ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES D. JOHNSON
Duke University Libraries and Archives
Submitted 05-01, 2024
Researcher: Danielle Okotcha

COLLECTION SUMMARY

This collection features an oral history I conducted with Charles D. Johnson on 01-31, 2024 for the Bass Connections Agents of Change oral history project. The 108.5-minute interview was conducted at Duke Medical Center Library. Our conversation explored his father, Dr. Charles Johnson's role as the first Black faculty member at Duke Medical Center, his experiences with his father through his youth, and racial relations in healthcare. The themes of these interviews include racial justice and healthcare.

This document contains the following:

The materials we are submitting also include the following separate files:

- Audio files of the interview*
  - Stereo .WAV file of the original interview audio
  - Mono .MP3 mixdown of the original interview audio for access purposes
- Photograph of the interviewee (credit:)
- Scan of a signed consent form

*At the end of the interview recording, we recorded a self-introduction and room tone for use in a production edit of the interview.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Charles Johnson, led a remarkable life shaped by his dual roles as a pioneer when he became the first Black faculty member at Duke, and an advocate for the inclusion of additional Black faculty members and medical students. Born on July 28, 1927, on the property of a coal mining company in Acmar, Alabama, he balanced the struggle of race and class in the south. Dr. Johnson's educational path commenced with the attainment of a BS degree in physics from Howard University in 1953. In 1959, he embarked on his medical journey at Howard University, graduating in 1963. In addition to his formal education, he served as a fighter pilot in the U.S. Air Force, where he rose to the rank of captain. Later, he would complete residency in medicine at Lincoln Hospital and fellowship at Duke University Medical Center.

Dr. Johnson's tenure as the first Black faculty member at Duke University's School of Medicine was shaped by his role as a fighter pilot, instilling in him discipline, resilience, and mental toughness–qualities that proved essential in navigating the challenges he would face as a pioneer in a predominantly white institution. As his son eloquently states, "He was a fighter pilot. He had that kind of mentality, and when you looked him in the eyes, you felt the weight of that." His ability to remain composed under pressure and his determination to excel despite racial barriers were evident throughout his 26 years of service to the Duke Med. Dr. Johnson played a pivotal part in diversifying the institution by serving on the Duke Medical admissions committee. His initiatives within Duke ensured the presence of minority faculty and house staff in every clinical department at Duke, alongside a notable increase in minority medical students. Outside of Duke, Dr. Johnson continued to push positive change on an even wider scale through his appointments as the President of the National Medical Association, his work as a delegate to the 44th World Health Assembly, and more.

As a whole, his legacy is defined by his unwavering dedication to patient care and his steadfast pursuit of excellence, both as a physician and as an individual. Eugene Wright: "Oftentimes looking back on your life and the lives of others, you realize there's some genuinely good people that end up being in whatever they ended up being. For im, he ended up being a doctor, and he was very good at being a doctor. But I think even before that, he was a good person."

Charles D. Johnson BIOGRAPHY (interviewee):
Dr. Charles Denton Johnson is an Associate Professor of History at North Carolina Central University (NCCU). He holds degrees from Morehouse College, NCCU, and Howard University, specializing in African Diaspora, African American, and Public History. Dr. Johnson holds a special relationship with Dr. Charles Johnson as his son and due to his renowned work in public history and commitment to preserving Black history and heritage.

INTERVIEW TOPIC LOG (Charles_Denton_Johnson_finaledited.wav)

0:00 Introduction to the interview on Dr. Charles Johnson. Charles Denton Johnson introduces himself and his relationship to Dr. Charles Johnson as his son.
1:10 Charles Denton Johnson gives some detail on Dr. Charles Johnson's early life.
5:20 Early and late childhood stories with "Dad" and how it was having a physician as a father.
15:39 Detailed background into Dr. Johnson's path from fighter pilot to later intended nuclear physicist, to becoming a doctor.
31:20 Significant allies to Dr. Johnson
37:31 Him and his fathers' relationship with Dr. Eugene Stead. Charles Denton Johnson tells a memorable story of him and Eugene Stead.
42:01 The story of Dr. Eugene Stead appointing Dr. Johnson as the first black faculty member, from Lincoln Hospital to Duke.
47:50 How Dr. Charles Johnson brought about change daily.
56:24 How Dr. Johnson supported early Black medical students and served as a supportive father figure for many.
59:37 Backlack Dr. Johnson experienced from his community and the manner in which he dealt with it.
1:04:13 Continuing on how Charles senior created change daily; "staying in character" and remaining resilient.
1:07:52 The average day of Dr. Charles Johnson (his work, hobbies, and how his family saw him).
1:12:19 Charles Denton Johnson's experience growing up in a community of successful Black professionals.
1:15:49 Dr. Johnsons remarkable bedside manner: how he cared deeply for his patients. A personal story intertwined in race and medicine from Charles Denton Johnson's youth.
1:20:57 The defining moment of Dr. Johnson's time at Duke University.
1:23:49 Dr. Johnson's time as President of the National Medical Association.
1:29:37 How his father's experiences shaped his own perspectives on the intersectionality of race and health.
1:32:46 The legacy of Dr. Charles Johnson with Duke and beyond.
1:34:57 Dr. Johnson's involvement beyond Duke.
1:44:13 Dr. Johnson as an activist, advocate, and agent of change.
1:46:40 Final comments from his son.

TRANSCRIPTION (Charles_Denton_Johnson_finaledited.wav)

DO 0:00

Hello, it's January 31st, 2024. I'm Daniela Okotcha, a second-year undergraduate at Duke University. I'm here with Charles Johnson, the son of the late Dr. Charles Johnson, for the Agents of Change Bass Connections oral history project. Thank you for being here. I'm very excited to capture your experience. Overall, we're trying to delve into the history of activism and advocacy within Duke Health, celebrating the centennial and today we'll be discussing Dr. Charles Johnson, the first Black faculty member of Duke Health.

Would you like to introduce yourself?

CJJ 0:36

Yes, my name is Charles Denton Johnson. Dr. Donald T. Moore, who was also here at Duke, delivered me in Lincoln Hospital (August 22nd 1965). I grew up here in Durham, came to Durham, my family came to Durham because of my father's opportunity to work at Lincoln Hospital and programs sponsored by Duke University to help African American physicians get specialized training in medicine.

DO 1:10

Nice to meet you. Thank you for being here. So, um, kind of starting off. Dr. Charles Johnson was born in Acmar, Alabama. Could you describe his early life and how he grew up?

CJJ 1:23

Right, so, yeah. So my father was born July 28, 1927, on the property at the Alabama Fuel and Coal company. His father was Charlie Johnson and was a laborer who worked alongside a mine. In that mine, those were fairly deep mines, some of them up to two miles deep. Dad's youth was spent trying to figure out how to get to something better. But as you can imagine, growing up in the Jim Crow south, at that time, being born literally right, as we're about to enter into the Great Depression and so forth, there was not a lot that he had that could create an image for him to imagine what the possibilities would be, limited as things were at that time. Today, we live in an era of flowering technology, and communication and travel in a way that just did not exist at that time. He found the promise of a better life and what he could get his hands on to read as a youngster. So at a very early age, he began to turn to comic books. And the like, to get some sense of what the wider world was really about.

CJJ 3:08

He had an older brother, who was much older, named Thomas Lightfoot. His mother married more than one time. And Tom worked for a white family known as Widdershins and Widdershins were wealthy and owned, amongst other things, a Mayflower moving franchise. Tom was kind of the handyman for the Widdershin family. So from time to time, he would come by and get his little brother and take him over to the Whiddershins. And they lived, as my father recalled, close to the airport or close enough for him to see airplanes, you know, taking off at low level, sort of to say. But he could see how the other half lived, the Widdershins up close, and wonder, you know, what it would take for him to be able to get his mother (her name was Willie Doll Christian, later, Marbury Johnson, Willie Doll, Christian Marbury Johnson) to get her into a better space and his sisters into a better space. And that gave him a frame of reference he said, you know, and something to aspire towards, and seeing the airplanes also raised a curiosity within him about the possibility of flying.

CJJ. 4:42

And can I say something else? I wasn't sure if you were going to follow up with more questions about me. So can I add that? Yeah, of course. So in addition to being born and raised here, and so forth, I did education through Morehouse College and then did my Master's at North Carolina Central [University] in History and then PhD in History at Howard University. Currently, Associate Professor and Chair Department of History at North Carolina Central University. I wasn't sure what you were gonna follow that with and talking about just a little bit of background about myself. Next question.

DO 5:20

So, kind of continuing off of that, how was your relationship with Charles Johnson as a father before he was necessarily the Dr. Charles Johnson? And what are some key aspects of him you feel should be highlighted in that regard?

CJJ 5:36

Father? Oh, wow. I don't know that I could have been any more fortunate than I was to have the kind of father that did. It's interesting that I have a son who's 18, a studnet of Civil Engineering at North Carolina A&T State University, Xavier Charles Johnson. And it took me having him to have a real appreciation for how much a parent loves a child. But I could feel that from my earliest days, dad [Dr. Charles Johnson] always, and with all people, was an educator. And I got to experience that, you know. Papa had -- I mean, I could go on in much more detail -- went on to Howard University, after going into the military, and so forth. And he, majored in physics at it

Howard and did really well and he just had an interesting perspective on the world. He could bring that physics into conversations about things that you would think would be unrelated in ways that were just very natural. So he was someone who could take complex things and just kind of break them down for you as a young person.

CJJ 6:59

He was also someone who was very humble. So he was very approachable. I don't think his feet ever fully left their roots in, you know, that little mining camp in Alabama. I think he always understood where he had come from, and you know, what it took to get where he was. So he never never lost sight of that, but, but Dad was great. He had a great sense of humor. He loved to talk; I would say that he was his own favorite subject; he loved talking about himself and his accomplishments. You all are here at Duke. You know, I don't know how much you get a sense that from the faculty that are here, most are pretty confident in quite a bit of themselves. You all don't have to answer that but um...

CJJ 7:52

But yeah, Dad was cut from the same cloth, you know, so he really was a hell of a father, Dad. As I got older, and in my youth, and I made mistakes I could. Dad didn't get upset. His first response was always to try to help me figure out whatever it was that I needed to figure out, and we talk about things and so forth. So that created sort of a relationship where I was always confident to talk to him about things that were, I would say, no secrets between us. We were extremely, extremely close. So yeah, great, great example. I mean, being a provider and all those kinds of things, as you know, most take that for granted. Great. Yeah.

DO 8:44

Sounds like he was amazing. And do you have any specific stories you feel come to mind when you think about that? Or is it kind of just across the board? You think about him, I guess, being a great father? What do you think? Do you have any, like specific instances or stories in mind with that?

CJJ 9:04

Well, I can tell you a dumb thing I did when I was at Morehouse. Honestly, I wrecked my car, like twice in about three weeks or something like that, you know, in the time there. And I can say, as a Dad, I don't know how to have the patience that my father had with me and working through that, you know, he was, like I said, he was just he was a different kind of person. I think he could look into who you were, and kind of get an understanding of your makeup. And then he

treated you based upon that. You know, so, he knew his son well, and that I would respond better to just constructive criticism for you know, the things that I did. He was that way, but he was -- also I should add, he was I mean, he was a firm disciplinarian, you know, Dad was a fighter pilot. He had that kind of mentality, and, you know, when you looked him in the eyes, you felt the weight of that. You could tell he had experienced a lot in life. And so you felt that presence, and as a youngster, I had no fears when I was with my Dad, and, you know, but I would not try him either. You know, because, I was part of that, perhaps the last generation of that when parents were really stern... And children were allowed to be children and do the things that children do.

CJJ 10:38

But that was a very clear demarcation between being a youngster and being with elders; Dad was definitely that way. You know, as I was coming up, you know. I don't know, Dad took me everywhere he went, you know, as a youngster, I can say. There was a med. rep. program that was designed to help African-American youngsters who were interested in medicine, to have opportunities to get exposure and so forth. Dad played a key role in that and we'd travel, you know, and he go and talk to students try to recruit student --did successfully recruit students here to Duke and that kind of thing... You know, the medical conventions and so forth. Always by his side, we um...

CJJ 11:32

A little story, we used to go hunting! One of his closest friends was a gentleman by the name of Junior Joiner, who had a 2000 acre farm that straddled North Hampton County, North Carolina and South Hampton County, Virginia. Junior, actually lived in Branchville, but then moved to South Hampton County. But we would go there and go hunting. Every fall we'd go deer hunting and so forth. And I remember, Dad was a very, how do you say like, a machismo, like a macho kind of, you know, fighter pilot. So I remember him shooting a deer from (laughs) a long distance with a shotgun -- a shot he probably shouldn't have even taken... But he was lucky in that and was successful in, you know, bringing the deer down, and then all that followed that and all of the stories and so forth, they grew considerably considerably in his telling of them. But yeah, I mean, a lifetime of great experiences with Dad doing different things. I don't know that there's any one story that just kind of jumps out. You know, I'll say that I genuinely miss the fact that when I get a little ill or anything like that, I can't give him a quick call because he was always, from my youth, fantastic about that. You know, as this relates to the medical center...

CJJ. 13:11

So I mentioned Donald T. more. We grew up in the same subdivision, in Emory Woods, and Dr. Moore was right down the down the road trained at my Meharry. I want to say he was far probably a first African-American OBGYN here at Duke and was an outstanding surgeon. Everyone I've taked to in research I'm doing on my father's life talks about him in that way. But he and my father had short fuses. And I remember I was, and my mother brought me to the ER, here at Duke. Before she left the house, were no cell phones in those days as a youngster, she called Don Moore's wife Barbara (who was Aunt Barbara to me) to let her know. So I wasn't in the ER long before they start poking on me and everything and taking me back to the exam room. The nurse was trying to get an IV in my arm. So Don Moore walked in, and he went to the physician who was there to kind of get a sense of what was going on. I recall, he delivered me. And the nurse was still poking in those days, they had to [indistinct] needles that were like really, really large, and so forth. And blood was going all over, and I was doing my best not to, you know, to come apart. So he came over and spoke directly to the nurse to ask if the nurse needed help, his help, to get it done. He wasn't very polite in his approach because he was becoming frustrated. So as he began to pipe up, the door swung open, and my dad walked in. So now you have like, you know, Mount Vesuvius about to go off in the ER over, you know... But it was it was a good feeling as a youngster to, you know, to have grown up in that way. You know, to have physicians who are like that and cared so much, not just about about me, but about medicine and so forth. Very, very unique upbringing.

DO 15:39

100% sounds like it. It's interesting, you talk about him being very caring but also like, I guess, kind of the fighter pilot aspect coming in, and kind of maybe some tough love in that way. So yeah, that's definitely interesting. 100% and kind of going back to his educational journey... So I believe he originally planned to become a nuclear physicist, but he was told that there were not as many opportunities for Black nuclear physicists, and he switched to medicine. What do you think kind of led him into switching into that?

CJJ 16:16

Well, I think the sort of story was Dad's principal... well, his mentor at Howard in physics was Frank Coleman. Frank Coleman was one of the founders of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated. When Dad got to the point that he was nearing graduation, Dr. Coleman called him in and asked him and he said, you know, Charles, what are your future plans? And he said, Well, you know, I'd rather work for DuPont, or, you know, a company like that, and so forth. Dr. Coleman, he says, Son, do you know anyone that works with Dupont, you know, and that kind of thing? And he said, he did not. He said, well, you know, it's not very likely, at this point that you would be able to get a job at a company like that. But you have the wherewithal, if you would like to continue on and to get a graduate degree and perhaps a doctorate, and teach, you know, in

physics, if you would, like (you know outstanding student, you know). And Dad thought seriously about that, you know, but it had occurred at the same time that Uncle Sam was asking him to return to the military (he was in the Reserves he had served in the army before going to Howard to get a GI Bill). He did not want to leave school, he felt like if he had gone at that time, he might not make it back to Howard, to finish his degree. So he had joined Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity Incorporated. And the military officer who was over the Reserve Officer Training Corps, for the Air Force was a member of Kappa, who had actually tried to get him to join the ROTC. And he said he did not want to so now he had to circle back. But he asked him what he could do for him. And he said, well, I'll get you into the ROTC and you won't have to go right now. But when you graduate, you will have that debt paid off. So when he finished, he had that military obligation and because he had taken so many math courses, while also completing his physics degree. The military is very focused on that, as you all might imagine, he he did really well on the aptitude test that you take. And in the Air Force he went into, after basic training, he went into, you know, basic flight, and on up the line to.. I think his his fighter pilot training class was pitch out 55. So he finished it 1955. But that put him on a different course. You know, sort of all together, he did that. He was stationed at Misawa Air Base in northern Japan. And he has great stories about that. You have to read about those in my book on his life, but he says a lot of great stories about that kind of thing. And I think of his accomplishments, that one really stands out in my mind because there were very few African Americans who were fighter pilots flying jets in the 1950s, I don't think he was alone, but it's very, very small number. But in any case, he came out of that after he finished that obligation and the nation was pivoting towards Vietnam and things were getting really hairy there. I came back and, you know, the story continues, he decided to go into medicine. It was a way he said that he felt he could be helpful to his people growing up, there were not Black physicians, you know. I mean, it would be startling to you, even today, the number of young people who've never met an African-American physician, you know, but he wanted to address many of the ills and things that he saw, as a youngster in the community. There were home remedies, and that kind of thing, you know, some of those work, many of them did not. And he took the life sciences, he took a year to get the life sciences, you know, and then applied and ended at Howard University 59, finished in 63.

DO 21:16

I see. And so, like, just a timeline. So after he graduated high school, he was a fighter pilot... and--

CJJ 21:24

So after my father graduated, you know, so that was an interesting story there also.. There's different types of poverty, right and then wealth on a continuum, you have intellectual spiritual material poverty. The family wasn't one of material types of resources. It was a great deal of

wealth in the other areas. But Dad ended up dropping out of high school, I wanna say in about the 11th grade, and he did that in order to join the military to raise money to help his mother. His mother worked as a domestic and home and wife physician on a mining camp. He ultimately was sent to camp law che, which is in New Orleans, and he worked as a stevedore. Which in those days, that's the person who unloads ships at the dock. In those days, that was back-breaking work. And he had lied about his age so he wrote to his mother, and she contacted the army and they let Dad out. So, that was his first time in the military. He went back and finished high school, Homewood, and then went directly back into the military. Yeah, this time he was sent to, I think, Fort Lewis McChord, Washington State. From there, he went to Roswell, New Mexico where the, you know, the UFOs, allegedly, and all that kind of thing. Yeah, no stories about that. But he could talk ad nauseam about his experiences there. Then he went to Guam and at Guam he was assigned as a clerk for the base commander, which put him in rarefied air. So he got to observe the base commander, his comings and goings how handled his business and so forth and learned quite a bit about how the base was run. So that was a great experience. I said that he was always teaching, he was always a student, as well, and a very good one --and he said, you know, from time to time, the African-American soldiers would ask him for a favor to see if he couldn't get the base commander to help him out with something and that kind of thing. You know, which he would do, would that put him in, you know, kind of special position, or place amongst his peers. He spent some time while he was there, he was able to go to Hong Kong. So that was his first trip like that. That for a boy who had been born on the property of a coal mining company, as you can imagine, really opened his eyes even more. And after that, he took the necessary courses while he was in the military to help him to qualify for college. He applied to two institutions. As a story goes, [he applied] to Harvard and Howard. He had read about both. He indicated you know, that he did not appreciate then about the type of rigor and all of that kind of thing, coming up as he had, in a school where he was. Harvard sent him, actually, a very nice postcard that indicated what he was missing from his application: he had to have a foreign language and maybe an advanced math or something like that... Obviously, they weren't teaching African Americans much anything in the Deep South, let alone the foreign language. So he got what he needed while he was stationed in Guam and Howard University did except him and he got the GI Bill. So many others did, and that was, of course, an elevated bridge to better opportunities. So that's how he ended up at Howard. I like to say, you know, when he got there, the caliber of individuals that were there on the faculty and in his class -- you know, Toni Morrison was a classmate of my dad's. You know, Andy Young was classmate, you know, working as UN former mayor of Atlanta. A young man by the name of Barry Gordy was an early classmate of my father's, the founder of Motown. All of those folks, not to mention my mother, Carolyn Lucille Denton, who ended up being an outstanding politician and judge here in Durham, you know, much later. But in fact, my dissertation advisor, who was a pioneer in the field of African Diaspora Studies, Joseph Harris, and a tremendous scholar, was also in Howard at that time. Very special place... But that was his journey from high school to, you know, Howard University.

DO 26:43

I see that makes sense. And continuing, post-Howard going into medical school, or I guess, also going back to him being a fighter pilot, how do you think that kind of played into him later on when he became a physician? How do you think that influenced his decisions and his interactions with patients and colleagues and people he was mentoring?

CJJ 27:11

I think it takes a different kind of person to strap themselves into a great big machine and fly into harm's way. And, you know, part of what Dad did, he had to do as an individual; his squadron did not always fly together. And I think about that quite a bit. It's more than a notion. You know, so I think you have to be wired a certain kind of way, you have to have a lot of confidence, you know. But you have to think about it, you know, I don't have a real frame of reference for it. Because I technically grew up, in a manner of speaking, as a privileged kid; both of my parents were professionals. They didn't have that luxury, you know --it was always forward, there was nothing to go back to. So he had to be very sure of himself, as anyone who was a fighter pilot would have to be -- very decisive. And I think that was part of his makeup. But it was also environmental because it came out of his experiences. I think his confidence and desire to be the best, you know, he appreciated being at Duke for that reason, he caught a lot of hell here. But he always had a tremendous amount of respect for his peers, and for what this institution represented as a place of excellence. But yes, that training, the training to become a part of fighter pilot, was very, very difficult. And then being a fighter pilot was very difficult, because there's so much at stake. Not just your life oftentimes, but a lot of other people as well. So he was a very serious-minded person, like I said, with a lot of chutzpah. You know, I think that how that benefited him here was -- there wasn't anything that was going to intimidate him or anyone; he had seen too much and done too much; quite frankly, he had done that even before he had gone into the Air Force. You know, so there were too many life experiences that had shaped him and molded him and created in him a "can do spirit" that, you know, in many ways I feel was indomitable, you know. He just was not going to be dissuaded from something that he was determined to do and that kind of thing. That, you know -- I gave a talk at his celebration of life, it wasn't one of my better talks, but I tried to indicate, you know, the dad lived his life by a set of principles and in a way that was very regimented. I mean, he was like a -- it's, I know cliche to say -- but he really was like a clock. He did things at a certain time and followed the certain routine. And you could, you know, bank on that. And because he stood on certain principles, you could also pretty much figure out where he was going to come down on the side of issues. And he always, as I see, it, tried to discern how to come down on the side of what was right. And he was very courageous in doing that. Oftentimes, we look into a situation, and we see what is right. But it's another thing to step up and put a voice to it, and to take action behind it. And he did that

routinely. But not just here at Duke. That was just how he lived his life. He made a lot of enemies that way. A lot of enemies, here and beyond. But it also caused him to have a number of of allies, and with some even became very good friends because they knew what to expect from from Chuck Johnson.

DO 31:20

Are there any specific allies you would like to list like, I know he had a very strong relationship with Brenda Armstrong, among some others.

CJJ 31:27

Oh, wow. Yeah. Brenda Armstrong was like a daughter to him. Brenda Armstrong was from Wilson, North Carolina and her father was a physician, was an outstanding physician who was a mentor to my dad, W. T. Armstrong. Dad promised that he would look after Brenda, the way that W. T. had looked after him. And what that look like, I'll give you this quick example, is when dad came here, and he was getting established, he joined Old North State Medical Society and W. T. Armstrong was already established and a prominent person in that organization. My father said he could not say why but W.T. and Bob Dawson, Robert Dawson, who was here in Durham and actually saw patients at Duke on the, we call it the public side of the of the clinic years ago, another excellent physician... But they were supportive of dad early on, in Old North State and that allowed him to rise all the way to become president of the of the Old North State. But there were many allies that he had; I would probably start with the one that he talked about to me the most. You had to understand that dad had so many bad experiences with whites growing up in the South. He carried a lot of animus about that, you know, and anger. He was the only one of his siblings who graduated high school, finished high school. Jim Crow, just you know, was so debilitating for African-Americans so difficult. A lot of frustration around that. But, the major contradiction in his life is that many of the people that he ended up being very close to were white. None any more so, to my way of thinking, than Eugene Stead. You know, I was hearing stories about Dr. Stead as a boy. And there were others, you know, Dr., Wingard -- I can remember some of their names and these were towering, towering figures, you know, in medicine. I mean, Dr. Stead, at one point, had trained something like 80% of the top medical faculty at the major research institutions around the country. In cardiac catheterizations, physician's assistants program, and all of these sayings I still have in my head now, like the sick do not inconvenience the well. You know, I still hear that and that was something that Dr. Stead would, you know, share with those people who are under his tutelage. But Dr. Stead would have been first; Dad had a tremendous amount of respect for people who were really well-read and really good at what they did. Here at Duke to him, there weren't -- I can't think of any who weren't -- there were giants here, but none integrated by Dr. Stead, as far as my father was concerned. He was a straight shooter and I'm imagining that's where you get that question about

the fighter pilot and Dr. Stead, kind of looking into that. And so yeah, you know, tip of the spear was what fighter pilots are known as. That's what you get. And so what you see first, as an adversary, is typically the Air Force. But yeah, others I mentioned, you mentioned Brenda Armstrong, who was a tremendous physician, someone who worked really hard, you know, to help transform Duke and to make it a place that was much more amenable to African-Americans and people of color just more generally. And, you know, they were still working together up until almost a time of her transition. You know, they were still having conversations and still fighting for what's right. You know, at that late date, you know, Dr. Anya Corrie?, who was a General Thoracic Surgeon here, Dr. Anya Corey? was another strong ally. And another just, you know, a brilliant surgeon. Dr. Corey? as I recall, came in the mid 1970s.. '76, '77, somewhere in there. I think that's right? I've talked to his wife, and in the last, you know, six, eight months or so -- I might be wrong about that. He had come to Duke from the Mayo Clinic, you know, it's a little than here, we are in the South, it's a little different. So it took him a little bit to adjust and so forth. But they worked together, all of them in concert to uh in a small way, to try to move the needle here. There are probably others I can think of.

DO 37:07

I'm sure he touched a lot of people's lives, and there's many people you can list in that way. And kind of going back a little bit. Could you speak more -- so I know, we talked about kind of post-high school, and then going to Howard, could you speak more about his journey, getting admitted into medical school and how that went?

CJJ 37:31

Getting into medical school? You know, Dad never made that seem like that was a hugely difficult challenge, because he had been a physics major. You know, who chooses physics as a major, no one chooses physics. You know, that's, again, that confidence thing, and so forth. So the getting in wasn't the real challenge. You know, he did really well in medical school. His mentor there was Dr. Walter Lester Henry who was an endocrinologist and pioneer and like Eugene A. Stead" was just a giant as a scientist, and like Dr. Stead, very, in his own way, a very humble person, very unassuming person. It's very interesting, like the the smartest people I've been around, ask a lot of questions. They asked typically more questions than they do make statements. Someone should do a study of that. But Dr. Henry was really my dad's first, I would say after Dr. Coleman, uh Professor Coleman, like real mentor in science and medicine, and he wanted to do everything Dr. Henry had done. I remember meeting Dr. Henry. He was someone who was very upright, he said, very upright and so forth. And I was in awe of him just as I was when I met Dr. Stead, because I so looked up to my dad and in our community, so many people looked up to Dad, that to see these people he'd looked up to was, you know, very humbling. They turned out to be very beautiful people, you know, both of them. Dr. Henry was, I think it --

was his wife's name Ada? She was like a cheerleader. I mean, I don't want to, you know, but it was so funny because he was like very upright and everything and she was kind of, you know, high spirits and all that kind of stuff. What a lovely couple, but Dr. Henry just had an air about him of someone who was just like really bright. When Duke had this formal welcome for Dad, you know, just after he had gotten there -- he told me, he said, son, you know, I was trying to figure out -- I hadn't done anything, you know, other than be hired and they had this program. And I was trying to think of who I could have, you know, come and talk and he had Dr. Henry come and talk and he gave grand rounds without notes. And, and just phenomenal physicians in those days, and oh, very, very good. Dr. Stead, my quick Dr. Stead story is that when I completed my master's at North Carolina Central, the very day that I successfully defended my thesis, Dad took me out to eat and invited Dr. Stead. I promise you the questions that Dr. Stead asked me were more difficult than the questions that I had during my thesis exam, you know, and he described my dad as a curious seeker of knowledge. But, I think that would be a self-description as well. And it wasn't his intention to -- he was not trying to embarrass me or anything. It was just the nature of the way that he asked questions. He was someone who understood that good research is rooted in really good questions. So I got to experience that. But overall, I really enjoyed being in his presence and being able to spend time with them.

DO 41:41

100% and going off of Dr. Eugene stead, could you describe specifically how he went about appointing Charles Johnson and how that kind of went about with choosing him for that role, and I guess, the before and after, as well?

CJJ 42:01

Well, you know, his dad tells a story, you know, Dad was running a hospital in medicine over at Lincoln -- he and Charlie curry were. Charlie Curry was another, I mean, just giant. As a cardiologist, he and Don Moore and Dad, were in the same peer group, all really, really good... As it turns out, John Beauregard Johnson, who was Chief of Cardiology at Howard University, and a giant himself, and actually married to a woman from Durham, passed away suddenly. Howard was in need of a replacement. So, since Charles Curry had been a star student -- my father called him a walking encyclopedia of medicine -- and I really mean he's a very good, very humble person. When I asked Uncle Charles, when he retired, you know, ""What will be your legacy?" He'd trained at, he'd stayed at Howard for 30 years or so.. He thought about it for a second, he said "child, I guess it's that I trained the most Black cardiologists than anyone in the world." Well, that's a pretty nice legacy I will say. But, very humble. Very humble in that. But Dad and Charlie Curry were running a hospital in medicine at Lincoln. They were I remember, working 100 hour weeks. And Dr. Charlie Watts, who had recruited Dad to Durham and Charles DeWitt Watts was the first African-American board-certified surgeon in the state of North

Carolina -- proud Morehouse man and Howard medical school graduate -- and another giant, brilliant you know, physician was running a hospital and Dad, talked to Dr. Watts. And he said, well, Chuck "you're making a lot of money," [Dr. Watts] -- and "I don't have any damn time to spend it, though, because I'm working all the time. Right, you know, I done worked myself to death." [Dr. Johnson] So after Charlie Curry left, that left Dad, and he had made up his mind and he was gonna leave Lincoln and leave Durham. And when I asked him, I said "Dad, where are you going?" He said, "I was gonna go back and work with Dr. Henry at Howard University." He came very close to going. I think it was Dr. Watts. I have not found the correspondence. I've going through Dr. Watts papers, maybe it was a phone call. But I think he let Dr. Stead know that one of his star pupils was about to leave. Dr. Stead called him in, they had a meeting and he asked Dad if he would join the medical faculty here at Duke. Dad, honestly, was not expecting that. And I really mean that. You know, and if you've ever seen a video interview about that, you know, he said, he didn't think that Duke was interested in having Blacks at the hospital. You know, and it was a kind of statement that would get him in trouble, but it was coming from a very honest place. And now he had to consider what that would mean for his patients and so forth. You know, I've seen -- and you can go look up yourself to newspaper articles, people would turn away from coming here, and that kind of thing... So, and just the treatment of individuals, and African Americans at Duke, very difficult. So there was a great deal of hostility in the Black community, here in Durham about, you know, Duke University, not just the hospital, it was called a plantation in Black Durham for a very long time, you know. So Dad, thinking about his patients first had to make that decision based upon what they would do. And in those days, physicians have very good relationships with their patients, though. It's much closer than today, you know. The way you all are trained is not your fault. It's just different, the time that you have, and so forth it's just different... But very fond of dad. So they came [Dr. Johnson's patients], and, you know, he came. That's pretty much as he says, in that film, that's it. And Dr. Stead wasn't Chief of the hospital. I have in my head Dr. Wingard was -- I have to go back and check my notes, double check that... But he signed off on it because, Dr. Stead said that, he would be ideal based upon all the things that he had been through. They had prepared him, you know, and they did! Just like a good fighter pilot, he had to pick and choose his battles, you know, he did that very much so here at Duke. He could never come out of character, which he knew and understood, he could not respond to every insult, and he recognized he was not going to win every every battle; that was a great award to be won overall.

DO 47:41

And upon arriving at Duke, are there any specific initiatives or policy changes that he instituted to help minority students that come to mind?

CJJ 47:52

No, what I would say is, I remember he was still, you know, very junior, when he arrived -- he was a junior faculty member here, and so forth. So they were people were much more, you know, established than he was. But he understood why he was brought here very clearly. And Dr. Stead was very clear about that. You know, he began to change things, I would say, in an informal way, before he did in a formal way, by just his presence, began to change things because people were used to seeing a Black physician hospital. So he made a point of it to walk around. I mean, the hospital has grown tremendously as you can imagine than that time now. I mean, it's ginormous now. But in those days, you could walk through, I don't know if it's still called Duke South, but you could walk through the old hospital. And he would do that daily, in part, so that everyone could get a chance to see him so he could get a sense of, you know, what was going on where and get to meet people. Dad was a people person. So the sort of Allied Health staff at the hospital, especially the African-Americans, really embraced that, and took that, a great deal as a source of pride seeing one of their own in the role that he was in and carrying himself in the way that he always did, you know, which was with his head up and his chin up. Eyes forward, you know, and not looking at the floor. And at the same time, still rooted in that, you know, the fertile soul of that mining camp in in Alabama. So he talked to everybody and respected their humanity and dignity. So they became very fond of them, and they would let him know, you know, what they were hearing and that kind of thing. You know, and to estimate how valuable that kind of information could be. But that was how he began to slowly change things.

CJJ 50:04

You know, when he retired, I heard for the first time he told a story at Duke, as they were phasing out all of the old battleships like that. They even phased out Dr. Stead as my understanding is they were bringing in a new managed care approach to medicine. They had a retirement celebration for Dad and Dad talked about coming here initially. You know, many of the women who were responsible for -- I think they assisted the nurses, I don't know that they were necessarily the nurses themselves -- refused to talk to him. And Dr. Stead would make a point of it every week of seeing Dad informally. He wouldn't call him in his office, he'd just find him somewhere in the hall and ask him, you know, how he was doing. (Charlie, you know, what's going on or whatever). And Dad didn't always have something to say, so that when he did, it had some meaning behind it, because he didn't always have something to say. But he indicated that you know, the health professionals refusing to talk to him. And he said, there was not any kind of statement made by the institution or anything like that. But within a year or so he looked up, and there were all these African-Americans who are now working in this different capacities, who are willing to talk to him and so forth. So the institution just quietly, I imagine, shifted those people perhaps to a role where they didn't have to... where they couldn't carry on the way that they were carrying on. But in any case, another thing that he did early on was to try to recruit medical students to Duke. You know Barton Haynes, who was Chief of Medicine here, was

someone who was a very close friend of my father's. Not just an ally. He was someone that my father had a tremendous amount of respect for, and cared very deeply about. But he did the same thing sort of, during his his time here, you know, and in interviewing him, he talked about some of the things that he, you know, that he attempted to do to help that. The work that he was doing and trying to recruit African-American medical students to Duke. But out of the gate, Duke, when Dad came on board, had recruited a class of students early on --and I cannot remember exactly when -- but they went and got African-American students who had come out of smaller institutions, which I will not name so as to not seem like I'm trying to put them down... But, their preparation in those institutions was not what would be necessary to fit seamlessly into a medical program here at Duke. So, my father, in an open meeting, led the committee that was responsible for admitting the students know that what they had done was intentional. In that sense, they had gone and selected students who they knew would not be prepared for the rigors of what they were about to be up -- and it wasn't about their intellect or their anything it was about their preparation. Since they had not been prepared adequately, that they would see those students out and that going forward, they would go to institutions where the students had come out of programs that had better prepared them to give them a fighting chance in the medical school here. And he always talked about that, about how difficult it was, you know, in those times. I know, Mary Klotman talked about how, you know, it was just, it was very cold. People were very blunt, and so forth, and very demanding. I mean, very demanding. So, you know, it's a real challenge for those early African-Americans; Eugene Wright can probably tell that story a lot better than I can but that was certainly a very difficult transition for many of those. But Dad worked really hard over a very long period of time to do that. To get the institution in sync with identifying young people who would be able to be successful. I know Gene Wright, Estrada Bernard --um I think he's out in Alaska somewhere -- good luck trying to catch him. But you ought to be able to catch Dr. Wright... Bertram Walls. Those were some of the early students of his. Really outstanding physicians, really outstanding people also.

DO 55:34

Yeah, I was able to speak to Dr. Eugene Wright, thankfully, and he gave a lot of good stories with that. Especially with -- he was the one that kind of listed the tough love mindset with him being a fighter pilot, and him being a mentor to a lot of the students.

CJJ 55:49

You know, how they described it to me was, Dad would take the students under his wing in a way that prevented other physicians, from beating them up too much. And you need that. But, that also meant that now you were at the mouth of the dragon, because he was going to really challenge you, and make sure that you would really be prepared to the level that Duke University would want you to be prepared so..

DO 56:24

100% And I know you were also describing more early on, like more informal, I guess, actions he took? How would you describe his interactions with the Duke, the Black Duke med. students, that he kind of helped integrate into Duke med early on. How would you say he kind of helped them I guess, more informally?

CJJ 56:45

Well, again, I think Dr. Wright, you know, knows, like that, like Dr. Walls. They can talk about that. You know, my sense is they had they had own parents, but Dad was like a father figure to them. You know, they really looked up, they looked up to him, you had to remember, you know, when you starting out, there weren't too many Blacks at Duke period, as professionals, let alone you know, in the hospital. So there was a certain aura about him. And you'd have to be around him. The way that he carried himself all of the time kind of demanded a certain level of respect, you know? Yeah, he just, he just kind of had that way about him. And those experiences, it was not, I'm not gonna say like a natural born thing. He was just a great student, I mentioned the base commander, how he got to observe and how he interacted with people, as a leader of soldiers, and so forth. So I think all of those experiences helped him with them. But a lot of it was, he could relate and he was very relatable. Many of the challenges that they were facing, he faced, you know, so he understood that really well. He had a no excuse policy; you could not make excuses. He just, he could not in his lifetime, make excuses. They woule always have to be a solution. So you had to drive towards the solution, and away from excuses. So I'm sure that -- I got that, right? So I'm sure that his students get that. If you weren't successful, then you had to explain why you were not successful. You couldn't say I'm having bad luck or something like that. He was a scientist you know; there's a very clear reason that you weren't successful. And the only way that you're going to be able to get beyond that, is to address it. But those lessons I would imagine he imparted on, you know, on those students. But he was a very strong mentor. He had no problems confronting people, it didn't matter who it was. And Dad was a very honest, candid and courageous person, you know, his background, screams that. And he was. So, his students, just like I didn't fear anything growing up with having him as a father, you know, I have to imagine that they felt very comfortable having him as a professor and mentor.

DO 59:37

100% and I know, you slightly touched on this previously, but are there any specific instances where Dr. Johnson faced, like resistance or backlash from colleagues or the community due to his activism? And how did he address overcome these challenges?

CJJ 59:58

Yes, he did. You know, oh, there are a number of things, you know, that happened. One of the first was there were white patients who didn't want to be seen by a Black physician when he first started in. And you'd have to understand, my father had a tremendous amount of pride, tremendous amount of pride. So he was fine with that. There were many others who were enlightened enough to figure out that if white folks had hired him to be a physician, he must be pretty damn good. So they had no issue having him as a physician, and some would travel great distances to have him as a physician. But there was that overcoming, you know, overcoming that. There were a lot of assumptions about his preparation. He used to joke about a colleague who was new, who, in making small talk asked him where he went to school, and he said, "Howard," and he said [colleague], "Oh, Harvard?" And Dad said, no, Howard University in Washington, DC. But he, you know, medical students would try him from time to time, you know, to see if he really knew his stuff, and he did. And I take it as a great source of pride you know, I knew -- I'm not a physician, but Dad was, some would call him very well read. You know, he had a nephew, Dwight Johnson, who said, "your father would read these books, they were like, three inches thick, and there were no photos in 'em" you know, you know.. But you know, his peers indicated that he was an outstanding, you know, physician. I guess, at the end of the day, that's what we all want is to be respected, you know, by peers for what we do and contribute, you know, in our profession. But from time to time, he had to deal with those kinds of things. There were no, like crisis moments that I recall. Dad was very cool under fire. I never -- and I mean this -- saw my father flustered, or like the situation was too big for him. I really, really mean that. And he was able to be in those situations and be humble at the same time. You know, and I just think that was, again, from all that he had experienced and accomplished long before he, you know, had come to Duke. You know` remember, often Charles Lorenzo Curry, Dr. Curry (Dad called [him] Charlie curry), told me, you know, Duke, the National Institutes of Health has sent a panel of individuals to review the hospital. And they had called the physicians together in this, just open meeting. And towards the end -- remember, my father was very junior, he and Charlie Curry very junior, at the time. They asked, they open the floor and said, "Is there anyone who has any kind of issues?: And Dad raised his hand, he said, well, I can't see patients on the private diagnostic side of the hospital. And Uncle Charles said, man, I thought we were gonna be fired the same day, I couldn't believe that your father had the gumption in front of all of these giants to stand up and say that. So when the guy asked him again, he said he repeated the same statement to make sure he was very clear. And so Duke, again, without making some sort of formal declaration, slowly moves towards a policy that` we would call more enlightened in that regard as well.

DO 1:04:13

Wow, that's very interesting to hear, and kind of continuing off of him being within Duke Health. What would you envision his average day looked like? And how did he kind of create change and difference daily? Or even what, what kind of interactions he went through on a day by day basis?

CJJ 1:04:33

You know, the first thing I would say is, you know, you have to understand that when Dad entered the hospital, especially early on, all eyes were on him. So he always had to be at the top of his game. You know, and that was not fair. It wasn't. But Dr. Stead felt that he would be the person to be in that role. And he was. I want to start by saying that he was always very conscious that he was representing much more than himself. You know, he could not be out advocating for having more African-American professionals and then not being professional, and literally outstanding himself. Right, he would have gotten no traction with that. You know, I alluded to that earlier, when I said he always had to be in character. He could not allow himself to come out of character for anyone to do anything that pushed his buttons to get him to come undone. Right. So everything had to be done as a professional at the highest possible level, which he, which he did. So, you think of all of all the micro aggressions, right, the passive aggressive behavior, all of the negative assumptions that he had to live with on a daily basis for a very long time in this hospital. You know, a lesser person probably would have just said, you know, to heck with this, you know, and go somewhere else to practice medicine. But he endured, right. I think he knew that there were higher ups who were committed to see the change, and there were or the hospital would not have changed. You know, it was not just Dad. There were others that helped. That reminds me of Mary Biddle Duke, Trent Siemens. She was what you might call a grey eminence. But she was someone who was like the mirror net? behind the scenes. In those days, it was different also. I don't know what kind of presence the Duke Family has here now but you felt the weight of her presence when she wanted you to feel it, in a way that I don't know is still here now. But she was another really strong ally for, you know, for Dad. But I think I mentioned Barton Haynes, Ralph Sniderman. Dr. Sneiderman was another... But, yeah, in terms of the allies, I kind of went I kind of went back to that. Yeah, I've kind of lost my train... What was -- what was? Did I answer that question sufficiently?

DO 1:07:52

Mainly, just about like what his average day would look like..

CJJ 1:07:56

So we talked about being regimented. Dad worked all the time you know, except Wednesdays. He took Wednesday afternoon to play golf. That was his time. All right. And he did not move off

of that. He was an avid golfer, had all sorts of delusions about playing in the PGA [Professional Golfers' Association] and all that kind of thing. But that was his time. And he took that. But all the other time he worke and he loved to work. It was not really work for him. He was a people person; he loved being able to sit down and to talk to the little ladies that came in to see him. That was one of the reasons he couldn't fit with managed care as it was in a recognized scenes of change?. But he says, you know, son, they will come and they'd bring me a pie. Then they'd give me a rundown on their grandkids and all of that. And he said somewhere in there, I'd find out, you know why they had come to see me (laughs), you know, but I could not switch to a thing where I was where I was pushing them to get out. But it started obviously before day, and then it ended after dark most days. You know, he made rounds to you know, to see the different patients, took time to meet with the students that he needed to meet with and to mentor to make sure that they were okay and that kind of thing. And then to have the conversations he needed to have with people who were asking very pointed questions about things that were going on in the hospital, you know. So that will kind of characterize it to me. You know, my parents divorced in '73 I want to say. And up until that time, I remember Dad coming home, you know at night he would take time to stop -- I loved plain m&ms -- he would stop at the store. And he'd have you know, plain m&ms for me. I don't wanna say nightly, but almost every night, and I was always, always happy to see Dad. You know, he, he gave to my sister Carla and I, what he could not have had as a boy. In a way of kind of material things and so forth. And even because his father died when he was a boy, and even in that way -- he was really an incredible father for a first-timer, you know, someone who did not have the experience of growing up with the father who was there throughout their childhood. His father worked in that mind, you know, from before day until after dark, and he did not see much of him. He just said he was a very, remembers him as a very large quiet man. And this felt like he must have loved him, because he just kept going back into that mine. But so that was, you know, his routine was pretty well set. He read the newspaper every day, he was very informed about what was going on in the world and could talk, you know, as an informed person would about those kinds of things. So he used to read quite literally everything he could get his hands on. So Dad was a very well-read person; I'm not just saying that he really did that.

DO 1:11:35

And kind of kind of going back to what you said about his daily routine. I think it's very interesting, the point of him, I guess, kind of being a minority within the majority having to be very level-headed. Whether that was like an intrinsic factor or something that like he felt he needed to be, I believe it was probably more so for him intrinsic... But, I think that's very interesting to hear. And do you feel like yourself -- have you ever been in spaces where you feel maybe as being one of the few Black individuals, you kind of had to maintain a level head? And kind of a very, I don't know, kind of very good appearance if that makes sense?

CJJ 1:12:19

Yeah, well, for me, not as much. You know Morehouse, you know, African-American HBCU, and all male, you know, and pretty much African-American. And then North Carolina Central and Howard University's education wise, in other spaces. I'm in a generation where I didn't have to think of it the same way that my father did, you know, not so much was at stake. I was in the different spaces where, you know, I mean, you can find yourself in that very quickly. You know, today I did an internship with the State Department, for example. There were African Americans who were officers and so forth and did that overseas internship, you know. But that was a great experience -- as it turned out the ambassador I worked for was great: Catherine Kahneman was dream ambassador to work for. Our experiences were so different. My father's experience was different from mine. You know I used to feel some kind of way about that growing up in his shadow because Dad meant so much to the Black community here. And the Black community here was really, really outstanding. And I mean that. All across Durham, Black Durham, was amazing. For example, in the subdivision, I mentioned Donald Moore down the street, well, right across the street was Willie Levitt who was, as I recall, a mechanical engineer. Next door to him was Bill Bell, who was an electrical engineer and had flown helicopters in Vietnamm and the longest serving mayor in Durham's history, a transformation, that's right across the street. Nextdoor was Charlie Curry, on the other side was DeWittig? who I believe was an industrial engineer. So I mean, that was just what four or five houses in that community, you go down the street and around the bend and you had Missouri Maurice, who was the first African-American woman all-American in basketball and then two College Hall of Fame's as a basketball player. But her husband flew B52s. And across the street from them was Wes Covington, who helped the Milwaukee Braves win the World Series in 1957 as a Hillside High School graduate from Durham. Nextdoor to him was North Carolina Central's second all-time winningest football coach George Quad, who was a good friend of my father's. But I could go -- Bert Collins who was a CEO of North Carolina making Mickey McShaw?, longest serving state legislator. All of those are just on almost one street in that, you know, in that community, And you could go all around that subdivision and then to multiple others around Durham. And a neat aspect of that, I will say, and I really mean this, is because of that, most of people here were pretty humble. Because you will always surrounded by people who were so outstanding, you know. So I like to say, Durham had a lot of African Americans who were elite, but they were not elitist.

DO 1:15:49

Okay, so kind of going less from of his role working as a faculty member but... He was known to care very deeply for his patients and defend them in cases if needed. Could you describe this, or any specific stories that come to mind?

CJJ 1:16:07

About his patients? Wow, Dad did share quite a bit about patients. You know, not necessarily in so much as having to advocate for 'em. I think there was, for the most part within the hospital, people worked as a team and trying to get people better. You know, but he did have interesting cases, he had a case where a daughter brought a mother who I think would either 102? 104? And she wanted Dad to see her to find out, you know, something that I can't recall. And he said, quite candidly that she should be telling him, you know, what her secret was to, you know, to longevity, or what have you. What I'll say about Pop is that, you know, what people came to appreciate about him is that he was very, very good at diagnosing people. And if you want a story, I'll tell you my own. So I guess.. hmm 2024. It was about a decade ago. Two decades ago now. Or was it three decades ago. Almost three decades ago, now! I became ill I was an athlete and I got to a place where it's very difficult for me to breathe and so forth. I was beginning to lose weight. I was having night sweats. You know, so talking to my father. I went to see Dad, as things became more difficult for me. And he said, Son -- I forgot who the pulmonologist was now, but he was the Chief of the Pulmonary Division; he sent me to see him. He said they're going to tell you that you have tuberculosis. And then he gave me the social reasons why that would be; the assumptions about African-Americans and so forth. He said, but you have sarcoidosis. He said, so what they're going to do is they're going to take a scan of your chest and do a biopsy and so forth. And that's exactly what they did, literally, in that order from the, we think you have tuberculosis to the chest scan to find the granulomas to, you know, the biopsy of them to determine that I had sarcoidosis.

CJJ 1:18:47

So people came to really trust what he had to say about medicine. You know, I don't want to say too much about that because it gets into other people's sort of medical history. But he was very good at diagnosing, you know, things that were difficult for people to figure out what they were. I'll say about my godmother, who was -- it gives me a chance to talk about her, talking about outstanding individuals, good gracious. Uh, her name was Josephine Ophelia Dobbs Klymit, and I'll be quick as I can with this. But, the Early College at North Carolina Central University is named after her and she was a politician here in Durham (kind of cutting her story short). She's deserving of this kind of attention herself. But she ended up coming down with Sjögren's. Initially there was a lot of difficulty in trying to figure out what she had, you know, Dad diagnosed her and took care of her for quite some time. But she was a really a phenomenal woman. And in her husband, William Alexander Clement, who was an executive at North Carolina mutual, likewise. And she came from a long line of -- she was the Aunt to Maynard Jackson's sister, who lived in Durham, uh was his mom. I'll get off into my Durham thing. So you better ask me a different question about something else.

DO 1:20:43

(Laughs) Just, I guess, kind of slightly summarizing his work with Duke Health specifically. Is there any specific actions he took that you would say were like a defining moment of his time with Duke?

CJJ 1:20:57

A defining moment? Wow. A defining moment, you know, when Dad was tenured and promoted, it came without much fanfare, to be honest with you. I would say probably when he became the president of the National Medical Association, you know, Dad -- and I indicated earlier, I traveled with Dad as a youngster to the medical convention. He took that so serious. From a very early stage, he was very serious about the professional association, and its role. And he was committed to that. And he worked really hard to become the president. And it was not a straight route to get there. You know, he met resistance along the way. And it's interesting how the good Lord had that work out because had he been elected at the time that he thought he should have been, I think his inauguration and all the celebration would have taken place in Indianapolis (nothing against Indianapolis if you from there). But the next year where he was, was in Las Vegas right. So that was great, as far as I was concerned (laughs). But I think it was that. That was a culminating thing in many ways for him. He was the consummate leader in that role. I remember for like, his inaugural address being a little nervous. And he was just so natural, and so calm, and so, you know, comfortable in what he wanted to say and what his platform would be, and all that kind of thing. And yeah, so I think that probably was it, because that brought a lot of attention to Duke and it gave them a reason to celebrate him, and so forth. And Ruff Snyderman made him like a special assistant, you know, to the Chancellor, or something. Which was a very nice professional gesture; it was a real gesture. You know, so yeah, I think that would, to me, probably be... As I think about that, that and then, you know, the retirement also people began to pay a lot of attention. John Hope Franklin came, you know, Ciragan Lincoln came, people who are good buddies, you know, but who were also giants in own areas came, so, yeah.

DO 1:23:49

And so, the National Medical Association was, like a counterpart to the American Medical Association?

CJJ 1:23:58

Right. So if you went back to segregation, i think the NMA was founded in 1896, if I'm not mistaken. So it's the oldest African-American professional association in the country. As I say, you all considered like our brightest individuals. It was filled with, you know, our brightest

individuas, going way back. And it, as you recognize, you know, afforded physicians an opportunity to share information in a way that they would not have, you know, as a consequence of Jim Crow. You know, African-Americans could not join the AMA [American Medical Association]. So they had the National Medical Association. During my father's period, amongst his peers, I can't say what it is today, because I've long since stopped going to NMA conventions, but they took that very seriously. It was very serious work that took place there. And it was a great deal of pride in, you know, in NMA. People have very strong feelings about it. You know, I just remember as a child, I guess I grew accustomed to seeing, you know, so many Black physicians doing great things all over the country, other countries. In the Caribbean and so forth. Dad, when he was President pushed them to have their -- because Dad was president, I think '89, '90 -- pushed him to have their '96 on the continent of Africa. And he wasn't successful but he did make the argument for it you know. He also wanted to see medicine socialized, you know. He felt strongly that we were paying too much to take care of people. Right so, he wanted to see, you know, to advocate for that. And that comes out of his background of seeing patients, oftentimes, especially in his Lincoln days, some of his early Duke days, you know, there were many people who paid with apple pies, sweet potato pies, and that kind of thing. Right and that was fine. And he was not the only physician doing that. I want to be clear, I'm not trying to characterize him as different, you know. They did what was necessary, you know, what was that quote I gave you of Dr. Stead, you know, "The sick do not inconvenience the well."

DO 1:26:39

100%. And specifically with his work in. NMA, could you list any specific changes that he made after he was appointed as president?

CJJ 1:26:56

You know, I have not, I've not gotten to that place, even in my own writing. So I haven't reviewed, you know, like policies and that kind of thing that he put in place. But what I can say is that I know he was an advocate for the care of the elderly. And I know he was called before Congress to (I think it was Congress?) to speak about that. A special committee to talk about like the cost of care which kind of, which dovetails into what I was literally just talking about. He had a very real concern about the affordability of quality health care. Of course that redounded more heavily on African-American and other people of color. He preferred not to be considered a minority, because he said, people of color are the predominant people in the world. So he said it's come to be a loaded expression. And he wasn't a big fan of that.

DO 1:28:06

I see, so I guess, continuing off of the NMA. Could you describe his work as a delegate to the 44th World Health Assembly?

CJJ 1:28:18

No, I actually, you know, that's another one of those where I don't want to try to get into the minutiae of what all was going on with that. I do remember him going. I do remember Lou Sullivan playing a big role in that. I think he might have been Secretary of Health at that time or... or... when was that? No. It was in a different capacity. But I remember him being part of that delegation and then going, but I don't recall like the details of that visit.

DO 1:28:56

And so I guess within Duke Health in other areas, how would you say his experiences shaped his own perspectives on the intersectionality of race and health? And then how would you say his activism within the Duke community contributes to a sort of like shift in attitudes and practices? Or kind of inspired, perhaps others to take similar positions as him?

CJJ 1:29:20

Say that again? That's quite a long question.

DO. 1:29:25

Just overall, how would you say his experiences kind of shaped his own views on like intersections in race and health and maybe inspired others to do similar things as him?

CJJ 1:29:37

Well, I think Dad was an exemplar for young people, student African-American physicians in particular. We've talked about, you know, a handful of them and Dr. Wright and, you know, Estrada Bernard and Dr. Walls, Bertram Walls. But I have to imagine that watching him go about his business must have impacted them. The issues that he was, that they that they were fighting, and certainly he was fighting, we're not a secret, they were widely known and understood, you know. The assumption of a person's inferiority based upon how they look and their capacity to do, what was required to be done, and so forth, you know.. Dad would have said himself, though, you're not fighting against what people look like, you know, it's their thoughts and beliefs and actions that militate against human decency that are, you know, that was the target. But I would imagine that many people will probably (especially those who got to see him more routinely) had to be inspired by that. I think that would be probably a better question for

those people who actually took up the mantle to do that work. But I want to be clear, though, because I don't want to take agency from like Brenda Armstrong, she greatly admired Dad and looked up to Dad. But Dad had a tremendous amount of respect for Dr. Armstrong. Who in her own right, she didn't need dad to become a firebrand; you know, she was a firebrand before she, you know, came to Duke hub. When she was a student at Duke, you may recall, she took over to the president's office at Duke, you know trying to get more African-American and people of color teaching at the institution in Black Studies at the institution and so forth. It's, it's interesting how there are aspects of the past that we seem to keep revisiting. But yeah, so you know, just so many of those people, I think were already kind of willing to take on, you know, the challenges in their own way. And I mentioned, Jean Spaulding, you know, who is such a towering figure here now. Who I cannot imagine has not been fighting many battles herself for a very long time. You know, people just go about their business in a way that I think, to those of us who are on the outside, we don't get to see all of the details and everything. And no, but I'm sure she has her fair of lumps. And I'm sure she's given a few over the years too in trying to make sure that the institution is true to a sacred trust.

DO 1:32:46

100%. And, I guess, kind of closing on Duke, I guess it's kind of slightly repeating maybe what we had already discussed. But, like, what would you say, his legacy that he left at Duke was? If you could kind of describe it in a few words. Or just how you feel it is in your words?

CJJ 1:33:09

There are now, people of color all over Duke Hospital and no one thinks anything of it. That would be his legacy... He said to me that when the Black medical students began to come to do, and no longer sought him out, he understood that the institution had changed. For a very long time, they always would look around the faculty and probably take a wild guess that the one African-American physician or one of a couple, probably had some say in their being there. Right, so they will go and introduce themselves. But there came a time where that changed. And that was not probably not as early as you would think. I'm sure that was well into the 80s. And, you know, a few more of them, and fewer will come by to, you know, to get advice or counsel, and that kind of thing. But to me, his legacy is that today, people just assume that Duke Hospital, that Duke Health is just an enlightened place. And I can tell you that it certainly was not. And there were individuals, not just my Dad, I've named some of them, you know, who helped to bring the institution to wisdom over its protest, sometimes kicking and screaming,

DO 1:34:45

(Chuckles) Kicking and screaming. Would you like to note any of his other involvement maybe outside of Duke or other places that is not necessarily mentioned a lot?

CJJ 1:34:57

My father? Dad was um.. whatever he became a member of he was really committed to. He was, you know, his Greek letter fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated, he loved, you know, through and through. He was a member of Boule, he was a very active with that, really, really enjoyed that, and so forth. But his real passion was his family. His wife, Carol, you know, became to me the love of his life. They fashioned a remarkable marriage and relationship. One that should be, to my way of thinking, emulated. They looked out for one another and really didn't care about what the outside world felt about things. In a way, that to me is just so uncommon today. But he really loved Carol, and vice versa. And they really took care of one another. You know, Carol, especially as he got older, Dad was fiercely independent. But, you know, she really looked after Chuck, and, and continues to do so even now. And it has not been without challenges even since he's passed. But she, um their relationship, I think really stands out, you know, in my mind. And, you know, I'm not going to say too much more about that. But because my father was such a well-known individual in the community. It just stands out that they was such a close couple, and supported each other, you know, so much. They traveled together, almost to an extent where Dad wouldn't go if Carol wasn't able to go, kind of thing, you know, so, yeah. But his family and then I mentioned, my sister. And my sister, I mentioned had a son. You know, who's in, right now, an honors program at A & T [North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University], an engineer. I have a niece, (my sister has a daughter) Christina, who is an athletic trainer at the University of Maryland now. And, you know, those became sort of, you know, focal points in his life, as all grandchildren are. But that was kind of his reason for being in many, many ways. And he was a great, just like, he was a great dad, he was a great, great grandfather also. Loved him tremendously, very proud of him.

DO 1:38:01

Wow, that's amazing. And kind of towards the end of his career, or maybe even like, after he retired, are there any specific influential things, or even just kind of ways he spent his time that you'd like to note?

CJJ 1:38:19

Dad... um most of his work was done in line with his professional career through either the Old North State, the NMA, or the Durham Academy of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy. And, you know, he, beyond that, there was just not a lot of time to do anything else, you know. In retirement, he retired for a while and he couldn't stay retired. You know, as I said, the delusion of

joining the PGA kind of went away. He was gonna play golf every day. As much as he enjoyed it, he enjoyed living the life of the mine more so and feeling like he was helping people. So he went back to work for a number of years and medicine, and he did that until he got to a place where he didn't feel like he was sort of at the top of his of his game in a manner of speaking. So he stepped away from it. He had that kind of discernment and humility about himself. You know, Dad was a very decisive person. I don't know that he had many regrets. He didn't seem to live his life like that to me. And, he's one of those people that was very intentional about pretty much everything that he did. So at the end, he was intentional about not doing anything. And, you know, he spent his quiet time reading, enjoying family, and obviously spending time with Carol. Having fun with you know, having fun with her family.

DO 1:40:20

I see and also I think you had mentioned.... I've lost my train of thought... [pause] So specifically, what age was it that he retired like officially? Do you know when exactly that was?

CJJ 1:40:55

I think Dad came out in '90 or about '97 or so, somewhere in there I want to say, Yeah, he'd been born in '27. I'm just a historian, but I think that's about 70... Is that, did I get that right?

DO 1:41:17

Yeahh, and I guess kind of in closing--

CJJ 1:41:19

He was a young 70, though I will say. Dad did, yeah he did push ups every day, into his 70s.

DO 1:41:29

Wow. That's very impressive. I hope I'm like that when I'm 70. And like thinking about him today, is there one specific aspect of him that's often overlooked, maybe that you'd like to know? Or maybe just describe who he was to you in a few words, or how you would describe him personally.

CJJ 1:41:49

So I just I said you can watch how I talked about him, he's a rock. And our family, he was a foundation upon which most of us pushed off of. You could always go to Dad and get solid --

and not just us, people in the community, close friends and so forth. We'd go to Dad, because he was a solid person, you were gonna get solid advice. And I missed that. I'm prepared for it, because he prepared me for. But I sure wish I had it. And that, you know, you go back to the legacy question again, obviously, he trained many outstanding African-American physicians. And, you know, he served as a mentor, and as an example to many others, some not even in medicine. And I think all of that is part of his legacy, you know, but he fought the good fight here and he did right by this institution. And, you know, so he's able to walk away from it with his head, you know, held very high. The institution, again, did not transform itself. There were individuals, not just Dad, many others I mentioned, you know, Jean Spaulding inside is still, I believe, you know, engaged in that work. There were many individuals, you know, who did, but he certainly played a big part of that from a very early period. And he was very intentional about it. It's just, it's hard to quantify that you know I've seen some statistics about like, where the institution was when he started versus where we are today. And you get a sense of a very significant impact in helping to make the institution a more welcoming place to people of color.

DO 1:44:13

100 % percent. And just a final question, kind of considering the purpose of this project -- Would you consider him an activist or advocate or agent of change? And why or why not?

CJJ 1:44:28

Would I consider him an activist and advocate or an agent of change? I think he was probably, at different times, all of those things. You know, what makes history to me, so rich is the complexity of the human personality. Right? We're not monolithic. You know, cause and effect relationships are often driven by multiple factors. Internal and external. They make things much more complicated. So I'll say at different times in his life, he was someone who was an advocate, and activist, you know, in that he was out, you know, rallying the troops to make a strong push to get more physicians or African-American physicians hired and so forth. Other times, he was an advocate for students who needed that, you know, advocation perhaps to get someone off of them, or to get someone to support them. And then he was also a change agent, right. And just the institution itself is, to me, the best example of that. The work that he did transformed the lives of the people that he was privileged and honored to serve. But his work here in the hospital, as someone who was attempting to bring about change in the right direction, stands out in my mind, just from what we see here at Duke on a daily basis. Because there's so many people now -- and I think the Chancellor of Health Affairs, is an African American, perhaps even a distant relative mistake?.

DO 1:46:35

Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish up?

CJJ 1:46:40

Well, my great hope is that Duke will do something with this meaningful to celebrate, in the appropriate way, not just my father, but all of those individuals who have played a part in helping to make Duke what it has become today. And they should not have to go begging to get the institution to do that. It should be done in a way that it brings honor, not just to the individuals, but those individuals represented larger communities of people. All right, who helped them and who helped this institution. So it would be a way of honoring I think the institution itself in doing that. But that's my great hope is that their legacy, you know, all of them -- Dad, Don Moore, Charles Curry... I could have said Sadye Beatryce Curry, who was the first African-American woman gastroenterologist, and also [indistinct] -- and others that I have mentioned. Jean Spaulding, first African-American female medical student to finish. Delano Merriweather, first African-American -- I mean, these folks shouldn't have to go and have a campaign to have their legacies remembered. And it should be done in a way that folks here across Duke and beyond should know because it's helped to make Duke Health what it is.

DO 1:48:21

Completely agree. And thank you so much for your time, you gave us some amazing insights and information, stories, all of the above about Dr. Charles Johnson. Thank you so much.

CJJ 1:48:34

You're very welcome.