5 or 7, soil scientist.

REINIER: For heaven's sake!

JOHNSON: I said, "Sure, what am I supposed to do?"

REINIER: Ah hah!

JOHNSON: Sure, I'll do it. And sure enough, I went around up there and I did it. I'm not saying it was the greatest thing that I did, but I went and I did it. The other thing I was asked to be involved with was committees--Federal Women's Program managers, being on committees, the African American Society of Government Employees. I was asked to be involved with that. I was on wildlife committees. I was on committees that I knew nothing about. But I had an opinion and I shared that opinion. I was asked to be on timber reviews, all kinds of reviews. Just different things, just a lot of different things. I took it all in stride, all for granted. You should do it, so good do it. The forest supervisor would call and say, "Clara, we need you on this committee, can you sit in for us?" "Sure. What am I supposed to do while I'm there?" Anyway, I did it. Then I told my district ranger, who was Mr. Larry Cabodi, very neat, very, very neat guy.

I believe I mentioned Diane Stittgen and Lisa Uertuitz. Larry Cabodi was the one who helped me, put me on a pedestal. He was a white male and a lot of people have had a lot of problems with him. I did not. One of the things I discovered about myself is if there's a person that everybody else had a problem with, I don't. It's really weird. I don't. And either I make it a point to try and get to know this person that everybody else had a problem with, or just ignore what they're saying and gravitate to that person because I see that person as a victim. And so

either I gravitate to that person because I see them that way or whatever, but I do. But seldom do I have a problem with people that everybody else had a problem with. I have a relationship with those people. The people that they have relationships with, I have a problem with. So it's just weird.

Larry Cabodi was the district ranger for the Lower Trinity District. I thought one of the sharpest rangers I had ever met. Larry would watch the things that I would be involved with and he told me one day, "Clara, would you like to be my planning forester?" And I said, "Larry, I don't know anything about planning." And he said, "Well, you're on the ID team; you have an idea and I'll work with you. And I said, "Okay." I became his planning forester. Sure enough, true to himself he worked with me in that job, and it was he and I who helped put together the planning program for the Lower Trinity Ranger District during that detail.

REINIER: So that's the kind of thing you did on detail?

JOHNSON: Um hmm. I did that on detail because I was still a soil scientist on the Lower Trinity District. But he asked me to move out of that role and take on this other role.

REINIER: In the same district.

JOHNSON: In the same district. And I said, "Absolutely." Now there were other people around me who had much more experience, who knew what they were doing, but I was asked to do it. It caused a lot of jealousy. I ignored it. I figured if the ranger asked you to do something, you do it. You deal with your other issues. That's how I dealt with life and to some degree I still do. It wasn't my issue if you were having a problem with the assignment I'd been given. My job was to do the assignment and I did it. Larry and I became very close, very, very close. And Larry hated to see me leave. Larry retired. I think the people who worked under him and with him did not give him a fair shake. He was really talented. He wanted to move things in a different direction and the agencies sometimes don't appreciate...

REINIER: What direction did he want to move in?

JOHNSON: Larry was very, I think, vision-oriented. He would bring up questions--I can't remember--but he would bring up questions that were totally opposite of everybody else. I know I'm being very general because I can't think of anything specific. But he would ask questions that nobody else would ask. And people would view that as not supporting the position of the agency. If time permits I may be able to come up with some things after I really think about it. But he got, as a result of that, painted a certain way, like not a team player--too tough, too mean, too this, too whatever. It's amazing how people put labels on you, inappropriate labels. But he wasn't. I've always gravitated toward people who think differently than the majority. Always. And so I gravitated very easily towards him.

REINIER: And he gave you a lot of opportunity, clearly.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. He did. He is one of the ones who would call people and say, "Well, why don't you put Clara on this committee; she can do this. Why don't you have her at this meeting?" Those kinds of things, he would set all that stuff up. He's the one who would talk to the forest supervisor about what he thought my potential was. He's the one who sat down with me and said, "Well, one day you're going to be Chief of the Forest Service." I said, "Oh, Larry, I don't even know how to spell "Chief."" I can remember that conversation! I didn't know how to spell chief. I could never see that happening. My ego has to change before I become chief. But he's the one who really in my mind helped me continue to help myself. And so he was my first

ranger, my first true district ranger, my first permanent district ranger who took an interest in me and helped me.

REINIER: And he really did become a mentor for you?

JOHNSON: He was, I think, more than a mentor. Or maybe he was just a mentor. But I would go in and talk to him about a lot of things. "Larry, I want to do this. I want to do that. And I don't like this. I don't like that." He would listen and counsel and give me examples of what he's experienced and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, he is the one from a mentoring standpoint who would coach me, would find opportunities for me. He's the one responsible for me being a part of the consent decree.

REINIER: Okay!

JOHNSON: He's first, before the consent decree. He's also the one who called another district ranger and said, "Clara needs to come over and be your Resource Officer." John Larsen was that ranger and he said, "Okay, I think she can do a pretty good job." Went over there and they worked with me on that.

REINIER: So what district was that?

JOHNSON: This was the Orleans District.

REINIER: Still in the Six Rivers?

JOHNSON: It's still on the Six Rivers. And I was proud of the Six Rivers because they gave me different opportunities.

REINIER: Well, they really did.

JOHNSON: They really did.

REINIER: So what did you do as a resource officer?

JOHNSON: As a resource officer my primary job was to oversee the operations of the fisheries and wildlife program, the hydrology program, my program, as soil scientist. What else did I have? I think that's what I had. There may have been another one. But to oversee those programs and because you have very extremely competent people underneath you, you're coordinating between the supervisor's office and that district trying to make sure monies are there for the programs that you're overseeing. Making sure that if relationships are broken, you're trying to renew those relationships. Making sure that these people working underneath you have their programs lined out and are accomplishing those programs. Making sure that you're out there on the ground, seeing what they're doing, so that you can talk knowledgeably about what they're doing. And so that's what I did.

And we had some very controversial issues. One I can remember dealing with a special use permit that we had to get for some fisheries operation. I can't remember all the details. And it was my job to pull that together. I was not able to accomplish it because the detail lasted for I think 120 days or something like that and you get jerked around so very much. But I can remember that being one of my programs. The other thing I can remember is that two individuals--there were three of them--two of them that I was supervising were extremely mad at me because they wanted the detail. And I won't mention their names. But they wanted the detail and they didn't get it. And I thought, Oh God, how am I going to work with this? And

they just knew they were more competent. I didn't argue with them. I said, "Here's how I am; I'm here and here's how I want to work with you." I think I'm about 23 or 24 then.

REINIER: Wow!

JOHNSON: And they were probably thirty-something and they'd been there an extremely long time. And I said, "Here's how I do business and here's what I expect. I'm going to meet every day." I can remember that. "I'll meet every day so we can figure out what we're doing." And it worked out okay. It worked out okay.

REINIER: Well now, you're moving into management, then, when you were very young.

JOHNSON: Very, very young. I was very, very, very, very young. I was called from the Washington office to apply for a forest supervisor's job at the age of 29, and I said no. I said no. No, no. I'm not going to do that. Because first of all there's no way I know a whole bunch. I'm just getting into the agency. Remember, I'm coming into the agency 21 years old. Here I am 24, 25, and there's no way. You know. And I'm so glad that I did not do that at the age of 29. What I chose to do instead is Larry Cabodi decided, "Clara you need to go off this forest and go on another forest, to the Shasta Trinity [National Forest]. And, by George, I'm going to call over there and..." "Ah! Clara! I just discovered that this lady's going on maternity leave. They're looking for an Assistant District Ranger. Don't you want to go?" And I said, "Larry, I don't know anything about that." "You can do it, Clara, you can do it. I'll help you!"

REINIER: Ah hah!

JOHNSON: Off I went to Hay Fork, California, Shasta Trinity National Forest. Population had to be ten people down there.

REINIER: I have a friend who lives in Hay Fork.

JOHNSON: Oh! Do you?

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: You drive forever to get to Hay Fork. Up this road, there's Hay Fork. Population- it may have grown by now, I don't know. Beautiful area. Beautiful area. Went into that community and got there on a Sunday when the office was closed and touched the door and the alarm went off. And so all of a sudden I had all these cops there.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: "Who are you? Where are you coming from? Why are you here? Why are you messing with this door?" And I said, "Oh! Hey guys!" I don't know them. "Hey, I'm Clara Johnson. I'm here as the Assistant District Ranger." I said, "I was just wondering if anybody was around." And they called Dave... Oh, what was Dave's name? He's a great guy. Dave. Dave, Dave, Dave. Wickwire.

REINIER: Was he the ranger?

JOHNSON: He was the ranger there.

REINIER: Okay.

JOHNSON: And he showed up and he said, "Well, Clara, you sure know how to make an entrance. You've done a great job here." And he said, "Everything's okay guys. I know her. She's going to be working with me." And he gave me keys and everything on that day. And that's when he and I hit it off. Everybody was having a hard time with Dave, working for Dave, and I came in and it's real easy to go in when you don't know a situation. And when the situation allows itself to present a certain case. I wish I could think of another word. The district was in turmoil and they all claimed that they didn't like Dave. Dave was very, very quiet. Very, very competent, but very quiet and he didn't interact with them very well. And they didn't interact with him. And so they labeled him. He don't care about us, he don't love us, he don't this, he don't that and that type of thinking.

REINIER: It sounds like a lot of that goes on.

JOHNSON: Oh God, just wait until we get to this job.

REINIER: Okay!

JOHNSON: And I thought, you folks are 30, 40, 50 years old. Why don't you love yourselves and care for yourselves? You know, it's my thinking. And so I would listen to all of this haranguing and gnashing of the teeth and that was my entire job. I was supposed to be doing other things. But all of that gnashing of the teeth and self-pity sucked up my job. Ate up the job. Because of that, they had a listening ear. I would listen to them and I would relay to Dave, "Dave, here's what's going on, here's what's being said," and other kind of stuff. "Just want you to know here's how I'm trying to deal with it." And he would say, "Thank you, Clara. I appreciate it." Dave would never have anything on his desk like I do. His desk was always clean. That was one of their biggest concerns. "His desk never has anything on it. How can he be doing any work?" They never moved to a point of thinking that he was proficient or that he had all of his stuff in his desk. And he was very proficient, very, very, very proficient. Very, very smart, very talented. But they couldn't see that because they were so blinded by their own needs.

I would work with them and one day I told a woman, I said, "Hey guys, let's just start a walking program." We started walking. Every day. We would just walk. And every evening at a set time we would just walk. And then we would come back. You know, just to blow off steam. Get them out of the office, get them out of the environment that they were in, and they loved it. And so that became the talk of the Shasta Trinity National Forest. "She came over here and she started a walking program." It was just done because it popped in my head; it was nothing big in my mind. But that became the talk of the Shasta Trinity at that particular time. And I got a reputation for being very people oriented, caring and nurturing. Not because I was, but because the situation allowed itself. Not that I'm saying I'm not, but the situation presented itself and that's what was needed. That's the only balance that was needed between Dave and I. He provided the resources needs, I provided the care and feeding need.

REINIER: So what were you supposed to do as a district ranger?

JOHNSON: What I was supposed to do was help the district ranger with all the natural resources issues, with these internal issues, with congressional issues, with local...

[End Tape 2, Side B]

Tape 3, Side A: Beginning to develop a management style—Living in small communities in Northern California—Moving into a line position as Assistant District Ranger on the Hume Lake Ranger District, Sequoia National Forest—Learning to prepare a budget—Effects of the consent decree in Region 5.

REINIER: Clara, we were just talking about your detail as assistant district ranger on the Shasta Trinity National Forest. Can you tell me a little more about that? You said you were deeply involved in...

JOHNSON: In a turmoil...

REINIER: In a turmoil! Good! Okay.

JOHNSON: Yeah. And just summarizing that I just worked with a lot of people who had a lot of personal needs as well as professional needs. And I was an ear for them to listen to and an ear for them to feel like they could trust. I provided that need to them. I'm just glad I was able to do that. So I was able to bridge between what they thought the district ranger was-- which he really was not; he was a very caring person with a great sense of humor--and their needs, meaning they wanted him to be more engaged with them. He simply wanted them to do their job and be content with themselves. And so there was that disconnect between the two needs and neither the two were able to bridge. And so I was able to bridge that. The district ranger later retired. Dave Wickwire. He later retired and to me it was a big loss in the agency. But other folks would say the opposite. But then that's my gravitating to the oddball again, the odd man out. So that was my experience in my detail on the Hay Fork Ranger District.

REINIER: Now were you beginning to work out a management style? Were you learning how to be a manager through this?

JOHNSON: You know, I don't know if I've learned yet how to be a manager because every situation is different. Every situation requires something because the people are different and you have to try and figure out how to fit in with that culture. You try your best to figure out what do people want and you try to match them. You try to help people based on where they are in their time and need. So I don't know if I was developing a management style. I do know that each experience helped me realize who I was, more and more and more. I know that I was growing as a person. Let's see, it's just hard to explain it. I was growing as a person because I was wanting to grow as a person, not necessarily because of all of the experiences if that makes any sense at all. The experiences helped me grow as a person. But I would have had the desire to grow as a person even without them. And so once I had the experience, it just helped me develop. I to this day cannot say any one thing right now that may have changed me other than the things I was talking about earlier, and that was my own work that I was doing to build me internally, build my soul and then help me come within myself. The reason I keep talking about that is because once you do come within yourself, once you become okay, once you become one with yourself, everything else is a piece of cake. It's a cakewalk. Cakewalk. And so any experience that you're given it's just something that's added on. It's not anything that really makes you or changes you internally. Does that make any sense?

REINIER: Well, you were talking before about being so shy.

JOHNSON: Very.

REINIER: And it doesn't sound like you were shy in these jobs.

JOHNSON: What do you call it? When a person exudes one thing externally and there's something else internally. What is that called? Not hypocrite!

REINIER: No! I'm not sure. I was not thinking of the word.

JOHNSON: But nobody ever sees me as shy. Nobody has ever seen me as shy, even my professors in school, never saw me as shy. Everybody always assumed I was very outgoing. When I come to work, I do not exude shyness. When I'm home, I'm all to myself. I don't necessarily have to go anywhere. I don't want to go anywhere. I don't want to be involved with people. If I'm called to go into a speech, I go and do the speech. When I'm done, you do the social thing, and then you move on. But it's not the thing that makes me, you know... So I exude one thing but I'm really something else internally. I'm very shy, a very shy person. And I'm okay with that. I'm okay with that. I can balance it very well.

REINIER: And then we were talking just a little bit off the tape. Here you are now, really the only African American person in these small communities in Northern California, but you seem to be well accepted.

JOHNSON: I was. Very well accepted. I think it was because I didn't go in with a grudge because I didn't have a grudge because of my upbringing. And because of all the things I had done to try and gear up who I was. So I came to the situation as myself, just pure me. And so I was able to allow everybody else just to be themselves. I didn't come to them with a challenge. "I'm African American and I expect something." Or "I'm a woman and I expect something." "Or I'm five-feet two and I expect something." I didn't come that way. I just came with, "Here I am, I'm innocent, I'm yours. Use me however. Boy, this is exciting!" So I gravitated towards their world, so to speak. I just said, "Here it is. I'm okay. I'm okay, you're okay."

REINIER: Did you feel you had to do things to fit in?

JOHNSON: No. Never did.

REINIER: Or with the Forest Service? Did you feel you had to behave a certain way to fit in?

JOHNSON: People tried to get me to behave a certain way, but I didn't. I always behaved the way I wanted to behave. People always would say, "Well, Clara, you don't say things like that." And I would say, "Why not?" Why wouldn't I say that? "Clara, you can't talk to that person because they're higher in the chain." "Why not? They're people? Is there a rule or something that states I can't talk to the chief just because he's the chief? Why not?" So. The agency tried and still to this day I think the agency tries to get us to follow one line of culture. But I don't. I have always, always, always just remained me. I have not moved off of that at all because I wouldn't know how to move off it, first of all. So I wasn't forced by me to try and change. I never felt like I had to make changes. I knew that people wanted me to make changes in my style, in my behaviors, in my thinking, in my speaking, that kind of stuff. I took training in a lot of stuff of course to improve my skills. But I didn't change me, my inner makings. I didn't change me. And you know I have people in this job right now, who will say things like, "Well, you just can't communicate very well." And I would say, "Can you explain that to me?" Whereas I've seen other people get that accusation and simply react. "What do you mean? I can't believe you accused me of that. What makes you think you can communicate better?" Da-da-da-da. You know back and forth in that dialogue. My response is, "Can you explain that to me? Where am I missing it with you?" What I hear the person saying is, "I'm having a hard time with you, Clara. I'm having a hard time accepting you. I'm having a hard

time communicating with you." Not that I've done anything, but I'm hearing that they have a weakness, not me. And so my job is to try and help them figure out what their weakness is by simply asking, "Oh, how can I help? How can I do it better for you?" Not change it, but just try to get into their minds and see where they're coming from. Once I figure it out, it's a piece of cake, and usually it's nothing. Usually that person is simply trying to get comfortable with who I am. Or trying to get comfortable with themselves around me and move on. I see it all the time, all the time. And that's probably the most frustrating part of the job. You constantly get accusations about something. Constantly. Constantly.

REINIER: From whom?

JOHNSON: Oh employees, externals, different levels of the agency. You're constantly under a microscope, constantly under some spotlight. And every little thing that you do is questioned or commented on or ridiculed or complimented or something. There's some reaction to every little thing that you do.

REINIER: Has that been true all the way along?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. That's been true. And I think it's part of human nature. And I think it's part of the agency. Absolutely. Absolutely. You can see it in society. The president stumbles. Everybody comments about him stumbling. Don't you stumble? But we make a big to-do about nothing. And you can see it in anything that happens. The president sneezes. The president's dog dies. Dogs die. And people react to that kind of stuff. So it's no different than what happens internally. Until it turns ugly. Until it turns ugly.

But living in Northern California around predominantly non African Americans was a growing experience, was a pleasant experience. I did not like where I was, but it was a pleasant experience because people worked with me. I learned a lot. I had a tremendous amount of exposure. I was able to learn that I could be no longer considered fat when I was growing up and got really conditioned. Wore size eight and nine clothes. Never wore that, even when I was a kid. It's a good experience.

REINIER: Were you still going to the gym in Hay Fork?

JOHNSON: I would walk in Hay Fork or jog some of the roads in Hay Fork. That's what I'd do by myself in Hay Fork. Go jogging by myself because there wasn't any...

REINIER: So were you feeling less lonely by the time you got to Hay Fork?

JOHNSON: No. No, no, no. No. No. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. No. It was still there.

REINIER: So how long were you assistant district ranger?

JOHNSON: [Sighs] Oh, gosh. It seems like forever, but I don't think it was any more than four to five months that I was there as assistant district ranger. It seems like a lifetime. It really does.

REINIER: And then did you go back to the professional [series]?

JOHNSON: I went back to being a soil scientist on the Lower Trinity District, but only for a very short time. Because while I was in the assignment as assistant district ranger on the Hay Fork Ranger District on the Shasta Trinity National Forest, the consent decree kicked in.

REINIER: Okay.

JOHNSON: The consent decree kicked in.

REINIER: Okay.

JOHNSON: When the consent decree first...

REINIER: We're talking about like '85?

JOHNSON: Had to be somewhere, '85, '86, '87, anywhere in there. The consent decree came about. And when the consent decree came about I first became aware of it when I got a phone call from Larry Cabodi, who said, "Clara, they're advertising for some assistant district ranger positions and they're looking to diversify from a feminine standpoint." And I said, "I was just over there on the Hay Fork doing that job." And really did enjoy working with the people, I truly did. And I said, "Okay. All right. I think that's great." And he said, "Well, I think you should put in for it, Clara. I think you should put in for it because I think you can do it." And I said, "Okay. If you really think I can." He said, "Yeah, I think you can. I'm hearing a lot of positive things about you over in the Shasta Trinity. I think you can do this job." And so I applied for it and was selected. I don't know how many other people applied; I don't care. But I was fortunate I was selected.

REINIER: That's the one on the Sequoia?

JOHNSON: That's when I moved to the Sequoia National Forest. Hume Lake Ranger District. Working under Bruce Waldron who was my trainer. Biker, he was a biker guy. So at the encouragement of Larry Cabodi who moved me forward, I became an Assistant District Ranger on the Hume Lake Ranger District.

REINIER: Now you're moving into a line position.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. Notice how that happened. I moved from strictly focused as a soil scientist, focused as a planning forester, focused as a resource officer, which is a little bit more broad now, to assistant district ranger in the detail, line.

REINIER: That was really your first...

JOHNSON: So the detail was my first time ever doing a line job, and then I had to take the assignment on permanently now. So this is my movement into line. As we call "line" in this agency.

REINIER: And it's really a chain of command. Now you're part of the chain of command the way the Forest Service has been set up.

JOHNSON: Always had been. When I was in the chain of command before, as a temporary I was at the very lowest chain, the lowest part of the chain, the GS4. Then I moved into a whole other segment of the organization and that was in the professional series versus the technician series. So once I entered the professional series, it gave me every opportunity there was, all the way to chief. I don't know of any technician who's ever been a chief because the technician jobs are limiting within themselves. And so moving into the professional arena--and I had no clue about all of this when I was in college--but moving into the professional arena I had set the course or somebody had set the course for me to move in any job that I wanted to move into if I could do the job. And I won't move unless I figure I can do the job. And so they had set that.

And so now I'm strictly in the professional series. Can't move into the technician series, cannot, because, you know, a college degree, da-da-da-da-da-da.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: It opened it up for me to move into line and so I did. Not by any design of my own, but by the encouragement of Larry Cabodi, who was my first district ranger that set all of these opportunities up.

REINIER: All of them, really.

JOHNSON: He set them all the way up to me moving into the assistant district ranger position on the Hume Lake Ranger District. He established that path for me.

REINIER: And then the consent decree was there at a really opportune moment for you.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. I knew nothing about the consent decree. All I knew is Larry said, "I want you to apply for these jobs. You can do it. Get your application put together; I'll review it." He even looked at it and we put it together and sent it in and, by George, I was in the job.

REINIER: Now where else did you apply?

JOHNSON: I applied to the position on the Angeles National Forest as assistant district ranger. Another lady, Susan Swinson, got that position. Susan Swinson. It's funny how it worked out because Susan wanted the job up there where I was going, I wanted the job down on the Angeles, and we were both switched and went different places. I'm glad that we were both switched and went to different places because I worked for Bruce Waldron. And Bruce was a different type, totally different. A recluse. His strength was in budget.

REINIER: Ah hah!

JOHNSON: Bruce's strength was in the budget. He knew the numbers. He knew how to manipulate the numbers.

REINIER: Ah hah!

JOHNSON: That's a positive manipulation. He knew how to get funds for his unit. When everybody else was moaning and groaning, he was getting the funds. I used to watch him on our leadership team meeting, because I would attend all the meetings with him there, and I would watch him in the meetings. Everybody else would just be gnashing at the teeth. And he would wait and let them all finish and then he would say, "If I had those funds, here's what I can do with those funds." And he would offer a project. Every time. And sure enough everybody else wouldn't come prepared. I don't care how many times they would be in the meetings, they would never get it. He would offer it up, and every time they would turn and they would say, "Well, Bruce, all right. We'll go with you."

REINIER: So the secret is being prepared?

JOHNSON: The secret is being prepared, and the secret is, I think, being able to do your homework ahead of time. Because what I think Bruce would do, is he would go down there to the supervisor's office and work everybody down there and get them to say yes to what he wanted. And then he would be positioned so that when he would bring it up in the leadership team meeting, they would always say, "Yeah, we can do this." As if nothing had ever taken

place. And I would just be floored. My God! I've got better at that, in this job, but I would just be floored. I would go, my goodness, look at this. Everybody had the ultimate respect for him. Ultimate respect. I was put underneath him because they thought he was the best district ranger on the entire forest.

REINIER: And they were training you.

JOHNSON: Bruce was training me. Bruce was the one who was to train me. And so Bruce trained me in the numbers. Not only that. Bruce trained me, and all the people there really liked him too. He was viewed as a recluse and all these negative things, but people liked him. And I thought, okay, they do allow people to be themselves. And Bruce was really strange because we didn't have any other bikers in the organization. He would get on his--was it a Kawasaki--one of those bikes. He would get on it and off he would go. And he would tell everybody, "I'm out of here for a month and I'm going on my trip across the states." Then he would hook up with other bikers and they would just travel. He'd leave his wife behind and off he would go. So that was interesting, that was great.

REINIER: Uh huh!

JOHNSON: He had a lot of challenges that he had to deal with, but Bruce made it a point not to badmouth people like I see so many other people doing. He stayed professional at all times. Amongst all of the challenges that he faced, I can never, ever remember him being negative. Even with his employees who wanted to file grievances against him or EEO complaints against him and all those kinds of things, he would never be negative. He would always just take it all in stride and get on his Honda. Bcccckkk! Off he would go. In that job I had the exact same rule that I had on the Hay Fork.

REINIER: Oh, really, I was going to ask you that.

JOHNSON: I was doing the exact same job that the district ranger was doing. Now when I went to the Hume Lake District, I went in wide-eyed and all excited and everything and noticed that there was a little resistance. I thought, Hmmm, this is going to be interesting. I was in a meeting one day and everybody was hating the consent decree. It was hate, that's the way it was, the thing to hate. And so they were all hating the consent decree. Really down on it. It was just discriminatory to white males, so they felt, and white males had been in the agency all their lives. They're putting all these women in these jobs, who don't know what they're doing. They're not talented and they're unprofessional. Just really cruel. Just really, really cruel. In my mind it was designed to discredit the women, and it was designed to make them leave, and it was designed to undermine them. And all the white males were doing this. All of the women were doing this also because they were siding with the men.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: "Yeah, I agree too."

REINIER: Which women were doing this?

JOHNSON: White women. All the women...

REINIER: ...Oh, really?

JOHNSON: ...were doing this. Because some of them were married to the men, some of them were married to them.

REINIER: Women in clerical and technical jobs or...

JOHNSON: All of them, especially in clerical and technical jobs because the clerical and technical field who are mostly women hate the other professional women.

REINIER: Oh!

JOHNSON: Because they see these women as being too overbearing; they should be where they are doing clerical work. We have so much discrimination within ourselves it's ridiculous. It's not just the discrimination based on race and all of that. It's all of this stuff that goes on. And so there was a lot of hate, a lot of hate between men and women and professionals and technicians and clericals towards these women. And me, I was one of them.

So I get over there and I'm in a meeting and this one guy--I can see his face but I cannot remember his name--said, "I don't understand why we have to keep hiring all these women and minorities. They need to learn to do this and learn to pull themselves up by the bootstraps" and da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da. And I just listened and I didn't say anything. And he just went on and on. And everybody was rolling with him. There was not one brave soul in the room who stood up and said you need to sit down and stop your hating. Nobody said that. Including the guy I later found out who they thought would have the job that I got. "You took his job." Somebody was brave enough to say, "You took his job. That was his job. He's been doing this job for 15 years" and da-da-da-da-da. "How do you figure I took his job?" "Well, he's been going the job" and you know all that kind of stuff. And I said, "I didn't take his job. If it was his job, he would have had it." "Well, you only got the job because you're African American, because you're black and you're a woman." And I said, "But I have it. It is my job and I intend to do it." And I said, "And furthermore, why do you guys always think that you have a monopoly on everything? I think that you are hating and that you are not skilled and that you're not qualified. If you were, you would step back and simply state, 'I didn't win this one, but I will win the next one.'" And the guy stood up and he said, "I never thought about it that way, Clara." And I said, "Maybe you should sometimes. I frankly get tired of hearing about how the white male has been beat up on." I said, "I don't want to hear it anymore. Nobody's doing anything to you." I said, "You have had all of the jobs all of this time and now it's simply because we want a job, you feel we're discriminating against you. Stop it!" That turned the entire district around. I was loved.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: They cried miserably when I left. Everybody came to the going away party. I thought nobody would come. Everybody came. And they all had gifts and things and said things like, "You really brought a different perspective to the district and we really appreciate it." I was loved.

REINIER: Fascinating!

JOHNSON: Great job! But I stopped the hating as far as I was concerned. Now a lot of the women could not deal with it. A lot of them quit. And because they didn't want to talk about it, they didn't want to put up with it. A lot of them just said, 'Forget it.'

REINIER: You did it by just speaking out.

JOHNSON: Yeah. Which is what I think you should do in situations like that. I don't think anybody needs to be beat up on. Or allow themselves to be beat up on because that's

essentially what you're doing when somebody's bashing you and you just sit there and take it and never say anything. You allowed it.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Because this person has an opinion, that doesn't mean that that opinion resembles you. If you don't deal with it, then you're saying it's correct. Don't call here moaning and groaning to me about it. Handle it. So I stood up from that standpoint and I never had to say anything to the entire district about it, just that one person. He got the word out. He got the word out. I didn't have to stand up and make any grandiose speeches at that district, none of that. He just got the word out.

REINIER: But were your duties there pretty much what they were in the other assistant ranger job?

JOHNSON: My duties were part of that where I was working and nurturing the employees because they were hurting. The other part of my job, what I focused on, was really what I should have been doing on the Hay Fork District and that is pushing programs. And then working on forest-level issues as opposed to just district level issues. Although I did a lot of the district level issues too, working on soils programs and all the natural resource programs, working on budget, working on human resources issues and things of that nature. So I had a broader view into the world, working now with commissioners and things of that nature, and getting out there trying to build relationships and partnerships and trying to get people to bring monies into the district. They were going to allow me to broaden my horizons. I was there and worked under a pretty good district ranger who allowed most of that.

During the same time too, of course, I got involved with the consent decree from the standpoint of you had to do a lot of tallying of numbers to see whether or not we were meeting all the objectives that was laid out by the magistrate, got involved with doing a lot of that kind of stuff. I also got involved with looking at who the consent decree was benefiting, white women versus Asian women versus African American women. I really got into looking at all that kind of data.

REINIER: But what did you find out?

JOHNSON: Of course, the data would support that mostly white women benefited. I don't know of any other African American woman who benefited from the consent decree other than myself from a professional standpoint. And I cannot think of any who benefited from a technician standpoint.

REINIER: Is that because they weren't in the pool?

JOHNSON: They weren't in the pool. Yeah, they mainly were not in the pool. There were no other soil scientists, there were no other hydrologists. There were no other planning officers or other staff officers. The technicians were not there because traditionally we have not...

[End Tape 3, Side A]

Tape 3, Side B: More on the consent decree—Living in Fresno, California—Working on detail as a District Ranger on the Green Horn Ranger District, Sequoia National Forest—Responsibilities that come with being a District Ranger.

REINIER: We were talking, on the other side of the tape, about who really benefited from the consent decree and about African Americans really [not] being in the pool in order to be able to benefit.

JOHNSON: And the consent decree, if I'm not mistaken, was designed to try and move more and more women into management, leadership type positions. And it was really focused around professionals, and technicians too, and I think there were some clerical fields where they were trying to get women into those fields also that were also dominated by men. Most of the administrative officers were men. So they were just pretty much dominating everything.

One of the reasons that there weren't, in my mind, a lot of African Americans available to benefit from the consent decree is because, I was saying, traditionally they had not majored in those fields when they went to college. They were normally in something else, and so they were not in the pool per se. That in my mind goes all the way back to our earlier heritage, where we tried our best to get away from those kinds of things because we were forced to do those, or our ancestors were forced to do those kinds of things. It was not viewed as being very positive when you were in that line of work, and so we worked hard to get away from that. Until this day it's very, very difficult. Although there's more African Americans now moving into the natural resources field, it's very difficult for us to find African Americans in those fields. They are growing in numbers, which is a good thing, and you can see the stats in the agency where you see more and more employment of them and Asians and everybody else. But they have not been there, normally. And I don't fault them for not being there; I don't fault anybody. The realities are they were not there. The agency did not recruit for them and so it's a Catch 22. So if you don't recruit for them you definitely will not have them in your agency. I lucked up on the Forest Service.

REINIER: Well, they recruited there at Alcorn.

JOHNSON: They recruited at Alcorn, yes they did. But I lucked up in my mind on the Forest Service because I never would have chosen the Forest Service as a career path, if it was left to me on my own. So either God made it so or maybe that's what I was supposed to be doing. I just didn't know it and I was open to it. So they were not there. That became a big bone of contention in Region 5. If there was anybody who could beat up on the consent decree, everybody beat up on the consent decree.

REINIER: I understand that.

JOHNSON: Everybody. I mean everybody beat up on it. As opposed to seeing it as a good tool to balance some things, they beat up on it. The white males: they're not qualified, you're taking my job, you should be ashamed, we're the breadwinners, we got to feed our families and you know. Okay. The rest of us have got to eat too. So okay! So I hear your argument.

REINIER: Well, they're getting at the single woman issue also.

JOHNSON: Exactly. I feel your pain, but, hey, that's the way it goes. The other, from African Americans it was all the white women are getting the jobs; they just don't care about us. They're ignoring us, and that kind of thing. Well, Clara, you've been around awhile and you're

just getting this because... Okay. I do not respond to that. From the Asians, they were not there. Most of them who could be moved were moved through the agency. Native Americans just were not there at all. Latinos, some were there, but they became extremely unified and vocal against the consent decree. And so, anybody who was somebody blasted the consent decree.

REINIER: Why were Latinos vocal against it?

JOHNSON: Because they were not moving in the agency, same reasons that the African Americans have.

REINIER: I see.

JOHNSON: They were not moving up in the agency.

REINIER: It was not benefiting them.

JOHNSON: It benefited some. When you compare who got the benefits between the white women and the non-white women, it definitely was in favor of the white women, simply because they were in the agency and there were more of them to move in the agency. The other ones, and part of their argument was, we would have been here but you didn't recruit us. And the excuses that you used were we can't find them. They're hard to find. They don't want to live in the small communities.

REINIER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Um...

REINIER: As you did.

JOHNSON: As I did.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: They don't want to live here because they can't find the hair products and the things that we need. All of that was true, but it was being used as an excuse not to recruit them as opposed to, oh, this is a recognition. Okay. Clara, how did you do it? You call home and when you go home on vacation, you get what you need and you bring it back. Or you go to some of the local stores and say can you order these products?

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: And you start putting the products in the store.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: And so instead of using those tools as insight, I do believe the managers within the agency used those things as excuses, and they still use those things as excuses, to not recruit as fully as we should be recruiting.

REINIER: Now did you hold any kind of a position with the consent decree?

JOHNSON: No. I did not and I'm glad I did not hold a position with the consent decree. There was no need for me to.

REINIER: So you kept up with these statistics on your own?

JOHNSON: Well, the consent decree would put these statistics out, and when we looked at them we could easily put the names of people in the block, especially when it came to African American. One. We knew who that was; it was me. Or one black male or one African American female, well, you could easily pinpoint those people, so you just knew. The answer's real easy. The consent decree was required to put out reports of this nature because we had to record all of this stuff. Plus we had to be a part of the upward reporting into their report so they could report to--how many reports can you say?--so that they could report to the judge, show our accomplishments.

I fault the agency for not moving aggressively. For dragging their feet, for not doing what the judge had ordered us to do, for letting it go where it went. Maybe that's what was supposed to happen; it was supposed to blow. I don't know. And if it wasn't, that is what happened. And so those are the facts as I know them. I used to carry all that stuff around with me and I finally decided it was time to shred all this stuff. And I got rid of all of that. But it was an interesting time. The agency had started facing change; that was one of the biggest changes that we had to face. Here all of a sudden we were saying we've been discriminating against women and the judge has said, "And you're going to change that." We were ordered by a court to change this and that is a slap in the agency's face. They felt it as a slap and I believe that's why they resisted it so much. You don't tell us, we're not a perfect agency, we know what we're doing and you don't tell us. And so it was that way and we came through it. We're still living it. We still get some of the hate mail.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: What I mean by hate mail, we get hate statements.

REINIER: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: Most of the white males would not come to Region 5 because they said all the jobs would go to women anyway. So none of them applied to Region 5. They still talk about it today. They will forever talk about it until all of them die off and we get a new breed through here. So there's still a lot of hate, and it's hate. I was going to say unhappiness but it's really hate around the consent decree.

REINIER: Did you know Chip Cartwright?

JOHNSON: I knew Chip.

REINIER: Tell me about him.

JOHNSON: I didn't know much about Chip; I knew of Chip. Chip and I met... How old was I this time, 20? 30? And I don't even remember what Chip was doing...

REINIER: He was the first African American district ranger.

JOHNSON: Was he?

REINIER: I believe so.

JOHNSON: Chip and I met on the Angeles National Forest when I became district ranger down there. We brought them in from all over and we were the host, my district was the host, to talk about a recruitment program that we had going on out there, and Chip came through. The recruitment program was a program where we were recruiting people from the inner city to come and work for the Forest Service. This was all after the '92 riots that took place there.

REINIER: Because I was going to ask you if you had been personally involved in trying to recruit people.

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. So we brought them in to talk to them about that. We brought them in also to talk about just urban forestry in general and Chip was at that meeting.

REINIER: I see.

JOHNSON: Chip and I never had any real interactions with each other. I know Chip became Regional Forester of Region 2. What happened after that, all I know is Chip was walking out the door one day. I don't know what led to all of that. I heard rumors about it, but I don't have any facts to support any of the rumors, and so I don't need to pass those on. From all that I could see he was a professional and he did a professional job. And leave it at that.

REINIER: Now you said earlier that you loved the Sequoia National Forest; it was your favorite forest.

JOHNSON: Yes. This was the first time, when I lived in Fresno, California. Sequoia is just inland from Fresno, California. East. East. Northeast.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: The ocean is west. Okay. Yeah.

REINIER: It doesn't seem right out here. [Laughter]

JOHNSON: I know; putting the roads in place is what I was doing, and the ocean. East, it's east. I lived in Fresno, California. Now what made me like the Sequoia was a lot of things. One, I had a very good district ranger, who was Roger in this assistant district ranger assignment. I, for the first time, owned my own house. I owned this really wonderful Victorian-style house.

REINIER: Oh!

JOHNSON: Had no furniture in it because I couldn't afford the furniture after I bought the house. But it was mine. It was all mine and I felt so good. It was an hour commute for me to get to work, but I felt so excited about going to work and about coming home to my bed because that's what I had! [Laughter] To my house. It was mine! And mowed my yard and got all kinds of allergies and got stung by wasps and everything, but it was mine and I felt so good. This was my first investment after all these years of working. And 28 or 29 at that time. When I would go to work, it was great. After I got through all the telling people off stuff about why do you think you have a monopoly on life! I would go into the mountains and the Giant Sequoias were there. Oh man! It's really a healing feeling.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Nobody should be able to go there and feel sad. Because you walk up to one of these big giant Sequoias and you are just in heaven. You are just in heaven! And then you try to look to the top and you can't because they're just touching the sky. And you truly fall in love with the entire surroundings up there. You have the Sequoia National Park as well as the Sequoia National Forest. Controversies galore! You're trying to work between two federal agencies to build relationships because we were doing two different businesses. The Forest Service is cutting; the park is not. The people love the park; everybody hates the Forest Service because we're cutting the trees. And they didn't want that. They wanted the pristine setting up there. And we were required by our agency to produce board feet. So we had to.

REINIER: But you weren't cutting Sequoias, were you?

JOHNSON: No. Well, yes we were.

REINIER: Oh, you were?

JOHNSON: Some. Some. Some. And we got into a big thing on that and the publics got involved with that and to us cutting any of the Sequoias. Yeah. Absolutely we were. The biggest thing there was the relationship we had between the Sequoia National Park and the Sequoia National Forest. The interesting thing about the whole thing though was nobody really knew the difference between the two agencies. We struggled a lot trying to identify ourselves as opposed to just saying we're the Sequoia National whatever. We're here to manage these lands and these are the different things that we do here. We cut trees, we provide recreation, we provide scenic views. You know, we provide visitors centers and all these different kinds of things. We provide wonderful lakefront experiences and those kinds of things. We spent a lot of time trying to find our differences as opposed to our commonalities. We would prescribe burn, where the park would not, two different ways of doing business up there. And the Sequoia National Park folks who worked there were extremely professional and so were we, extremely professional. They were really into history. Really into history and preservation, and it made their job real easy because that's the feel good side of everything.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Makes it real easy. When you start talking conservation, people don't exactly go, "Yea!" You say "preservation" everybody goes, "Yea! Life is wonderful!" But they had this gorge out there, and I forget the name of it, and it was 7,000 and some odd feet, no, over 9,000 because it was deeper than the Grand Canyon, according to the historians up there in the National Park. And we would go on the tours and things with the National Park and I just fell in love with the entire place up there. I was so unhappy to leave. I just knew I'd died and gone to Heaven. I was content. I brought my mother out and she loved it. Her favorite place, she said, "Oh, when am I going to get back out there?" I said, "Well, you need to fly." "I'll never get back out there." She's never flown. And will not fly. If God wanted her to fly, finish the story.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: So I just fell in love with it, very content, very happy.

REINIER: And you were happier living in Fresno?

JOHNSON: Yeah, all by myself. Just enjoying life, involved. Now this is the first time I started getting involved with the community that I was living in. I was into plays--me coming out--I was into plays. I was into going to different things by myself. I'd already learned to go to restaurants and eat by myself and be perfectly okay with it. When I first started doing this it was

like, hmm, everybody else is sitting here with somebody. But I learned how to do it. I would take books with me, I would take papers with me, I would do whatever, and then finally I just said, "I don't need these props." Just you got to eat, go. So I would go by myself.

Brent Roath, who was the soil scientist who used to work with me on the Six Rivers, had also moved to Fresno. So I would hang out with his family and sit around and talk with them. And so I was getting connected in the community. And it was moving so great and so easily and then of course, then I had to move. But I felt part of the community there. Getting involved with some of the issues of the community and things of that nature. Getting involved with the university there. Fresno State University [California State University, Fresno].

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Well, anyway, just had a great time living there.

REINIER: Now you said you had to move. You moved to become a district ranger yourself.

JOHNSON: Well, the assistant district ranger program was designed so that you had to move.

REINIER: Oh, I see.

JOHNSON: You could not become a district ranger in place, at least, that's the way it was designed. So I had to move. I did not want to move. I could have stayed in Fresno for a long, long time. I would go back to Fresno. I would go back to the Sequoia National Forest and work there. Absolutely, in a heartbeat.

REINIER: Was the program limited in terms of time?

JOHNSON: Um hmm. It was limited to two years. They wanted you out of it in two years although everybody did not follow through on that because we had one person stay in the assistant job for three, four, five years. And everybody used to moan and groan about it. Da-da-da-da-da. But it was limited in time. They wanted us out of those positions within two years. And so they would drill, drill, drill you. Expose you to what they thought they felt you needed to be exposed to.

REINIER: Did you have any details on that job?

JOHNSON: No, I did not do details. Wait! Did I? Yes I did. Yes I did. I did, did, did. I went to the Green Horn Ranger District on the Sequoia National Forest, in a district ranger detail.

REINIER: Oh!

JOHNSON: That's where I had my first district ranger assignment, and I went down there to do the detail. Janine. Janine. Janine. Janine. Janine Derby was the District Ranger. She was moving. She had just gotten another job and she was moving to Arizona at the time. She said, "Clara, would you like to come in and do the detail? This would be great. This is all part of your assignment and everything." And we worked my training plan and added that to it and I went down there as the district ranger. A great time. Wonderful people. Wonderful people. Had a wonderful time working in that position, just a fantastic time.

REINIER: How was it different, though, to be district ranger rather than assistant?

JOHNSON: You had the full responsibilities. As the assistant district ranger you sort of hung out. You really had no authority. You really had no decision-making power. You could be overturned by the district ranger although he didn't do that. Everybody saw you as the second person in charge, or didn't see you at all. Everybody focused on, you know, those kinds of things. But when you became a district ranger, you had the ultimate responsibility. You were then making critical decisions about how the budget was going to be spent, what programs were going to be, how you were going to design that program and which projects were going to be accomplished. Who got disciplined and who did not.

REINIER: Exactly. You were really managing the staff.

JOHNSON: Yeah. You're learning to delegate. You can't hold it all here. You're learning to delegate. You're not learning, but you're having now to delegate. You are now having to represent that district in front of all of your peers and the entire leadership team for the entire forest. So that's fourteen or fifteen, sixteen other people in the room with you now when you go to debate and position yourself. So you're having to do that. It was totally different, totally different. Totally different. The other thing that happens is, you're no longer friends. As the assistant district ranger, you're considered as part of them. When you become ranger, you're no longer considered part of them because you're the big bad one who has authority over me now. I never saw it that way. I still don't see it that way because I respect people. But it doesn't matter how I see it, that's how they see it. And that's how you're treated. And in order to overcome that, I don't know why, but I worked with them extremely well, extremely well. We got so much accomplished. We sat down and we debated so many different issues. Got a lot of stuff accomplished. A lot of good projects accomplished. One of the biggest things we did was, we were moving into a new office and that's a whole chore within itself. It sounds easy. Well, you know how it is when you just move your own house.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Try moving not only yourself but 50 other kids.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: Employees.

REINIER: Kids!

JOHNSON: And then you're having to decorate this thing. Decorate the office, make assignments as to who's going to sit where. People are having to agree to this and nobody can't get a half inch bigger than me. You've got to be kidding! Oh no! But you're having to make that decision. And so the forest supervisor calls me in and he said, "And I want this done and I need it done by July! And I want a..." What do you call it? A celebration. What do you call it? A home...home...home... What do you call it? What do you call it?

REINIER: Welcoming?

JOHNSON: It is all of that. There's a word. Open House. I want you to have an open house. Bring everybody in the entire community down to see where your new office is, and they ooh and ah and you feed them and make speeches and all. This was my first time having to stand up and make a speech.

REINIER: Oh my!

JOHNSON: My first time. All the other times, you know, I'm facilitating things and not necessarily having to make a speech. But this is the first time I'm having to stand up and make a speech, and I think, "Oh my...".

REINIER: How did it go?

JOHNSON: Went great. Went great.

REINIER: Sure.

JOHNSON: Went perfect. Went perfect. At least that's what they told me. I was just happy to get from up there! But we did it and did the ribbon cutting with the mayor and the city council and all of these different agencies and organizations that came.

REINIER: So you were working with the public a lot.

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Which is another part of the ranger's job, and the forest supervisor's job is very public oriented. That's our whole job. First of all, the lands are owned by the publics, by you. And we are stewards of that land. We try to manage the lands for its longevity, making sure that we're doing the things up there that we need to do. It's almost like gardening in a sense. At least, that's how I try to simplify it. Some of the scientists of the agency just goes, "What? We're chopping this down." Well, it's kind of like gardening. You go out to the forest and you look at it and you try to make sure that the trees are healthy; they're growing healthy. You're thinning them where you need to thin them, you're taking out stuff that doesn't need to be there, you're looking to see what diseases could possibly have infested trees or what trees have been infested already. We have all kinds of different infestations that take place out there. We're looking yet where we can put a campground so that the publics can come in and enjoy them and all those kinds of things. And in order for us to do any of that kind of stuff we have to ask you. Which makes our job so much harder. It makes it good. It's fun because we're engaging with the owners of the land, but it makes it difficult because everybody has a different idea about what they want done out there.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: And we're using our best judgment, our best science, our best professionalism to try to convince you that this is the best thing for the land.

REINIER: So how do you do that? Do you hold a public meeting?

JOHNSON: We do it in a lot of different ways. We do it one on one, where people will come in or in a group of people. That's why these couches are here because they're always in this room. Somebody's always here debating some issue with me. And my job is to listen to them and after I listen to them, engage in dialog with them and make sure that I'm clear on what their needs are. And then try to convince them that they can trust me, that I'm not going to do anything silly out there. And that you can trust me and that I know what I'm doing or that I have staff who knows what they're doing. And the other thing you're doing is trying to convince them that if they're providing something that's exactly the way you think it should be, that's great. If the two of you are differing, then you've got to try and work to mediate that. If you aren't able to resolve that, of course, once we put out a NEPA document, which is the analysis that we have to do, they can appeal. They can say, forget it, I don't like what you're proposing here. We don't think that's right and they can take you to court. And, as a matter of fact this forest just came out of court.

REINIER: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: Yeah. From 1997 until I got here, we just got out of court.

REINIER: Oh, my.

JOHNSON: It doesn't mean we're not headed back but we just got out. So that's one way that we try to work with the public. The other way is we have huge public meetings where people can come in and debate with us the issue. We don't necessarily like to have the debates because some people come in, they're very unhappy, they're very unruly, and they can be dominant in the meeting. But mostly they try to be pretty civil. We just use a lot of different methods to try and engage the publics and help them understand what we're trying to accomplish and make sure that we're all on the same page as we move forward. This forest in particular, because of this setting, we have more debate than any forest that I've ever been on, much more debate than any other forest. I did not know that prior to coming here. I probably would not have come if that was the case.

REINIER: [Laughing] If you'd known!

JOHNSON: Much, much more intense oversight from the owners. Much more.

REINIER: That's interesting because I've heard that California has a lot of concern and a lot of controversy among the public.

JOHNSON: They do! They do. Northern California all the way to extreme Southern California, they do. Most of the issues in Northern California from San Francisco inland north surround their timber program. Most of the issues south involve our recreation program.

REINIER: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: Yeah. Although that's not to say recreation is not significant up there in the north. But if you were to talk to somebody in Northern California, it is usually surrounding the timber program as it relates to wildlife habitat, wildlife restoration, those kinds of things. Fish habitats. Fisheries. Projects to restore streams and rivers and things of that nature. And of course there's more, that's just quickly generalizing. In the south, from the Los Padres National Forest, taking in the Angeles National Forest and the San Bernardino National Forest and the Cleveland National Forest, most of our issues are recreation oriented as it relates to people because we have so many people down there. Just L.A. County itself.

REINIER: And those are urban forests!

JOHNSON: Oh, absolutely. And that is exactly why they are urban forests, because of the huge amount of development that's taking place, just like here on the Chattahoochee-Oconee [National Forest] in Georgia, because of the number and intensity of the people that utilize those forests. And these people are coming from everywhere, not just the local areas surrounding these five forests. They are coming from everywhere.

[End Tape 3, Side B]

SESSION II, May 26, 2002

Tape 4, Side A: Becoming District Ranger on the Tujunga Ranger District, Angeles National Forest—Working with a mining company in the national forest—Building a relationship with owners of recreation residences—Difficulties in working with employees.

REINIER: Clara, at the end of the tape last time we were just beginning to talk about your time as district ranger at the Angeles National Forest in the L.A. area in California. How did you happen to apply for that job?

JOHNSON: Coming out of Fresno, California, working on the Sequoia National Forest as the assistant district ranger, that position was designed to be a training position. You're developing yourself to assume the full responsibilities of a district ranger. And so I applied for the position and was selected for the position and assumed the role of district ranger on the Angeles National Forest, Tujunga Ranger District. This district had approximately 200 employees. We had approximately 120-some thousand acres. Of course, I could be off the numbers a little bit. And it brought with it extreme complexities. The role of the district ranger is to oversee all of the operations that take place in that piece of land. What you're doing is you're making sure that you're managing those lands for the forest longevity. And what I mean by that is, for an example, on the Angeles National Forest, the Angeles is located in Southern California first of all. And it's located approximately 45 minutes or so from the city of Los Angeles. And of course it's surrounded by other huge communities or small communities, so it's truly an urban setting where this forest resides.

One of the key focuses on that forest is recreation. It's recreation. And the other thing that happens in that forest is that we get an abundance of use there. Tens of thousands of people come to recreate on this forest, just to recreate, because that's the primary focus on the Angeles National Forest, recreation. Providing recreational opportunities for folks. Those recreational opportunities can come in many forms. They can come in the form of campgrounds, hiking, ski areas, which I did not have on the Tujunga, but there were some on the Angeles National Forest. It can come in the form of hiking trails, sightseeing, people just driving their cars on some of the roads there. It can also come in the form of people wanting to utilize their motorbikes on some of the roads up there or having an off-highway vehicle experience where they have these three-wheelers, that they take off road and just drive in everywhere that they want to. What we have to do is design that recreational use so that the forest remains healthy and the people can continue to recreate. So we have to balance the use between man and natural resources and that's a hard thing to do within itself. But we try to do that. And I think we did a pretty good job on doing that.

What happens when you have so much use from the public is there's a tremendous amount of controversy there that's created. One piece of the public will want one thing, another piece will want something else or they'll want the same thing but they want it in different ways. So we have to try and assume the role of facilitator or convener, to try to get these people to come together and agree that, yes, you want the same thing, that you have a commonality here. Now let's figure out how we can move another step and figure out where you have other commonalities. So that was a tremendous amount of our job, doing that, doing that kind of work.

When I applied for the Angeles Forest, I'd always wanted to work on the Angeles my entire career. I don't know why; I just always wanted to work there. And when this opportunity came up, I of course jumped on it. When I got there to the Angeles, you quickly learn what the forest is all about and what challenges it offers. You have to learn to work with the folks who are there to support you because you're the new person coming in, and you have to win those people over to your ways of doing business, especially if they've had a very successful district ranger before them. So you have to come in and re-learn these people about yourself and get them to agree to follow where you want to go. And some of them, you know, most of the folks on the Angeles had been there fifteen years or twenty years or so. Normally when a person goes to Southern California they seldom leave. It's a beautiful place to be regardless of how crowded it is, how overpopulated it is. Everybody wants to go and work. A lot of people want to go and work in Southern California and so people just don't leave. So when I got there, I had a lot of challenges, and one was I was the second woman who had been district ranger on that unit.

REINIER: Who was the other one?

JOHNSON: The other woman's name was Christine [Rose]. Ah! I can't think of her last name.

REINIER: We can look it up.

JOHNSON: It almost came to me. If I remember it I'll come back to it. But she was the first female district ranger who had come and worked on the Angeles. Her biggest challenge at that time was a huge special use permit that we had there. A special use permit was designed around mining. A major controversy broke out between her and the mining company and then the relationship just died. And so when I got there, of course the people expected me to have the same position as Chris had, and they were pleasantly surprised to see that I didn't. One of the things they asked me when I first got there was, "What is your position on mining on National Forests?" And I said, "The agency recognizes it as a legitimate use." And so that was kind of surprising to them because a lot of times we take personal positions as opposed to professional positions. When you take a personal position you always have a tendency to run afoul of the people who are doing something. If you stay strictly professional, then you will not run afoul because you're then following the agency policies and those kinds of things. But the moment you say something like, "Oh, I don't feel..." you're in serious trouble. When you stay in a position of saying, "Well, the agency's position is this, my position is the same, let's see how that applies to this piece of ground, and let's work through all the difficulties," you'll be pretty much okay. So I was able to work with this guy. His name was Phil Gilibrand. I'll never forget him, a really big guy, really nice guy. Real soft teddy bear kind of a guy who really liked pushing you around if he could. But once you got to know him, he was very, very easy to work with. So I was able to build a very positive relationship with Phil Gilibrand.

REINIER: What was his name again?

JOHNSON: Phil.

REINIER: Phil...

JOHNSON: Phil Gilibrand.

REINIER: Gilibrand.

JOHNSON: Never will forget. P.W. Gilibrand was his initials.

REINIER: And what was his position? Was it a mining company?

JOHNSON: He was the owner of that mining company. He was the owner, the founder, everything, to that company. And it meant everything to him. So I worked with him. What he had to do was get a special use permit from us, and that is permission to do this mining operation out there on national forest lands.

REINIER: And what was he mining for?

JOHNSON: He was mining for apatite, magnetite and ilmenite. Some of these minerals are minerals that we use in paint, for paint thinners. And he would sell this stuff to various companies nationally and internationally. It took a lot of work. Took a lot of heavy equipment, required a lot of personnel, a lot of safety, all that kind of stuff in order to run his operation up there. In my second or third, maybe fourth year, his company started losing a tremendous amount of money. They started losing money because...I don't know if we were in inflation or what was going on at the time, but they started losing money. We started working with Mr. Gilibrandt to figure out how we could keep his business afloat. We didn't want him to go out of business necessarily and we did everything that we could possibly do to keep him afloat. I'm not sure what happened to all of that after I left, but I was happy to be a part of being able to work with a person, trying to help them stay in business, try to help them open up other doors to remain in business and that kind of stuff. And so I don't know what happened to him. Maybe I should give him a call just to find out. But that was just one major project, one of the largest projects on the Tujunga Ranger District. It was the largest mining operation in the entire nation, so the Tujunga got a lot of recognition for how we did our business with Phil Gilibrandt. Excellent. Excellent. We even got to a point where we were having to work with lawyers and everything else in dealing with his business. We'd have our attorneys meeting with his attorneys and just a breadth of experience in dealing with that kind of operation. And I'd never dealt with that before. Fortunately, I had a number one top notch support staff there, who had a tremendous amount of experience in it. So it was real easy to pick it up from my standpoint and make the appropriate decisions when I needed to make decisions.

REINIER: So who did you have? Did you have a mining expert?

JOHNSON: He was my resource officer. But one of his focuses had been in mining. Of course we had a lot of expertise at our regional office, which was located out of San Francisco, to support us and provide us the guidance that we needed. And that's the beauty of the organization. We had three levels of this organization, or four levels, the district's, the supervisor's office, the regional office and the Washington office. Each level is there to support the other level to make sure that we're providing factual information, we're providing needed information. They can help us from a legal standpoint or any position, will take on some great advice and counseling, those kinds of things. So, that's the beauty of being part of this organization.

Another project that we worked on, that comes to mind, was special use permits for recreation residences. Normally what happens on a forest that is considered an urban forest is we have a lot of private land intermingled with the National Forest. That creates a challenge within itself because a lot of the people who move up into the National Forest or move on their own private land up there, they've either been there all of their lives or they're moving up there to get away from the city. When they get there, they don't want anybody else there. It becomes theirs. They definitely don't want us to do anything, call it timber, logging, or any timber management, that's going to mess with their view. They don't want it.

And so we had this situation with our special recreation residences. Most of these folks had lived there; they had a special use permit from the Forest Service to have cabins on National Forest lands, and this was something that had been determined a long, long, long time ago. The Forest Service recognizes these cabins as legitimate use of National Forest lands, so a lot of National Forests will have cabins where folks come and get a special use permit and they rent them and they return. Some of them, like we had on the Angeles, in particular on the Tujunga District, start living there. And you're not supposed to live there year round. And when you get a special use permit from the Forest Service, you have certain conditions that you're supposed to follow. Of course these people didn't follow those conditions because first of all, this is my cabin. It just happens to be on National Forest land. You can't tell me what I should be doing to it and those kinds of things. And the cabins were supposed to resemble something rustic. Not a big mansion. Something very simple, a log cabin to give you an idea of what I'm talking about. Well, most of the cabins on the Angeles are huge, bigger than the average house. Some of them are two stories, and growing. One of the reasons this happened is because when people move into the National Forest and getting these cabins, they can afford to live there in Southern California because the Southern California is extremely expensive to live in. So when you move into a cabin and you're paying a nominal fee to the Forest Service, which is very, very little--very, very little, maybe \$500 a year--to live in one of these cabins and compare that to \$700 a month for rent plus food and other expenses and those kinds of things. So people move up there. And they forget that they're cabins and they want to turn them into their second home or third home or first home for that matter. And so you have that controversy that you have to deal with.

The other thing that happens is these cabin owners form an alliance with themselves. And that's how they usually work with the Forest Service. They'll form this alliance and they start making all kinds of demands. We want to be allowed to build roads here or we want to be allowed to build a cabin. We want to put a deck on our cabin. We want this and we want that. The other thing they do is they'll start making demands like, "You have all of these people coming up into the National Forest; you should limit the number of people that come up here." "They're shooting outside of my back door. You should stop shooting on the National Forest." Just anything that's contrary to what they want, they make these demands.

When I got there to the Angeles, to the Tujunga District, there was no relationship on that forest between these cabin owners and the forest. The forest hated them; the cabin owners hated the forest, and literally. I use the word "hate"; it's a very strong word but I can't think of a softer one to describe what the relationship was like. I spent probably a good 50 to 60 percent of my time rebuilding that relationship. Rebuilding it. With one guy there, who I will not name because I do not know where he is, who was just a nuisance. He wouldn't listen to anything I said; he didn't want to hear anything I said. He just knew I was there to undermine anything that they were trying to do with the cabin owners. He just did all kinds of things. I decided I've got to do something with this guy. And I've got to do something with these cabin owners. I've got to rebuild the relationship between these cabin owners and the Forest Service. So what I started doing is I sent them letters saying this is who I am, this is what I'm all about and this is what I want to do with you. Let me know if you're interested. Well, I had one person return a call to say, "We don't believe you; we've never had a relationship with the Forest Service. By George, you guys have always been mean and cruel" and whatever else. I said, "Well, you don't have to trust me. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't trust me. I'm just coming on; you guys don't know me. I wouldn't trust you."

So I called my staff in one day and I said, "The only way we're going to build trust with these people is if we start holding enough meetings with them on a regular basis." And I said, "And they are going to build the agenda. We're not going to build the agenda." And my staff said, you know, moan and groan. And sure enough we did. We started it. The first meeting we started it and all I did was just introduce myself and talk about what I wanted to do and said,

"Here's what we're going to be doing." Exactly what I told my staff. "We're not going to build the agenda. You guys got tons of issues that you want to discuss with me; put these issues up here." And said, "For the rest of the night..." And these were all evening meetings. They were between the hours of 7 o'clock and 10 o'clock at night. "You have issues. Let's spend the rest of the meeting just talking about what your issues are." And we took out a flip chart and just started listing issues. And they actually did it. They actually did it. And I said, "Now that we've listed all these," and of course that took forever to get all those issues up there. People wanted to clarify them and make them just right. But we worked through it. We were very, very patient and worked through it. And then I said, "Well, we have tons of issues up here; there's no way we're going to get through all of them tonight. This looks like we're going to have at least another two or three years worth of talking amongst ourselves." I said, "Are you willing to meet with me once a month, every evening, to discuss these issues until we get through all of them." "Absolutely," they said. So we started. And I said, "Secondly, are you willing to prioritize these issues for me so I can know which ones you really want to talk about. And then on top of that, if I can't address the issues, are you okay with me bringing in experts from somewhere else." And I said, "I don't claim to have all the answers but I can get these people down here who can who can address your concerns. Whether they're National Forest people, employees, or whether they're county employees or state employees, whatever your issue is, I guarantee you I will do the logistics as long as you tell me how you want to prioritize." They did it. I could not believe it. We built a wonderfully, wonderful relationship with those folks.

The one guy who just would not believe, who just refused to believe, stood up one night, he and another lady that I will not name--there's a bunch of them--and said something to the effect of, "Well, I think she's just trying to snow you guys and get you to a point where you're going to sign over your cabin and those kinds of things." And I thought, "Oh no, we're taking a step backwards here." One person in the audience stood up and said, "Sit down. We don't want to hear anything that you have to say. You don't speak for me. This is the first time the Forest Service has ever stepped out and tried to work with us." They shut him up, they shut him down, and he could not say anything else in any of our meetings anymore. So they dismissed him...

REINIER: Great!

JOHNSON: That's when I knew I had made some progress.

REINIER: Yes!

JOHNSON: And I had my boss come up with me the first two times, and he said, "Wow! I can't believe that you pulled this together! This is great! This is wonderful!" And I said, "I don't know how well it's going to go from now on" because we were early in the stages. But when I heard that as part of my second year of doing this, because we sweated it every night we went out there, my second year of doing this, and I heard those people shut this guy up, it was very, very, very, very pleasing. When I left, I got messages and letters from all of them. I couldn't believe it, saying we're so disappointed that you're leaving, now we've got to start all over again, we're really going to miss you. And here's my phone number, give me a call. You can stay with me any time you come back.

REINIER: Great!

JOHNSON: That was a plus. Now there were times of other challenges that did not go that nice. Tons of them, most of them internal, most of them internal. I don't know this to be a fact, but I think most of the challenges that I had with the internal people was my own style. My style is one where I just respect you right away, regardless of who you are, what your level is, what your grade level is and those kinds of things. I don't over-express concerns for you; I just

respect you for who you are. Like, for example, some people come in and they're always going, "Oh, you're so wonderful," you're so this and that. And I didn't do that on the Angeles. I was viewed as being cold because I didn't do that--that was the furthest from the truth--by the internals. That was the furthest from the truth.

REINIER: These are people on your own staff?

JOHNSON: These are people on my own district and on the forest. Because I didn't engage in that extra mother love, I guess you call it. And you can get labeled; it does not matter how great you're doing or how well you're doing within one area. You can get labeled by your own employees. At the same time, my employees were very pleased with me because I allowed them to make their own decisions. I allowed them to set the projects for the year. I allowed them to deal with the issues that needed to be dealt with. The piece that they needed was the mothering. And I was not equipped to do that. And I'm not sure that any leader should have to mother you when you come into a workforce. I really don't. I think a leader needs to respect you for who you are. A leader definitely needs to recognize you when you're doing great things and there are occasions when you do over acknowledge and over pat the person on the back. But you shouldn't be in a position to have to do that 24 hours a day. You just get worn out.

I'm going to make a comparison between how I was viewed and how my boss was viewed. My boss is Mike Rogers, one of the greatest forest supervisors I had ever met, who I got to work with as his deputy later on. Very, very nice man, extremely personable, extremely happy. When he sees you, you're the most important thing that he's ever seen for the day. Christian-oriented, just wonderful. The employees on the forest did not like him. I couldn't believe it. I could not believe it. They didn't like him. And I thought, why do they not like this man? He's everything that a person would want! Now I got along with him just great. He's everything that a person would want. On the other hand they were saying, "You're too cold." Over here with the boss they were saying, "You're too nice."

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: And these were the actual words. "You're too nice." "You're too cold."

REINIER: How do you win?

JOHNSON: You don't. You don't win. So what you do is you just become yourself and you let the chips fall where they may. Of course, people can make or break you based on the words that go off their lips. But when I saw that, when I saw that a man was as nice as this person, as wonderful as this person was, the communities loved him, the internals did not, I thought there's no way you can win. There is no way you win. So you have to just identify who you want to be and what you're all about and be that.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: And then let it fall where it may. And that was an interesting discovery for me. I had seen it other places, but I had never seen it so obvious there, so very obvious there. And this was a man who had a great tenure, had been forest supervisors on other forests, had worked in the Washington office, had just done a lot of great things in his entire life there. But couldn't overcome...

REINIER: Well, it sounds like there's a lot of backbiting in the Forest Service.

JOHNSON: There are a lot of very positive people in the Forest Service. There are a lot of very happy people in the Forest Service, and there are a lot of unhappy people in the Forest Service. And the unhappy people seem to overshadow the positive people and the happy people. It's almost like in society when something negative happens, people gravitate towards the negative as opposed to gravitating towards the positive things that are going on. A kid makes an A+ in school and they're just moving and they're just fantastic and, by George, they have an offer to go to Harvard or to go to Alcorn State University, and that's wonderful. You never hear anything about it; it's the parents and the relatives and the teachers who hear about that. What you hear about is the kid who is into drugs, who is not doing this, or who is going to fail this, that's what you hear about. And the same thing, I think, happens in the Forest Service a lot. The exact same thing happens in the Forest Service. I do think that there is some backbiting, but I wouldn't want to say that it's all of the folks in the agency who do that. I would like to think that what happens in this agency, and I have nothing to compare it with, is the same thing that happens in any other agency or private industry or anywhere else. I really do. But it does happen in this agency; I would be not telling the truth if I said it didn't happen, because it happens. Let's just say it does happen. It's done not in a positive way. It's done in a very mean way, and it's done that way to make sure that your career path is cut off.

REINIER: So people really do try to do other people in.

JOHNSON: There are some who do. Yes, there are some people who try to do other people in. And there are those people like I talked about like the Larry Cabodis and the Mike Rogers who were my boss and Dave Wickwire was his name, Dave Wickwire, who was my forest supervisor on the Hay Fork district. Just a tremendous amount of great people in the agency who work with you to try to elevate you. It's kind of a balance in the agency. Maybe, maybe not, I don't know. I've had a lot of great experiences, but I've also had people who are doing a tremendous amount of backbiting and the undermining and malicious work also. And that's unfortunate.

REINIER: How did you deal with that on your staff?

JOHNSON: [Sighs] I'm not sure when I was on the Angeles. I can talk to you later about how I dealt with a few on the Chattahoochee.

REINIER: Okay.

JOHNSON: On the Angeles I'm not sure if I designed anything to deal with it other than it just happened. I'm not even sure if I addressed the issue when I was there. And I don't think I addressed the issue there because I didn't think that I would probably have support to address the issue. I'm sure that I brought it up to my boss and others. But I don't know that I addressed it on the Tujunga District. One of the things I did was I stayed focused on what I was trying to accomplish on the forest. And that's what I stayed focused on, not so much the backbiting and all.

[End Tape 4, Side A]

Tape 4, Side B: Reputations in the Forest Service—Learning to establish priorities—Developing self-esteem—Being a “people person”—Assuming responsibility in a line position.

REINIER: We were talking before about how you dealt with some of these problems among the staff on the forest when you were district ranger.

JOHNSON: One of the things I want to describe and make sure that I said this right. When I was on the Tujunga District, I got this label of being cold, although I was very good at what I did. Everybody always just acknowledged it or was always calling me to head up some kind of committee or something. So I knew that it wasn't my abilities, but rather it was what I think people saw as me being a cold fish. In my mind they saw that as a weakness, as something they could go after. Because one of the things that the Forest Service had conned at that particular time was we were looking for people who are “people, people.” And I never quite understood what that meant. I would ask somebody, “What's that mean, when you say you're looking for people who are ‘people, people.’ What does that mean?” Nobody could really explain it. So it was one of those things that just got conned and then everybody had their own vague idea of what it meant but nobody had the definition for it. What I think they meant was, they were looking for somebody who was nice and kind and polite. Now remember, Mike Rogers was all of this.

REINIER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Nice and kind and polite and that they would follow him any and everywhere, who was nurturing and all that kind of stuff. Now I was all of this too, I think. I think I was nice and kind and nurturing and all that. I just think that I was. But for some reason, and I think it was maybe some of the decisions that I made, that may have led people to believe that. Maybe one time an employee wanted to drive a government vehicle somewhere and it was illegal and I said “No,” and it was a practice that was happening everywhere else on the forest. I don't know, but I made different decisions than some of my peers, whereas they would allow some things and I would not. And I always erred on the side of being legal. Now they erred on the side they called “risk taking.” I erred on the side of being legal because I didn't feel like I needed to be taking a risk with things that in my mind were illegal, so I did not. And so maybe that's where it started. I really can't say when it started or where it started or how it started. But I do know that it started. Once they decided that, they as a whole, the district and then the forest decided, “Yep, this is what she is,” the entire forest partook in that definition.

REINIER: Oh, really!

JOHNSON: Every last one of them. And we had over, I don't know how many people down there, but there were a bunch of people down there. Everybody partook in that definition. All the way to me not being invited to some of their social functions and things of that nature. And that was just pretty interesting to watch that. It was their way of ostracizing me. Now I didn't get into any of this stuff. I just said that's the way it is, so fine. But it was interesting to watch how that whole web was woven. At the same time people would come in and say, “By George, Clara, you're the best ranger we got here. You're doing this; you're just doing these things. I just don't understand what they're saying because I can work with you very easily.”

REINIER: So they would tell you what they were saying!

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, you could hear it. You could hear it, you could sense it in the air, you could see it when you walk into a meeting, you could see it when you ask a question about anything. But people would follow my lead. And so I don't know. I remember one employee on my unit who did not want to come to work and did not come to work and just missed day after day and I wrote her up. You know, we've got a job for you to do. We expect you to come to work. "You just don't understand her problem," they said. "Clara, you need to be more sensitive to her." And I said, "She needs to come to work."

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: That's as sensitive as I can be! If she needs me to change her work schedule, that's a whole another thing, but she needs to come to work. "You just don't understand." And then at the same time they would moan and groan and belittle this employee that they were in there going to battle for. And I just never understood the mentality of people when they did that. They took on this thing where they would just spread rumors about any and everything that they thought about me and they didn't have very many. I do think that's one of the reasons that they felt I was cold, because nobody knew me. Nobody knew me personally. Nobody knew what I was interested in and I didn't bother to tell them. At that time I felt my personal life was all I had and I was determined to hang on to my personal life because you have no life in the agency. When you're there, in a leadership role, especially these line positions, you're watched all the time, every little move that you make, you're watched. And so I didn't feel that I needed to share my personal life with people. I'd later been told, "Well, maybe Clara, if you'd just told us a little bit about yourself." And it's not that I held back. They knew I went to school. They knew this; they knew that. But they were not involved in my personal life. They, on the other hand, shared everything about their personal lives. Dating, when, where they went, the discussions, everything. But I didn't feel that was what I needed to do, not as a person. I definitely didn't sell that part of myself to the agency. At least that's how I felt, and I think that's part of what brought that cold identification to me.

And I don't do that till this day. I've been criticized by the employees here on this forest for not doing that. And I've said the exact same thing, "Guys, this is all I have. My personal life is all that I have. Now I have no problems telling you about my mother, my growing up. But I'm not going to tell you about my every day-to-day life." Where are you going this weekend? I don't get into that kind of stuff. So that's followed me, and it will probably follow me until the day I die because I just do not disclose like that and I don't think anybody should. Well, I'm sorry. I don't think that I should, let me keep this on an "I" basis. So I think that's where that came from.

And so they ran with that information on the Angeles and just really did everything that they could to, in my mind, damage my reputation. And I, on the other hand, just kept doing what I was doing. You've got to come to work, you've got to make decisions, you've got to do the budget. [Laughing] You've got to get out there and meet with the publics and embrace them. You've got to work with your members and all that stuff. You've just got to do these things. And so I continued to do that. And I think that was an irony for them. How could a person be beat up on like we're beating up on them, and still seem so confident and okay about herself. I've heard the exact same thing here on the Chattahoochee. "How do you manage to do this? How do you get through this, Clara?" Where everybody's saying this one thing, which may not be positive, yet you continue the same as if there's no problem.

REINIER: How do you do it?

JOHNSON: You simply decide that's what you want to do. You establish priorities for yourself, you decide what's important in your life, and you focus on those things that are

important. You don't focus on the negative; that's all you can do. If people ask you about it, you respond to it and you move on. You don't sit there and just indulge in it or have it for lunch, for example. You don't. And so that's how I do it. I move on every day; I position myself to recognize that anybody in a leadership role is going to be beat up on. That's the first reality that you have to get. And if you aren't, well, maybe you're just great or you're not doing something, one way or the other.

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: And I was telling somebody the other day, a young lady I was meeting with. She said, "Clara, you're aware of these people saying that you can't be trusted, right?" I said, "Absolutely I'm aware of that." I said, "I'm aware of everything that's being said on this forest or anywhere else about me." "How do you do it? How do you know?" And I say, "It's my job to know. It's my job to sense. It's my job to hear what you guys don't think I'm hearing; it's my job." "Well, how do you do that?" "You just do it. It's not anything I practice. You just do it. You just listen for what everybody else is not really saying. Or you listen at the words and you listen at the tones or you watch the eyes or you watch the coloration in their skin. You just see certain things and you just zero in on what a person's truly saying." And then you can deal with it. Your job is to not let that person know that you're aware. You go home and you say, okay. Oh boy, I'm aware of this, now how do we deal with this one? By the time you come in the next morning, you've figured it out and you've moved on. And so you're always staying ahead of the game. And it's kind of a fun game that I have, it's a fun thing."

REINIER: Well, I was going to say, is that hard?

JOHNSON: It's neither hard nor not hard. It just is. It's not fun. It's not anything. It just is.

REINIER: That's how you survive?

JOHNSON: Survive almost makes it sound as if you're always running. For me, it's a part of my life and how I just manage my life. That's how I manage my life. I'm forever trying to see what somebody else is not seeing. So therefore, by the time they see it I've already seen it. I can go ahead and deal with it when it actually happens. When the boss actually walks in and says, "Clara, people are saying these things," I can sit there and laugh and say, "Yeah, I'm aware." And he's going, "Are you really?" "Yeah, I'm aware." "Well I just need to tell you these things," he says, and, "Well, yeah, I'm aware." "Well, were you?" "Yes, I'm aware. I appreciate you telling me that. Let me talk to you about what I've done already to deal with those issues. Let me tell you where this is coming from and why it's here." But it's just a way of life for me, simple way of life.

REINIER: Since you've been in the line positions?

JOHNSON: I think I would like to say as a result of me being in line positions, but as far back as I can remember, even when I was a child, I dealt with life that way. I've honed my skills in that area as I've gotten older, but as far back as I can remember as a child when I was asked by some of my girlfriends in high school to smoke weed, and I said, "No." Because it's not what I want to do. And they were all doing it because it was the popular thing to do, and I said "No." And then I was conned as a misfit and I was labeled that way for the rest of my entire high school. From the ninth grade to the twelfth grade I was a misfit. I mean I just did not fit in; I was not to be dealt with. I became okay with that, even way back then, even way back then. Ninth grade. I can remember that. And I became okay with myself. It wasn't fun to be labeled as a misfit. I didn't rush right out and wear a banner on my shirt or a cape with "misfit" written

on the back of it. But at least it told me who my friends were, where my strength, my inner strength was, where my friends were not, and that I could rely on me to be okay. And so when I look way back then, that's always been the way I've done business, and even in this job today, I still do that. Just a strange thing, I guess.

REINIER: Is it helpful to have that trait...

JOHNSON: ...It is.

REINIER: ...to hold positions that you hold?

JOHNSON: And, you know as a trait, if you want to put a label on it, it's called having a high self-esteem, that's what it's called. Being okay with your inner self, knowing who you are, that's what it's called, having a high self-esteem. And I didn't always have one. You know instantly when you get it; you know instantly. And I knew the day that I received my high self-esteem. I was 26 years old and I can remember after lots of prayer and reading the Bible and going through just burden after burden after burden and I can remember the day all those burdens were lifted and I became okay with me. Twenty-six years old. I remember that. My esteem was much, much more than what it was when I was younger.

REINIER: Was that a religious experience?

JOHNSON: One could say it's a religious experience.

REINIER: But not necessarily?

JOHNSON: I think definitely religion had a major part in it, a major, major part in it. Because I can remember working every day with the Lord, working every day with the Lord. Work with me. Help me see this. Why is this? But I'm innocent, but I'm Your child. Absolutely. It was based around religion and so I guess it is a religious experience. I do know religion played a big part in it and just reading everything that I could put my hands on. I could remember reading lots of books by Chuck Swindole, who is a renowned minister, just all kinds of books like that on becoming one with the Lord and all those things and becoming one within yourself. People had been telling me all kinds of things about God and Jesus and I discounted all that stuff and said, "Okay, I got to find my own way." And so I did. And got to a point where you're on a one-on-one basis with the Lord. You're talking to the Lord; nobody's talking on your behalf. Nobody's fed any stuff in your head that you're just following because somebody's fed it in your head. You have made your own discovery; you've made your own linkage and that's what you're following. And once that happens, you can deal with undermining and backbiting and hate and all of those obstacles that are thrown at you. If you never become okay with yourself, if you never become okay with yourself, you will fail every time. And it's not so much as failing in your career, as much as it is failing within yourself, that's your fault.

And if I had to tell any young girl, and I really want to work with young kids, as I'm growing, especially young girls, I would work with them strictly on building self-esteem. Everybody has to do it their own way, but I would sure work them hard on getting them into that Bible and learning that and making their own way with the Lord and having the Lord to find how He wants to work with you and how He can deal with any obstacle that comes about. How you can actually sit there and laugh when people think that they're destroying you. And then you can move on. And then you go home and you say, "Oh God, I just went through another one of those! Do I have to keep going through these? I'm learning, I'm learning, I'm learning!" And you do. And you have to do it every time you meet another person. Every time. That's the

unfortunate part. Every time you have to do it. Every time. Especially every time you make another move you have to do that.

REINIER: You mean to another place?

JOHNSON: To another place, or just meeting a person on the street or whatever, you have to do it every time. Every time. And it's just remarkable. I'm always amazed that when I see people, like I was meeting with a young lady the other day, and I was doing her performance rating. Every thing that came out of her mouth was victimization. "They're doing this to me. They don't like me. If they liked me they wouldn't do this. They've always done this. They didn't do this with the white women and they're doing this to me." And da-da-da-da-da. And finally I stopped and I said, "Stop it. This is not about anybody else other than you. You have got to stop what you're doing or you're going to self-destruct. You are killing yourself. Nobody else is. You have chosen to be the victim. Nobody has made you the victim; you've made that choice. Until you decide to take ownership of what's happening, you will self-destruct." And I said, "You're sick. Since I've met you, you've gained at least 60 pounds; you've gotten this illness"--I won't mention it--"And I've seen these things happen to you. You're out more. You're in the doctor's office more and that's because of you, not because of anybody else."

And she said, "You don't understand." And I said, "Oh, but I do. I've been here and I've been there." I shared with her some of my own experiences and she said, "You're the only one who's cared about me since I got here." And I said, "So why would you think I would tell you something mean if I'm the only one who's cared about you? Why do you think I would?" I said, "You've got to let me help you. And I can help you by teaching you how to help yourself." And she left and she called me back at home that night and she said, "Thank you for meeting with me. I agree with you. I'm going to start working on it." I said, "It's not going to be easy. It's one of the most difficult things you can do, to learn to be okay with yourself; it's very, very difficult. Very difficult." The hardest thing I've ever had to do in my entire life and I work on it every day, every day because any little thing can send you in that negative victimization role, any little thing if you allow it, if you allow it to. So I have to work on it every day.

REINIER: On the Angeles do you think there was resentment against you because of the consent decree?

JOHNSON: [Sighs] Nobody ever said that. Nobody ever said that they resented me because of the consent decree. I think in the back of their minds, that's why I was there, because of the consent decree. Because surely they could have found a male who was much more talented in their minds, who could do this job much better, and who's had a career in the agency for 30-40 years. By George, he's just been waiting on the opportunity and you come along and you take the job. Surely there were those thoughts. Nobody voiced it. Nobody voiced it. If they did voice it, they voiced it through labeling me as cold and that was their avenue for saying, "See. We told you. It should have been a white male with this kind of experience and those kinds of things." So it could have been through that avenue.

REINIER: But cold is not in anyway suggesting incompetence, that's what's interesting about it.

JOHNSON: Well, it was.

REINIER: Oh, it was?

JOHNSON: Cold in their mind was a demonstration of incompetence because, remember, the number one criteria for getting hired was you were people oriented, you were a people

person. That was one of the criteria in their mind that I did not meet. So therefore if you were not a people person, you couldn't get us to follow you. You couldn't get us to agree with you. And it just ran the gamut. So that's the way they place it in their mind. So you can just define incompetence in a lot of different ways, lots of different ways. And it just doesn't have to be whether or not you have a degree in this or you have so many hours of natural resources management or you've marked timber or you know how to put gamines in for fish stabilization, those kinds of things. It doesn't have to be that way. It can be in any way that people define how they want it to be. And people do that in a lot of different ways. I watch it every day here, where they pick a soul out and they'll come to me and they'll say, "By George, I wouldn't do that if I was that person." Their own peers. "I wouldn't do that if I was that person." Hoo, I've had that experience. They're going to say yeah, [whispering]. You listen to that and you think surely you're doing the same thing to me. And so I dismiss myself from those people. But absolutely, incompetence is defined in a number of ways by a number of people. If they find something that they can stick you with, that's what they go after, and then they re-stick the hatchet on those words over and over and over again. Because when you go to the next job, one of the interview pieces is going to be, "Do you consider yourself as a people person? Give me some examples."

REINIER: So they've already heard the scuttlebutt?

JOHNSON: Absolutely.

REINIER: So they have that question in their minds.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. And it's a canned question that we ask people anyway.

REINIER: Oh, I see.

JOHNSON: So it's a canned question. And plus, these people who are interviewing you are going to call back to the unit where you came from and ask tons of questions about how you dealt with this situation, how did you handle this situation, how did you deal with the internal people, do the internal people like you, that kind of stuff. Oh, absolutely. Happens every day. Every day.

REINIER: Now did all this interfere with your ability to do the job as district ranger?

JOHNSON: Not at all. Let me back up. I said, "Not at all." I should say, "To a limited degree." It interfered from a standpoint of I took some of it personally because I could not understand why people wanted to be cruel. And so I would wrestle with that at home very much. I would wrestle with it at home and try to understand and make all the dots connect and just understand it. From a professional standpoint, my abilities to do the job, it did not interfere. I did the job, and did the job quite well, I may add. I balanced my budget. I made sure projects were identified. I continued to work with the publics. I was continuously on committees. I continued to do the things that I was supposed to be doing, but I wasn't happy. It made the job a little bit more difficult for me from a personal standpoint, made it much more difficult to deal with.

The other thing that happened is once you get labeled, people will then spend their time trying to go around you to get things accomplished through members of your staff. Then they'll call you and say, "Well, you weren't around, so I just went ahead and worked with this person." Just to get around you thing. And so I watched those kinds of things happen. So [snapping fingers] I quickly put things in place to change that. Things like, "Hey! Sally. Here's my cell phone." Sally is a made-up name.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: "Here's my cell phone. Call me on the cell phone anytime you need to work with me." Or an e-mail to all of them saying, "Guys, I'm not giving my staff the authority to make this decision. You're welcome to do staff work with them, but they're not decision-making bodies. So please contact me and we'll work with those kinds of things." So they did have lots of little things that they do to not have to work with you.

REINIER: Do you think that they're more likely to go around a woman, to try to use that on a woman?

JOHNSON: Oh, absolutely.

REINIER: I've heard that before, that's why I brought it up.

JOHNSON: I think they're more likely to discount women at the agency. Yes, they are more likely to. Women for some reason seem a little bit more vulnerable than men, because of tradition, probably, because of the American tradition. [Sighs] I've seen it happen so much to men also. I've seen it happen a lot to them, but I do know that it happens to women quite a bit too. And I can just have a conversation with a woman, another woman, and she will say, "God, I just don't understand these people, where they're coming from. Instead of working with me on something, they're working with my staff on this." And those kinds of things. And we take it from the standpoint of yes, because we're women. And that could be. But without having done the research I can't say for sure that's it. But I do know it happens; it happened to me. It will continue to happen to women. Until they're in the ultimate decision-making role like president of the United States or chief of the Forest Service or chief/head of this agency and then it will start changing, especially if the woman who gets in there is willing to take on challenge, willing to not just conform, is willing to make the necessary changes, willing to acknowledge them. Yes, these things happened to her, and "By George, I want to put a policy out that states you will not do this." So until it happens; it hasn't happened yet. At this agency or in the presidency, it hasn't happened. But until it happens it will continue to go on and on and on and on and on and on. But the Angeles did teach me a lot about those kinds of things...

REINIER: But the first time, you did the acting district ranger job, previous to that, but this is the first time you've really been...

JOHNSON: This was my responsibility.

REINIER: But as the authority figure in that line position.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. I had the ultimate responsibility there. I could go to nobody else; I had to rely on myself to make that decision. I could rely on a lot of other people to assist me in gathering data, but I was the ultimate person who was responsible. A person just brought that to my attention again here, when I was deputy forest supervisor in Mississippi, just a wonderful working relationship, people would follow me anywhere. It's great. I was the deputy and they picked on the forest supervisor. Well, you know I used to watch that and I would say, "Boy, these people are following me. Would they do this if I was forest supervisor?" And I know the answer is no.

REINIER: Well, you mentioned before when you were assistant district ranger, that then you were one with the staff.

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. You're not the ultimate head figure. You're not the ultimate person who has ultimate authority over anybody.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: When you're in that assistant role or when you're in the detail role, you just are not. And once you become the point man or woman...

REINIER: Person!

JOHNSON: The person! You're challenged and double-challenged and double critiqued or triple critiqued and triple analyzed. Every little thing, if you make any little misstep, it's criticized.

[End Tape 4, Side B]

Tape 5, Side A: Living in Los Angeles—Working with Opportunity L.A. after the Rodney King riots in 1992—Gardens in the Wonderful Outdoor World program—Working on detail as Deputy Forest Supervisor on the Angeles National Forest—Reorganizing the Angeles National Forest.

REINIER: Clara, we were just talking a little bit off the tape, and I was asking you if you were happy living in the Los Angeles area.

JOHNSON: I was not happy living in L.A. County. I wasn't happy because one, I didn't have my own house. I was renting again, and I did not like that.

REINIER: Did you sell the house in Fresno?

JOHNSON: I sold my wonderful house in Fresno. I wanted to keep it, but could not afford it, especially moving to the L.A. basin. It was just too expensive. So I wasn't happy for that reason. The other reason I wasn't happy was because I had to rent, which meant that I had people living on the sides of me. I had a townhouse and there was somebody else connected to me, so we really had no privacy there. I wasn't happy because there was no grass in front of the apartment. I remember getting out there and putting in a flower garden. The landlord took it over and made it even better. So I was happy from that standpoint, but I was living too close to people and I needed to be away. When I grew up, of course, we were always by ourselves, and to be that confined was not good for me. I was not happy because I was, I felt, being beat upon by the folks on the forest unnecessarily, without any reason. I didn't feel that I had any friends on the forest. Friends. I had acquaintances, but I did not have any friends on the forest. And so I wasn't very happy.

REINIER: Were you able to find another support group? Other people who were supportive of you?

JOHNSON: Yeah, there was one other district ranger--her name was Gloria Silva--who was experiencing the same things that I was. She's a Hispanic female, Latino female, and she was experiencing the exact same thing that I was experiencing. Gloria is, in my mind, extremely intelligent. We also had another Latino female on the forest at the time and her name was Peggy Hernandez, extremely competent, but was experiencing the same thing. Except they weren't being told that they were cold. They were being challenged on other things by the publics or whomever. It was just very, very difficult. The men who were there were not being challenged at all. They were perfect, they could do no wrong, they walked on water that God hadn't even made yet. So, they were held as the kind of rangers we were to aspire to be. And I didn't particularly like what I saw, but that's the way it was.

REINIER: You were there quite some time, weren't you?

JOHNSON: I was there for seven years.

REINIER: For seven years?

JOHNSON: I was there on the Angeles, I believe, for seven years.

REINIER: Wow.

JOHNSON: Because I wanted to stay there. Because it was a great place to work, lots of opportunities there, lots of things to get into. Things such as when the forest was asked to help with the Los Angeles riots in 1992, that was quite an experience there.

REINIER: Please tell me about that.

JOHNSON: In 1992 as a result of LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] being caught on film and a young man, Rodney King, who was African American, was beaten--at least that's what the tape shows--that he was beaten by these officers. They had this major trial and these officers were released and told that they hadn't done anything wrong essentially. The community who has no relationship with LAPD, there, for obvious reasons in my mind, because my brother lived in Los Angeles at the time and he would talk to me about things that they would do to him just because. And my brother is a good person and always has been. So these people were just very upset about the outcome of that trial and they started rioting and burning down businesses...

REINIER: ...I remember it well.

JOHNSON: ...some homes and things. The public's reaction to that was one of as long as they're in their communities tearing down their communities, so be it. So deal with your own problems. And in my mind they failed to understand that there was a bigger problem in Los Angeles than they were willing to take responsibilities for.

We were asked as a Forest Service agency to work with the communities and the community leaders, to try and employ some of the folks who had just lost their businesses and houses and some of the young kids there, and some of the people who had never left Los Angeles. And we did that. We had an operation called Opportunity L.A. What that simply meant is we have an opportunity to get into Los Angeles, into the city of Los Angeles and help those people who have been devastated by this riot. And have been devastated by the conditions that they've been living for so many years, conditions where they felt like they were helpless, that their cries were not going to be heard ever. Their cries were not heard, and, by George, the reaction that they got from the courts just said, you're accurate. We were asked to work with the community leaders to try to employ some of these people--young people; it didn't matter what the ages were--we were asked to do that. And we formed a committee and I was the co-chair on that committee.

REINIER: What was the name of the committee?

JOHNSON: Opportunity L.A. Opportunity Los Angeles is what it was called. And I was asked to co-chair that with one of the senior rangers there who had to train me--is how they said it--in this operation. And what we were asked to do was--quickly, very, very quickly--advertise a number of jobs, re-do the standards for hiring people and get people employed, and on board and working for six, seven, eight, weeks or so. I don't remember the exact number.

REINIER: Where did that instruction come from?

JOHNSON: It came from Washington D.C. The president asked us to do this. And then of course it funneled on then through headquarters and then on down to us. And so we organized very, very quickly. We used the incident command process to do this. An incident command system is a process that we use when we deploy to suppress wildfires. In it we have an incident commander and a planner and a logistics chief and all these different things, people who are really trained in putting something together really fast and taking action very, very fast. All of us play a role in that. And so we used that system to help us get organized very, very quickly. And

we hired, I believe, five hundred, maybe six hundred people, anywhere from five to six hundred people. I don't remember the numbers, but it was a large number of people that we had to have work for us.

What was interesting about that is several things: One, we for the first time went into the city of Los Angeles to work with the people there. Most of the people from Los Angeles, if you were affluent, you used the National Forest. If you were not, you did not. So these were people that we were working with who were not affluent at all, who had not left their neighborhoods, they had not ventured out. These were people who had been living there for all of their lives, their entire life, and they're so ingrained in that community that there was no other world out there. When they finally started working for us, we said, "Haven't you been here before? It's right next door to you." "No, we look out of our windows and wonder what's up in those mountains." They never ventured out of their neighborhoods to go and see folks up there.

So we hired all of these people. We brought them in and into a variety of roles. We brought some into the office to do receptionist type work, mapping, filing, gosh, just a number of things. We also brought some on board to put on some of our fire crews, some of our trail crews, working in our work center. Whatever jobs we had, we tried to make sure that they just mixed right in.

There were some interesting things that came out of that, very interesting things that helped me understand just how distant the races are, that they're not as nearly as close that we would like to think that we are. And it helped me realize that America has a long ways to go. We've made tremendous progress in the United States, tremendous progress, but for every piece that we've made, we have to triple that now or quadruple that because we have that much further to go. If we're ever going to get to a point where they're truly saying that every man is created equal and they will be treated equally, they will be given equal opportunities, I mean truly equal opportunities, and by that I mean access to the resources, the know-how that you will be included even if you don't know how to get there. You will be given the opportunity to get there and not left just to fend for yourself. Because most people don't just do that. You're usually hired by somebody, or they pull you up and say you can do this. Or you're in Harvard because your father was there and the professor knew you. Of course, you had to do good grades. But those opportunities and those in peoples' minds do not exist in the United States. They did not feel a part--they lived here--but they did not feel a part of it. It became very obvious. And I don't know if anybody else in this group recognized this other than myself. Because there was a lot of politics associated with this, just tremendous politics, because we had to show that we were doing something.

REINIER: Was this the [President William Jefferson] Clinton administration now?

JOHNSON: This was the Clinton administration.

REINIER: So [F.] Dale Robertson was now chief. [1987-1993]

JOHNSON: This was 1992. President Clinton was just coming on board.

REINIER: He was just coming on board.

JOHNSON: The [President George H.W.] Bush administration was the current administration at that time. So we had to do something and I thought what we were doing was the right thing. I got real excited. As a matter of fact, I volunteered. I'll do this. I'll lead this one.

REINIER: Uh huh.

JOHNSON: You're good enough to be the co-leader but not the leader, they said. Oh, well. Whatever puts me in the face of it, I'll take it. When these people came on board, we had to get them all signed up and everything. Get them hired and bus them in and all that kind of stuff because some of them didn't have transportation. They didn't need it. They were right there in their own neighborhood, so they could walk in the local stores and buy whatever they want--the over-inflated prices in some of these stores--just go and purchase whatever they needed. So they didn't need to go to some store up in San Fernando Valley or wherever. They just lived right there in their community.

I met some very talented people from down there; some very, very talented people lived down there. Young ladies who were just very gifted in computer skills, young ladies who were gifted as being receptionists, accountants, all kinds of gifts came to us. The way the riot thing came about, it tainted how people viewed these new employees that we had. We viewed them--and I'm saying "we" not necessarily meaning me--we viewed them as outsiders that we hired them for a reason other than employees. Like we would bring on temporary employees in the summertime. Well, what we do, is we welcome them. Welcome, welcome, welcome! But these folks, they had a stigma attached to them. They were hired because they couldn't take care of themselves. They burned down their own neighborhoods, obviously. They are mostly African American, and so they must be criminals and everything else associated with that. I say that and I'll share the reason why in a few minutes.

So we got them on board and there was complaint after complaint after complaint. The women didn't want to work with them because they didn't feel safe around them. The men didn't want the women working with them because they [the new employees] would abuse the women. The men didn't want to work with them because there was so much more work to have to do this. And it just went on and on and on. We got to train them, we got to do this, we got to do that. Just the normal things that you would do anyway when a new employee comes on board, but they made it extra hard for these employees. Now some of them we should have fired right away, especially one of these guys who would come to work and just spend all his time sleeping in the office. We should have fired him right away. We had one or two who were no jewels, so I make no exceptions for them. But overall these were very good employees.

One day we had one of the (white) females on one of the fire crews swear at one of the guys. She told him something and he took her off and he told her, according to the story I got, "You don't talk to me that way." And he swore back at her. Well, the men wanted to jump on this guy. They came running to me, and had a big meeting. "Clara, we just want you to know what this person said and you need to fire him. You need to protect us from these people." I said, "This is interesting." Which was another one of my reasons I got my "cold" label!

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: I said, "What do you mean 'protect us from these people.'" "Well, they were hired for this reason, and they were just this and they don't know this and they don't know the other." I said, "Your role is to work with these employees. That's your role. That's your job. And your role, young lady, is not to be swearing at these people. You don't talk to anybody that way." "Well, Clara, how can you say that? Why are you taking up for them?" "I'm not taking up for them. I'm simply telling you what I expect of you. I will talk to them later, but I'm telling you what I expect of you. No more, no less." "Well, you're just taking their side because they're African American." "Let me talk to you about what I expect of you. Here's what I expect of you. This is what you need to do. Never address their accusations." And they called the cops to come and pick these horrible people up. And so I went up to talk to these people and they were having a little going away party because this was their last day of work. I had to disrupt their party and really ruin it by saying, "Here's what's going on, guys. The two of you who've been

doing this and you've got to go. I don't know if you did it, but you've got to do this and you've got to do that." Ruined their entire party. There was a tremendous amount of hate associated with these new employees who came on board. Now some of them stayed on board a little longer, especially the ones who worked in the office.

REINIER: That's what I wondered, if people became permanent employees.

JOHNSON: Some of them did. Some did. Some of them, most of them did not. I would say, at the most, ten out of five hundred became permanent employees. Because once it was all said and done, they went back to their communities. One good thing that came out of it... Oh, a lot of good things came out of it. It employed people, got people working. It got people thinking about other things other than the riots and the situation that was going on. It also provided an opportunity where some young people, through another program, the Wonderful Outdoor World program, started growing their own garden. These people just started growing their own vegetables in their own neighborhood.

REINIER: What was the name of that again?

JOHNSON: Wonderful Outdoor World. WOW. And it's a program designed to work with communities, especially major metropolitan communities.

REINIER: A Forest Service program?

JOHNSON: It's a Forest Service program.

REINIER: Okay.

JOHNSON: And what they do in this program is they teach young people about taking care of their communities, about conservation, about becoming lawyers and doctors. In this one case, these young people started growing this garden in their neighborhood. They went in and they took out an old area that had been dilapidated. You hear about this all the time. And then part of you going, "This is actually true."

REINIER: Yeah!

JOHNSON: It was an old area that had just tires and all kinds of garbage. They went in and cleaned it up and they planted a garden.

REINIER: Lovely.

JOHNSON: And they started selling their vegetables to the consumers and started making money. They are now little entrepreneurs. They packaged their own, they can their own vegetables and things and they sell them there.

REINIER: Great!

JOHNSON: I don't take any credit for that at all, because that was something outside of what I did. But I was so happy to know that these kinds of things can come out of situations like that. So they sell their own vegetables and their own canned goods and things of that nature.

REINIER: That's great!

JOHNSON: They're doing pretty good.

REINIER: Good!

JOHNSON: They're doing pretty good. The last time I heard. I've not touched bases with them since I left, four years now. So I'm not sure about what's going on with that effort. But that was very, very nice. They're young, Latino, young Mexicans who took this on and made it very successful. So that's a good thing. So there were a lot of great things that came out of this effort. There was the negative thing and that was the racism that took place and the hate that took place towards these young people. That's unfortunate. That's why we're so very distant from each other. Unless we start really focusing on some of these domestic issues that we have in the United States, we're going to continue to grow further apart as opposed to growing together.

REINIER: I think so.

JOHNSON: I hope not, but I think so. Especially when people feel like they don't have access to opportunities. Absolutely. And they don't know how to manipulate the system, infiltrate the system so that they can become significant. And so, yeah, I think so. I pray every day that is not the case, but we all have a role in making sure that doesn't continue to happen. Hopefully, I'm picking up my piece of it by working with Cydney and the other little kids that I have around.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: But the Angeles [National Forest] provided in seven years a lot of great things. When I left the Angeles, I did not have a going away party because I thought I cannot stand up there and say all these great things when I'm feeling like none of these people are my friends. None of these people have my interest at heart, and I don't want a going away party. I was asked numerous times, "Clara, don't you want to have a going away party?" And I said, "No." "Well, do you not want to have it because you think nobody would come?" And I said, "Quite the opposite. Everybody would come because everybody wants to come and say, 'Clara, I forgive.'" That would be their way of saying, 'I forgive you.'" I said, "I don't need that. I just need to leave. That's all I need to do." They were feeling so very guilty they did one anyway.

REINIER: [Laughing] Well, was it good?

JOHNSON: It was fine. It was short and sweet because I said a few words: "Thank you all so very much. It's been great working with you. I am so excited about moving on to the next adventure, and I hope I'm successful there. May God be with all of you." And I left. And I've not looked back. Except to go to Mike Rogers' retirement party. Mike was, as I said, a really, really great person. Mike asked me to come in and work with him as his deputy.

REINIER: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

JOHNSON: Yeah, when his deputy forest supervisor got another assignment.

REINIER: So that was a detail?

JOHNSON: That was a detail.

REINIER: Okay.

JOHNSON: It started out as three months, turned into six months. And I said, "Mike, I can't stay on a detail forever."

REINIER: So when was that, that you did that?

JOHNSON: Oh gosh. Let's see, it was '97. So, probably the year '97 that I did that.

REINIER: Toward the end of your stay there then?

JOHNSON: Yeah, probably the last six months of my stay there.

REINIER: And somebody came in then on detail to be district ranger?

JOHNSON: Behind me?

REINIER: No, to take your position as district ranger.

JOHNSON: I had one of my staff just assume the responsibility.

REINIER: I see.

JOHNSON: So.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: So yeah.

REINIER: So what did you do then as deputy forest supervisor on the Angeles?

JOHNSON: My primary role there was to balance out Mike and to support Mike. Help Mike move the programs on the forest that he needed to have moved and to work with some of the difficult people on the forest. And that was interesting because here I was moving from a district ranger, moving into the deputy role, now I have full authority over all the folks on the forest. And people were very nervous about that. Couple of them came to me and said, "Oh my goodness, Clara, now you're our boss." Realizing the damage they had been trying to do and all this kind of stuff. And all the time one person who truly supported me all the way through this was Mike Rogers, all the way through, all the way. Never wavered. Now he may have wavered with somebody else, but when he was with me, he never wavered, always supported. He came to me and he said, "Clara, would you like to be the deputy here?" Now some people viewed that as him coming and asking me to be the deputy because he was trying to move me off of the Tujunga. They shared that with me. They said, "So he's trying to move you out of that and promote you into the deputy role." And I said, "He sure is a cruel person, isn't he? He shouldn't promote me! How cruel of him to promote me." And so I was promoted into that position and not competitively. I moved into it. We can do that legally; we can do that legally for a short period of time. And then you can remain in the position, but you go back to your normal grade after 120 days.

So that was my role for Mike, to support him, to help him move programs aboard, deal with a lot of the internal things, deal with some of the difficult issues there. The biggest piece of that was supporting Mike. That is what a deputy does. You support. You are not Mike. You support Mike. Although you guys are working equally as partners in trying to brainstorm issues. That's what I did with Mike. We would sit down and brainstorm all of the issues that are going on in the forest and talk about how we wanted to move forward on that. Get clarity of mind between

the two of us, and move forward on those issues and then proceed. And then he would move on to do some other things while I was doing this. And so that was my biggest role there. He would say, "Clara I have an issue with this employee, can you sit down and counsel with them and see if you can work through this?" I will do that. That's my job. If he would say, "Clara I need you to go and speak to this group." That was my job, so I did that. But we sort of divvied up the work and then tried to balance each other out that way.

The forest supervisor's job is a very difficult job. Without that person there who you can brainstorm with and talk about all the horrible things that you were experiencing and remain confidential, it makes the job that much more difficult. And the same with the ranger position, usually a ranger does not have a deputy on them so they're shouldering all that pleasant news as well as unpleasant news. They're having to work through each themselves.

REINIER: So you didn't have an assistant district ranger?

JOHNSON: Oh no, no. I did not. We could have used one, but I didn't have one. One of the biggest things I took on, when I was in the ranger job, was a reorganization of the entire forest there. Mike asked me to take it on. He said, "Clara, can you lead this effort for me? You're the only one," he said, "who can take this on and not have to worry about people beating up on you." And I thought oh, he sees this as a positive. He just doesn't understand how stressful this is!

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: So I said, "Mike I appreciate you." I said, "But this is not a good assignment, to talk about how we're going to re-organize the entire forest." I said, "That's not fun." And so when I continued with the deputy role, I continued with that assignment.

REINIER: How did you reorganize?

JOHNSON: [Sighs] Very difficult! Very difficult! At the time we were experiencing budget problems. We did not have enough money to support the staff that we had in place, nor did we have enough money to accomplish some of the projects or programs that we wanted to accomplish.

REINIER: So you're downsizing now?

JOHNSON: Well, I had to reorganize. And part of it was to look at whether or not we needed to downsize. And there are a lot of ways that you can do downsizing without impacting employees. You can simply say these are positions that we don't want to fill in the future. If these positions are encumbered right now, we will just wait until these people retire and then not fill these positions. Or you can take the more drastic approach and say, "You, you and you, you, you gotta go, after we complete a Civil Rights Impact Analysis and determine what our real true needs are on the forest of who's being impacted. We can simply identify people who need to go on a—a RAPS list is what we call it, and those are the folks that we're saying are surplus to our needs. And so we can take a lot of different ways to try and do this. We can do RIF [Reduction in Force]; we can do a whole bunch of things.

In this workforce analysis what we looked at--oh man, so many things--what we looked at was could we support five district rangers? We had five of them at the time. Or could we consolidate down to three? If we were to consolidate, who had seniority and who had to move on and those kinds of things. And so by my moving into the deputy job, it made it much easier for this district to be consolidated. Now once the employees on the Tujunga realized this, they all went, "Clara,

you can't leave. You can't leave." Well, it was self-serving to them. It wasn't because they necessarily wanted me to stay; it was self-serving for them because they didn't want to be consolidated with another district. We looked at performers and non-performers. We looked at budget, of course--how much is the budget--and we looked at our priorities and things of that nature. What we would do is we would go to every district and talk to all the employees and get their input and then put on the public meetings, internal public meetings, to let the employees know here's how we're considering your input. This is where we are with your input and all that kind of stuff. And we did all that. The employees were never happy. Nobody's ever happy when you're doing re-organization. Never. Because somebody is going to have to change something. In this case one of the decisions that came out of the re-organization was we will be reducing from five districts to three districts.

[End Tape 5, Side A]

Tape 5, Side B: Reducing districts from five to three—Managing the forest ecosystem—Accommodating recreation patterns of different ethnic groups—Dealing with crime on the Angeles National Forest—Dealing with fire—Forests that do not produce timber—The recreation fee demo program—Participating in the California Agriculture Leadership Program.

REINIER: On the other side of the tape we were talking about your re-organization of the Angeles National Forest.

JOHNSON: What I was saying is one of the decisions that came out of this was we decided to reduce a number of districts from five to three. With that, it meant we had to make some decisions geographically about how these districts were going to be realigned. We also had to make decisions about now that we've reduced them, what will their names be? Nobody wanted that to happen. None of the employees wanted that to happen. It took us forever to get them to a form of saying, all right, we'll accept it but we're not happy. They're now operating under this new organization. I left. That was my part of it; I left and didn't do anything else. I was happy to get away from it.

REINIER: [Laughter]

JOHNSON: Because it is a stressful thing to do.

REINIER: Yes, it's a very hard thing to do.

JOHNSON: The other thing that happens is, of course, you're not making any friends in this effort.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Not a single friend. So I didn't change my reputation by any means there, as far as that was concerned. But we reduced from five districts to three. We renamed the districts. The districts became the L.A. River District, the Santa Clara-Mojave District and the San Gabriel District. And they were named after prominent watersheds on the forest. Once they got the names, everybody sort of went, yeah, okay, this is real. This is actually going to happen. Yeah, makes sense. This is actually going to happen. What kicked in then was territorialism. Our district was known for its quality--quality facilities, quality work, quality everything. The district we were combining with was known for just the opposite. Lousy facilities. Leadership was lousy. It was just horrible. And so everybody started asking, oh my goodness, how do we get these other facilities up to speed? Well, what you're doing when you say that is just letting the other person know what you think about them and that's not building a very healthy relationship. So they had to work through all of that. The other thing they had to work through was everybody who was in the fire organization; we had fire management officers on each one of the units, the five of them. We then had to make a decision as to who was going to leave the FMO's [fire management officers] and who was not. And who was going to have the largest district and who was not.

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: And so we worked things out. There was a lot of anguish that went through that. All in all, I think we did pretty good with that whole reorganization effort. They have the

three districts now, they have the FMO's, they have their resource officers, they have their rec[reation] officers, they have all those things in place now. I was just talking to the forest supervisor about half a year ago. "Well, how are you progressing on this stuff?" And she said, "Well, now Clara, we've got to move to the next step. You guys did all that and when you stopped, everything stopped." And I said, "Hey! I left!" So now they're working on the other pieces of it, that is, finding the program, shoring up responsibility lines, and those kinds of things. Good luck to them. Jody Cook is the forest supervisor out there now, a really great young lady, probably doing an outstanding job. Difficult district, difficult forest. If you want some really good experience, go to Southern California, that's all I can say about it.

REINIER: Now it sounds like with your renaming of those districts, is ecosystem management now a part of the planning process?

JOHNSON: Ecosystem management was always supposed to be part of the planning process. I'm sure that's what they're using now.

REINIER: Were they doing that when you were there?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. Our whole objective again was to manage the forest's ecosystem. Making sure that the wildlife was healthy, the fisheries were healthy, and to balanced the needs of man and nature. Definitely that forest will never get away from that; that's their whole objective. The predominant challenge there is balancing man and nature. Very, very difficult. My district was probably easier of all of them, because on some of the other districts they had wilderness that they had to deal with, they had ski areas that they had to deal with, they had off highway vehicle areas that they had to deal with, tremendous, tremendous, tremendous workload over there. So I view me as being very fortunate. Regardless, there were always the people there that we have to sit down and talk with and negotiate with and facilitate and service conveners, in order to get them to a point where they understood the importance of nature and the needs and not overuse that area.

The other thing that I didn't mention down on the Angeles was on the Angeles there's a huge Latino use. Most of the folks are from Mexico. Some are coming in from El Salvador. And also we had a huge Vietnamese population there. Just like the Vietnamese population and the Mong population were prevalent users of the Sequoia National Forest, the predominant users or a good 50-60 percent of the users down there on the Angeles is Latino users. They bring an entirely different definition to recreating.

REINIER: To what?

JOHNSON: Recreating. In the old days there was the man and his wife and probably two kids and a dog who went. They used one picnic area and they used a grill and they were happy. They went off and they hiked in the woods and those kinds of things. When the Latino population came, they brought the mother and the father, the grandmother, the grandfather, every kid that ever existed that's a relative of theirs, and great, great, great, great grandfather, the great, great, great, great grandmother, their entire family. So it could easily be 20-30 people utilizing a small site. So we had to rethink how we designed our campgrounds.

REINIER: Oh, isn't that interesting.

JOHNSON: We could no longer just have one little tiny table there. We had to have several tables or one huge table. You couldn't have just one grill there; we had to have several grills and things of that nature. So that changed it.

REINIER: That's interesting.

JOHNSON: Yeah. And internally, we didn't adjust to that very well because we were still trying to design for what we call traditional users. These were non-traditional users as we coined the phrase. I used to always think, what is that "non-traditional user?" They're users!

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: So you adjust to the user.

REINIER: Exactly. And your users have changed.

JOHNSON: Our users changed. That's right. They're now Caucasian, Hispanic. Very few African Americans who were out there at the time utilizing the forest although there's a huge African American population there. And that was pretty much the users. And some Asian users.

REINIER: Did the Asians use the forest?

JOHNSON: They did. But I wouldn't say differently because their families were usually smaller. They may have done different things when they came there, but probably they're similar to the Caucasian users. The Latino users also did something different. Because most of them spoke Spanish--most of them understood English--but most of them would only speak Spanish in our presence, especially if we were giving initial warnings or ticket or something. *No comprende. No comprende.* You understand. Let's just say our bathrooms. Instead of using the facilities, they would use the floors. Or they would put stuff all over the walls, and we could never understand that. Finally we were working with some Latino employees or some consultants and we said, "Why is this? Because we don't have time to clean this mess up all the time." The reason was because in their country they didn't use toilet paper; they didn't use those facilities. They always used the ground or something. At least that's what we were told.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: We thought, "What?" Here we are imposing our American way on these people and making a lot of assumptions. So it taught us that we couldn't make assumptions. We really had to work with the Latino communities to understand what they needed. The other thing we had to do is we had to move to putting in bilingual signs or multi-lingual signs, or universal signs. Universal signs would be those signs that have a picture of a toilet, and it shows the lid opening, you're dropping the paper into the toilet. Or the lid of a trashcan open and you're depositing the [trash]. So we had to put up universal signs in order to help people understand because some of the Latino users literally could not read and they could not speak English. So we had to adjust how we did business.

And I see the same thing is going to start happening here because in Gainesville alone, the Latino population increased by 400 percent--huge increase. And mostly people are coming to work in the poultry factories and things of that nature. But we're going to have to move to do some of the same things. I've already started working with the rangers out there saying these things are coming; we need to get ready for them. I can still see the little resistance coming through that. It's just interesting to have déjà vu all over again. So those things were different things that we had to consider in order to meet the needs of all the users.

The conflict that I dealt with most was when, remember those cabin owners that we spoke about earlier? We had a lot of picnic areas and campgrounds in those areas and the Latino users would come right behind their house and recreate. They had a fit. "They can't be here! They're

starting fires! We're afraid the fires are going to get away." On and on, it just went on and on and on. "You need to ban them from the forest." "We can't do that," I said. "No, I am not going to do that. There's no need for me to do that. I will deal with them exactly as I deal with you. If you violate something out here, I'll deal with you as an individual, but I'm not going to paint not any culture any different in any way. You will all be treated the same."

REINIER: Fascinating.

JOHNSON: That was not what they wanted to hear. And they went all the way to the forest supervisor and said, "You need to have her do this." And "You need to have her do that." And the forest supervisor said, "No. She makes the decisions out there."

REINIER: And they're the public too. It's for everyone to use.

JOHNSON: Exactly, that's the whole point.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: The national forest is owned by everybody. It's not owned by a select few. A select few believe that they own the national forest and they try to dictate the outcomes of how we do business out there. And they try real hard to weed out some of the other ones who have not organized or in some sort of organization or committee or something of that nature. They try to exclude them from being a part of it. It is our job to make sure that doesn't happen.

REINIER: So the problems of the larger society, especially in a place like the Angeles, really are problems you have to deal with on the forest.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. Oh, absolutely. The other thing that we had there on the Angeles was a tremendous amount of crime.

REINIER: I was going to ask you about law enforcement.

JOHNSON: A tremendous amount of crime. People would steal a vehicle, bring it up to the forest, burn it up. Or strip it up there and leave the pieces. Law enforcement had to deal with that. Had to track the vehicle back to the owner. We had people driving too fast up there, running off the side of the mountains, killing themselves. Law enforcement had to deal with that. We had people who would bring people up and kill them. You may have heard about this case where this model was asked to go to the forest--right on my district--go to the National Forest, and they would take some shots. Instead, he raped the lady and killed her.

REINIER: I do remember that.

JOHNSON: Right there. All of that kind of stuff. Killings all the time going on up there. Or they would kill the people and bring them up there and dump the bodies. We were always finding bodies up there. Or take them up there. One incident involved a father who was having a dispute with his wife, brought his two boys up there, fed them Kentucky Fried Chicken. After they finished eating, rolled up all the windows, killed them. All of them dead. That kind of stuff we had to deal with. It adds a different complexity.

REINIER: So who dealt with that?

JOHNSON: Our law enforcement people had to deal with it.

REINIER: The Forest Service law enforcement.

JOHNSON: Forest Service. And we have great partnerships with all of the law enforcement agencies--L.A. County, the sheriff department, our law enforcement agencies, search and rescue. All of us work very, very closely together to deal with these kinds of issues. We have the same thing with our fire organization. L.A. County, whichever county you're in, we all have mutual agreements where we talk about how we assist each other and respond to each other's situations or fire situations.

REINIER: And fire is a huge issue.

JOHNSON: Very huge issue, very, very, very huge issue out there. They're all the time. And they're either by arsonists or God caused. And we have to have those kinds of relationships there because houses are intermingled all over the National Forest. We're not allowed to go inside of buildings and suppress fires. We can only deal with wildfires. So we have to have the relationship with the county and the city and other fire-fighting organizations, volunteer organizations, or the fire departments to help us deal with those situations out there. So partnerships is the name of the game out there. It's the name of the game.

REINIER: So do you get together and meet regularly?

JOHNSON: They do. Our fire organization meets with all of the fire folks because each year we have to make sure that we're in agreement on how we want to do things and who's going to have the ultimate responsibility when they arrive on the scene. Because we have to be clear on that. There cannot be any discussions about who's going to be in charge once you get there. You need to know these things before it happens. And so what we do is on a map we'll draw our jurisdictions and state if any fire happens in this jurisdiction, L.A. County will be the ultimate responder. If it happened in this district, the Forest Service will take the lead, those kinds of things. We all show up, but once we get on the incident we know who the IC [Incident Commander] is going to be. If it's the county, it's the county. And we're working together on suppressing that fire, especially if it slops over on National Forest lands or if it slops over on county land or city land. So those things are worked out way in advance, way in advance. We do the same thing here. But we do it a little bit differently here with our state foresters. We work with them on those kinds of things.

The crime is just rampant out there. Fires are rampant. Working with communities is a major need. We have a lot of people who are sick out there. We had prime opportunities, not that I got a chance to do this, but we had prime opportunities. Instead of having people try to recuperate in a hospital, they went out to the National Forest, especially if they have a leg injury or something, and let them hike and get physically fit again. There are tons of opportunities. I would love the day when I could connect with the pharmacy and the doctors and the nursing homes and entities like that, where I can say, "Instead of putting your mother in a nursing home, let her come out here and walk around." The older people, when we have brought them out, have just really enjoyed...

REINIER: ...Oh, I should say.

JOHNSON: ...the fresh air and the sun beating down on them.

REINIER: Oh, yeah.

JOHNSON: And you go into these homes and you see how they're just vegetating and dying. Bring them out.

REINIER: Were you able to do that?

JOHNSON: I didn't get a chance to do that. This is one of my dreams that I have, working with these different entities, just a dream. Not only do I have that dream, there's a lot of us who have that dream, we just have not made it happen yet. Now it may have happened somewhere, but I was not fortunate enough to make it happen on the Angeles. So yeah, all of those things that are a part of society, everyday living, is exactly what we have to deal with on the Angeles National Forest, almost to some degree on any National Forest. If I'd been up in Northern California when we were no longer producing timber for the timber industry and a lot of communities dried up, then a part of my job would have been to work with those communities and help them become economically efficient. We had one lady who did a tremendous thing in her job. She was working out on the Sierra National Forest and I don't remember her name, but just got in there and had the community rebuild itself, not around timber but around a whole bunch of other things.

REINIER: Now you weren't producing any timber on the Angeles, were you?

JOHNSON: Not a single board. The only timber we produced was for firewood. None of the Southern [California] forests produces timber down there. We have them, and we still have the same responsibility for making sure that they're healthy. By that I mean that the Blistered or some beetle isn't eating them up or something of that nature isn't taking place. But if we were to cut some of them down, nine times out of ten it was not sold to O'Neil but rather it was sold for firewood or something commercially to some people who were into gathering firewood and those kinds of things. Or we would sell it to people who were into making poles for fences and things of that nature. So that would be the only way.

REINIER: It's a very non-traditional forest in a lot of ways.

JOHNSON: [Sighs] Yeah. The one tradition that we didn't have down there was commercial timber sales; that's the one thing we didn't have there. Everything else we did have, and more. The diversity of what we had down in Southern California, to me, Northern California just did not compare to Southern California as far as diversity and complexity. They were, "Are you with me?" And that's okay. But now Northern California's having to re-think how they do their business, because they're not producing a lot of timber. They're having to re-think about the recreational opportunities.

REINIER: Well, that was going through my mind. The Angeles was really at the forefront of where a lot of forests are now going.

JOHNSON: The Angeles and San Bernardino and Cleveland and the Los Padres I think. And those four forest supervisors worked very, very closely together. One of the things that brought them together was the fee demo program that we have, the recreation fee demo program.

REINIER: Tell me about that.

JOHNSON: When I was on the Angeles, congress authorized us to start charging the users a fee. Before we were not charging the users a fee to come and to use campgrounds or hike or any of that kind of stuff. All of the entire nation got this authorization; this law was passed so that we could do that. When the Angeles and San Bernardino and the Los Padres and the Cleveland received their direction, they decided to unify themselves amongst the four forests. They developed a board and they created this business team to develop this program for them. And some of the things they looked at was how do we sell the tickets? How do we get these

people to pay for these things? How do we communicate that this is now a new law? How do we find vendors to help us sell these passes as we called them? Adventure Pass is what they called them. How do we get the employees to engage in this?

Because most of the employees were in opposition to this. They didn't want it. They thought that the Forest Service should not be charging these people a fee. They're already paying for this, they said, through their taxes and those kinds of things. In reality, the Forest Service receives very few funds from folks' taxes. But, you know, maybe you can build perception and don't build on reality, so you go for it. So it was as hard a job to sell this recreation pass internally as it was externally. Very, very difficult. Very, very difficult to sell it internally. Because the people, in addition to that one statement, they would ask questions like, "Well, what if we're robbed?" "What if somebody hit this?" Or all kinds of things, all the things that you would even think about, that I don't think about. The thing I think about is, "Oh, you have a new act? Let's figure out how we can make it work." And I don't venture off on all those other things. I just stay focused on what we're trying to get as opposed to chasing things that are insignificant in my mind but very significant in folks' mind.

So that Adventure Pass, that new law, created a lot of controversy internally and externally. Externally, the people had to adjust to the fact that they now had to pay for something that was free for almost a hundred years. "Why do we have to pay? We don't want to. You don't have anything here for us. All you got is a campground," those kinds of things. "We don't have to pay to walk on a trail. What do you mean we have to pay just to come on the National Forest?" And right now there's a major debate on the Hill about whether or not we will retain that authority. I'm hoping that we do, but if we don't, we'll adjust. I'm hoping that we do. But that was another one of those major things that we had to deal with when I was out there. Gosh, there's so many.

REINIER: Aren't there?

JOHNSON: There's a lot of things. If we talked for another two years I could probably come up with more.

REINIER: Anything else you can think of right now?

JOHNSON: Nothing as far as the Angeles is concerned. If I do, I'll jump back to it.

REINIER: But there were a couple of things I wanted to bring up while you were there. While you were there, you participated in this California Agriculture Leadership Program.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Yes.

REINIER: Tell me about that.

JOHNSON: The California Agriculture Leadership Program is a non-profit organization. It's actually called the California Leadership Alliance, but the program is the California Leadership Program. What this program does, it focuses on building future leaders in agriculture. And so typically what you would have is a bunch of leaders. There's about thirty of us in each class. And this is the 33rd or 34th class. I was in class number 24. What they do is they focus on building future leaders in agriculture.

REINIER: Did you get selected to be in this?

JOHNSON: Thirty of us in a class. What you have to do in order to make this class is you have to submit an application and then you have to go through a rigorous interviewing process before they would consider you. And I remember there were six or seven people in the room who were interviewing me. My application went through, and they literally dragged me through the mud in this interview. Why should we have you? Are you credible? And all those kinds of things. What can you bring? Why do you think you're a leader? Of the presidents, which one do you most resemble? All those kinds of things. And they asked me that question.

REINIER: What did you say?

JOHNSON: I had no clue which one.

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: But I figured, Clara, that's not the answer. So quickly I said, "Harry Truman."

REINIER: Good!

JOHNSON: Harry Truman.

REINIER: Uh huh. That's probably a good choice.

JOHNSON: Because I had been hearing so much about Harry Truman. Of course, we read about Harry Truman. It was not any of the other ones; it was Harry Truman who dropped right out of my mind. And that's what landed me this opportunity. So I said, "Harry Truman." And they said, "Why?" And I thought, man, I've got to come up with a reason! And they were genuine reasons. We had heard about his leadership. We had heard about his honesty. I don't know what all I said, but I said something. I knew I was in when the one guy said, "I agree with you 100 percent. I never heard Harry described that way before, but I think I'm going to capture that and describe him that way from now on." I knew I was in.

REINIER: [Laughing] Good for you!

JOHNSON: So I'm glad I didn't say anybody else!

REINIER: Yeah!

JOHNSON: I said, "Harry Truman." And I'm positive that's what got me in there. So I was in. I was in. And we go through this rigorous orientation; all thirty of us showed up scared. e...

REINIER: Was it down in L.A.?

JOHNSON: No. This was from all over California. It was people from all extreme northern to extreme southern, central.

REINIER: So where did it take place? You had to travel to...

JOHNSON: Did we travel to Fresno for our orientation? It was central and we traveled there. I was very grateful that the Forest Service said yes, you can do this, because this was two years of investment here for me. They paid my entire salary and all that kind of stuff. So the agency really helped me there.

REINIER: So is it a state program?

JOHNSON: It's a state program. It's a state program. And they really focus on leaders in agriculture in California. Only in California. Now if you move to California you can participate but if you're in Kansas or somewhere else, although they have a sisterhood with another agency in Kansas, you cannot be in that program. So you had to live in California and you had to be in agriculture; those were the criteria. Twenty-eight of the folks who were in the class were young folks whose families had passed on farms to them. So they were already groomed for how to grow this and to grow that and all those kinds of things. Two of us were in government. One was state and one was federal. I was the federal. And one was state. And government employees just are not looked at very favorably. I soon learned this from this class. But these were very nice people, very, very nice people in the class. You go to the orientation and they do a lot of this scary stuff to you, just scaring you to death. You've got to do speeches, you've got to do this, you're going to be meeting dignitaries. We're going to teach you how to use spoons and forks and knives and how to eat properly at a table. You've got to go and you've got to meet the members. You've got to learn how to shake their hands. When you go international, you've got to learn how to work with the NGO's and learn these cultures and all this stuff. And we're all going, "Oh, God, help me, help me, help me." Ooh! It's all in an effort to get you ready, to prepare.

[End Tape 5, Side B]

Tape 6, Side A: More on the California Agriculture Leadership Program—Dealing With Cydney as an infant—Traveling to Thailand, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Malaysia—Earlier trip Germany, Switzerland, and France—Taking Cydney on Forest Service trips.

REINIER: Clara, we were talking about the California Agriculture Leadership Program. You were talking about the orientation.

JOHNSON: Yes. They get us through orientation and the program is designed for two years. Every month, you take a week and you go to class. We went to places, for actual classroom settings would go to UC [University of California] Davis, [California Polytechnic University] San Luis Obispo, different universities, doing the classroom stuff. But in the classroom they talked to us about agriculture and how to market ourselves internationally, how the members [of congress] play a role in establishing our business in the foreign act, and how you become a lobbyist and all of that. Because in their minds, when you groom future agricultural leaders, one day one of us will be in the House [of Representatives] or in the [United States] Senate making decisions about agriculture. The more you know about agriculture, the more open-minded you will be about passing positive legislation to support agriculture. And it's true, it's just true, having worked up there, it's just true. In our first year we focused totally national. What we do is we go to classes; we travel to different locations within the United States. We travel to Michigan and work with the people there, all of the leaders with the Ford Foundation, Ford Motor Company. We went to Washington D.C. and met with the key leaders at the time. Newt Gingrich was in the house so we got to meet with him and talk with him. We met with Diane Feinstein. Tried to meet with Barbara Boxer but she did not come.

REINIER: [Laughing] Oh, Barbara!

JOHNSON: So, met with Dick Gephardt and tried to meet with the president of the United States but he was not there. We met with newscasters, and what's the guy's name? He does this show, A&E Investigations. But newscasters, people on television who you sit and watch every day. We tried meeting with people like Peter Jennings and those people, but we didn't meet with them. But the leadership of the Agriculture Foundation organizes all of this stuff for us. They really worked behind the scenes to make sure everything works out perfect for us.

REINIER: Fabulous opportunity.

JOHNSON: We had socials, oh, that was wonderful food. As a matter of fact, we all gained weight. We had lots of socials every evening with prominent people.

REINIER: What fun!

JOHNSON: It was a lot of fun, a lot of fun. We were not aware that all this stuff existed in the United States. Because for the first time now we're exposed to all of these prominent leaders, and the greatness, and talking to them about issues and how they're running their business. Getting recommendations from them on how they can do things differently, how we can do things differently and better. Then how we can become entrepreneurs. And how they work between governments, whether it's city, county or national governments. And that was just eye-opening for all of us. And so this was our national tour. In California, outside of California, different states, getting a different sense of how different states run. Mayors and just everybody you can think of we were meeting with these people. Then we had to go international. And we

traveled to five different countries. We went to Hong Kong, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia.

REINIER: On one trip?

JOHNSON: In 22 days we were over there, for an entire month. And then Cydney was definitely born at that time. Cydney was four months old when I took off.

REINIER: Oh, my goodness!

JOHNSON: Yeah, three or four months old when I took off. And she had tons of hair on her head; when I came back the child was bald. So, I couldn't believe it.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: But we went international. They were concerned that I was going to be miserable because I'd just had Cydney and all this. I said, "Guys, I don't do things like that. I will be fine. Cydney will be fine."

REINIER: Who did she stay with?

JOHNSON: I took Cydney--I did not leave her behind--I took her to my family.

REINIER: Yes.

JOHNSON: You always take your kids to your family. And so I took Cydney to Washington, D.C. because I had to fly out of D.C. anyway. I took her over to D.C. and she stayed with three of my sisters while I was over there. And they fell in love with this kid and didn't want to give her back when I came home.

REINIER: Oh! [Laughs]

JOHNSON: So I regained her. Once I made that decision to do that instead of leaving her behind in California, I knew I was okay. And so I did that. Cydney flourished and grew in a month. In a month.

REINIER: Yeah, well, that's a lot when you're that age!

JOHNSON: They grow so fast. They grow so very fast and change so quickly. When we were in Thailand and the various countries, there are certain things that stuck out in my mind. We met with all of the top leaders. All of the top leaders. Not their leaders beneath them, all the top leaders, we met with them. Many, many leaders of the NGOs [non-governmental organizations], women's organizations. When we were in Cambodia, we met with the women who were leading those organizations, or the women's organizations on behalf of people who had lost parts of their bodies as a result of our bombings. What was the guy's name? He just died.

REINIER: The land mines?

JOHNSON: Yeah, he was the guy who put all these mines out there and killed the children and families. He's the one who did all this horrible stuff and he lived out in the jungle.

REINIER: Pol Pot?

JOHNSON: Yeah. But he was part of an organization, what did they call themselves?

REINIER: The Khmer Rouge?

JOHNSON: There you go! Thank you very much. Khmer Rouge. So we talked about them and talked about how this man had dominated everything, exploited so many lives. And we went to this place that they had where all the skulls are of all the millions of people that were killed. It's just skull after skull, miles of skulls. And this guy, he kept all these things. Some real interesting things stuck out in my mind. In Hong Kong I got sick, and this is where I think I got all of my allergies and everything.

REINIER: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: Hong Kong, yeah, because I got a mold in my system and for a year I was not able to get it out. I just coughed and coughed and coughed and coughed. And it stayed with me for an entire year. And I literally had to just keep coughing in order to get it out of my system.

REINIER: Oh, my!

JOHNSON: So I'm not interested in going back to Hong Kong. Although Hong Kong is very, very beautiful, it's growing. Businesses are thriving there. The biggest thing that was going on with Hong Kong was whether or not it was going to return to China, the mainland. I think it was a year or two later. I'm not sure what happened with that because I didn't follow up on it. And if it did return to the mainland, how the politics would change because Hong Kong obviously is not a communistic operation. You can definitely see democracy all over that community, all over that city, that country. And to return to the mainland, we kept wondering, how will Hong Kong influence mainland China? Or vice versa? And so it would be interesting now to go over there just to see if there's been any change or what's happened there.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: We went to Thailand. This was my first experience. I thought we were pretty poor when we grew up. Well, I didn't think we were poor. Everybody told us we were poor. We thought we were pretty okay. But society told us that we were poor, and I said, okay, we must be poor. I didn't realize how poor a person could be until I went to Thailand.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: Growing society, but very, very, very, very poor. Very poor. High, high, high unemployment. Shacks and lean-tos and things of that nature. People fishing on the main river over there. Fishing on the main river. And not only are they fishing for food, but their houses, their homes, the shacks that they live in hang over the river. All their waste goes into the river and it's just a real big stench that's there. Just incredibly horrible. And I thought, my God. The little kids are running around begging for dollars and half naked. The girls have to cover up; the boys can run around naked as a jay bird. And I thought, well, I tell you, it just never stops. I saw the poverty there. Then you move into Cambodia. Oh, the other thing that I saw in Thailand was their street systems. It just was not logical. They would have cars and intermingled with bikes, intermingled with these carts that you get in and some guy is running down the street carrying you. All of this stuff is mixed together and there's death after death after death on that road, on the streets over there. When you get hit, it's just a normal thing.

REINIER: Really?

JOHNSON: It's just a normal thing. And if an ambulance comes and pick you up, fine. If not, they'll come when they come. So if you're not dead, you will be dead by the time they get there. Women who just sat around chewing this red stuff all day long and their mouths are really red. And then we of course moved on to Cambodia and Vietnam, the other two places that I thought were just devastated. When we got to [Viet] Nam, it was just real obvious that the Americans were still hated there. One guy in our class was a veteran. He had a hard time. He had never been back to Nam. Since he left. And he had a hard, hard time, very hard time, adjusting and looking at the slogans that were on the wall, "The Ugly American," and those kinds of things in Vietnam. And we also got a chance to go into some of the underground trails that they had created, which made it more difficult for us as a nation to defeat them or fight them. Made it very, very difficult.

REINIER: How interesting.

JOHNSON: And they were so short. We were almost dying not to be in there.

REINIER: The tunnels.

JOHNSON: The tunnels. We were almost dying because they're so very small for those people and we are much bigger. So we all walked through these things. I was just happy to get out of there. Literally, their houses and things were underground.

REINIER: Fascinating.

JOHNSON: And there's no way we, as Americans, could have found those people. There's no way. So that was pretty interesting.

REINIER: I should say.

JOHNSON: I thought it was very interesting because I had not heard about the Vietnam War from their perspective. I heard it from our perspective. And I never got a real good feeling for our perspective. And so when I was over there they had museum after museum after museum that talks to that war.

REINIER: Fascinating.

JOHNSON: We should take our kids over there to learn their piece of it. Not to side one way or the other but just to see how...

REINIER: Just to know...

JOHNSON: Just to know. Just to know. The interesting part about that whole country is the passport system, well, not the most interesting thing but another interesting thing, is the passport system. How we tracked our luggage, and how we had to fly in planes that we would never fly in over here in the United States. We are so very fortunate here. We prayed every time we went up. Asked God to get us down, get us home, get us out of this place. We will walk! From Hong Kong to Thailand. And the busses and things of that nature.

REINIER: Were you learning about agriculture all this time?

JOHNSON: We weren't just learning about agriculture although agriculture was the focus. We were learning about other countries, one, and also about how we need to learn to work with other countries if we wanted to bring our commodities into that country.

REINIER: How interesting.

JOHNSON: So, we had the NGOs and the vice presidents of this and the presidents of this and that and the other and those kinds of things that we were talking to.

REINIER: I see.

JOHNSON: And that's why we were given money.

REINIER: I see.

JOHNSON: Then we went on to my favorite place of them all, Malaysia. I would go back there in a heartbeat, in a heartbeat.

REINIER: Why did you like that so much?

JOHNSON: Beautiful country! It reminded me I think of the South. Green and lush. It reminded me of the big Mississippi River because we took this boat from one location to another. We just took the boat all the way across and just rode and the water was spraying on the faces.

REINIER: Oh, yeah, and you grew up on the Mississippi.

JOHNSON: I grew up there, but I never got on it.

REINIER: Oh!

JOHNSON: My mother wouldn't allow it, but it was just the fact that it was there. And then everything was so nice and lush and green, it reminds me of this part of the country. It was just very, very nice and the people were extremely nice. All of the people were very nice in all of the countries, but Malaysia I fell in love with. Most of the class fell in love with it. Each time we had to introduce people. We had to really cram the night before so we could stand up and do a quality introduction for these people. Because they got off on that. I didn't realize it until I went over to one guy--we were meeting with the Farm Bureau over there--I went up to this guy and I said, "Tell me about the Farm Bureau. Who is this guy? What's important about this guy? How do they like to be introduced?" And he said, "Clara, they think they're the most important people in the world, so you really have to drum it up." And I got up there and I remember saying something like, "It's a great pleasure to introduce the most prominent people" and da-da-da-da-da. "I present to you Mr. Da-da-da-da-da who is the most da-da-da-da-da."

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: And he loved it. He loved it! I thought, my God. Now just stand up there and say, "This is Clara Johnson and she's come to talk to you to sell."

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: He loved it. He loved all that extra stuff. "Oh, I've never been introduced so great!" Oh! Sit down! But God, that was good for a whole another hour. You really have to figure out who these people are and what makes them tick.

REINIER: Yeah, you really learn the cultural sensibilities.

JOHNSON: You are. So we finished that trip up and came back home. We all graduated in June of 1995, I believe it was--1995 or 1996, one or the other--and had a great celebration. The other thing they do is they teach you about the arts, too. And we got an opportunity to go see "Sleeping Beauty." Was it "Sleeping Beauty?" Yeah. Or "Beauty and the Beast." One of those two. And it's a live play; it's live. So very well done, so very well done. So they teach you about the arts. They tried to teach you about everything. Things that are important to nature, They work real hard to culturalize us.

REINIER: Fascinating!

JOHNSON: And I was very, very fortunate to be in that. I learned a tremendous amount. I keep all of my notes. All of us keep in touch. They always have a reunion. I cannot afford to go yet, but I will go one day. The class meets every year at a reunion and we all contribute to the organization, so that other young kids can come through. Now some of the people have gone to Africa and people have gone all over.

REINIER: I see. They choose a different part of the world.

JOHNSON: They choose a different part every time.

REINIER: Fascinating.

JOHNSON: I, of course, was trying to push them to take us to Africa. Everybody else wanted to go to an Asian country. I lost. I really wanted to go to Africa. The very next year they went to Africa in Class No. 25. So I called them up and I said, "Is there a way you guys could pay my way to go?" They couldn't. But anyway it was a great experience. I feel so fortunate...

REINIER: ...Oh, it sounds fascinating.

JOHNSON: ...to have had that. I would never have been over there if it hadn't been for this class. The only other foreign trip...

REINIER: ...And in that way.

JOHNSON: ...And in that way. Yeah.

REINIER: Yeah, I mean you aren't just traveling. You're meeting people and learning. Sounds wonderful.

JOHNSON: The only other time I traveled overseas--just on my own--was when I was much younger. I put a backpack on my back and I went to Germany and Switzerland and where else did I go? Got over into East Germany when it was East Germany at the time. I had some friends who were German who invited me over. "You have to come over. We've always come over to the United States. You have to come here." And I said, "Well, God, I don't know. I don't speak the language; I don't know. "We'll take care of you." So got over there and they did take care of me. They made it very, very comfortable. Got into France, was about four or five different countries I went to.

REINIER: Were you working for the Forest Service?

JOHNSON: I was still working for the Forest Service. I just decided to take off a month and then the following year I went over again, too. So I took off a month from work and just went over, and I went for the entire month. Out of all of those international experiences, the preachers stated in church today, once you go outside of the United States, you learn to love the country even more. You really do. You learn to appreciate what you have. We are viewed in the international world as very selfish people, that we take everything for granted. It's true. We do. I did not know that I was taking things for granted until I went over there and they pointed it out to me. We just waste money. We want something; we go get it. They wait and they plan for what they want. And the food that we waste. They consume everything on their plates. If they're not going to eat it, they don't put it on their plate. Just little things. We're very, very fortunate, very, very spoiled. Ask me if I'm going to give up my citizenship? Absolutely not.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: Never! We're very fortunate here. Very fortunate. The poorest person is filthy rich compared to the folks over there. I would never have thought that. Living in my own little world over here, even the people that I was talking about earlier who live in Los Angeles, who just live in their own little circle of life, we're very rich. Yeah.

REINIER: Good education.

JOHNSON: Cydney will be going overseas. I've talked to my friends in Germany about having her come over there and just live for a year.

REINIER: Fabulous.

JOHNSON: So that she can see that there's a different world...

REINIER: ...Fabulous.

JOHNSON: ...than what's over here.

REINIER: So let's talk about Cydney.

JOHNSON: Cydney is a seven-year-old kid now, my seven-year-old daughter. Cydney was born in 1994. At the time I was a district ranger. And I decided to have a young kid and Cydney is the kid that I had. When I was carrying Cydney, it was exciting because for the first time in my life, you know I'm 35 now, and most women have had their kids.

REINIER: That biological clock was ticking!

JOHNSON: I really knew that it was time to have a kid.

REINIER: If you were going to do it.

JOHNSON: If I was going to do it, I knew that was the time. I had not planned on having any kids in my entire life, not a single one. Because I thought, there were a lot of brats out there and I didn't want to contribute to that. But around 35 or so I decided, yes, I want to have a kid. And I did. When I was carrying Cydney, it was real easy. Very, very, easy. I remember deciding that you've made this decision, you've got to be happy with this decision, and it doesn't matter what anybody says. And I didn't care. Because it was my decision and, by George, I had--it was incredible--I just had everything lined out from A to Z. From A to Z. The day she

was to be born, how I was going to notify my family, the information I was going to share with them, her name and everything, I just had it all lined up. The day she was to be born and all this kind of stuff, I had had it all lined up.

REINIER: Did it work out that way?

JOHNSON: It did.

REINIER: Oh!

JOHNSON: Everything I had planned out worked exactly right. The doctor said she would be born on this day and I said, "No, doctor, she will be born on this day." Because I just knew. And sure enough, there she was.

REINIER: Wow!

JOHNSON: And the doctor of course, states, "Well, I don't remember telling you about it." Yeah, you did. Anyway, when Cydney was born, I thought, oh my goodness, this is going to be so difficult now to have to work and take care of a young kid. Plus do everything else.

REINIER: Plus participate in an exciting program.

JOHNSON: I never viewed Cydney as an obstacle. I never viewed her as a challenge. I never viewed her as somebody stopping me from being able to do something. I viewed her as an extension of me. Which meant, what I did, she had to do. If I traveled, she had to travel. If I ate this, she had to eat this. Whatever. She was just an extension of me, and that's how I viewed it. And that's how I view her to this day, as an extension, not a problem. And a lot of women get into thinking, oh my God, you've robbed me of this. And if it wasn't for you, you know, I've heard this too many times from other women. I never viewed her that way. Never have. I viewed her as a gift, first of all, and as an extension. So I decided, Clara, you know you will have to travel. You know you have to travel, how are you going to do this? I'm not leaving her behind. I have to take her with me. Because I was breast feeding and doing everything else. I thought, well, the first thing you've got to do--and I had this all lined up before--the first thing you've got to do is you've got to get a quality babysitter. I must have interviewed a hundred people. "Thank you." "Thank you!" Oh! And I ended up with a lady from India. Ranu is her name, a wonderful lady. I ended up with her. I was so glad because Ranu liked the kids. She took care of the kids. Every kid was important to her. She recognized their qualities. As a matter of fact, I thought this one couldn't walk. I said, "At fifteen, fourteen months, why isn't this kid walking?"

REINIER: Um hmm.

JOHNSON: Come to find out she'd been walking at the babysitter's house. The way I discovered that is I went to pick her up one day and I said, "Come here, Sweetie." And she crawls up, arms raised. I said, "Gosh Sweetie, you've got to start walking." And Ranu said, "Did you say 'walking?' Clara, she walks around here all day long."

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: I looked down at Cydney and I said, "Cydney, never again." Cydney understood right away. She's always been a very, very, very, very smart kid. She understood right away, and I said, "From now on I will not be carrying you. Get down. Walk." She started walking. I said, "I can't believe this! Good trick. I've been carrying around this heavy kid around all this

time and she could walk." But anyway I found Ranu, and Ranu would keep her from this hour to this hour. And what Cydney did for me is it put me on a schedule. Before, in all of my entire life, I was working fourteen and fifteen hours, sixteen, seventeen hours a day. I would go in, in the nighttime. I would get up at two o'clock in the morning. I'm in the office working on something, as you can see, working on something. All days, I'm in the office working on something. Cydney put a focus on my life. She said you have to organize if we're going to make this work. And so I had to organize myself. You can work these hours, period. You work 3,000 percent, and that's it. When you go home, you've got a kid to focus on, and so you focus on the kid. And that's what I did with Cydney.

Going to Hong Kong was the first time I had to leave Cydney behind. Cydney was three months old or four months old. And I made the decision to leave her with my sisters, whom I dearly appreciate and love. One of my sisters adopted a kid and she was raising her as a single parent. And so I knew it would be good because my sister knew what it took to feed them and all that kind of stuff. And my other two sisters were like kids, who still liked to play, so I knew she would have a playmate. And she did. When I came back from overseas, Cydney had changed, as I mentioned earlier. Lost all of her hair, looked like a boy. They gave her to me at the airport and I said, "Whose kid is this?" I didn't recognize her at all. But Cydney recognized me, and she just instantly gravitated back. So I won my baby back.

Over the next three years I traveled quite a bit. So I went into my account, and I'd saved up quite a bit of money. I would call ahead. I said, "I've got to travel." I cannot tell my boss I can't travel because they're going to start thinking, well, you're letting the kid interfere with this and da-da-da-da. I've seen that happen to women many, many times.

REINIER: Well, that's what I wanted to ask you, how this worked out, being a district ranger.

JOHNSON: Um hmm. I had to travel, which meant if I wanted to make sure Cydney didn't become an issue, I had to make all the arrangements and really plan ahead. So when I was told that I had to go to a meeting, for whatever reason, I kept wondering, "How am I going to make this happen? I don't know anybody in all of these places that I'm traveling to." Way out in the boonies here or in some big town here. And I called a hotel one day and I said, "Hey." Just by accident, I called, and I said, "I'm coming to your town. Do you guys have any babysitters there?" And she said, "No, the hotel doesn't have any babysitters but we have a nanny service. And they come to your hotel and they take care of your kids. It costs nine or ten bucks an hour." This is where my bank account went. It costs nine or ten bucks an hour and you just pay them. They are responsible for entertaining the kids and taking care of them. They're bonded. They're licensed; they're everything.

REINIER: Uh huh.

JOHNSON: And I said, "Wow. Nine or ten bucks an hour." I said, "This is a whole week." Whew! There just went that paycheck. But I did it. That's how I took care of Cydney. When I traveled, Cydney traveled. Cydney learned how to travel better than I did. The airline stewardesses and all those people on the plane loved Cydney. So while I slept, they would entertain Cydney. Well, where were they going? They couldn't go too far in an airplane. They couldn't run away with her. And they literally took care of her while she was in travel status with me. When I got to the hotel, I would interview the people. I would interview them before I got there. "Do you like kids? What do you like about kids? Have you ever kept African American kids?" And those kinds of things because those things were important. "Well, it doesn't matter with me." All the ones who said that are the ones who got selected. The ones who said, "No," didn't get selected, did not get selected. I didn't even give them a chance. Because their

response should have been, "What difference does it make?" That should have been their response. But it wasn't. So the other ones I got. Every last one of the ones I got, and I had many, many, many, many, many in my travels. Turned out to be excellent. Cydney loved them all; they all loved Cydney. They all wanted to adopt her; they all wanted to take her away from me.

[End Tape 6, Side A]

Tape 6, Side B: Moving to Mississippi as Deputy Forest Supervisor on the National Forests of Mississippi—Living near her mother—National Forests in Mississippi compared to those in California—Relationship with the State Forester.

REINIER: We were talking about traveling with Cydney on the other side of the tape.

JOHNSON: Yeah. Financially it took every dime that I had.

REINIER: Yeah. Constantly.

JOHNSON: I had saved up a tremendous amount of savings bonds, and just all kinds of savings because I knew I'd have to spend it. It sucked up every dime that I have.

REINIER: Yeah

JOHNSON: But it was worth it. It was worth it because it allowed me to bond with this little kid 100 percent. I would not do it any differently if the circumstances were different. I would not do it.

REINIER: Did you get any flack when you were pregnant in the job of district ranger?

JOHNSON: I did. I did. The flack that I got was from the men who wanted to take care of me. "You can't go out in the woods." "Why can't I?" "Well, we're going to be climbing this hill." "And? So am I! So let's go." So I got a lot of nurturing from the men. The women, I got very little information, very, very little discussion from them. But from the men it was mostly from a nurturing standpoint. I didn't get very much at all. If I did, I was probably either ignoring them or didn't care. I'd made a decision and it didn't matter what anybody said. So they probably said a whole bunch! You just don't know what they said.

REINIER: Uh huh.

JOHNSON: Other than that, that was the extent of it. Of course, they all wanted to hang out with Cydney or play with Cydney. I only took her by the office probably once in my entire time the remaining three years that I was there. So they knew her but they didn't know her.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

REINIER: That was part of your private life you were keeping...

JOHNSON: ...Oh, yeah.

REINIER: ...private.

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. Nobody needed to be involved with that. It was my decision and it had no bearings, in my mind, on my worklife or anything. People try to pull your private life into your work, but I've been very, very good at keeping them separate. Very, very good at that.

REINIER: By 1997 you decided to move to Mississippi.

JOHNSON: Um hmm.

REINIER: To the National Forest in Mississippi?

JOHNSON: Um hmm.

REINIER: And did you go there as deputy forest supervisor?

JOHNSON: Um hmm.

REINIER: Why did you make that decision and how did that come about?

JOHNSON: Cydney was the reason I made the decision.

REINIER: I wondered about that.

JOHNSON: Cydney was the reason I made the decision. First of all, I felt that I had done all that I could do on the Angeles National Forest and I needed something different. What really drove the decision was Cydney. I was still living in my townhouse, sidewalks all around. You had to go walk forever to get to a park and the park was right next to a street. And I wanted Cydney to grow up in the environment that I had grown up in. Plus I wanted her to get to know my mom a little bit and see if they could connect. It was like overnight. I called Cydney's father and I said, "I'm leaving." And he said, "What?" I said, "I'm leaving. I have to make this move. I have to go. You are welcome to come with us but I have to go. I cannot stay here. It is not good for Cydney." I said, "I need her to be in open space. I need for her to run. I need for her to be free, to run; I need for her to grow up a healthy kid." I said, "But the smog here is killing me, I'm not happy here, I don't want to do this job anymore." And it just so happened, when you say what you—God, be careful what you ask for--the announcement for the deputy forest supervisor came across the Internet. Normally I did not pay attention to any advertisements. Normally people would call me and say, "Clara, this job is being advertised. Why don't you consider putting in for it?" or something like that. Like Larry [Cabodi] and all those people who worked with me. This time the job came into my e-mail and I thought, Mississippi, they don't have a National Forest in Mississippi. Remember I grew up in Mississippi; I knew nothing about the National Forests; I didn't even know they existed. Did not know that the Homochitte National Forest is right next door to Natchez.

REINIER: Really!

JOHNSON: Less than an hour away.

REINIER: Oh, really!

JOHNSON: Did not know that. We were so confined in our own little world there with my mother. And I said, "Mississippi? All right! This gets me back home; this makes me meet my objectives that I have for Cydney." I put in the application and it took months before we heard anything. I put the application in and I went in to Mike Rogers, and I said, "Mike, call the forest supervisor in Mississippi and just see where they are with this job." And I said, "And while you're at it, say a few nice words about me." Mike said, "Clara, I can't influence the selection." I said, "I know you can't." I said, "But you could at least call and find out where they are with this." He came back and he said, "Clara, I made the call and they're still working through the process. I did put in a few good words for you, but I can't tell you when they're going to make the selection." It seemed like a month later the human resource specialist came down to my office--I was working out of our supervisor's office as a deputy there on the Angeles--and she said, "Clara, I need to talk to you." And I said, "Gosh, what is it now?" Because I'd just finished dealing with another issue on that forest. I said, "What is it this time." I said, "Please don't tell me it's

another issue we have to deal with." And she said, "Yeah, it is another issue that you have to deal with." And she said, "You have to make a decision as to whether or not you're going to accept the deputy forest supervisor job in Mississippi."

REINIER: Ah hah!

JOHNSON: And I screamed and hollered and carried on and danced and went, "Oh, thank you, Lord!" "Oh! Call them now. Do not let them change their mind. Call those people now and just tell them I can be there tomorrow!" But Mike came back into the picture and he said, "Well, Clara, I really need you to stay here and help me. Would you be willing to do that for a couple more months?" I said, "No, Mike." I said, "No! I've got to go!" I said, "I gotta go! I gotta go!" And Mike said, "Please consider staying." And so I called the HR [human resources] specialist back and I said, [voice sounding grumpy] "Mike would like for me to stay until this time, but on this day I'm out of here. I don't care what you say, I'm out of here!" And so he and I worked that out. I got my stuff all packed and got in my Volvo and I went home. For an entire week, I mapped out every step of the way, the trip that I was going to take. I had so many people call me and ask to go with me. "We'll drive with you, Clara. We don't want you on the road by yourself. We'll do this for you." People from Oregon that I had met, people from Washington called. "We'll travel with you because you meant so much to us." And that was good.

REINIER: That was nice!

JOHNSON: I didn't hear all this when I was there. But now that I'm leaving, it's almost like when you're getting rid of a guy, everybody has everything nice to say about you. So I didn't hear all this. So when I started hearing those kinds of things I knew I had made an impact in my stay in Region 5 and it stretched up to Region 6. And so that was positive. I went home and I thought about it and I said, "Cydney, all these people want to travel with me." And I said, "But I don't want to do that. I want to do this by myself." And I got the map and mapped me out all the way. And I said, "Cydney"--and she was three years old; she just looked--I said, "We're going to drive for eight hours a day. If we can do ten, we'll do ten, but we're going to drive an eight hour day and we're going to stop and we're going to go in a hotel." And I convinced myself that's what I was going to do.

REINIER: That's a lot.

JOHNSON: It's a lot of hours. But if you get up six in the morning and you travel, you're dying around 2:00 or 3:00. It doesn't seem like that much because you're flowing with the traffic. But if you're out there at night, it gets really laborious. So I mapped out the hotels. I called all the hotels. I called the Ramada Inn and I said, "Hey, I'm going to be traveling across country; I'm going from here, to point A to point B." And they said, "Well, why don't we just do it for you all the way through. We'll map you all the way through. We'll book you all the way through. We'll take care of everything for you. We'll do all of this for you." I said, "You guys do that?" And they said, "Yeah, we do this all the time." And I said, "Perfect." Line me out. And I said I'm going to be traveling eight hours a day, so if I'm traveling eight hours a day and it's this many miles to get there, it's 2300 miles to get there," I said, "estimate what eight hours is within each one of those." And they did and they came back with a schedule for me. And I said, "Perfect schedule" because it allowed me to travel six to eight hours a day. And I told them I had a kid and I would need an extra bed, a day bed and all that kind of stuff in the room, or a crib in the room. They had everything set up.

REINIER: Great!

JOHNSON: And I went, "Wow! All you had to do is ask!"

REINIER: Yeah!

JOHNSON: And my trip across country was wonderful. Cydney rode in the back and I drove. We looked at mountains. She could talk pretty good. "Mommy, look at this." "Look at that." And we stopped often and got out and just hiked around and looked at things, and had a great trip coming across.

REINIER: Great!

JOHNSON: And then we really wanted to get to Mississippi because we were getting tired then. And we pulled in and my mother was excited and the rest is history. So that was my experience in California. Glad I did it. Would I do it again? Yes. I probably would. I probably would. Overall, I had a very positive experience in California.

REINIER: Where were you located in Mississippi?

JOHNSON: I went there as a deputy forest supervisor in January of '98. I worked out of Jackson, Mississippi.

REINIER: Oh, you were in Jackson?

JOHNSON: In Jackson, Mississippi, out of the supervisor's office there, which is the headquarters, just like this office is the headquarters for all the districts for this forest. And I worked for Karl Siderits, who was the forest supervisor there. Most people describe Karl as eccentric, odd, weird. I describe Karl as, "Wow! Exciting! This is great! I've never worked for a forest supervisor like this!" Extremely people oriented. Extremely politically minded. He knew how to work the politics. He knew how to make things happen. He could get an idea and he could run with it and make it sell. And the employees there didn't like him. Again.

REINIER: Again!

JOHNSON: Very people-oriented, will do anything for you, make sure he rewards his people, takes care of his people, but they didn't like him.

REINIER: Uh huh. Why didn't they like him?

JOHNSON: They didn't like him because they claimed they couldn't understand him. When Karl thinks, he thinks very quickly, and he moves from Z to A. He has the answer and then he fills you in. Or he infers a lot of things, which I've been accused of, too. He infers a lot of things. For example, he'll say, "Gosh, it would be a good idea if we met with the mayor of Jackson tomorrow." Well, that's his way of giving direction. He's saying, "Make it happen." Or he'll say, "What do you think about that, Clara?" He's saying, "Make it happen, Clara. Get a meeting with the mayor of Jackson tomorrow." And you do it. Or he'll give lengthy direction or he'll make up another story in between, those kinds of things. He was a little difficult to understand, but I understood him perfectly. Because again, I understood my role. My role, again, is a role to support what the forest supervisor wanted to accomplish. And my role was to deal with all of the negative stuff that was coming to him before it got to him. And then I'm only briefing him on the results of that. My role was to make sure that the foundation was laid so that he could accomplish what he needed to accomplish. Whether it's meeting with a congressman, I need to do the staff work. I need to make sure that I pull these people together to make that happen. Whether it's a timber program, I'm pulling these people together to say, "We've got to put a timber program together so that the forest supervisor can understand the

decision-making space that he has.” And that was my role on all those things. And I did it quite well.

This was the one forest that I came to that I felt nothing. I felt absolutely nothing. I didn't care if I succeeded; I didn't care if I failed. I was just very neutral. I didn't care. I had nothing that I was trying to prove to anybody. And as I look back, probably the reason I stayed on the Angeles so long is I was still trying to prove something. I didn't have to prove anything. I felt free. I had what I wanted. I had my mother, I had my daughter, and I had a place that I grew up in and that I knew. I had the environment again that I was used to and that is open space. That's where we lived, in open space.

REINIER: So where did you live?

JOHNSON: Natchez. Which is an hour and a half away from Jackson, and I commuted every day.

REINIER: You lived with your mother?

JOHNSON: No. We have two houses on the property where she lives right now, two brand new houses, and I lived in one and she lived in the other one. We ate and everything together. I would cook, come over, and that kind of stuff. But no, no, no, you don't go back and live with your mother, no. I would not recommend that! No. No. No.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: No matter how close you are.

REINIER: So she moved to that house?

JOHNSON: She eventually moved to that house.

REINIER: She eventually moved to that house. She didn't do that right away, you said.

JOHNSON: No, she did not. She did not. She did not do that right away. She has moved to that house now. She was living in the little white house when I moved back to Mississippi.

REINIER: Yeah, the one you grew up in.

JOHNSON: Yeah, the one that I grew up in. I wanted Cydney to live in that house. The first year that I was there, from '98 until '99, Cydney commuted with me every day. She would travel with me the hour and a half every day up and every day the hour and a half back.

REINIER: You had a babysitter or a preschool?

JOHNSON: I had a school that I would drop her off, right there in the federal building where we were. And I would just drop her off there and go straight up to my office. Or go down and see her during the day or something like that, and go pick her up and take off. So that worked out perfectly also. And that took a lot of research to try and find those kinds of things because people don't share information with you very easily. You literally have to research stuff yourself and I did that. So she would travel with me. That turned out to be a good thing because she and I bonded even more. "Well, how was your day today?" "Oh I did this, I did...da-da-da." "Well, how did you do, Mom?" You know, those kinds of things. And plus we got to make friends along the way as we were driving back. We had this water tower that we named, this

tree that we named. And to this day when we travel to Mississippi, she'll say, "Mommy, there's our friend." That's the water tower. "There's our friend." Yup, there it is." So you create those kinds of little bonding things.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: But by the second year I was beginning to have to travel quite a bit, and I thought, okay, you're back into this situation again. So I was going to hire a babysitter up there in Jackson and move to Jackson. And then I said, "Clara, that's not the environment that you came here for." I need to be in an open environment. Jackson does not offer that. It's a large metropolitan community. Jackson did not offer what I wanted. Made a decision, you're going to move to Natchez. You're going to stay in Natchez and have my mother watch Cydney for me.

REINIER: I wondered if you would do that, yeah.

JOHNSON: I did that. So I enrolled Cydney into a Catholic school, a Christian Catholic School. They are Christian schools and Cydney loved it. Holy Family was the name of it, Holy Family Catholic School. And she enrolled in that school. All the teachers instantly loved her. She's always been a kid that's loved. I keep trying to talk to her about respect and being on good behavior and that's why people like you. If you have the opposite, you can forget it; nobody's going to want to be around you. And she's adopted that message. But the teachers loved her. My mother would drop her off every morning because my mother still worked at the time. And pick her up after school because my mother would get off of work about the same time she was getting out of school. So that worked pretty easily. The school was inexpensive, so I paid for her to go to school there. And the other thing it did was it allowed my mother to have an income, a real income for the first time in her life, because I was paying my mother to keep my kid more than the job that she was working on.

REINIER: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: And it was ridiculous. The same job she had been on all these years and these people had not raised her salary or done anything to help her. As a matter of fact, they had told her things like, "Well, your kids can take care of you," and those kinds of things. That's the abuse that goes on when you are a maid, and you're having to clean homes and all that kind of stuff. It's backbreaking work and they can use you however they want to.

REINIER: I thought they had to give Social Security.

JOHNSON: She got a little Social Security and she draws it now, but it's so minor. You can get it, but it's not going to be worth anything when you are older. Well, it's worth something. She gets a nickel or two. It's better than not. But I was very, very happy to be able to contribute to her financially. I paid her quite well. She used to say, "I don't charge any money for my grandbabies." I said, "I'm going to break this thing." Every week I got ready to pay her, "I told you, I don't charge any money to keep my grandbabies." And I said, "Okay, then what I want you to do is take the money and just give it to somebody who needs it. Why don't you do that?" "Well," she said. The second time, she started with the same story. I said, "I told you what to do with it. Just give it to somebody." I said, "I'm just going to leave it here on the table and you just give it to somebody. Somebody else who needs it." Well, by the third or fourth time, my mother was waiting for payday.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: I said, "I knew I could cure you." Because for the first time she could start buying some of the things that she wanted as opposed to what she needed. And I saw her start buying little things for her and stuff for Cydney. She could actually contribute to her grandkids now. It worked out quite well where she actually had a mattress now that was humped up as opposed to flat.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: She's still stuffing them in there!

REINIER: Yeah! I guess so. Oh my!

JOHNSON: So that was good for all of us. It worked out really good. Cydney was not a hassle. As a matter of fact, she was not happy at all when we left because she and Cydney were torn apart. Cydney was her buddy. They traveled all over town everywhere. So when I would get Cydney on weekends, I would say, "Hey Cydney! Where did you and Grandma go?" We would just be traveling, and Cydney would say, "Grandma went here. She took me here. That's this place, Mommy." I said, "She's been taking you all these places?" "Yeah, Grandma and I go everywhere." And she was. So Cydney was her traveling companion.

REINIER: So she really enjoyed her.

JOHNSON: Helped her grow and heal. If she felt old, she didn't feel old then. And so they worked out quite well. So that's how I dealt with the Cydney issue. To this day if I can take her with me, I take her with me. Now what I do is I pay a babysitter to keep her or one of my sisters will come over if they have the days off and keep her or something like that. Found a really good babysitter to help me out here who's a Christian and who's raising a kid of her own now. We go to the same church and she's really involved with the church. And I've watched her mannerisms and Cydney enjoys being over there, so I know it's a good situation.

REINIER: How were the national forests different in Mississippi than in California? What issues were you involved in?

JOHNSON: Pretty much the same issues. The topography was different. In Mississippi the topography is all flat. In California everything is a mountain. And real mountains, 7,000 feet elevation. Here, well, it's not 7,000 feet. Lots of flat lands there. One different issue that we had in Mississippi was we had two key things. Let me back up. The similarities were the programs that we had, recreation programs, soil/water programs, fisheries programs, wildlife biologist, wildlife programs, timber programs, those things are similar. The differences that we had here were on one of our districts which was the Delta National Forest, one of the things... Let me back up again. In Mississippi you have the National Forests in Mississippi, which means that there's more than one forest in Mississippi, but there's only one supervisor for that National Forest.

REINIER: So it's statewide.

JOHNSON: It's statewide. The forests are statewide but you have one forest supervisor. Every state down here is like that. Every state down here is like that. The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest is administered by one forest supervisor.

REINIER: So you're it in Georgia.

JOHNSON: I'm it in Georgia.

REINIER: I see.

JOHNSON: In Mississippi we have six national forests there, but under one leader.

REINIER: Wow.

JOHNSON: In California, that is not the case.

REINIER: No.

JOHNSON: That is not the case. You have one national forest on a national forest.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: The Angeles National Forest. One national forest. The San Bernardino. One national forest. And so it took me a long time to adjust to that.

REINIER: I guess so.

JOHNSON: Because I kept thinking the Homochitte National Forest, what are you? Are you a forest supervisor or are you a district ranger? Well, they're treated like rangers but they have their own national forest. They're under the guise of one forest supervisor and it's administered the same way that a forest supervisor would administer districts, for example, on the Angeles. Little confusing for me. It took me a couple of months or so. Whew! Got it!

REINIER: Isn't that an awful lot of responsibility for the supervisor's office?

JOHNSON: There are three different things that I've come from, two to three. One of the things that's different is the relationship that we have with the state forester here. The state forester is the chief forester for the entire state. And the state forester is like king here. Now when you interview [Leigh] Beck...

REINIER: Leigh Beck.

JOHNSON: Leigh. You interview her, she'll talk to you more about the role of a state forester. And it was very different out there than we have it here. As a matter of fact, I had not heard of a state forester in California. I didn't hear about a state forester until I came to the South. The state forester is like a president of the United States for their state. They are very prominent people. They're lobbyists. They're just very prominent. If you are to be successful, you have to have a successful relationship with the state forester. So they are the man. They are the man because there are no women state foresters. They're key to things here. Karl and I didn't quite understand that...

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: ...in Mississippi.

REINIER: We were both very vision oriented. We were both very, "Let's get it down and let's just make it happen" without having to coordinate with the state forester. So when we had an idea, we said, "State forester, here's our idea," and we moved on it. We didn't say, "State forester, why don't you come along with us and build this relationship and buy into this." Although we tried a little bit and moved. Caused a lot of rough. Karl was right. Caused a lot of

rough. The regional office didn't like us for that, for causing that rough between the state forester and the forest.

REINIER: The regional office?

JOHNSON: The regional office here in Atlanta.

REINIER: I see. So the regional office is for several states?

JOHNSON: The regional forester oversees seventeen national forests down here including Puerto Rico. Sixteen or seventeen, including Puerto Rico.

REINIER: So it's very big.

JOHNSON: So he has sixteen or seventeen of us who report directly to him. So yes, his land base extends all the way from Texas, takes us all in and goes up to Kentucky, picks up Virginia.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: And come back down, hit Puerto Rico, Florida, and reconnects.

REINIER: That's quite a shift in conceptualization from Region 5?

JOHNSON: Region 5 has all of California and Hawaii. That's it. Region 6 has Washington and Oregon. That's it. Within Region 5, there's seventeen or eighteen national forests.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: So he's got the same amount of responsibility. We may or may not have more land base. But he's got the exact equivalent responsibility.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Now in Region 6 it may be the same. It may be seventeen or eighteen national forests. We just have more states. And that makes it very complex.

REINIER: And each one of those states has a forester?

JOHNSON: Each one of those states has a forest supervisor and they have a state forester.

REINIER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Each one of them. And each one of us has to have excellent relationships with the state foresters. We sneeze, they ask, "Have you talked to the state forester or anything?" God! Let me just get my work done; I could be on the phone with this person 24/7. But you need to be. You need to be where you have a good relationship with the state forester. Or at least the state forester isn't badmouthing you. So if he doesn't have anything good to say, just be quiet.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: Better you have them saying nice things about you. That's one of the biggest differences here, the state forester and the authorities that the state forester has, and how we have to play a role in working with that state forester.

REINIER: What is his authority?

JOHNSON: What the state forester does is he works with private landowners. He works with state issues, whether they're county or city, and he works with small landowners. Helping them predominantly understand conservation of their lands. How to cut a tree and then how to replant those trees so that you can always have a healthy forest, or a forest that's going to produce fiber for you, or whatever. So he works with the landowners from that standpoint, the private landowners. How to deal with fire issues, natural resources. He does all of that stuff for the state.

We are in the state; the national forest is in the state. The state forester has no jurisdiction over the national forest, has none. But because we're in the state we have to work very closely with him because we also work with private landowners on probably wild fire issues. We call it "urban interface issues." Southern pine beetle issues, meaning southern pine beetle is a beetle that eats up your pine, kills it off. So if an infestation starts over here, we have to work with the private landowner, but we can't work directly with that private landowner, we have to work through the state forester's office. So it's just really strange. It's really strange. Bugs are eating up your trees but we got to call the state forester. And that's okay. So we have all these different programs that both of us have responsibilities for. We have these responsibilities not only within the proclamation boundaries of the national forest, but also into the private lands. And because of our location, we can work with any county or city that is 100 miles away from the national forest proclamation boundary and for the state of Georgia; that's almost everything. For the state of Mississippi, it was the same thing. So anywhere you drew 100 miles, it essentially touched every part of Mississippi because of how our forests were located. That's why those relationships have to be so very close and so very important. When we have a fire, if the fire moves on... Remember, I was talking about the Angeles, where we have all of the partnerships and relationships with the county and all those? That's the relationship we have to have with the state, with the state forester, and his organization. So if a fire starts and runs onto private land, we have to have those memorandums of understanding or agreements in place.

[End Tape 6, Side B]

Tape 7, Side A: The Delta National Forest in Mississippi—Working with rural development and economic recovery programs—Forming satisfying relationships with employees—Helping build community centers—Providing grants for dry hydrants.

REINIER: Clara, on the last tape we were talking about the National Forests in Mississippi and the relationship that you had with the state forester.

JOHNSON: Um hmm.

REINIER: Can you tell me more about issues in the National Forests of Mississippi?

JOHNSON: I was talking about some of the unique things that I saw that were different...

REINIER: ...From California.

JOHNSON: ...from California, from Region 5 and Region 8, which is where the National Forests in Mississippi is located. And one of the differences that I had mentioned was the relationship, the intricate relationship that you had to have between the forest supervisor and the state forester, or the employees who work on the national forests and the employees who work with the state forester's office. And the relationship has to be a very positive one.

The other difference that I saw in Mississippi was we have a national forest that's called the Delta National Forest, and it was one of the most unique places out of the entire forest in Mississippi. Mississippi has about a million or two acres that they oversee of national forest land. The Delta National Forest was the only forest, and it was the only forest in the entire nation, that is a bottomland hardwood forest. It is located in the Delta of Mississippi and if you know anything about the Delta, it is a very poor, impoverished area. The rich are rich and the poor are definitely poor by our terms, by our standards, by our definition of poor. This was a bottomland hardwood forest. What that mean is 90 if not 95 percent of the vegetation out there is hardwoods--all hardwoods--cypress and spruce and ash and different types of hardwoods. You're managing that national forest for, not timber management, although you're cutting down some of the trees up there, but the reason you're cutting those trees down is to improve the quality of the wildlife up there. It's for the wildlife. So you're creating excellent habitat for the various types of wildlife that's up there--turkey, deer, beaver, whatever. You're creating habitat for those wildlife up there. Just a beautiful forest, I mean, absolutely gorgeous forest.

The other thing that happens is because the Delta is so very flat and the soils do not percolate very easily, there's always standing water there that these hardwoods are growing out of. And so you get an abundance of different types of birds that fly into there, to nest or to feed or just to sit on the water and those kinds of things. So it's a great place to go and experience viewing opportunities, wildlife viewing opportunities, and that forest provided those kinds of things. It is the most unique place in the entire nation.

REINIER: Fascinating.

JOHNSON: The other thing that that forest provided because of its location there in the Delta, one of the things that Karl Siderits started working on and the forest supervisor that's there now is continuing, is we recognized that that Delta area was very, very poor. And so Karl said, "We're responsible for rural development and economic recovery programs," and that's part of our state and private program. So Karl set out to change things up there. He went up and he met with the state forester. He met with the Natural Resource Conservation Service, he met with

Farm Bureaus, he met with all the other federal agencies and the state agencies who were supposed to be helping with developing that Delta area up there. So he met with all these people and like I said earlier, Karl moves. When Karl gets an idea, Karl does not sit around and wait. I'm glad he didn't. Because Karl took the initiative and he went up, he single-handedly went up there and did this. He went up to the Delta and met with almost every mayor up there. It had never happened before. None of the other agencies had ever met with these people. They were out of sight, out of mind. Karl went up there and met these people. At least we were not aware of any other times that they had met with them. Karl went up and he met with these mayors and he talked to them about the rural development and economic recovery program.

As a program, it does a couple of things. One, we provide grants to these communities so that they can do some of the things that they want to do up there. It has to be natural resources based. One of the things that we did in one of the communities was they had an old schoolhouse that they wanted to teach conservation out of, and we provided a grant that allowed them to do this. Now they are able to have kids come through and learn about natural resource management. We also provided grants where people could put walking trails through communities where before they had nothing to walk on but the streets. Now they have walking trails that meander through, nice, beautiful, forested areas or within these communities. And so Karl met with these mayors. He introduced this program to them and he moved this program off dead center up there.

What happened is the state forester was not very happy with that. If the state forester's not happy, the regional office is not happy, we're not happy. And everybody would say he'd make the state forester mad and da-da-da-da-da. But people were shortsighted in that. They were worried about the state forester being mad versus the successes that he was having up there in the Delta. Major successes. It was as if they couldn't connect the two. And I can remember one guy meeting with me and talking to me about how I needed to do this with him and how I needed to slow Karl down. And I said, "Why? Why would I do that? He's doing what he's asked to do, per the directions that you guys have given us. Why would I do that?" "Well, he's not making the state forester happy." "And?" That was not the right response! But the whole point is that we had an opportunity, we saw an opportunity. I don't want to take any credit for it; I was just tagging along trying to make it happen also.

REINIER: It must have been exciting to you.

JOHNSON: Oh man! It was exciting because the Delta is where I was born.

REINIER: I know.

JOHNSON: Indianola. I was born there. And to go back home. And the fun thing that happened is, when I was up there working with these communities, this mayor of Shelby, Mississippi, a cousin of mine came along. I was talking to this guy and I said, "I remember this name from somewhere. Are you related to this person?" "Oh yeah, yeah. That's my aunt, oh, and she's the greatest lady." And I said, "Don't you know that's my mother!" And so that's how we connected. So I found some relatives up there. But it was just wonderful to go into an area who welcomed the Forest Service, who really wanted to do great things with the Forest Service, who was craving somebody to give them some attention. Karl walked in there like Karl-- I wish you could meet him one day; you would like him instantly--he walked in there, he didn't walk in there like he was a savior, he simply walked in there and he said, "Here's what you're entitled to." And he talked to people, through staff that he had working with him taught these people on how to apply for these grants and make a difference in their communities. That's what the State and Private [Forestry] program is all about, making a difference for the people, or teaching the people how to make a difference for themselves. That's my favorite part of what

we do in the agency. I like all the other things too, the National Forest Systems side, which deals with most of our normal programs, timber and recreation and wildlife and all of that. And then of course our research program, but I really like the state and private part, where you get in there, you excite a person, and then you see the person taking charge of their destiny. And that is just marvelous to see that. You'll enjoy talking to Leigh [Beck].

REINIER: Oh, that's interesting.

JOHNSON: Just love it. But that was three things that I saw--the relationship with the state forester, the bottomland hardwoods, and the rural development and economic recovery program--that we were able to put in place then. The forest supervisor there now is getting major recognition for the work that he's doing down there, that program. And I call him up every now and then and say, "Don't forget the people who lay the foundation there." I can say that to him. But he forgets. He ignores it! Those were three different distinct things that I picked up on, that I moved into, totally different things, very unique things, that was happening in the state of Mississippi. With the creation of the rural development program we ran through the same resistance with the internals. We shouldn't be doing that, we have enough problem working within the proclamation boundary, we don't have enough money for this. They were always the naysayers. And the beauty of Karl is he could never hear it. He could only hear opportunity and that's where he stayed focused.

And then of course I was enjoying that assignment, working with the internal issues, building really positive relationships with the employees there, helping them through their agony. They had a lot of issues going on there, civil rights issues, women feeling like they were being discriminated against, the African American women in particular, feeling like they were being discriminated against. And so I was able to help them walk through their issues. I don't know if they overcame them, but I was at least able to help them.

REINIER: Well, that must have been satisfying too.

JOHNSON: It was satisfying from the standpoint that, one, they felt comfortable enough coming to me and talking to me. And it wasn't just African American women. It was all the employees on the forest who felt very comfortable talking to me about any issue. Although it started building up some jealousy because if one saw me talking to this one more than I was talking to that one, "You seem to like this one better." "No. Give me two minutes; I'll be right down there in your office to talk to you too." It was satisfying to be able to work with the employees as a whole. One, because remember I came there with no expectations, nothing to prove. I came very empty. I knew what I knew; I didn't have to prove it to anybody. I'm here, you accept me if you want to. And that's what they did. They just accepted me. I came pure and clean. I'm not coming to try and lord it over you, I'm not trying to come and tell you what you should be doing differently, not taking any of that, coming in all that way. And so I was free to engage with the employees, and I rebuilt my reputation, which was definitely dealt with and taken care of over here, from the standpoint of being a very caring and nurturing person, open to people. I did absolutely nothing different than I'm doing over here.

REINIER: Interesting.

JOHNSON: Very caring and open. "Boy, she walked me through this, and she really helped me with it." I hear that all the time. And they still call asking me if they can come and work for me. I've pulled several of them over here behind me. And so that felt good. It felt real good to be accepted for just who you were, and have nobody challenging you and trying to label you on anything. And so I built up a really good reputation for getting things done because we did get a

lot of stuff done. Building good morale over there. It was just a joy to work there. I would go back any day. Now notice I've not said that about another place other than the Sequoia.

REINIER: Yes.

JOHNSON: I would go back there any day.

REINIER: You would. There were some specific things you had in your materials. You talked about community centers.

JOHNSON: Um hmm.

REINIER: Do you want to talk about that a little bit? Was that in general or was there a particular community?

JOHNSON: What did I say?

REINIER: Well, you mentioned nature trails, which you talked about. And then you talked about installations of dry hydrants. What are those?

JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah. Through this rural development program the community center is the one that I was touching on earlier. They put this school or this community center in there for the communities to come and the kids could go there and learn about natural resources and conservation. In the Delta, and in Mississippi in general, and the nation as a whole, it seems like a lot of the young girls are getting pregnant at very early ages and they're single moms and those kinds of things. And there was nobody to teach them what it means to raise a kid. If I had a kid when I was eighteen or nineteen, the kid would be a basket case. I waited until I was much more stable, older, a little bit more mature. If I can see some of the struggles that I had to go through in providing for Cydney, surely you can see what an eighteen-year-old has to go through.

REINIER: Oh, absolutely.

JOHNSON: And so this center provided opportunities where they could help the kids learn about parenting, becoming an adult, regaining self-esteem and those kinds of things. So that was very good and what this mayor tried to do there.

REINIER: What community was that in?

JOHNSON: That was in Shelby, Mississippi also; I believe it was Shelby. There's so many of these little communities that go through there. But I think it was Mayor Holmes, Eric Holmes, who provided this. They called it, "Noah's Ark. Noah's Ark." That's what they called it. And I think this mayor passed on. He was a very young man, in his 40's. Had to be 30's and 40's and he passed on not too long ago. That was unfortunate but he was a true pioneer. Hopefully they got somebody else in there who has the same dream that he has or a similar one, one who has the drive that he had. The other thing you mentioned was...

REINIER: The dry hydrant?

JOHNSON: Oh, the dry hydrants, yeah. In a lot of these communities, they didn't have hydrants that they could put in. They didn't have anywhere that they could put them in. They just went there. And so if a fire broke out they had nowhere to put them. I mean they had nothing that the engines could hook up to and suppress a fire. And so we were able to provide

grants to communities where they could put these hydrants in. They don't have water in them but when we need them, we can turn the water on. It's connected to a pond source or something somewhere underground. We had it turned off all the time until fire kicks in. And so we can install those things so that people don't just go and turn them on and waste the water. So we can install them or the communities can install them. And we were able to provide people funding through these grants to install some of these. It really helped a lot in all these communities. They just thought the world of it. The other thing is by the time an engine gets there to some of these communities--they have to drive forever to get there--the communities are lost. So if people can go and do some of these things themselves or work with the volunteer fire department that's there, it sure helps the communities a lot.

REINIER: Fascinating.

JOHNSON: Yeah, it was. Those are good things. That's why you're still working for the Forest Service because there's so many positive things that this agency has to offer. In spite of the undermining and all that kind of stuff that takes place, there's a lot of positive stuff that the agency can offer. If we stay focused on that and put those things into the media and into the limelight, we could regain our reputation as being the number one agency in USDA [United States Department of Agriculture]. We really could. And I don't know who's number one right now. I don't know if there's any, but I don't think it's us. But we could regain that.

[End Tape 7, Side A]

SESSION III, May 27, 2002

Tape 7, Side B: Working in the USDA Forest Service Washington Office—Applying For the Legis Program—Working for Congresswoman Eva Clayton.

REINIER: Clara, you had a really interesting experience in 1999 when you went to Washington for, what was it, two months, three months?

JOHNSON: About eight months.

REINIER: Eight months! Oh my! Okay. Will you tell me about that please?

JOHNSON: Let's see. I'd been to Washington, D.C. before in two other roles before I went up for the eight months as a congressional legislative assistant. The two times previous I'd gone up to the Washington office working at our Washington office headquarters. I worked on details working on the ecosystem management staff. That was back in '94, '93, somewhere in there.

REINIER: When you were on the Angeles.

JOHNSON: When I was on the Angeles, I believe. And then I'd also gone back on another detail as a legislative aide working out of the chief's office, working in the Legislative Department, Policy and Analysis Department in the Washington office. That was a great experience because our entire objective there is to work between the members of congress and our office trying to provide any information that they want and answer any questions that they want. The other part of that was we had to prepare the chief and anybody else who was going to be testifying in front of the members. We had to get them prepared. We had to do a tremendous amount of research, which meant that we worked directly with the field units, the forest, on all of the issues that the members came up with. And those issues were budget issues, natural resource management issues, off-highway vehicles issues, or any issue. We had to do a complete staff work, put packages together about the members, what their interests were, who would be asking questions, when the hearing was taking place, trying to estimate the kinds of questions that were going to be asked by the members so that the chief could be fully prepared. And then go in and brief the chief and prepare the chief for the hearing. That was great work. Because you also had to work with the Department of Agriculture, the Secretary of Agriculture staff, or the undersecretary staff to make sure that the way we were preparing the chief was consistent with the department's position. And so you had to work through all those hoops. This took a lot of time, too, to get all this work done.

REINIER: Who was chief? Was it Jack Ward Thomas?

JOHNSON: The chief at that time was Mike Dombeck when I was there. And during that time we were always on the Hill because the members did not trust us as an agency for whatever reason. Either they had facts to not trust us or they just decided that they weren't going to trust us and we were an easy target. One of the reasons they probably didn't trust us is because we're the agency within the USDA with the largest budget and we were not able to justify our expenditures the way we should have. We were telling congress that we needed additional monies and at the same time we were showing a huge surplus that we were turning in at the end of the fiscal year, and we couldn't account for those kinds of things. We were always billing any Office of the General Counsel's—OIG--audits that took place. So there were a number of reasons why congress didn't necessarily have to trust us. But anyway, during that detail, that

was my job to do, to prepare the chief for hearing and prepare whomever else was going to be testifying.

REINIER: When was that and how long were you there?

JOHNSON: Gosh. Time flies. When was I there? '98? Maybe '98 or '97. And I was there for two or three months.

REINIER: Were you in Mississippi then?

JOHNSON: You know, for some reason I can't remember where I was. Yeah, if it was between those time periods, I can't remember what circumstances took me out there. But I was there.

REINIER: Yeah, okay.

JOHNSON: And I'll have to look at all my notes in order to find out the exact dates and times and all of that. But I was there and I worked with some very dynamic people in policy analysis. At that time Ron Stewart was the head of policy analysis and Tim DeCoster was over the legislative part of the department. And so I worked directly under the leadership of Tim and the other folks who were there. So anyway, that was my first insight into the Forest Service and the relationship we had between the legislative branch and the executive branch. It was a tremendous amount of hard work. Most of us were in there by 8:30 and most of the times we didn't leave the office until 7:00 or 8:00 at night because the work was continuous, just continuous. But I did learn that we're at the whims of congress. They dictate and facilitate and determine what we're going to do and how we're going to get funded. The other thing was the importance of the relationship that we had to have with those members up there. So that was quite interesting, quite a learning experience up there. Plus it gave me additional exposure again to the chief and others.

So much so that in 1998, I was called by his office to come up and head up a project that he had just initiated. And that project was some chief's awards that all the forests had to compete for. And when we first sent this out, everybody was saying I was wasting money and all this kind of stuff. But we sent it out. We got over 900 responses. I, the leader of the team, had to get together and determine who was actually going to receive some of the funding and who was not going to receive some of the funding. And so I had a committee of about six or seven people and all of us got in a room and had to read all of those applications and make those determinations. And the chief was very neat to work for. I enjoyed working with him during that detail.

REINIER: Tell me a little bit more about working with him.

JOHNSON: The chief from my view... I don't know. I hate to label people as introverts or extroverts and things of that nature, but just on the surface he seemed very introverted. He seemed a little uncomfortable in front of people like we all are, and standing up and making speeches about where you're trying to take a forest or an agency for that matter. But my experience with the chief was a pleasant experience because I was there doing tasks for him, not only when I was there in the legislative position working to brief him, I was also there working with him on the awards program, the chief's awards program. He always made a point to write a nice note to us saying, "Thank you." Even after the hearings, when we were doing the briefing work, he would always make it a point to write a note to us saying, "Thank you for preparing me. You did great work." Or come by our desk and say, "Thank you, I appreciate what you're doing." And we of course would in turn thank him for doing a good job. And he really did, in my opinion,

do a great job in testifying in front of these people. And so my relationship with him, I wouldn't say it was friendly or anything of that nature, but it was definitely one of respect. Just appreciated him from that standpoint. Others did not share the same view about the chief.

REINIER: What were their complaints?

JOHNSON: [Sighs] That he was a political appointee. We're all political appointees if you really want to think about it, especially when you work for the executive branch. And all of your decision-making space is directed by the legislative branch. And anything that we do wrong or right is legislated by the judiciary branch. So we're all political appointees if you really want to think about it. But the employees took it to another level. They felt he was a political appointee and therefore obviously he didn't understand the Forest Service culture. Therefore he obviously didn't understand what we needed in the Forest Service and he didn't support it. And they also felt that he didn't care about the people. Here we are again, a person being labeled as not being a people person. And so they felt he didn't care about the people. Whether he did or not, I don't know. Maybe he just had a different style and people weren't used to that style. I don't know of any chief that was any more dynamic than he was, and I've had about five of them now that I've worked under. A chief is a chief.

REINIER: This is Mike Dombeck.

JOHNSON: Yeah. Mike Dombeck. But that was their opinions. I don't necessarily share their opinion, definitely, simply because I worked directly with him and for him. And when I hear the negative I just respond with, "Well, that's not how I felt," and I leave it at that.

But anyway, from there, when I was in Mississippi, I was still working for Karl Siderits who I felt was very politically astute. He had also gone through the Legis program, is how I got into it, working for a congresswoman. Legis program. What that program is designed to do is train us about the politics of the various branches of the organization, especially the legislative branch, and help us understand the relationship between the executive branch and the legislative branch and the judiciary branch. Karl had gone through that program also. I knew being a deputy, sooner or later somebody was going to say it was time for me to go ahead and become a forest supervisor. I thought I was being really smart. I had this all planned out when I told Karl, "I'm not going into a forest supervisor's role until I work in the Legis program." So that was my tool to try to stall moving into a forest supervisor's role. Well, I forgot who I was working for.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: Karl, once you tell him something, you just may as well have seen it happen. So he got on the phone and he called up to the Washington office and said, "We need to get Clara in the Legis program." The Washington office sent down all the information and the various avenues that you can take to get into the Legis program. In March of 1999 I was on my way to Capitol Hill. And I was not ready to go up there. I really just wanted to stay where I was being a deputy forest supervisor for the National Forests in Mississippi. I was having a great time. So I was not excited about going up there.

REINIER: Did you take Cydney with you?

JOHNSON: Oh, absolutely. Cydney always goes with me. There was no way I would leave Cydney behind. And those were some of the other reasons I didn't want to go. I had Cydney pretty much established in a new school, the Holy Family Catholic School, and I was pretty set in my routine. My mother was very, very happy. Life was really good. The environment I wanted existed. Or at least I could get back to it once I left the hustle and bustle of Jackson, Mississippi.

So I was pretty content. So when he said, "Clara, it's all set up for you to go into the Legis program in January," I said, "That is much too soon." I think this was November or December that he was telling me this. I said, "It's much too soon. I don't need to go for another year or two."

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: And he kept digging and sure enough there was another program coming up in March, I believe it was. And so I got enrolled in that one. We had to apply and go through the application process. I entered the Legis program through the Brookings Institute. I entered in that program. You're sending your application and resume and everything and they look at it and decide, yeah, she's a person I want in it. She's a person I do not want in it. And the program is designed for people they think are going to be future leaders in the organization. And since I was in a deputy role, I guess they thought that meant me. And so I went.

After I learned that I was going to Capitol Hill, of course I had to immediately start making arrangements for Cydney. Now we've got to pull her out of school in mid-stride, then we have to get her in school in Washington, D.C. Where am I going to live? How am I going to find a house? And all this kind of stuff. Again, amazing, when you start asking yourself the questions and you write them all down--which is a tool that I use all the time, just write down all this stuff so I can actually see it--and you write down all this stuff, then you start making phone calls, and it just seems to fall in place. Within a week of my calling I had new housing, I had a new school, I had babysitters, I had everything I needed all lined up. Worked for Cydney and it just worked out extremely smoothly. Then we had to make a decision about how much clothing to take, what kind of clothing to take, and all that kind of stuff. I decided we were going to take very minimum clothing. The key was for us to get over there and figure out our new environment.

We went over a week before I was actually supposed to start in congress. When you enter into the Legis program through the Brookings Institute, the institution spends about a week or two weeks preparing you. They've got to change your mind from the organization that you're coming from to get you prepared to move into a whole other organization. And so we went through intense briefings where members of congress or their aides would come over and talk to us about what's to be expected and about their experiences. They talked to us about the pros and cons, and how a bill is made, and why a bill is made, and why there's very few bills passed, and all that kind of stuff. Getting us really ready. And the norms of an office, who's in charge, what's a chief of staff, and what's a legislative director, and what's a legislative assistant. How we were to realize that we were insignificant in the legislative branch. And we are. We're a tool. We're there to produce. We're not there to have a big ego or anything else. And most of us who went in there were deputy forest supervisors or forest supervisors or some higher level within our organization. And so we really had to, if we had one, eliminate that ego right away, because if you didn't, they would take care of it for you. Very definitely. They walked us through what I thought was a very fine orientation.

Part of that orientation you had to go and find a member of your own to work for. They were not going to assign it to you, you had to go out and beat the bushes, have your resume in hand. They looked at our resumes and blessed them one way or the other or said forget it. Bless you my child! Good luck! But we had to have resume in hand. We had to make calls ahead of time, get appointments, go in, meet with these people and try to convince them that we were somebody that they would like to have on their staff. When you do that, if you have an ego, it quickly disappears. Through this interview process there's two things that happen. The people who are interviewing you realize that, yes, they want you, but there's no way that they are going to give you any idea that they want you. So you're having to oversell and talk more. I think what they're trying to find out is, what is your politics? Are you somebody that we can trust? Can you

produce? Who are you? You know, those kinds of things. And we had to have a long list of people that we had to interview. We couldn't just interview one person and call it quits. And everybody had to work for an office. They were telling us about some classes where a guy came in and he interviewed for almost six months before they... [Laughter] The program was only seven, eight months. Really! And he couldn't go home, he had to stay there, commute over there. So anyway, they suggested that we might follow his lead. Anyway, we had to write all of these letters to these people. We had to make calls to these people. We had to get times set up to come over and even interview with these people. It was tiring. It was tiring. It was a lot of stuff that we had to do in a short period of time.

I had a list of delegates and I was working with the Forest Service because we were trying to figure out what the politics was going to be in the next year. In the next administration, whether the administration was going to be a Democratic administration or a Republican administration. So we were hedging our bet there. We weren't sure because everything was so up in arms. President Clinton was the president. President Clinton was the president at that time. So we didn't know how things were going to play out. So we decided to split it down the middle. Let's do Democrats; let's do Republicans. We can't lose. Cannot lose. And also there was one guy, he was a Republican and he decided to become an Independent. And so they suggested we look at him also. And the other thing they looked at is, since we were in the South, I definitely wanted to work with members from the South. My interest of course was working for members from the West because I knew the West very well and I could go in and I could offer them quite a bit of things. But I knew none of the members down here in the South and so that made it even harder.

I decided to interview with Congresswoman Eva Clayton who was at the bottom of my list, all of the Georgia delegates, and Dick Gephardt's office, and I don't know who else. During the interview, it was interesting how things played out. When I interviewed with the Democrats, they were very excited. When I interviewed with the Republicans then, they wanted nothing to do with me. Absolutely nothing. It was very, very interesting to see that just right off the bat. They wanted nothing at all to do with me. And I thought this is quite interesting. But the Democrats did. And I interviewed with Jack Kingston's office, who was a Republican here in the state of Georgia, interviewed with [Charlie] Norwood's office, who's a Republican here in the state of Georgia. Interviewed with the two senators' office, who are Democrats here in the state of Georgia. Sanford Bishop's office, who's a Democrat. John Lewis, who's a Democrat. Cynthia McKinney, who's a Democrat, who did not want to have anything to do with me, believe it or not, because I was Forest Service and Forest Service practices conservation and she believes in preservation. So I can remember my interview with her. She pulled out this big map, or her aides pulled out this big map, and showed me all of the cutover lands in the state of Georgia. "By George, we're losing these lands like crazy up on the Chattahoochee," they said. "We want to make sure we maintain those lands and we don't cut timber." Okay. I can see I'm not getting in this office! And on the other hand, the Republicans were pushing more timber cutting, those kinds of things, use of the forest. They would ask me questions like, "What is your position on nuclear war?" Who cared! That has nothing to do with the job! But it did! And I guess that was their way of trying to establish what my politics was and all that kind of stuff. The interview processes were kind of strenuous. We had to learn how to get around on Capitol Hill. All of the buildings up there started looking alike. So we had to learn to get around on Capitol Hill ourselves.

When I interviewed with Congresswoman Clayton's office, that office said, "No. We don't you." I said, "Okay." I had gotten to a point where I was sick and tired of being rejected by these folks. So I went into Congresswoman Clayton's office a second time. As a matter of fact, the chief of staff, I interviewed with him, and I said, "Is it possible I could meet with the congresswoman?" I had never asked this before. "Oh no, she's really busy." Well, I saw the congresswoman leaving

out of the office, and I said, "Excuse me a minute." So I got up and I followed the congresswoman. He jumped up and he came out. I said, "Hey, I just want to introduce myself. I'm interested in working in your office. I'm with the Legis program and da-da-da-da-da." Followed her all the way on the elevator. Kept right on going. And kept right on talking. She told her chief of staff, "I like her. Get her in my office." That's what she said.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: That's how I passed my interview.

REINIER: That's great!

JOHNSON: So I was pleased that I finally had an office to get into. Remember, the chief of staff didn't want me. The congresswoman said, "Get her in my office. I like her." And I'll never forget that. She had on a yellow jacket and a blue skirt and she was on her way to vote. I remember her saying, "I don't have time to talk to you right now, but I'm on my way to vote." And then I kept babbling, and she was facing me this way, off the elevator, and I'm of course looking at her. "Get her in my office."

REINIER: Great!

JOHNSON: And I went, "Oh! Thank you!" So I was happy. So I could go back to the Brookings Institute and say, "I found a match." And that's really how I got in there. Through a lot of rejections and a little perseverance on my part, and the woman said, "Yes."

REINIER: Is she a Democrat?

JOHNSON: Congresswoman Eva Clayton is a Democrat from North Carolina. I was very pleased. Well, when I first went in there, my starting day was April or May. For some reason May keeps in mind. My first day there I went in and there was nobody to stand up and say, "Welcome! Welcome, welcome! We're so happy that you're here. Great, great, great!" They hadn't even identified a desk or anything for me. So I went into the chief of staff and I said, "What do you want me to work on?" "I don't know. Go back there and see the legislative director." And I said, "And exactly who is that?" Corliss James was her name. So I went back and I said, "What do you guys want me to do?" And she came out and she said, "We just want you to sit here and answer the phones." And I said, "Now I know this is not what I'm supposed to be doing." But I answered that phone and I was really good at it.

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: Was very good at it. My first month there--and I think this was a test on their part, just to see whether or not I was going to break or not break--but my first month there was sheer unhappiness. I was so unhappy. They wouldn't speak; they wouldn't say hello. It was as if I was a disease in that office. Well, they didn't know who I was. They had no reason to trust me. I had not really made any attempts to try and bond with them. I just took the assignment and said, "Fine. I'll answer the phones. I'll file. I'll do whatever you need." I came home. I took a break. And I said, "I've got to get out of here. I've got to tell these people something that I don't want to tell them." I actually went and started interviewing with other offices. Well, that's one thing you don't do. If you go into an office, you stick with that office. Because if you move, then your reputation gets around Capitol Hill extremely fast and they pride themselves on spreading information quickly. So I took a break and for an entire week I came back to Mississippi. I just needed to relax and get my thinking put back together. So Cydney and I came home. During that time I said, "There's no way I'm going back up there. I'm sick of this. I

don't need it." I was so tired. But into that week when I had to make a decision as to whether or not I was going back up to Capitol Hill and take more abuse, my extra backbone kicked in and said, "You're going back up there."

REINIER: Good.

JOHNSON: And I went back up to Capitol Hill and I went into that office and I said, "Corliss, I can do more for you than answer the phone. Let me talk to you about some of the things that I'm capable of doing. There's a lot of letters and things that needs to get back out to your constituents. I can take care of that stuff for you. I can also run a tremendous amount of errands for you. I can head up these issues and these issues and these issues." And I said, "You're welcome to utilize me however you want to." I said, "I'm free labor for you and so you should take advantage of this." She must have listened very carefully because Corliss started loading me up with work. My first assignment was we were trying to get a piece of legislation. We were trying to get some cosigners on a piece of legislation. What you want is bipartisan legislation. You get Republicans to go with you and Democrats to go with you so that you can show that you have all of these supporters and the legislation usually moves a little bit faster. So what I had to do was take this legislation, learn it, and then walk it around to the various members' offices and get their signature and approval. And I had to get at least 200 signatures that day. Okay. I went up there with heels on--not the best shoes in the world--and I died that first day. But guess what, I came back with 200 signatures. And Corliss looked at me and she said, "Did you get all the signatures?" Just like that. And I said, "Yeah. I got every last one of them." And she said, "How did you do that? Nobody's ever done this before!" I said, "You told me to get the signatures and I got the signatures." I said, "All I had to do was just talk to the folks in the various offices and explain what we were trying to do and they're done." And she said, "My God, you're good!" From there Corliss started giving me even more difficult tasks to take on, like briefing the congresswoman on an issue that she had given me to take care of in education, biodiversity, all those kinds of things.

[End Tape 7, Side B]

Tape 8, Side A: Preparing a Black Caucus seminar on bio-diversity—Working on rural issues—Writing speeches for the congresswoman—Learning about Capitol Hill—Becoming Forest Supervisor of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests in Georgia.

REINIER: Clara, at the end of the last tape we were talking about the issues you were working on with Congresswoman Eva Clayton.

JOHNSON: Uh huh. Some of the issues I worked on were education issues, bio-diversity issues, veterans' affairs issues, forest issues. And anything that came up that they needed me to work on.

REINIER: Do you want to explain some of those a little bit more?

JOHNSON: I'll do the bio-diversity one. Bio-diversity, the part that we were focusing on was whether or not genetically altered food was healthy or unhealthy for people to consume. None of us in the office knew anything about bio-diversity. And I heard Corliss come over and say, "Clara! You could handle bio-diversity, right?" And I said, "Yep. I can." And so I called the Library of Congress and I said, "I need to know everything you've got on bio-diversity. Send it over to me now." The Library of Congress is designed to do nothing but work with the members, and so they sent it over. Right away. I mean they are quick. They've got quality people; they are quick. And they turned around information to me within a day or two. Or they called and they clarified exactly what do you want. "I don't know what I want; just send it to me! I'll figure it out! I'll read what you got." What we were looking at again was whether or not this genetically altered food--corn, rice, whatever--was good enough for consumption. There had been a tremendous amount of research on it by prominent scientists, some folks who had done research on the sweet potato and its alteration. Some people had done research on rice. Or they had added Vitamin E to the rice and genetically altered it somehow and fed it to people in a foreign country who had poor eyesight. As a result of that a lot of the people's eyesight improved. And so that was very positive stuff. Corn again. They don't use the same corn. There was a tremendous amount of research going on at the historically black colleges and universities I discovered, at all kinds of universities with the most prominent scientists in the world. And I got a chance to call all these people and work with them.

REINIER: Fascinating.

JOHNSON: And another person who was really involved with the bio-diversity was [Andrew] Andy Young, our former ambassador to the United Nations and also a former mayor here in Atlanta. What I was tasked to do was during a Black Caucus seminar, a weeklong seminar, I was to get Andrew Young to agree to come in and be the keynote speaker on bio-diversity. That was a chore. But can you believe it turned out to be the easiest thing going. Because when the members call, all you have to say is, "This is Clara Johnson; I'm working in Congresswoman Eva Clayton's office and she's very interested in having Ambassador Young come there and be the keynote speaker, da-da-da-da-da." "Would you consider that?" "Yes." I make a call up there as a forest supervisor, "Who are you?" You know! "What do you want?" But it was just like that. It was the mere fact that a congressperson was calling and asking for their attention, and they instantly responded. I literally had to do nothing but call the people, connect the people, and they pulled my entire program together for me. I was allowed to deal with the logistical side of things as opposed to the problematic side of things because they handled it. And all they would do is report to me so that I could report to the congresswoman and give her a progress report. "Is this what you want? Da-da-da-da-da." You know, those kinds of things. And so I was so surprised because I had to connect Ambassador Young's office with Conagra, with other poultry

organizations. Just a lot of folks we had to connect with so that these people could be supporters and sponsors of this program that we were trying to put together. And just met all kinds of neat people as a result of that, all kinds of people, who just wanted to help.

REINIER: Who would attend this conference?

JOHNSON: The Black Caucus, anybody who wanted to come could attend the conference. And so, because we advertised as far wide as we wanted to, people like Bread of the World, Bread for the Hunger, organizations like that were involved. Anybody who wanted to could attend.

REINIER: The people were hungry for information.

JOHNSON: They were very hungry. I was surprised that we had about 200-300 people show up just for that session. There were other sessions going on too, sessions that dealt with predatory vending, those kinds of things, young people getting them into congress and all of that. It was just an amazing task that they put together. Even working with the catering folks to get food and all of that, caterers right there on Capitol Hill, and negotiating with them and going to get the sound system and all of that stuff put together.

REINIER: But the whole thing was really put on by the Black Caucus?

JOHNSON: The entire thing was put on by the congressional Black Caucus. Yeah. And there are a bunch of caucuses up there as you so well know, Hispanic Caucus, Women's Caucus, men, there's a caucus for.

REINIER: Well, that must have been interesting observing the Black Caucus.

JOHNSON: It was very interesting being a part of the Black Caucus because I got a chance to go over to the headquarters and work with them. And listen to their issues and the things that they were trying to push congressionally or legislatively. So it was very, very interesting to be a party to that. Any other time I would not have been involved with those kinds of things. The good thing there is not only was I involved with the Black Caucus, but I was involved with the Women's Caucus. I was involved with the Rural Caucus, which Congresswoman Clayton and the lady from Missouri co-chaired; they gave me that task to take on. Rural issues, rural development issues. That was another one of those issues that I dealt with.

REINIER: Yeah, because that's...

JOHNSON: There was so much stuff.

REINIER: Yeah, you loved that on the Mississippi Delta.

JOHNSON: It was great and that was part of what I talked to them about. The other thing I talked to them about was one of the things we were trying to do was a lot of times we focus on making sure that the urban communities are okay. They have the best telephones, they have the best electricity, they have the best of everything. But when you go out into a rural setting, what you find is, the septic system isn't up to par, the telephone systems aren't up to par, the electricity isn't up to par, just basic things that we take for granted living in the city just do not exist in the rural environment. And people in the rural environment, especially older people, were being misused by banks and other agencies, that whole predatory lending thing that was going on. So you got a chance to really look at the issues from a different perspective, rural versus urban. And one of the things we tried to do was bring in urban partners on these issues

so that they could see the bigger picture. A lot of the people who were members within the urban communities, are focusing on development, transportation systems, more big buildings and that kind of stuff, whereas in the rural communities, it's just the opposite. So that was an interesting piece to work on also. For about eight months I was there on Capitol Hill dealing with these issues.

REINIER: Did you work with any forest issues?

JOHNSON: I worked with very few forest issues. One of the issues I worked with, again, it came back to the rural development piece. Because where Congresswoman Eva Clayton's district was located, it was a rural setting, and so I worked with her on trying to get additional funding for her communities, and bringing in folks from the Forest Service to talk to her about monies and opportunities and all those kinds of things. And also talk to her about partnering up with Charles Taylor, who was also a member from North Carolina who was really into the rural development programs. So if they could partner up, they could probably push funding and things of that nature through congress a little bit better. So we worked on all of that. I also worked on a project we were trying to get additional funding for, historically black colleges and universities or 1890 schools. And what we discovered there was the schools that were not considered as being predominantly African American received just a tremendous amount of funding. I mean they were funded heads over. It was just incredible to see the discrimination and the prejudices between how they would fund one set of schools and how would they not fund another set of schools. So we worked real hard to push funding there and force those universities, and was successful. Not as successful as we would want it to be, but we were able to get a few dollars here and there to push in that direction.

REINIER: Is this federal funding?

JOHNSON: This is federal funding, federal money, yeah. Absolutely.

REINIER: So discrimination, even among the federal dollars.

JOHNSON: Absolutely.

REINIER: Absolutely!

JOHNSON: Absolutely, even within congress. Of course, they would never describe it that way. They would describe it from the standpoint of we're providing opportunities and these schools can provide this kind of a curriculum. And do you have accreditations in this area. And of course if you don't, that's the justification that works over there. Now they wouldn't describe it as discrimination. Maybe I'm being a little too harsh, but when I was working on that program, it was just not right, what I saw. It just was not right.

REINIER: So you learned a lot.

JOHNSON: You couldn't help but learn a lot working on Capitol Hill. I would go back up there in a heartbeat to work on Capitol Hill for a member. I would do that, very, very, very quickly because you just have so much exposure to so many things, just so many issues. I would definitely work for Congresswoman Eva Clayton again and her staff. She's just a very dynamic lady, very smart lady, a pusher. She was 65 when I was there. I got a chance to travel with her down to her district and work with her on meetings that she was holding with her constituents in her district. I never saw an ego associated with her. I knew it was there; you have to have an ego if you're up there. But she could manage hers, very professionally. I was

very pleased with what I saw, whereas with some of the other members who I will not name, that's the first thing you saw, the ego. So I worked with her.

As a matter of fact, when I got ready to leave from up there, they had just asked me to start working on farm issues. I knew nothing about the Farm Bill or any of that kind of stuff. And folks had started coming in, getting familiar with me and saying, "Oh, you're going to be the new agriculture expert." Yeah. And so my tenure was ending. By the time it was getting ready to end, she came in and she said, "Would you consider staying?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Well, how much would it cost me to keep you on my staff?" And I said, "If you're meaning permanently, I'm extremely expensive." I said, "I have a kid and my first priority is making sure that my kid is taken care of." Because their salaries are half of our salaries. I said, "So I have to really look out for Cydney right now." Probably in hindsight I should have stayed up there.

REINIER: You think so?

JOHNSON: I don't know. Probably, who knows, but I didn't, so I can't tell you hindsight. But I am glad that I did stay for as long as I stayed.

REINIER: Did you stay the length of the program? Is that what determined how long you stayed?

JOHNSON: Yeah. Some people continue to renew their appointment. Some people have stayed an extra year; some people stay two years. Some people are still up there. So you can extend it as long as the agency is willing to pay for you.

REINIER: So did you get your Forest Service salary while you were there?

JOHNSON: Yes. The Forest Service took care of everything for me so that there were no expenses on the member you were working for. And they got more than their share. They paid for more than their share, again because it's so much work that you have to do. Even going to the socials and the receptions and all that stuff, there's just a lot of work that goes into making sure the congresswoman is successful. And that was the other part of what I liked about that job too, is that you have one objective. And that is to make sure that that the congresswoman is on top of it, that she's successful, that there are no stumbling blocks laid in our way. And so that was what I was excited about. For the first time in my life, I had one focus as opposed to multiple focuses. I'm a person who really likes multiple things but I knew what I had to do and that was to make the congresswoman look good. I enjoyed doing that on behalf of another person. And everybody in that office worked for that purpose. Because if you didn't, you shouldn't be there, you really should not be there.

I remember when I did my first speech for the congresswoman. And they told me, "Clara, needs to be a three to five minute speech. I said, "Who can write a three to five minute speech? You know I don't even get a chance to say hello in three to five minutes." And they said, "You better get more than 'hello' down on that paper." And so I remember writing my first one. Of course, you have to have everything approved by the legislative director or the chief of staff, which is no problem because you're working for them. So I wrote my first one and the congresswoman looked at it. Well, one person was writing a speech for the same purpose, and the congresswoman looked at theirs and she said, "This is not what I want." So I finished mine up and the legislative director took it in to her and came back and she said, "Clara, this is exactly what the congresswoman wants. She needs you to add a few more things to it and this is the speech she wants to give on the Hill." It was on the floor. I felt so good! I went, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!" And the reason I was writing that speech, one, was because it was based on my own experience and two, I listened to the congresswoman very closely on how she talked about

issues. It's not hard to pick up where she's trying to go with stuff and what she wants to hear. One of the things she likes to do is give real good examples of things that are successful. I kept that speech because that was the first one I wrote. And I remember when she went up on the floor, we had the television on to C-SPAN and we were watching it. The congresswoman came on and we all went, "Hey! The congresswoman's coming on!" And I'm going [whispering], "Okay. Okay. Oh, God, this is the one I wrote." She delivered it and they had to take a vote on it. She was the only one speaking on that subject and there was nobody else to speak. When she finished hers she said, "Is there anybody else who wants to speak on this subject?" Nobody else was there. And the chairman said, "Well, let's take a vote," because she requested a vote. They took an oral vote, they didn't have to punch in their vote, they took an oral vote, and the chairman said, "All in favor of this proposal by Congresswoman Eva Clayton say 'Aye.'" And you heard, "Aye." "All opposed, say 'No.'" Nobody said no and it passed.

REINIER: Oh!

JOHNSON: We went "Yeeeessss!" And then of course we were all excited and everything and this is my first. Corliss came over to me and she said, "Clara don't get too happy because this is just the first leg. Now we got to walk it to the next leg." And I went, "Oh, no! Okay. But just let me be excited for a second. It went through, it went through!" And then of course you do have to work it all the way through the process in order for it to either be tagged on to another bill or become a standalone piece of legislation by itself. And ours got tagged on. But that was great to see it go all the way through.

REINIER: I should say!

JOHNSON: I had a success. Or she, the congresswoman, had a success.

REINIER: But it was yours in a sense too.

JOHNSON: Well, it was my success from a personal standpoint because I helped make it successful for the congresswoman. So those kinds of things made the day worthwhile.

REINIER: Oh, I should say.

JOHNSON: And so that was all exciting, being on the Hill and meeting the members and sitting in meetings where they're all around the table talking about the same stuff that I talk about every day of a forest supervisor. And it's sort of made me see the members a little differently. Before I went up there, if you've never experienced something you have a tendency to think people are God. The president is God, oh my goodness. Congress is God, oh my goodness. You go up there and you hear them dealing with the same issues that you're dealing with, and you think they're just people. They're just people! Plain old people dealing with the exact same issues I deal with on a daily basis. And so you get a different sense of who they are. You either gain respect or don't gain respect for them. But most of us gained respect for them. Because they truly were trying, in their own minds, to do what was best for the country. I truly believe most of them who were up there are trying to do what's best for the American people. I really do. Of course ego and all that stuff plays into it, but I really believe they're up there working on behalf of us.

REINIER: Well, that was a pretty tumultuous time, too, wasn't it? Was that when the impeachment trial was underway?

JOHNSON: Well, yes, all that stuff was going on. And one of the things you don't do is talk about it when you're up there on the Hill. You've got to learn to really train your tongue over

there on the Hill. So none of us talked about the Clinton situation. We knew it was going to be politics. I was working for a Democrat and I knew I had to make sure that I was quiet. I really wanted to talk about it, but you just didn't talk about any issues that were going on up there. One of the reasons is you may say something that can easily get back too, on somebody else, because people are always listening for something there. So when people ask you, "Well, what do you think?" You don't think. "I haven't thought about it. I really haven't put in much thought to it." And you move on. From that perspective, you haven't. You may have thought about it while you were with your family, but you sure didn't think about it on Capitol Hill, and you move on. So yeah, it was kind of stressful. I was also up there when Vice President [Albert] Gore and then Governor [George W.] Bush had decided that they were both going to run for congress...

REINIER: You mean for president?

JOHNSON: For president, thank you, president. And some of us had thought about working on the Democratic ticket and all that kind of stuff because of those of us who were working for Democrats we were taught quite a bit about just stuff and bonded. We thought about working for the Democratic Party and pushing a lot of stuff and those kinds of things. And then we all realized, "We can't do that. We're still executive branch employees."

REINIER: [Laughing]

JOHNSON: So if we were going to do that we had to take a leave of absence from our job and go to work on either party. So we didn't do that. But everybody was very, very nervous during that time, very nervous. They weren't sure if all the things that people had been putting out there about President Clinton was going to have an impact on Vice President Gore's election. A lot of people was concerned about Governor Bush and his way of saying things and the perception that they were getting from him. So there was a lot of concerns. And the American people were reflecting those concerns very, very actively, all the way from being at home to Capitol Hill. And it just played out in the media with the election the same way.

REINIER: Interesting.

JOHNSON: It was very interesting to be up there on the Hill listening to this stuff and watching this stuff. That's how I know I don't ever want to be a member because I cannot play the game where I'm hurting somebody for what we call "critical gain." I don't play those games. I have enough problems just being me. I don't try to do that stuff. So there was a lot of stuff going on that year, just a tremendous amount. And one of the things I really wanted to do was stay over after the elections and just see how people were reacting to the outcome and how they were repositioning themselves. Because now the Democrats didn't have the president; there was a Republican president and they didn't have the House. They just barely had the Senate. And so knowing what I knew about politics, I really knew that things were going to be very difficult. You have not heard of very many bills being signed off by the president since he's been there. And you won't hear of them, you just will not. Especially if the House remains as close as it is and the Senate remains the way that it is, you just won't hear it unless the Republicans are able to get a lot of moderates to move over to their position. But, you know that's me sitting out here looking in based on a little eight months of experience. But it would be very difficult for the president to get meaningful legislation passed, very, very difficult.

REINIER: So then you came back to Mississippi.

JOHNSON: No, I never returned to Mississippi.

REINIER: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: I left the Hill and came directly here to this forest, the Chattahoochee Forest.

REINIER: So, how did you get this job then?

JOHNSON: Knowing that I had to make a decision... One of the reasons that I was on the Hill was to get the congressional experience because I had told a forest supervisor that the only way I will become forest supervisor is if I do this. Knowing that I had to move and probably the Mississippi had moved on from where I was, to go back in to try and get caught up, I thought that was not what I wanted to do although I really wanted to go back home. I decided to apply for a forest supervisor's job. I decided to apply for this one because of its proximity to Mississippi. It's about nine hours from here to Mississippi. And I knew I could drive that fairly easily. Now it's getting a little hard, but I knew I could do that. Alabama forest supervisor's job was not open, nor was Louisiana, so the only other one that had come open was this one, the Chattahoochee and the Ocone. There were others out west. As a matter of fact, I got calls to apply for positions out there, Region 5, and I just said, "Forget it." I've been there, done that. I cannot imagine coming back out there as a forest supervisor. As a matter of fact, the Angeles position was open at that time and I got calls to come in and apply for that one. And I said, "No! No. It's not even a good selection of mine."

REINIER: You had come home.

JOHNSON: Well, it wasn't so much that I'd come home as much as it was I had experienced the Angeles. I still was not healed from my experience on the Angeles. I had no intent of going back out there to experience the same thing again. No intent whatsoever. So anyway I applied for this job. In September of 2000 I got the word that I had been selected for the position. And I asked a lot of questions before I applied. "Tell me about the forest. Is it rigged? Is anybody pre-ordained to get that position? Who are the people? What are they like?" And you heard nothing but really positive, great things about the Chattahoochee. Although if I had listened a little bit closer, I would have heard people when they said, "There's a lot of work there to do." If I had just listened and asked a few more questions. When I hear, "There's a lot of work," I think, "Great." Well, if I had just listened and asked a few more questions, I would have got a real clear picture of the message that they were trying to give me at that time. Anyway I applied and I got the job. The congresswoman was asking me at that time if I could stay. I postponed my coming here by two months because I had to get back to Mississippi and set up everything for moving and all of that. Got with all that and postponed the movement for three months. You were supposed to move within thirty days, but I postponed it until December 31st.

I officially came to the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest on November 6th 2000, and my entire life changed. I received a lot of messages from some of the employees here saying congratulations and things of that nature. But when I got here, Tom Speaks, was the deputy forest supervisor, but he was in an acting assignment as a forest supervisor. Tom had been on the forest for almost two years so people had gotten very familiar with him, they were comfortable with him. He represented the norm, the normal forest supervisors who had come through the Chattahoochee. There had never been a female forest supervisor here. There had been a deputy forest supervisor—female--here, but not ever a forest supervisor here. And Tom just represented what they were used to. And by that I mean male, older.

REINIER: And he also had applied for the job?

JOHNSON: I later found out that he did apply. It would have just made sense for him to have applied for the position. So later through people just talking, learned that he applied for the

position. And Tom can definitely do the position. I will never take anything away from his abilities because really it's a matter of trying to figure out how to get things done and getting it organized and getting people to follow you and those kinds of things. I want to spend a little time on Tom. He did not experience any of the things that I experienced, like the undermining or the resistance, any of that. At the same time what Tom did while he was here was not make decisions on things that should have had decisions made on them prior to my coming here. He did just not make decisions. They were too controversial, or as he told...

[End Tape 8, Side A]

Tape 8, Side B: Issues with the timber program on the Chattahoochee National Forest—Setting priorities for the national forest—Participating in the Personal Mastery Program—Working with the Regional Forester—Comparison of issues in the West with those in the Southeast.

REINIER: On the other side of the tape we were talking about your coming to the Chattahoochee [National Forest].

JOHNSON: Um hmm. And I was mentioning that Tom had not made decisions on things that I think he should have made decisions on. His justification was he wasn't forest supervisor and he was going to wait until the forest supervisor got here. To me, that's ludicrous because if you're in the acting role, you make the decisions that need to be made. I later understood why he didn't make the decisions because they're extremely controversial decisions. A lot of them have to do with internal things that needed to be changed, behaviors that were just totally out of line, and just a lot of things that needed work but did not receive the attention. And what he was able to do by not making the changes was build really good relationships with the people. I guess that's the sign of a good leader, you've got the people following you! In spite of what you may or may not be doing. And the employees feel that he was the best thing ever since sliced bread. Well, Tom didn't get the job and that essentially set me up for whatever I was to walk into.

When I got here on November 6th they had a little welcome thing. I guess they expected me to make a big speech, but I did not. I simply said something like, "I'm happy to be here. Thank you all so very much. Hopefully I'll be able to talk to you more directly about what I want to do in about six or seven months or so." They were not happy, come to find out. They wanted me to talk about the timber program and where I was going to go with the timber program and these things. Anyway, when I came on the forest I thought the best way to figure out what's going on is to hop in a vehicle and go and meet the rangers. And go and meet the employees on those ranger districts. And so the employees, the only question they had for me was, "Are we going to have a timber program here on this forest?" And I said, "We probably will not have a timber program the way we have had timber programs here in the past." I said, "Because the situation is very sensitive here. You guys have just come out of a tremendous amount of litigation. You're telling me that you have two amendments already done and you've not been able to do any work under these amendments. The program probably will not exist the way you are used to having that program here." And back in the day they were cutting maybe 76 million board feet of timber and they went all the way from that to zero after the litigation. And that was a lot of stress on the employees.

REINIER: Tell me a little bit more about the litigation.

JOHNSON: In 1996 or '97, the forest here, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests and this entire region had a very active timber sale program. There are a lot of environmentalists who would not like to see the forest manage it for commercial purposes. They unified themselves and took us to court. We presented some legal documents. They appealed these documents and they have a right to do that the way our laws are set up. They have a right to say through that appeal, "We don't like what you've done. You said you did this; you didn't do it." "This isn't clear," those kinds of things. "What is your overall objective? What are you trying to accomplish here?" And so they appealed us. Anyway, we went through court and everything and the courts agreed with the litigates that the forest service in fact had not done the things they said they were going to do in that legal document, and therefore they're remanding for not agreeing with your decisions. And so the litigants felt really good. They had won. They had

won. And they had brought all of the forest from a point of where they were producing timber to where they were doing nothing. And this is all the forests here in this region if you had a timber sale program.

Well, that was devastating to the employees here in Region 8. And it should have been because part of our mission is to provide timber. And all of a sudden they made it seem as if everything that we had been doing was horrible. It was *wrong*, it was just not right, and they really beat up on us pretty bad. The press had a party; everybody had a party. The environmentalists won and, by George, we're going to keep it this way. Well, the employees were saying things like, "We did what we were supposed to be doing; the judge doesn't understand. These people don't understand why we're doing what we're doing." It's the normal reactions that one goes through after you've had a normal practice and then you have to change it. Normal behaviors. Denial. Resentment. Anger. Feeling like their credentials were being questioned, and all that stuff.

When I got here I could do nothing but empathize with them. But at the same time I knew that I could not be telling them that we were going to have an active timber sale program here, especially when the judge had just made his decision. I said, "Guys, that's just not going to happen." Well, what they heard me say is there would never be another timber sale come off of this forest. And I said--isn't it interesting--I said, "It will not happen the way it's happened in the past, guys." And the more I said it, the more they heard me say, "I'm an environmentalist and I agree with the environmentalists." And that's the furthest from the truth. I agree with what's right for the forest out there and that's the position I have to take. So anyway, that started moving the employees definitely away from me. Now in the old days, all the forest supervisors had pushed timber--timber, timber, timber, timber. And I started explaining to the employees, I said, "Why would we, as dynamic of an agency as we are, only want to have us defined by the timber sale program. We're into recreation. We do a tremendous amount of restoration. We have special uses that we're doing. We have a dynamic lands program, but nobody ever hears about these things as it relates to the forest service. We have a great state and private program. We have great research going on out there. Why do we want to limit our definition of the forest service to timber? That is most unfortunate. Most unfortunate." Anyway, it just got worse. Didn't help any. So two things: Tom didn't get the job and my position on timber, that's the only two things. And I've not moved off of that position. And I will not move off that position unless the chief tells me to move off that position and that's fine. He's the boss. Or the Secretary of Agriculture, that's fine.

The other thing that the employees were sharing was the folks just didn't understand what we needed to do, and we need to educate these people, and we're the scientists, and da-da-da-da, all that kind of stuff. And I said, "Okay. Education is a good thing and we have been known for education, conservation education, not a problem." "We need to get our land management plan taken care of, get that thing off the shelf, so we can start doing some things." Now we already have a plan, but doing some things in their minds meant cutting timber. "And we're not managing the forest," and whenever you hear that, they're saying, "We're not cutting timber." In spite of all the other great things that we're doing out there, that's the one thing that they define as managing the forest. And so the other thing I heard was, "We don't have good relationships with people. We need to build some relationships. We just need to get rid of these folks, all these folks who are in opposition to us, and teach 'em about what we do. And somebody needs to stand up to 'em." You know, all that kind of stuff. So I said, "Okay. I hear you." They said, "Our recreation program, we should have the best recreation program in Region 8. We're right here in Atlanta's backyard. Everybody comes here. We got ten million visitors a year." And on and on they went about the recreation program. And there was one other thing they said, "When we manage our forests they need to be healthy. They need to be healthy forests. And our waters need to be healthy because the Chattahoochee River feeds the

city of Atlanta, Alabama, Florida, and everybody else, and, by George, we need to be pushing water quality."

So listening to them through their anger and their frustrations and their disappointments, made it very easy for me to define what the forest should be doing, made it extremely easy. They couldn't see it, but an outsider coming in could easily see it. And I just listened to their words and developed six areas where we were going to focus. They were completing the land management plan, and getting from under litigation and staying from under litigation as best we can. Managing the forest from an ecosystem standpoint and making sure that the watersheds were stored as necessary. Build the relationships and partnerships with whomever we needed to. Creating a very aggressive and active conservation education program. I don't know if I said it or not, but getting that plan completed. I don't know if I said that or not.

REINIER: You said that.

JOHNSON: I did? The other thing I heard when I got here was, "We've been deficit spending, every year we've been deficit spending in our budget, and, by George, we've had to go off on details to make up for this," and all this kind of stuff. And so along with those other four or five that I just mentioned, financial health became another focus. And recreation, running it from a business standpoint. So there was building relationships and partnerships, ecosystem health and watershed restoration, getting the forest plan revised, making sure that our finances were in healthy and stable condition, running our recreation program using business principles, and conservation education. It became very, very easy. Anybody could have walked in and heard the exact same thing and focused on it.

REINIER: That sounds very clear.

JOHNSON: It was very clear. Well. That is not what the employees wanted to hear. What the employees wanted to hear was, "We are going to have a timber sale program." That's what they wanted to hear. And they still asked that same question. "Where's the timber sale program?" Well, we have not cut a stick of timber on this forest since 1996, '97, '98, one of those years. We've not cut a stick of timber here. And so all of a sudden I was hearing, "You don't care about timber. Because you don't care about timber, we don't trust you." Or "You're saying one thing and doing something else." Anytime I talk to them it's about these six areas that I just mentioned. So I've been consistent in whatever I said, very consistent. In addition to me not being Tom, them having to deal with the litigation, me defining a program under six umbrellas, programs that they claim they did not agree with, those are three things that added to the challenge that I have here.

So the employees decided that, "We told you she didn't know anything. We told you." And they just started with the undermining and the backbiting and all those kinds of things. And then it became very interesting to just sit and watch it. And so what I decided to do--unlike most people who react and retaliate and all that kind of stuff--I decided to just listen and not say anything. I didn't say anything because I knew that they were talking to the regional office and anybody who would walk past them, all those kinds of things, including some of the people we had great partnerships with and those kinds of things. So I decided not to fight fire with fire. But use common sense in dealing with the employees' hurt and their loss, not only of the timber sale program, but of Tom and everything else that was going on with them.

When I got here some of the things that I quickly picked up on also was the employees were working way outside of their PD's. They didn't have training plans in place. And some of them had not received performance reviews for a very long time. But there was no issue. They were content. For fifteen or twenty years they'd been very content from just operating the way

they've been operating, which has required no major thinking on their part. Because remember, their focus was on the timber sale program. That was their purpose.

REINIER: You're undergoing the change in this forest that the whole system is undergoing.

JOHNSON: Exactly. And this forest, just like the Angeles and the San Bernardino, in my mind they're very similar, very, very, similar. Except I didn't see the politicians involved with the operations of a forest. I didn't see everybody and his mother involved or having an opinion about the Angeles or the San Bernardino. But here on the Chattahoochee everybody is involved with the management of this forest. I mean everybody has an opinion. Everybody. And one of the reasons is, it's a really great piece of real estate...

REINIER: ...Yeah.

JOHNSON: ...that has not been developed and will not be developed except for roads and things of that nature. And it's a small piece of a land base that's here that is in that stage. And we have a national park up here, but it's real small in comparison to ours. People are looking for a safe haven and the Chattahoochee provides that. You can go up there and really feel content and happy. You're walking amongst the trees and the vegetation and get up on the highest point in Georgia, which is Brasstown-Baldwin Look Out, and look out over Atlanta and all those kinds of things. So people are looking to escape the cities of Atlanta and the other metropolitan cities. They want to get to a place that provides them seclusion, a place where they can just drive and go, "Ahh, life is good" and feel at peace again. And so I can easily understand why so many people have an interest in this national forest up here, so very many people. The locals have an interest. The *Atlanta Constitution*, we were always in the papers. And the politicians. Anybody you could think of has an interest in this national forest up here. So that makes it a little bit more difficult.

So not only am I dealing with that, I'm dealing with employees who are unhappy. And so, I'm just watching the dynamics happen for an entire year. And one of the things I read one time that said if you want to make change, you have to keep a consistent message out there; you have to keep a consistent message out there. And the day you hear one person say, "Well, yeah, we need to be doing ecosystem management and dealing with our watersheds" you know you're making a breakthrough. And I believe I've made some semblance of a breakthrough. This is about a year and a half that I've been here now pushing this. I've even had to push it with the regional office. I have people up there saying, "You're not managing the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. And my response has been, "Really? Well, how do you define management?" And it's all around the timber program. My response to them is, "We're managing the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests; let me talk to you about some of the things that we're doing. No, we are not cutting timber out there, but we are strategically thinking about how you want to manage that forest for its ecosystems and making sure that those ecosystems are intact, that they're healthy and that they're going to be there for generations after generations after generations." "Well, you're doing a good job," they can conclude. "But you've got a lot of unhappy people." "Yes, I'm aware of that. I'm aware of that." "Well, Clara"--in their indirect way--"Do you really know what you're doing?" Oh! They ask the questions in all kinds of ways. Either I respond or I don't respond or something. But anyway, I've been challenged to the maximum. It's been a hard job for a year and a half. It's been a very hard time. Normally I can walk into an area and people are very receptive and I get along with them very well. And all this kind of stuff, and they create this thing that said, "You can't be trusted, Clara." I said "Okay." I said, "Okey dokey."

By this time I had entered into a program known as the Personal Mastery Program and that program is designed to teach you about yourself. You learn to go inside and really learn

yourself. It's a nine-day program. You go a session and then you go away, and then you go back until you complete it. My next session is in June. In that session it said, whenever people are accusing you of something, that means that's what they are. It has nothing to do with you; it has to do with them. All of us were sitting in the room--there are ten of us in this class, and really neat people, really neat people--and all of us were saying, "Are you telling us that when we're told that we can't be trusted that really they're saying they're not trustworthy?" Absolutely. Because people react based on their own perception of themselves and who they are, not about you because they don't know you. So I said, "Thank you for this learning! I'll take it right on back!"

[Laughter]

Thank you! And they taught us much, much more. But they taught us more about how people perceive things and it's based on their own values and their own beliefs and their own behaviors and all that kind of stuff. Great classes.

REINIER: So that's helping you deal with this?

JOHNSON: Absolutely. Personal Mastery has been just perfect.

REINIER: Did you get that through the Forest Service?

JOHNSON: Through the Forest Service. It's a course that they just started. When I first heard about it I sent my name in, and I said, "This is definitely something I need to be in." Just a dynamic...

REINIER: Do you have to go away for that?

JOHNSON: I do. I'm going to Denver, Colorado, the first week of June to finish it up. But it's been great because it takes me away from the existing environment that's here on the forest so that I can go and reconnect with people who are experiencing the same thing. We can talk through all of that stuff and use examples. And we have great facilitators who have gone through this and live this. And it's working to help us.

REINIER: That's very interesting.

JOHNSON: So it's just been great. So anyway, a year and a half now we've been trying to reconnect as a forest, them with me. Some of the employees have even said, "We were waiting on the regional forester to get here so that he could move you. We were sharing all this negative information to make sure that seed was planted." So our regional forester came out and talked to me. He said, "I just want you to know that I'm hearing that you're saying you're not going to cut another stick of timber on the forest." And I said, "Exactly how do you feel about that?" And he said, "Clara, you know we are." And I said, "We probably will." And I said, "So let me talk to you about what I'm doing to address the system management here on the forest, not timber management." And I said, "Timber harvesting is only a tool to accomplish what we want to accomplish up on the job, and we focused on that tool, and solely on that tool. There are a lot of ways to accomplish what we need to accomplish out there--for habitats and animals and fish and everything else." And I said, "If you want me to limit my thinking to just the timber tool, then you have the wrong person in this position. It's just the way it is." And I said, "I believe that I'm on the right track, where I'm going with this, and all I ask is that you support it."

REINIER: But Clara, you're going where the agency is going.

JOHNSON: See, two different things are happening. The agency has been transitioning in my mind for about fifteen years. And you know as well as I do that change is very, very hard. All throughout these fifteen years--because I've been with the agency twenty-two years now--throughout these fifteen years of us transitioning, we have had different words that we've used to describe what we're trying to accomplish. Ecosystem management. New perspectives. Long-term sustainability. Different words that we've used, but people have not grasped the full concept of those things. Or we have not made them a part of the agency like we have made the timber program a part of the agency. When you say "timber" everybody knows exactly what you're talking about. When you say "ecosystem management" it's a little bit fuzzy. And so you have to go and define it for your own unit.

REINIER: But is it true that you've come from the West where these things perhaps are better defined than they are in the Southeast?

JOHNSON: I think what has happened in the West is because we were hit with it first, the timber program, we lost the timber program out in the West. The West has had more time to work with it, much more time. I don't know if it's any better defined. I don't know. I do know that people are doing a lot of great work in ecosystem management and watershed restoration; they're doing a tremendous amount of great work out there. I mean just awesome work. And some of this work includes removing timber. And we sell that timber because it doesn't make sense to cut it and then just let it rot on the ground. It's just a waste, especially when people need the wood for other purposes, furniture or whatever. So I don't know if it's any better defined. I think that they've had to deal with it sooner than we did. Because I was there in '87 and '88 on the Six Rivers and by '89 the Spotted Owl had made a significant difference in how we dealt with programs out there.

REINIER: Of course, that affected the timber program so much in Region 6.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. Absolutely it did. And so we're all just struggling with a lot of this stuff, but again people have done a tremendous job in trying to implement the best thing on the ground. Again, in my mind, there's nothing wrong with taking a tree out of the woods. There's nothing wrong with that. As long as you're understanding that you're trying to accomplish some conditions when you do that. And that's the philosophy that I'm working on. I don't necessarily know if we should be saying things like we have been doing. "We need to cut so many trees out and sell them." But if that's where our agency is, that's where our agency is.

REINIER: Now, are you finding a change of direction with the change in administrations back to the Republican administration?

JOHNSON: Yes. Under the Clinton administration--and I think it was led mostly by the vice president--they were really into preservation. That is, setting aside areas under the terms of roadless, meaning that no roads could be built into these areas, and if roads did exist we were to take them out so that the areas could grow back up naturally. Or there was more designation of wilderness and those kinds of things. And a lot of the people didn't like that in the agency, because it did limit the amount of acreage that we could manage for timber production. Under the Bush administration, and he's been kind of slow on coming out with where he is. He's been kind of slow on a lot of things, but he's been kind of slow in coming out where he is. It's just recently we've seen an increase in his discussions about logging on the Tongas National Forest, which is in Alaska. The president had a proclamation where he set aside so many millions of acres. There's 1.4 million acres as wilderness. The Bush administration is now changing that so that more logging and mining and those kinds of things can take place within the Tongas National Forest. I don't know how it's all going to play out.

I just know that I have the same issues here on the Chattahoochee and I should be allowed to set the direction for how we manage the forest here in Georgia. Our situation in my mind is so very different than the Tongas National Forest or other national forests because of the number of people I have here, the number of people who are visiting this forest, the demands for so many different kinds of uses out there on the forest, all kinds of demands. You think of anything, horseback riding, sightseeing, this, that, just tremendous demands on this land out here. A small acreage, 865,000 acres is what we have here. We have to really think about what it is we're trying to accomplish before we just go out and do something. And that's what I'm trying to get my folks to strategically think about, so that when we go out to the publics we can say that "Based on our assessments, based on our inventory, based on the management that we've been doing for the last ten, fifteen years, here's what we need to be doing with our forest. Yes, folks, it means that we need to be cutting some of the trees down because if we don't, as you can see, the Southern Pine Beetle is going to continue to eat them. So they'll fall one way or the other. So why don't you let us manage it as opposed to having the Southern Pine Beetle spread their infestation throughout the forest. We got this disease that attacked hardwoods. You need to let us manage this kind of stuff. Everything shouldn't just stand there and let Mother Nature take its course." At the same time we need to be factoring in the huge recreational demands. The natural resources that we have out there and the recreational demands, the people demands, on these resources, and try to balance that stuff out. And so to just carte blanche say this is how this forest should do... And I'm hoping that the chief won't do that. I'm hoping that the chief will say, "Look at your forest." And he has and so has the regional forester. "Look at your forest and decide the best for that forest." And so I've been very appreciative of them.

REINIER: Do you feel you have the support now of the regional forester?

JOHNSON: I do. The regional forester just got here in January. He just came on board.

REINIER: What's his name?

JOHNSON: The regional forester here in Region 8 is Bob Jacobs, Robert Jacobs. He comes from Region 9 and just has a very healthy background with the Forest Service. I do believe I have the support of the regional forester. We have so many controversial issues here whether they're internal or external, I'm sure the regional forester wonders about me sometimes. But he's given me his support. I think that the time has come for me to walk in and share with him my timeline on how I think I can get things accomplished here. And I do believe that he will support me in getting those things accomplished. And so I've been very pleased with him so far. He's a person who believes in letting the local line officer make the decisions that need to be made, keeping the relationships where they need to be with the congressmen and the locals and the environmentalists and everybody else who has an interest in the forest. So he tries to allow us to work pretty independent from him. Now working independent does not mean that you isolated yourself from him. What it means is, you're working with our regional office and making sure that they're aware of the things that you're trying to accomplish out there so that they can advise you properly and so that they can support you when they do get a congressional or hate mail coming down. "Now that Clara Johnson, how dare she..." They already know my position on it and they can respond appropriately.

[End Tape 8, Side B]

Tape 9, Side A: Off highway vehicle use in the national forest—Issues in urban national forests—The Conasauga River Watershed Project—Heritage Resources Management issues—Working with the state forester—Joining the Society of American Foresters—Being an African American woman in a federal agency undergoing transition—Reflections on the consent decree in Region 5—Training through taking detail positions—Mentoring other women—Impact of women on Forest Service culture.

REINIER: Clara, we were talking at the end of the last tape a little bit about the controversy you're engaged in now with Congressman Norwood of Georgia.

JOHNSON: Um. The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests will always be involved in controversy whether it's with congressionals or whether it's with environmental groups, whether it's with locals, regardless, we will always be in controversy. The key is, how do you stay out of that controversy? We have an issue right now—one of many, we have so many issues here—one of them is off highway vehicle use. And the issue that's surrounding that is whether or not these OHV's [off highway vehicles] can ride on public roads. There are several members who are interested in having these bikes on the public roads and there are some members who are not interested. And so I'm trying to work to balance their interest along with the resources. And the thing that I try to keep in mind is, what's best for the resources, what is best for the resources.

REINIER: You're the steward.

JOHNSON: Exactly. What's best for the resources out there. Not about what's best for the environmentalists or the politics or the locals or those kinds of the things, what's best for the resources. And so what I have to look at is whether or not what someone is asking us to do is going to cause detrimental impacts to those natural resources out there. Any T&E species or damage to water quality or any sensitive species or erosion, any of that kind of stuff, I need to be in a position to balance it. So one of the things, this OHV issue has really surfaced as a big thing here. Historically people have always ridden their bikes on the roads. We changed that when we were doing our first land management plan, the plan that we're under right now, where we designated these OHV's to be only on designated trails. And I believe that, just like any other use, we need to designate trails or designate a route that we want people to be on, otherwise they run in and everywhere. Then you run the risk of really messing up a national forest and killing off T&E species and sensitive species and other things. And so that's the issue that we're dealing with now. In my mind, it's not about whether or not the bikes should be on the road, but the issues is, where should this use occur and how should this use occur. That's where I'm trying to keep the issue focused regardless of who's interested in it or not interested in it. We've been working with our regional office very closely on this particular issue. And there's just a lot of information on our web site about it. I could probably talk about this one for a good year because this is my first real controversial issue that I'm having to deal with on the forest as it relates to natural resources.

A couple things that I've wanted to say about the forest is this forest is truly an urban national forest. What makes the forest an urban national forest is again the proximity of metropolitan communities, huge metropolitan communities, the amount of use the forest is receiving, the development that's taken place in these metropolitan areas, and the need for us to make sure that this development does not occur up in the mountains. Because of the people, the politics, the environmentalists and everything else that's surrounding this national forest. Truly an urban forest, the folks in the urban dwellings want to come here, they're excited about coming here. The locals are getting a little concerned about them coming here because what they're seeing is

their lifestyles are changing, the locals, I mean people who've been there for a very, very, very long time. And it's generational. And now what we have is folks who have completed their careers and they're wanting that peace and harmony and serenity and they're building homes up on the private lands right next to our national forest. The other part that makes us a true urban national forest is when these folks go up there and build these homes right next to a national forest, it means that we're responsible to a major degree for protecting these homes against wildfires and storm damage and everything else that takes place. This is a true, true, complex operation here on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. I was not anticipating it to be that complex; I was thinking it was just going to be as easy as everything else that I've worked on. But it's been a welcome. It has been a welcome. It's been a challenge, but it's really a welcome to be here. So I could stay here forever just working on this kind of stuff.

REINIER: Your experience on the Angeles is appropriate too.

JOHNSON: It was very helpful to have had that experience on the Angeles. It gives me a sense, a real clear sense of what the issues are. I mentioned earlier, when I was talking about the Angeles, the huge Latino population that's exploding. The same thing is happening here. So once again, we're having to re-define how we service different users of the population.

REINIER: You have a watershed project, for example, the Conasauga River Watershed Project. Do you want to say a few words about that?

JOHNSON: Sure. Oh, probably back in '99, nationally we recognized that we wanted to continue to fix up some watersheds. We focused on several watersheds. I'm not sure how many were identified, but here on the Chattahoochee there were two projects, two watersheds identified, the Conasauga River Watershed and the Chatuga River Watershed. Both of these watersheds are major, major watersheds, that provide water and fisheries and rafting opportunities and just great recreational experiences. A couple of things have been happening. These watersheds are also owned by private lands. The whole objective is to restore these watersheds to a healthy condition. In order to do that, we have to have partnerships with a tremendous amount of organizations, the state forestry organization, the national parks, friends of this river, friends of that river. We have to have these partnerships with these people because so many different people own this watershed as it leaves the national forest lands. And so what we're trying to do is work with these other interest groups so that we can all get in and fix up the watersheds. When I say "fix up" the watersheds, some of the banks are sloughing off, trees have fallen over and caused a lot of sedimentation to enter the streams. The fisheries have been lost as a result of overuse. So we're having to get in and clean out and re-establish nice pools so that the fisheries can have the proper conditions so that they can span and start expanding their population again.

The Conasauga River Project is headed up by Kent Evans, a really dynamic young man. One of the key pieces that we realized was if we were going to restore these watersheds and we wanted them to be restored long-term, we had to invoke conservation education. So Kent works with a board and a group of people to put on a lot of conservation education type programs. He brings teachers out, he brings kids out, and he teaches them about proper water quality, and how to restore watersheds, and the importance of the various species that live within the watershed, mussels and the various things that live within these watersheds. So these teachers can in turn take this information back to their students. What we're trying to grow are more conservationists in society. We believe that there are not a lot of people who know about natural resource management anymore. It's sort of like the farmers; there's not very many people who farm anymore. And so we're relying on a few people. Well, we don't want that to happen with the Forest Service because we are firm believers in conservation. And we want to be in a position where we're teaching people about what we do, why we do it, how we do it. And then have

them grow up and want to enter into their new lives being conservationists, and/or Forest Service employees. So that's the Conasauga River Watershed Project. The Chatuga is a little bit different. Both of them are doing the same thing.

One of the things that we are doing in both of them that's very similar is roads contribute a lot of the sediment into the rivers. And so we're spending a lot of time restoring these roads. Some of these roads we're scarifying and putting to bed meaning that we're replanting them. Some of the roads we're graveling over, especially if they're roads that are used by the public or we're using a certain type of gravel to make sure that it's going to be there for a very, very long time and not wash off, or not allow sediment to move through the bigger coarse rocks and into the streams. And that's been a major success. We're redesigning the shapes of roads so that the water when it does travel, travels in a direction that we want it to travel as opposed to traveling and causing gullies and adding more sediment to the water. So those are just a few things that we're doing. There's so much more that we're doing with this project that is just incredible but those are two good things that are nationally recognized. We're proud of them. And the folks who are heading them up are definitely just top notch.

REINIER: I'm personally interested in this. You have tremendous heritage resources management issues in this area. Do you have a historian on staff?

JOHNSON: We do. Well, we don't have a historian; we have an archeologist on staff. When I first arrived on the forest, that position was vacant. So we didn't have the program in place the way we needed it. Just last year we hired [J.K.] Jill Harrell to serve as our forest archeologist. This area is rich in history, I mean, just tremendously rich.

REINIER: Well, this is the old Cherokee territory.

JOHNSON: It is. Right now we have the Eastern Band Cherokee who is still here in Georgia and we're working to build a very solid relationship with them. And we have about twelve other tribes that we work directly with, or are trying to build relationships with them. Jill Harrell is responsible for making sure that if we're going to do any type management out on a national forest, that we do surveys to make sure that we're not going to impact any of the artifacts that may still be out on the ground. So she and another individual or a crew of folks will come out and do those surveys for us. The other thing we have is a program known as Passport in Time, where a group of people who are really interested in history come out and they dig. They have an idea that certain artifacts is in these areas or certain burials have happened in these areas. And they come out and they actually dig. They explore, and they made some really great discoveries by doing this program. Very, very, very, some of the top scientists come out to do this work. I've gone out one or two times just to look and see what they're doing and dug. You gotta know what you're doing and they keep you out of the way.

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: "Let's do a photo moment with you." But short of that, they don't let me get in the way. But they're discovering all kinds of bones, all kinds of pottery, all kinds of different things here. I was just out on the forest looking at this area, way out in no man's land, where we saw these really strange rock formations out there, where they line them up and some are really stacked high and just all different kinds of things. And we had one of the tribal nations come out and look at it, and they were able to identify it as being culturally significant. So those kinds of things are exciting...

REINIER: Very much so.

JOHNSON: ...where you discover it yourself.

REINIER: Is there anything else that you want to say about this forest?

JOHNSON: Other than it's—and I think I said it before—other than it's one of the most complex controversial forests there is, I think it's a great place for anybody to come and learn about natural resource management and all the different things that's associated with that. If anybody's interested in urban forestry and learning about how the social environment impacts the national forest, this is the place to come. If you want to learn about great conservation education programs, this is the place to come. If you want to learn about how the state works very closely and has influence over the national forest operations, this is the place to come. You could probably learn almost anything that you want to hear on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

REINIER: Because you're working with the state forester--in fact you mentioned this before--in Georgia, very closely...

JOHNSON: ...Oh, very.

REINIER: ...just as you were in Mississippi.

JOHNSON: Very closely. Very closely on all of the programs--wildlife programs, rural development programs, timber programs, all of those kinds of things. Forest health programs. Anything that the state forester is involved with, we're usually involved with it also. It's truly got to be a partnership, and it is a partnership so far.

REINIER: I wanted to ask you a few questions, Clara, just kind of summing this up. One thing that I would like to ask, you're a member, aren't you, of the Society of American Foresters?

JOHNSON: Yes.

REINIER: When did you join?

JOHNSON: I joined the Society of American Foresters association in 2000, because I'm just getting here. I was a member before and I allowed my membership to elapse, but I re-joined in 2001. 2001. We had a Society of American Foresters conference in Washington D.C., so I renewed my membership prior to going to that conference.

REINIER: So is that pretty much mandatory as a forest supervisor?

JOHNSON: It's not mandatory, but it's definitely a way to be engaged and be around other people who are dealing with the forestry related issues, and get a sense that you're not in this all by yourself. Because they talk about all of the issues there. They talk about national issues as well as international issues as it relates to forestry. They talk about the importance of conservation education as it relates to forestry. They talk about the diseases and infestations that could destroy a national forest. And so it's nice to go and meet some of the scientists who've done the research. It's nice to go and listen to the professors talk about the very same things that you're dealing with and you think you're dealing with by yourself. And so it's nice to have that relationship with the Society of American Foresters just to understand and be aware.

I was just at another conference, just this month, where they had an international forestry forum where they talked about all the forestry issues. Folks were here from Canada, Romania, China, from all over, all coming to talk about forestry management, of course, from Brazil and all of

those different places. What was most interesting to me about that session is the issues are exactly the same regardless of which part of the country you're in. If you're in Brazil, you're dealing with over-cutting, or the loss of key habitat for butterflies or whatever. If you're in Canada, it's about when you can cut and whether or not there's enough timber to cut because of the weather conditions and those kinds of things. If you're in Germany, you're dealing with the same thing because you have acid rain and all those kinds of issues that you have to deal with. Also, of course, you were dealing with the issue of what is a sustainable forest. Just what is a sustainable forest, everybody's still messing around with that definition. What do we want here for our forest, all that kind of stuff. And so where I hear the professors of universities talking about these things and the heads of countries talking about these kinds of issues, I feel okay. I feel real, real good.

REINIER: It's interesting that your connection with the Society of American Foresters doesn't seem so much a networking connection as an issue oriented connection.

JOHNSON: Oh, definitely it can be used as a networking opportunity because if you need research on something you can easily call somebody and say, "Hey, I'm dealing with this issue; can you help me?" It can be used as networking from the standpoint of "I'm trying to get a job over here; can you put in a good word for me?" You know, those kinds of things. So it can be used however you want to. Mostly I have used it from an issue standpoint. I'm dealing with an issue and I'm trying to find out how the rest of the world is dealing with this issue. That's how I've been using this.

REINIER: Now you are clearly someone--and we've talked about this before--you're clearly a pioneer in the Forest Service in a lot of different ways, not only as a black woman, but also in issues that you've been involved with and are trying to work with as the agency goes through transitions.

JOHNSON: [Sighs] I think the timing is good timing. These issues had to be dealt with sooner or later. They've been trying to come to the surface for about fifteen years—the timber issue, the recreation issue, and all of those issues have been trying to come to the surface. It's just timing. And with that comes a decision within myself as to whether or not I want to continue with this kind of stress and agony, and shaping the issues and defining issues, and whether or not I'm willing to stand firm in my beliefs as to where we should be going as an agency, and definitely where I should be going as a forest. I like the positions that I've taken so far; they're positions that I can see that are reflecting the rest of the world. It's not something that Clara is just doing by herself. So it definitely tells me that the fight—if you want to call it a fight—is definitely something I want to stay in for at least through retirement, for right now. Pioneer? I don't know about being a pioneer, but I can say that the issues of the forest make me think about where we're trying to go as an agency and I think I'm doing that.

REINIER: You're clearly somebody who's benefited by the consent decree [in Region 5].

JOHNSON: Oh, absolutely.

REINIER: We've talked about that, but do you have any more reflections on that?

JOHNSON: I am very pleased that the consent decree happened. If the consent decree had not happened, I do not believe that I would be in the position that I'm in today. I don't know this for a fact because it did happen this way. All I know is that the consent decree provided me opportunities. It said we know that there are women out there who can do this job, we're going to find them, we're going to groom them, and then we're going to support them. And so I'm very, very pleased that the consent decree came about. I believe that if the consent decree had

not come about, that I could easily still be a soil scientist, mapping soils, documenting profiles, doing soil surveys, and those kinds of things, very, very easily. And I believe that I could have been a very disappointed employee within the agency, someone who could have ended up filing something because I would have felt that I was not getting the support or the direction or the career opportunities that I felt I should have been getting.

REINIER: Well, the Forest Service has done a lot to groom you for your positions too.

JOHNSON: Oh, I really owe everything to two people and that's my mother and the Forest Service. One, my mother pushing me into the Forest Service, or pushing me into a job. And two, the Forest Service, in spite of what I just said about the consent decree, I am here and they have provided every training opportunity that I've ever wanted. I've never had anybody said "no" to anything that I've ever wanted. And they're saying "yes" to me because I'm asking. A lot of people are not asking. A lot of women and men are not asking. I'm looking out there to see what kind of training and what kind of seminars and those kinds of things I need to be in, always trying to hone my skills in some area. The Forest Service has been a great supporter of mine. I would recommend that people come into the agency. But before they come into the agency, I would recommend that they really do a lot of research on the agency and recognize that it's not an easy agency to work for. It is not easy at all. But you can make it easy by how you position yourself within the agency. If you want to come in as a victim, you will be a victim. If you want to come in and see things as obstacles and figure out how you're going to get around those obstacles, you'll be very successful and you'll be okay.

REINIER: You had a number of details too that really were training details.

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah.

REINIER: I think that's very interesting how that's worked out.

JOHNSON: More than likely I will go on other details. I've probably had as many details as I've had permanent assignments. I recommend anybody take details because it does take you out of the element where you are. It puts you in a whole different situation. You can take advantage of it when you go and you learn something new. You definitely need to do details. I will probably do a detail while I'm here as forest supervisor, into something that I know nothing about, because that's the only way you are to learn. Take the opportunity, get into the training that you would normally say, well this isn't in my career path. Well, maybe it is. Take it. Do it anyway.

REINIER: Are there ways that you have worked yourself to open up opportunities for other women and minorities?

JOHNSON: Yes. One of the things that happens is when your name gets out there... And my name's been out there since I was a GS5 really, coming into the agency. When I first came into the agency as a GS5 everybody wanted to take care of me. Now African American women in particular call me for advice.

REINIER: Do they?

JOHNSON: Oh, all the time. "I'm looking at doing a detail in this area; would you consider doing that for me?" "I'm looking at this; would you consider doing this for me?" "How can you help me do this?" "Can you put me in contact with this person," or that person. So they're networking through me. I've actually served as mentor to some African American women, and non-African American women. But a lot of African American women call me all the time just to

talk about some of the agonies and frustrations that they're feeling, or wanting to excel and their bosses are not supporting them, those kinds of things. So, absolutely. As a matter of fact, I'm working with the Mayor of Gainesville right now. She has a meeting every second Saturday every month where she's just being with the African American communities and talking to them about issues that they need to know about, that affect their communities. And so I'm going to those meetings now so that I can start talking to them about "You live right here; how many of you know about the Chattahoochee-Oconee [National Forests]?" "Do you know you own this national forest up here?" You know, trying to branch out that way. Soon I will be expanding even more once I fill my deputy position. It will free me up to get out external a little bit more. And then I can breathe a little easier and start building all these kinds of relationships that I want, including getting involved with more things other minority women are involved with, and just don't have an idea about how to open that door. They just don't have an idea about how to do it. They want to do it, but they've not had the counseling or the support to move forward.

REINIER: So you really are a role model for other African American women.

JOHNSON: I would like to say that I'm available. I don't ever like to say that I'm a role model because we all have done things that's not so great in our lives. So when you put the label "role model" on it, it almost makes you seem like you have to be perfect. I'm a long ways from that, a long ways from that. But those things that I have done great or have done good, I think a lot of the women, African American women, can look and say we're very pleased with what you're doing. We're going to keep supporting you, and those kinds of things. I have a niece now who's trying to enter the Forest Service. She's been working as a temporary, and I know I'm serving as a role model for her. And so whatever I do in this agency, I'm going to make sure that I'm doing the right thing so that it doesn't mess up her opportunities that she will move into. [Laughter] Because people do know. But role model, I don't know.

REINIER: Has anybody been a role model for you?

JOHNSON: Lots of people have been role models for me. Lots of people. Well, I would say lots of people have been mentors for me. The Larry Cabodis of this world. The Mike Rogers of this world. When it seemed like I was down and out, so to speak, or everybody was picking at you, these people always stayed there to say, "We're here; we believe in you." And then moved me to the next level to actually demonstrate the support for me.

REINIER: Do you think that the presence of women in the Forest Service has had an impact on Forest Service culture yet?

JOHNSON: It has. It has a long way to go. It could not not have had an impact. We're here. We think differently. We need different things, especially those of us who are single parents trying to raise healthy kids. We need different things. And in the old days, men didn't have that worry. Women took care of the kids, and they went on with their careers. Well, we're balancing now between career and family. So that means we're not going to be here until seven and eight and nine o'clock at night and the babies are off somewhere else. We're going to work reasonable hours and go home. And the agency has to understand that.

REINIER: You told me before off the tape how difficult it was for you when you moved here, for example, getting Cydney established.

JOHNSON: Oh it was. It was very, very difficult. When I moved here, I did my same routine of calling ahead and trying to find nannies and schools and things of that nature. One of the things I wanted to do with Cydney was put her in a private school. And the private school would not accept her because they said she was functioning on a kindergarten level when the kid

was a first grader. Maybe she was functioning at a kindergarten per their standards. But the kid that I saw was a very intelligent kid. I did not want to move her back to kindergarten, so I found a public school to put her in where she's excelling. I'm happy to say she had all A's when she came out of second grade. I expect that to continue through high school. But just meeting people here in Gainesville is difficult. Meeting other African Americans is very difficult. I go now to a church, and the only reason I go to this church is because I was invited to go to this church. Nobody sent me any information....

[End Tape 9, Side A]

Tape 9, Side B: Finding a community in Gainesville, Georgia—Disappointments and Triumphs—Advice for other employees in the Forest Service.

REINIER: We're talking about your coming to Gainesville and the difficulty of finding people, finding an African American community.

JOHNSON: I was mentioning that the reason I go to this church that I attend now, the Free Chapel Worship Center, is because somebody said, "Clara, would you like to come?" And that was only after I said, "Where's there a good church to go around here?" Normally, in the old days supposedly people had a welcome basket all put together for you and they brought you over pies and things. That's what they told me anyway. That never happened to me. That definitely did not happen here in Gainesville. So I go to Free Chapel Worship Center and the church is multicultural. It's just really great going there, just really great to go and see a whole bunch of different people in the church that you're worshiping with and praising with. But it has been very difficult to get into the communities. When I first came to Gainesville, we had a reception, they did a reception for me and over two or three hundred people came to that reception. Environmentalists, members, all kinds of people came to that reception.

REINIER: Checking you out.

JOHNSON: Absolutely! And that was good because it said I'm here and this is what I look like. All you guys can work with her or make your own assumptions about her. But that was very nice when they came here. It only happened because I was a forest supervisor coming into this area, which gave me an idea of how important the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest is to the state of Georgia. It's extremely important. Somebody once told me, "Clara, that Chatahoochee National Forest is equivalent to a Fortune 500 company," and I said, "You've got to be kidding." I said, "Oh yeah."

REINIER: You're the CEO.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. And they said and that's how they view you and that's how you need to be conducting your business, as a CEO. And I said, "How did that happen to a forest supervisor?" I was trying to figure that piece out. But very important player in the politics and economics of this state. Very important thing.

REINIER: Well now, in your career looking back over it, is there anything you would have done differently?

JOHNSON: I don't know. Knowing what I know, I don't know if I could have done anything differently. No. I can't think of anything that I would have done differently. The only thing I can think of is before becoming forest supervisor for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, I probably would have taken an assignment in Washington D.C. prior to coming here. One of the other things I probably could have done been more Britney Spears like where everybody just loves you. You're so outgoing and wonderful and all that, but I don't think that ever would have happened.

REINIER: It doesn't sound like that happens when you get to be the person in the position.

JOHNSON: It does not happen. It does not happen. It really depends on if the people decide if they're going to like your or not. That's what I found throughout this entire thing. When our regional forester came here, before he got here everybody said, "Oh, he's such a great

guy; he's wonderful; he's this; he's that." All the positive. And that's what stuck. And he is a good guy. He is a good guy; don't get me wrong. But however people want to paint you is at the whims of those people. It's just interesting. No, I can't think of anything that I would have changed necessarily.

REINIER: Well, it's harder to get people to paint you positively if you're not in a particular mold I would think.

JOHNSON: It's a little bit harder. You do have to pull yourself a little bit more. Definitely if you're not male, I think you have to work a little bit harder. Because we do have some African American males who are forest supervisors here and they're not experiencing what I'm experiencing. At least they haven't told me that they're experiencing the same thing.

REINIER: Are they helpful to you?

JOHNSON: We talk. We talk about just general stuff. But they're not me and I'm not them. They can share their issues that they're dealing with and how they dealt with them, but it still comes back to me having to figure out how I deal with those issues.

REINIER: Yeah.

JOHNSON: So.

REINIER: What's been your greatest triumph?

JOHNSON: Cydney.

[Laughter]

JOHNSON: Giving birth has been the greatest triumph. Professionally. Two things. It was working on the Operation L.A. Project when I was on the Angeles. That was because I had an opportunity to help people. That was so wonderful to actually see people smiling and getting paid for work, and getting them introduced to a totally different environment. That was one thing. And the other one was working as a legislative assistant for Congresswoman Eva Clayton. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would be working on Capitol Hill. They probably run one and one, as far as my greatest successes, my greatest triumphs, the things that I would want to talk to my kids and grandkids about. Those two things. Yeah.

REINIER: What's been your greatest disappointment?

JOHNSON: My greatest disappointment has been and is people don't allow people to be themselves. Everybody—very general terms here—a lot of people like for you to reflect certain behaviors or act a certain way or think a certain way or speak a certain way. And that just isn't reality. So people do not allow you to be yourself. And that's very disappointing to me. I enjoy the uniqueness of people, the diversity that people bring to the table, their own ideas. And that doesn't happen a lot of times, especially if you don't fit a certain mold.

The other thing that's been a big disappointment to me is how people seem to jump on negative rumors and help spread them without checking to see if there's any validity to them. I don't engage in behaviors like that, so it's still mind-boggling to me. "One would say, well, you know, Clara, it's about time you grow up because that's how society is." I don't think society has to be that way. I really don't. So I don't accept that as an explanation. If I can choose not to engage in that behavior, surely the next man can decide not to engage in that behavior.

So those have been my two greatest disappointments in my professional career, things that I would love to see changed, things that I would never teach Cydney how to do. And then the other part that goes along with that, everybody--I always use the word "everybody"--people have a tendency to justify it by saying, "It's politics." No! It's wrong. It's cruel. It's mean. It is not politics and I think politics has gotten a bad name. [Laughter] I think it's just wrong and I pray to God every day that I don't get into those behaviors in spite of the consequences that I may face, in spite of that. So.

REINIER: Do you have any advice for--we've talked about this a little bit--for other women in the forest service?

JOHNSON: Sure. My advice always comes from a personal standpoint and not so much as how to climb the career ladder or those kinds of things. It's always about you. It's always about you as an individual. If I was to advise women, I would tell them, spend a lot of time getting to know you, getting to know yourself, build your height, build your self-esteem, make it very, very high. Don't rely on anybody else to tell you that you're okay. Know it within yourself. Once you establish that okayness with yourself, you will be okay. Those things that come across your desk, yes they're obstacles, but you are strong enough within to overcome any of that. Professionally, I would say work with people, work with them honestly, work with them knowledgeably, don't sit there and pretend if you don't know, just say, "I don't know." Use as many resources as you possibly can, don't rely on any one person to provide you all of the advice because no one person knows everything. Build your network as wide as you can so that you know that you can call anybody that you want to and talk to them about how to deal with an issue. But don't get into talking about the people who are beating up on you and those kinds of things because the agency is very small and word travels very, very fast. So always stay professional in your dealings, always. That's my advice.

REINIER: Clara, thank you very much for taking your time to do this.

JOHNSON: You're welcome.

REINIER: I really appreciate it and I appreciate your candor and your honesty in what we've talked about.

JOHNSON: Thank you very much. You're welcome.

REINIER: Okay!

JOHNSON: Okay.

[End Tape 9, Side B]

Names List

<u>Name</u>	<u>Identification</u> (Position during time being discussed)	<u>Page</u>
Leola Johnson	Mother	1
Hillary Rodham Clinton	U.S. Senator	2
Verester Johnson	Sister	2
Allen (Bone) Johnson	Brother	8
Adam Trudell Gwin	Babysitting charge	8
Emma (Jean) Johnson	Sister	9
Cydney Alexis Anderson	Daughter	11
Mrs. Hickombottom	Teacher	13
Ms. Fleming	Teacher	13
Alan Smith	Friend	22
Ward Fong	Soil Scientist, Mad River Ranger District, Six Rivers National Forest	24
Diane Stittgen	Recreation Officer, Mad River Ranger District, Six Rivers National Forest	25
Lisa Uertuitz	Range Conservationist, Mad River Ranger District, Six Rivers National Forest	25
Larry Cabodi	District Ranger, Lower Trinity Ranger District, Six Rivers National Forest	32
Dave Wickwire	District Ranger, Hay Fork Ranger District, Shasta Trinity National Forest	35
Bruce Waldron	District Ranger, Hume Lake Ranger District, Sequoia National Forest	40
Susan Swinson	Assistant District Ranger, Angeles National Forest	42
Charles (Chip) Cartwright	First African American District Ranger Regional Forester, Region 2	49
Brent Roath	Soil Scientist, Six Rivers National Forest	51
Janine Derby	District Ranger, Green Horn Ranger District, Sequoia National Forest	52
Christine Rose	District Ranger, Tujunga Ranger District, Angeles National Forest	58
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F. Dale Robertson	Chief of the Forest Service	77
George H.W. Bush	President of the United States	77
Jody Cook	Forest Supervisor, Angeles National Forest	84
Harry Truman	President of the United States	91
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