Oral History of June M. Jeffries
Sixth Interview
November 5, 2019

This interview is being conducted on behalf of the Oral History Project of The Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewer is Will Weaver, and the interviewee is June Jeffries. The interview took place at the Alumni Relations Center in the Hotung Building at Georgetown Law School on Tuesday, November 5, 2019. This is the sixth interview.

MR. WEAVER: Good morning, June. To start off, we've kind of gone in depth about this the last couple sessions, but you became a highly regarded and successful prosecutor in one of the toughest cities at the time in the United States, during a pivotal period where we saw crime skyrocket, come back down again toward the end of your career. Kind of thinking about your body of work at the U.S. Attorney's Office which we've discussed in detail, I was hoping you would talk a little bit more about how your work fits into that broader story and the sort of historical context in which you worked.

MS. JEFFRIES: I guess I have some things I could say. I went to what was called Felony Ones in 1987, but it was probably in late 1988 early 1989 that our gun violence rates skyrocketed, and with that, homicides skyrocketed, largely due to the arrival of crack. Crack was a drug I had been hearing about in news reports in other cities, but it had not hit D.C. yet. But once it came, it came with a vengeance and with an unprecedented level of violence. Most of that violence, of course, was done by Black people, and the victims of the violence were other Black people, which is a distressing thing for me. It is a distressing thing for me, but it was out of control and rampant.

Along with that, and I don't mean to disparage these people or this nation, a lot of drug dealers came to town who were Jamaicans. Often, and around then, the weapons were getting more powerful. They had automatics, and they didn't shoot just one person. It would be multiple. I think we had one shooting where women and two children were killed, maybe four people were killed. So that was a very difficult time.

I would also like to make clear that in my work, I did not and do not now take joy in the fact that persons were convicted and then sent to prison to live their lives as people live in prison. So that was not a joyful thing for me. With many of my defendants, they were young Black males, and I was a mother of a son. I was doing this work before he was born. I went to Felony One when he was 2, and the bulk of all that was during his childhood and into high school.

I would look at my defendants and think of them as I do my son but with the understanding that their lives could have been different if many things had been different, if their mother's pre-natal care had been different, if her diet had been different, if their home environments had been more serene and more nurturing, if the schools they went to, the conditions were different, if there were more activities and things in their neighborhoods. Because all the while, like I lived in Montgomery County, and you have all kinds of activities and facilities in Montgomery County. Well if it's good for the kids in Montgomery County, it's good for the kids in Washington, D.C. And if they're all in the same year of graduating

from high school, the ones who do graduate, generally speaking, had different experiences than the ones at some of those Montgomery County schools and are not able to compete when they go out into the world and their lives are just different.

So I didn't take joy in that, and I can also say this. My work was doing homicides, which I think almost everybody's going to agree that those were serious crimes, and in doing homicides, I didn't have that much leeway, so from my point of view, you couldn't kill two or three people and then want me to agree to probation. That's not happening. And yes, it's also true if you read the pre-sentence reports of my defendants that almost all of them came from distressed backgrounds, if not many of them downright awful backgrounds, and I had sympathy for that. But at that point, if they're standing there and they've got, two, three, four homicides, I can't focus on fixing that person. That was not my role. The defense did that quite adequately, and sometimes they got some success, got some what they wanted, so that's how that was. And that wasn't a good thing. And I wish that wouldn't be true.

The other thing I feel deeply is for instance I could have a case where I might have a young woman come in, a witness, and she could be 25 and have like four or five kids, and each of the children had a different father and all the circumstances that were going on, and you could see the way that the mother others might interact with the children, so it was no surprise that 15, 20 years later, those children end up in the system as well.

And everybody knew that, so I consider that to be a failure of society not to be addressing that, both external government forces and the people within. We have failed to address that, and things are still going on now.

The most recent discussion I had on my way here with my son, there was a killing yesterday over one of these Popeye's fried chicken sandwiches. And that's nothing new because we've had kids killed over boom boxes, over North Face jackets, over Air Jordan shoes because people take great validation in these things, and violence comes about over acquiring these things. It's not as if other people don't value things. As my son said, people get Mercedes or they buy art and stuff, but they tend not to get into arguments at the dealership, or if they're driving down the street and another rich person doesn't come and just take it from them. They do other kinds of things, as we know. They're not perfect. But this violence to me is very troubling and continues to me. But as you noted, the homicide rate has gone down considerably.

MR. WEAVER: I want to jump off on that. You typically in our interviews have been modest about your prior work, and I want you to maybe suspend that for a moment. Do you feel that the work you did, and the work other people did at your office, help to make D.C. safer, help to bring crime rates down?

MS. JEFFRIES: I don't know that we brought crime rates down. I don't think that locking people up per se brings crime rates down. Here's an observation I would make, and then maybe I'll talk about the work. When I was in law school

in D.C., they changed the gun laws and they made these guns illegal, so people had to turn in their guns. That was amazing to me because all these people, they had them on the news, lines of people turning in their guns, which I personally thought was stupid. Anyway, they did to comply with the law. I lived in Montgomery County the whole time I was at the U.S. Attorney's office, and in Maryland, on some level, you can own and carry weapons. I don't know the intricacies of Maryland laws because I never sought to own or carry a weapon, but I know that you can. I don't think you can argue that during the years of the heyday when things were so out of control and we were having 400 or more homicides a year, I don't think you can say that D.C. was a safer place because of the gun laws that made guns illegal than Maryland was where people could actually legally own guns. If you say population-wise, Montgomery County was probably around the same size as D.C. D.C. might have 400 murders in a year, but in Montgomery County, maybe we had 10 to 20. So it wasn't those guns or the lack of guns that made you safer. Of course now since I've retired and the *Heller* case and all that, all the gun laws have changed, and I can't keep up with what you can and can't do, but apparently you can have guns, and the people who want them in D.C. their workers are pushing to expand the limits of that.

I think that our work, though, served a purpose because I worked closely with my victim's family members. Some of my cases I had people who had been injured but survived, so sometimes I also had survivors I

was dealing with. I know the impact that these murders had on spouses, on parents, on siblings, on children, and I know that there are people in that group who if D.C. had had the death penalty, they personally would have wanted that in their cases. I know they want people locked up forever and a day, which isn't necessarily what was going to happen. Some people did get life without parole, but there is that side of it when people are the victims of the crimes.

I also know what it's like to live in neighborhoods that have been ravaged by drugs. I know what the neighborhood I grew up in in Detroit, we moved in in 1955, and then particularly after the riots and stuff happened, I know what it was like there and the impact that drugs can have on a community and people. So, yes. We did work that did something. It didn't necessarily stop other people from going out and breaking the law. And for that matter, the death penalty, I don't think the death penalty really keeps people from committing crimes because they already know they can go to prison or get life without parole and they do it anyway so I don't think the death penalty prevents that, and I'm not a death penalty proponent either.

I think that in my work, and there are people who may disagree with this, but I did have compassion for my defendants, it's just that I felt I wasn't in a position to focus my attention on them. Although there are defendants who I tried to work with the court and defense counsel in fashioning a sentence that I thought would achieve some specific goals,

and I would for any of my defendants, whatever happened with them. In my heart, I wished good things for them. Would they be in a situation where that would happen, and could they come out a better person. I hoped that they would, but that didn't always happen, I'm sure.

MR. WEAVER: Looking back on your career, what do you think was your biggest accomplishment?

MS. JEFFRIES: A lot of people talk about me and the child murder cases that I had, and when I did those child cases, I tell people okay my kids are like 8 and younger, but they were really younger, but really 18 months and younger. The youngest child killed was 59 days. The first child murder case I had, that child was 10 months old. For those children, very often the person who killed them was the person you would think would protect them more than anyone else. It was a parent, or it could be some other relative or somebody. I felt that those children so often did not have anyone standing up for them in life, and I felt that it was my thing to represent them in death and try to get justice for them. That first child that I had who was ten months old and I had those blowups from his autopsy, I have kept those blowups, and sometimes I look, and I think I'm the only one who remembers them. So I probably think that was important work because my colleagues would say I don't know how you could do that. I could never do that. Well I was a parent, and I did do it. I may have said that I would go to autopsies of my victims. The very last autopsy I went to was of a five-month-old baby boy, an African-American male, with a full head

of hair, very sweet looking, except he's lying there on the table with his chest cracked open and his organs removed. So yeah, I thought of those children a great deal, and I still do.

I also think another part of my work is I have relationships with some of my survivors or family members to this day I have relationships with them. We'll talk, see how they're doing. I appreciate that, and I think they appreciate me.

MR. WEAVER: Is there a moment in your career that you look back on that makes you the most proud?

MS. JEFFRIES: I'm proud that I was able to do my career, to have these successes that I had, but also raise my son with the success that I have had because my personal bottom-line feeling is this. It doesn't matter what success I would have achieved in my career. I would have achieved at the U.S. Attorney's Office if I had short-changed Rudy, and that was my number one concern. I am glad that I worked in an office where I was able to do both. I'm glad I worked at a time when I did because over the course of time, advances in technology made that a lot easier. I could take stuff home and use a computer and do things, so I could be home and work in the evenings. I'm glad for that I would say.

I think back about my job, especially working here, but of course in other aspects of my life, other things I've done, and I think of all the interesting people that I have met or worked with and people whose names you hear in the news, people who have done all these amazing things.

Because I consider myself to be a regular person who just did a regular thing, but through that, I got to meet so many really cool people, as I say, doing really cool things. And also other aspects of my life, like I told you knowing Mrs. Parks, I've had a lot of good experiences because of that.

MR. WEAVER: Are there any other anecdotes about these folks that we see in the news and people that you had significant interactions with during your career, any good Bob Mueller stories or anything like that?

MS. JEFFRIES: Here's what I like. I like the summer they did the public reading of the Mueller report over at the Arena Stage. I went over there, and I did a reading. My friend Deborah did. I will say that I never bought a copy of the Mueller report, and when it came out, I think I was traveling and didn't really focus and read stuff. But of course my son would tell me, or I would see the news or other things, so I was aware of many things generally, but I never read it myself. I may have discussed with you how now in retirement I like to go to the Supreme Court, and I go for arguments. I went to two days of arguments last month. I go the opening day of the term, and they did two criminal cases that day which were interesting. Then I went back two days later because they did the cases involving the gay employees who were fired and then the transgender woman who was fired. I went for those arguments. I put my purse in a locker downstairs. Well I went to one locker and opened it up, and there was a copy of the Mueller report. So now I have a copy of the Mueller report because I didn't turn it into lost and found. I took it home.

Knowing Bob. Through my job I got to meet Stevie Wonder. You people call him Stevie, but friends call him Steve, so I call him Steve. I got to introduce my son to Steve. That was good, and that's through my job. I'm happy that right now, across the street, or down the street, at U.S. District Court, the Roger Stone trial is going on and my former colleague and friend Judge Amy Berman Jackson is presiding over that, so I'll probably go over there one day and look at that trial.

Some years ago, our former colleague Judy Smith, she was the press person under Joe DiGenova. She left there and became Deputy White House Press Secretary under Marlin Fitzwater with Daddy Bush. So when Judy was at the White House, she had a group of us come over. She contacted me, and I got a group together. We went over to the White House. She gave us a little tour. That's when I got to see the Oval Office. We had lunch in the White House Mess. We got to keep the printed menu. While we were inside, Barbara Bush was walking around, and we saw her. Then we went outside and had our picture taken by the White House photographer. President Bush was going someplace, so the helicopters were taking him to Andrews, and we got a picture of his helicopter rising above our group there. Judy Smith went on to NBC and other things. Most famously, she is the inspiration for the character Olivia Pope on *Scandal*, so Judy had a very excellent career. I'm happy to have worked with her.

I was trying a case one time, and George Stephanopoulos was then, this was during Clinton's presidency, he was on the jury panel, so he's sitting there acting all important on his phone looking at stuff, like we got the impression he didn't want to be there for my murder trial. So we're doing voir dire, and he comes up and said whatever he said, and we struck him. Okay, that's fine. I went on and did my trial. Later on, I wrote George Stephanopoulos a letter at the White House, and I said you know what, I was the prosecutor on the case that you came for jury duty, and we let you go, and now I want a favor. I want to bring my child to the White House and see President Clinton. So Rudy and I went to the White House one day. We had a tour, and then what was happening is President Clinton was leaving to go somewhere, there was a group of people there from Arkansas, and he was going to come out and work the crowd and shake hands before he got on the helicopter. So we were back there, and Rudy was about 8 to 10 years old, and I got pictures of Rudy shaking Bill Clinton's hand that day.

Now also there that day was the Dali Lama. So then I see the Dali Lama and his people, and I say to Rudy, that's the Dali Lama. Of course 8-year-old Rudy is like who, what? I said just remember he's Richard Gere's friend, because Rudy knows I like Richard Gere. I've liked Richard for a while.

So we did that. That's because of my job. I liked that with my job I've been shooting at the FBI range. I've been down to Quantico to the

labs to see the work they do. Of course I thought a lot of their work was irrelevant. I felt what they did was interesting, but I wasn't going to put all that in my trial. They could tell you the bullets were all made at the same time and stuff like that. But it was interesting listening to it.

I've been up in police helicopter a few times flying around. The last time I went up I was in a rickety National Guard helicopter. The first thing the pilot is telling us is instructions in case of an emergency. I didn't go up again, but I'd go up in a nicer helicopter if offered.

Things happened. I told you I liked going to the Supreme Court. One of the things I used to do when I was working is I would arrange group admissions ceremony and take people over, and I've done individual ceremonies. I was there one time and talking to the man in the admissions office, and another man was standing nearby wearing the morning attire that some of them wear at the Supreme Court. Eventually he introduced me to that man. Well, that man is named Gary Kemp. As it turns out, Mr. Kemp had been in the clerk's office in D.C. Superior Court, and he recognized me from my days at the U.S. Attorney's Office. Mr. Kemp has an interesting story because his grandmother is from Georgia or wherever, and it turns out his grandmother was the midwife when Clarence Thomas was born. And then Mr. Kemp started his job as deputy clerk of the Supreme Court on Clarence Thomas's first day. When I retired, Mr. Kemp and the other gentleman, Perry Thompson, came to my retirement party. They gave me an autographed copy of Justice

Thomas's book, and I tell people this to this day. I encourage people to read his book, not because I'm seeking to change anyone's opinion. It certainly did not change my opinion. But I think it's important to hear what he had to say that explains himself and his actions. Before I actually read the book, I was at the library and they had it on CD. I listened to it. He read the book himself on CD. That was interesting.

So, I would also say that through my career, my son ended up working at the Supreme Court, and after he finished college, he got the first and only job that he applied for. He worked first as a Marshal's aide. They are there to assist the court, and one of his functions was he would work the courtroom, especially they have the lawyers seating area, and sometimes the Marshal's aides, well any time the Justices are on the bench, they have maybe three aides who sit behind them, and they do things for the Justices. So you call that bench duty. Sometimes my son had bench duty, so during those arguments, you'd have the nine Justices facing the audience as well as those three law clerks. Only twelve people. Then you have the clerks. A small group of people would get to look out, and my son would be one of them.

Ultimately, my son became personal aide to Justice Kennedy for two-and-a-half years. That was a tremendous experience for my son. My son left to go to law school, so on his last day of work for Justice Kennedy, they had "a working lunch" with my son and the law clerks, and they all gave him tips for law school. The Justice told him to call back if

he had an issue or a question. I said Rudy, how many people do you think get tips on their last day of work from a sitting Supreme Court Justice and his set of law clerks about law school. So I was very appreciative for that. I thought that was very special.

Justice Kennedy and his wife came to my son's wedding. They stayed way longer than I would have thought. They stayed until the dancing. I didn't even realize that until I saw the wedding video and he danced with my daughter-in-law. Justice Kennedy was a very gracious person. He'd walk up to people and say Hi, Tony Kennedy, and I'm like yeah, right. I'm not calling you Tony. But he was very gracious. What I was thinking at that moment was my mother came from the Mississippi Delta, the daughter of sharecroppers, and she had a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court at her son's wedding. So I was quite taken from that.

Subsequently, his first year of law school, his law school inaugurated an environmental moot court competition. The Chief Justice came out for the competition. Well Justice Roberts's Chambers knew that Rudy was at the school, so they arranged for Rudy and his wife to be invited to a dinner with the Chief that was being held at the law school for a small group of people. Rudy and his wife got really good seating, like they were in the second row of the moot court competition. Each law student could only get one ticket, but Rudy got two, and one of his friends wanted to know how do you get two tickets, but Rudy didn't tell him. When they were at the event, there was a little reception afterwards and

one of the chief's security people came over and said something to Rudy, then his friends wanted to know why do these people know you? He didn't really tell them at that point.

So anyway, he had that experience, and that comes from me working at the U.S. Attorney's Office, and I'm glad for that. I'm glad to be able to say that I worked for Eric Holder, and I know Eric Holder. My mother was always a very big Kennedy person, and Bobby Kennedy at the Justice Department, so when Eric was the Attorney General, I contacted Annie in his office and arranged for my mother and me to go up and see Eric. He had his official photographer take pictures with the two of us, then he sent us a couple of 8" x 10" that he inscribed. I told Eric as we were standing there that next to meeting President Obama, there was probably nothing bigger for my mother and how much I appreciated that. So I'm glad for my career that I could have an experience like that. I always shared those things with my mother because she was the one who really got me through after my father died.

So I think I had a lot of good things in my career. I'd also like to think that I was respectful of my defendants and their families because I saw the humanity in my defendants, and I can't say that that was necessarily true of all of my colleagues, or I certainly can't say that that was historically true of them. When I dealt with my defendants' family members, I endeavored to treat them with respect as I would want people to be respectful of me or my family. I would always think of this. When I

stood there as a lawyer for the U.S. Department of Justice and my client was the United States of America, I took that to mean I represented 330 million people, of which my defendant was a part of that mix, and I was there to do the right and fair thing. So I would tell myself in some ways I was the defendant's lawyer too. I wanted to do the right and fair thing for them, and what I represented, there was no way that they could match in resources. There was never a case that I had where I needed an expert, I needed some kind of investigation, I needed blowups or models made. There was never a case I had where I could not get what I needed for that prosecution, and that's not true for the other side. I had the whole government at my back, and I was mindful of that with them. I like to say that. So I would like to think if you ask some of my defendants how did I treat them, I think they'd say well. I had a notorious murder defendant, and yes I do believe you killed those people, Eddie, you and I both know you did. He called me. Something happened, and I think I talked about that already.

MR. WEAVER: One thing that comes up again and again talking to some of your former colleagues and talking to judges who you've argued before, is you as a prosecutor, cool and unflappable, but you've also discussed the emotional tug of prosecuting defendants who committed crimes against children, what it meant I think your words were stand up for them in their death because no one stood up for them in their lives. Can you speak a little more about how advocating for children gave meaning to your career?

MS. JEFFRIES: I did feel that way because yes I was a mother during all of this time, and I was attuned to what children are like. You see some common themes in child murders. A lot of kids get murdered because people think they should be something they're not. So an 18-month-old knocks over a glass, and they take that as a personal affront and that the child is being obstreperous and obstinate, and then they take out and they react violently toward the child. Okay I know what an 18-month-old child is like. I know what a four-year-old is like and how you should discipline a child. That does not include kicking the child in the abdomen with your booted feet. That does not include burning a child with cigarettes. So I knew all these things in particular because I was a mother but also because I'm just a person and I'm an adult.

Another thing I would also say is I'm sure for many of my defendants in those cases, I think that many of them were treated badly as children, and maybe they did not have the same examples as well, and sometimes I was mindful about that.

MR. WEAVER: What do you think and kind of hope that we as a society can do to avoid some of the same tragedies and to avoid the cycles of abuse and then the abused then becoming the abuser in some of these horrific crimes that you dealt with?

MS. JEFFRIES: It goes back to what I said. We're really not dealing with these issues. For me, I think so much of this is often just breakdown in familiar relationships and family, households. As I said, I could have a young

woman who had four or five kids and they all had a different father. You think about that. Each child has a different set of relatives, and each child may be treated differently, but they're all in the same one household, but Child A knows his father and knows the grandparents, aunts, and uncles, and those people recognize that child and give him gifts or take him places and do things and maintain a relationship. Child B does not know who the father is, does not get any of that, but he sees that happening with the older brother or sister. Then over here maybe the child knows the daddy, maybe he comes over like once a year and gives something. You have all of that going on. Then with the mothers, all these different men are coming in and out of the children's lives and being exposed. I think that's not a good way to go for children. By the same token, I had one pre-sentence report I always remember, a defendant reported that he had a three-year-old child. He knew the child's first name, but he didn't know the child's last name because he didn't know the mother's last name. I think that's a very profound statement, and he's not the only person like that. It's very profound.

I would say over there in D.C. Superior Court or any other similar court in this country, most cases that I had drugs and or alcohol played a role in it some way, and it didn't have to be that it was a drug case because most of my cases were not drug cases. But the defendant may be an alcoholic or drug user or the mother was when he was born, and he grew

up like that or the boyfriend is and he's beating people and doing things. Drugs, drugs, drugs.

I had a case where a woman killed her six-year-old son because they were living in public housing, she had a number of children, and she was a crack user. She felt that the six-year-old and a sister had taken money she had hidden away in a shoe or something for her drugs. Her response was to hit the child on the head with a crowbar and make him stand in the hallway and stand still. She's off in another room. The other children said he began to behave kind of funny. He ultimately relieved himself on himself because she wouldn't let him go to the bathroom, so he told her that. She told him to take a bath. She's in another room. He got in the bathtub. The water was scalding hot. He called out to her that the water was too hot. She's in another room. She told him to put in cold water, turn it off, or whatever. Well the child passed out because he's already been hit on the head, then he's in the hot water. He passed out, so he died from the head trauma as well as burns from this water. Well here's the deal. It was public housing. A Mobile Crime Officer measured the temperature of the water. The water coming out of the tap was 165 degrees, so you figure at the boiler it was probably hotter and it's traveling through the pipes. If you read Dr. Spitz I have his book, whatever it's called, I don't remember, but anyway, everybody uses Dr. Spitz, the part in there about burns, I think they say if a household has elderly or children, that the water should be set at no more than 120. But there was a

chart in there that would tell you how quickly you'd get burned at certain temperatures. So he's in 165-degree water. That water was very hot. We wrote a letter to the housing people telling them they needed to turn the water temperature down. Now, that woman did intentionally hit him in the head and that put everything in motion, and she was guilty. I'm not saying she ever intended for her child to get scalded, but she did put all this in play.

So you know children grow up in these circumstances, and drugs and alcohol have something to do with it. One of my defendants, Ricky Brogsdale, I had met his mother and she was a long-time alcoholic to the point where I think it really was affecting her brain. I could imagine how difficult it was to be Elaine's child.

As I said, drugs and alcohol play a role in almost any case that we have over there. What is society doing about that?

MR. WEAVER: One of my favorite anecdotes that I read in news articles about your career, and I think this captures something about your personality and your approach to your work really well, but it's the one about the letter you wrote to J. Edgar Hoover when you were 13 years old. In the letter, just for some brief background, I think you told him that you knew at the time that the FBI didn't hire women or African-Americans but that it wouldn't matter because, and I think this is a direct quote, "You will be dead by the time I'm old enough to work there anyway," and then of course you go on to have this long career at the U.S. Attorney's Office and then at your

retirement ceremony, you have this letter from a well-respected director of the FBI with glowing praise of your work and thanks for your service to the country. We've talked a lot about your path from childhood to your later career and family, but where does that audacity of the 13-year-old June come from?

MS. JEFFRIES: I'm going to put a lot of that on my mother because like I may have said, from the time I was five, I was going to be a lawyer because of *Perry Mason* and stuff, and my mother was always exposing me and pushing me to do things. I had by then seen that movie with Jimmy Stewart, the FBI story. Okay, it's propaganda, but I like Jimmy Stewart. I looked it up, and I think back then they said to be an FBI agent, you had to be a lawyer or a CPA. Well I wanted to be a lawyer, so I thought I could do that. I wrote him. And they told you what happened when I wrote him back. I wrote him, and the response I got back was a little flyer about being a clerk, a typist or file clerk. June Jeffries wasn't going to be nobody's typist or file clerk for the FBI or anybody else. So when I was retiring, and they ask you if there's something you want or whatever, probably I can't remember if I said a second thing, but I know I most definitely said I wanted a letter from the FBI, and I mentioned that in my remarks, and that letter was from Bob Mueller.

The other thing I want to say about this is when I look back on my life and just being who I am, I think it's entirely weird that I would grow up and be able to say that I knew the director of the FBI or that I've been

to Quantico or that I've worked with FBI people. I think that's weird for a Black person growing up in Detroit like I did, but it is what it is. I'm able to say that. So that's something I would not have known. There's so much about my life I would not have known. I wouldn't have been able to predict really any of this. I knew I wanted to be a lawyer, and I thought I'd live a nice life. And I probably thought that meant I was going to be living in Detroit. I hadn't thought beyond living in Detroit, but once I went to, right before I started college, that program in New York for six weeks and then going to college in Connecticut, well that opened me up to other places. I saw that you could live someplace besides Detroit and Belzoni, Mississippi and be happy.

I couldn't have predicted any of this, the specific things or people, but I'm glad for it, and I look back on it and I think like wow. And I consider myself a low-level regular person. In our conversation before we started taping today, I talked about going to the Emmett Till sites and then about having coffee with James Meredith a few weeks ago. One of the things I forgot at the time, and I'm sorry I did but I'll bring it up next year, is one of the deputy U.S. Marshals who was assigned to protect him back then was Kirk Bowden who was here in D.C. during my career and had a very distinguished career with the U.S. Marshals Service. I think last year over in the Federal Courthouse they dedicated the Marshals' training room in his name, and I went to that program. I know Kirk's widow, Shirley. Kirk probably died a couple of years ago. Kirk is also a part of this

project and has an oral history, and I would say to anybody you need to hear his oral history about his career and experiences.

I went to the portrait unveiling for Judge Norma Holloway Johnson which occurred after she stepped down. Judge Norma Holloway Johnson was not a person who was going to put these things out there herself. She didn't make remarks, but her husband, Judge Julius Johnson, made remarks for her. Subsequently, I got the transcript of that proceeding, and it's probably packed away with things I brought home when I retired, but in it, he talked about her career. She worked at Main Justice at some point. She had a case that was over there at that Federal Courthouse, 333 Constitution Avenue, Northwest, right near the Capitol, so she went to court and the white male judge her case was assigned to would not recognize her as a lawyer and certainly not as a lawyer for the United States of America. She had to call back to the office and get a white colleague to come over there for her. She went on to become chief judge of that courthouse. I don't think you're going to have that experience now in that courthouse, but racial things are happening all the time, and I think a lot of our younger lawyers, I hope people will listen to these oral histories because there's a lot to learn about what people experienced. What she experienced as a judge was in my lifetime. So I think about those kinds of things when I go to the courthouse.

The bench over there over the course of my career, the lineup of that bench over there now is so different from when I started. Diversity,

gender, race, ethnicities. That's not what you saw when I first started working, so that makes me very happy and proud to be able to experience that and see that.

MR. WEAVER: After your retirement, I know you spent some time volunteering with the Obama campaign in 2008 and that was a very meaningful experience. I think you mentioned phone banking was not quite your cup of tea.

MS. JEFFRIES: Not quite, but I did it. But did I also say the thing I would not do is knocking on doors because the idea of knocking on the doors of strange white people is unsettling for me. You never know when you might knock on the wrong person's door, and at that point in life, I just didn't need the drama.

MR. WEAVER: We've talked about that before, and today I think you've mentioned a couple times some of the really meaningful experiences that you got to have with your mother based on your career, meeting Eric Holder, having Justice Kennedy come to her grandson's wedding and dance the night away. I know you also got to take your mother to the inauguration after working on the campaign, so I'm hoping maybe you could say a little more about the meaning that you've derived and the meaning that your mother got out of seeing your career and getting to see some of these things that have happened in history along with your time in this role at the U.S. Attorney's Office and afterward.

MS. JEFFRIES: I think this was all very I would like to think good and special for my mom who went on to become herself a grocery store cashier and being a

grocery store cashier you don't get the same kinds of experiences that I got, but since she got me there, I endeavored to include her. I know it made my mother very happy to be able to meet these people, to go to these things. Here's a story. My mother used to look at Greta Van Susteren on TV. Greta had a show, and my mother would look at Greta. Well I know Greta from her days when she was a defense attorney over there at D.C. Superior Court, and then Greta's on TV. I didn't really look, but one day I'm lying in bed and I'm channel-surfing, and I happened to land on Greta's show, and she said you can email me at whatever. So I sat there and emailed her and said Greta, my mother just loves your show. I said something about either that day was her birthday or the next day was her birthday. So Greta said give her number and I'll call her. So I gave her the number, and Greta called and talked to my mother. My mother really liked that. Then when my mother came to town, I took her to Greta's show once or twice we went down to the show and watched the taping. That was like really cool for her. Like I said, she wanted to know how much money Greta made. Does she make a lot of money? Yes, mother, she does. Greta changed jobs and then went to CNN or something and they wrote about her in *People* magazine, so then *People* said she made $3 million. So I called my mother up and I said okay, mother *People* magazine said she makes $3 million a year. My mother's response was maybe something good will happen for you too. I'd say oh she's just like me, ma. She used to be chasing cases in Superior Court. My mom liked

that. I was able to take her to meet Willard Scott because a former reporter, who is now the press person for the U.S. Attorney's Office, is married to Doreen Gentzler, so I knew Bill and Doreen, and I wanted my mom to see Willard Scott, and I can't wait until she's 100 years old. So Doreen told me what to do, so one morning, my mother and I went over there when he was doing his birthday greetings for the 100-year olds. I got a picture of mom and Willard Scott. She liked that too.

Oftentimes, for some things, she'd want if we were in Detroit or something, she wanted to take somebody with her or get extra copies of programs or do whatever so she could give to other people. I'm like mom, I'm doing this for you, okay. I'm not doing this for everybody. So she'd be very happy to go to those things. She was very happy the night we went to the Democratic party election night in 2008 and we were there when Obama won. She was happy. And we were able to go in 2012 that election night, and that's when she'd been diagnosed with cancer, and I didn't know if she'd be around by Election Day, but she was.

So, yeah, all of that. My mom. And like I said, my dad too, but my dad died when I was 18, so I was a sophomore in college. But my mom, yeah.

I want to say this. Back in my first year or so in the office I was in Misdemeanors. One of my colleagues she was a Jewish woman from New York. Whatever we were talking about, I said my mother was from Mississippi and they were sharecroppers or something, she then says to me

she must be very proud of you. I said she's no more proud of me than your mother is of you. Why does she think her life was different from mine? We're people too. You think what the real deal is it's unusual that someone like me would end up here. Oh no it's not unusual. I know lots of people like me who have these jobs.

MR. WEAVER: In our last session, you mentioned that you talked about thinking of phases of your life as chapters of a book and that you were on to the next chapter after you decided to retire, that was it. That's what you decided to do, and it was the next chapter. My question is what's the next chapter for June M. Jeffries?

MS. JEFFRIES: Well, this is the chapter. I read one of Jane Fonda's books a few years ago that she wrote, and she divided her life in three parts, and she was in the third part of her life. You know, I'm like that too. Here's the big part of my life. The big part of my chapter is to do and be whatever I want to be without delay because I fully realize that. The example for people I use a lot from my homicide days is like we're sitting here, I could take a bullet and be dead before I finish this sentence or be dying before I finish the sentence. But certainly, your health can change at a moment's notice, injuries, your body, something can happen at a moment's notice, and I don't want to live with regret, so that is my thing. I'm living every day without regrets, and I'm open to new things, trying not to dwell on the past. Whatever good things happen, whatever good people that I've had in the past and many of them are now gone, I'm not dwelling on the fact that

they're gone. I salute the fact that I had them for whatever period of time it was, and now there are new things and even new people, but I'm also fortunate that I've got a good circle of people I've known for years in my life. Like I told you about the junior high school people. I'm happy for that. So that's what the next phase is. I think about little Clara, and I'd like to see her when she's 18. That means I'd be 80. Okay. I hope to live to be 80. My mother lived to be 90. I also know this. When I turned 60 a few years ago, that's the first time in my life when I thought ahead to the next birthday, the next big one being 70. The next decade birthday and realizing that I might not be here at age 70 because at this point in time, my contemporaries have started dying one a year or something. But for the rest of my life, that pace is going to accelerate. And that's the course of the rest of my life that people that are meaningful in my life are going to be dying way more than I'm meeting new ones. So I might not be here in ten years. My plan is to be here, so therefore I'm trying to do those things. I'm trying to be is my goal, to be the person that I feel June Jeffries was born to be. So I'm trying to be kind. I'm trying to be principled. I'm trying to speak out about things that I think are wrong. I'm trying to be strategic in how I allocate my energy and time and how to be efficacious at the things that are important to me. I try to identify, and I have a good idea of what institutions are important to me and how I support them and the advancement of ideas and positivity. I also am trying to spread love in the world. I'm trying to spread love, and I

encourage people to be loving and approach things that way. There are a whole lot of people who are not loving and kind. I've seen a lot of violence and bad things. Vestiges of my job. I may be out and see somebody treat a child roughly, and that's an issue that I grapple with. I haven't gotten to a point or seen something where I've actually had to intercede, although sometimes I might speak to them and smile to both them and the child. One problem I'm aware of is when people are treating kids badly out in public in front of you, it's worse at home. I don't want to say something and then make them mad and they go home and take it out on the child. It's a very big conundrum for me, but fortunately I don't get to see a lot of that kind of thing.

MR. WEAVER: One thing we talked about in one of our earlier interview sessions was your trips to Belzoni in Mississippi as a child, and I know another thing we talked about today before we turned the recorder on is you were organizing another trip to Mississippi for friends and colleagues and others I think next year. Could you talk a little about that trip and how you got the idea? I know you recently went to Mississippi. Do you want to talk about how that fits into this next chapter?

MS. JEFFRIES: Yes. That's important to me. So here's the deal. Like I said, I've been going there my whole life, and I will always have fond feelings for Belzoni and for the state of Mississippi because I associate it with my childhood and special people to me. The Mississippi Delta was the Mississippi Delta is the Mississippi Delta always will be a rough place.

That said, it still is a special place in my heart. Here's the deal about Mississippi, and this is deservedly so on the part of the state of Mississippi. I've been to 44 states in this country. Mississippi is the only place that I can say to people I'm going, or I just went, or I've been going there, and their reaction is visceral, like oh my god, why would you go there? I never wanted to go there. I've never been. That's the only place in the country where I get that reaction. I've been to Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana. People react to Mississippi. As I point out, Mississippi is the poorest state in the union, and there are a lot of reasons for that. Usually on most lists that you look, Mississippi is at the bottom, except they lead in vaccination rates, or at least that was true a few years ago. But still, there's a lot to see in Mississippi. So much of our history, civil rights history, which is American history. There is the cultural history, the Blues Trail, there's food, and there's just the people. Mississippi has changed in many ways since I was a child because when I was a child I could not go to the places that I went to, and if I tried to go, they could have killed me and maybe would have, and that's like a real statement, people. I could have been killed. Like I went to the Gulf Coast a few years ago and I was sitting in that hot tub, and the thought in my mind when I'm in the hot tub is they would have killed me for this in 1965, and I don't mean that lightly. I mean killed me. And it wouldn't have mattered that I was a girl or that I was eleven, because that's the way they rolled down there.

I went last year, and I'm going to send you this article. I was going to go to Mississippi anyway because I've hooked up with this woman and these other people who were from that area, and she invited me to a program, but then *The New York Times Travel* section had an article about the civil rights trail, and they talked about two things in Mississippi. One, sites associated with Emmett Till, and two, Belzoni and the Reverend George Lee who was murdered, and many people consider him one of the first martyrs of the civil rights movement. Well he got killed on the same street that my aunts lived on and my cousins where I would go to their house in Belzoni, and two doors down from my very good friend, Loreen, who is a retired judge up in Detroit. My mother knew Reverend Lee and knew his wife. This article talked about that, so since I was going to Mississippi, I said to my cousin let's go a day earlier and go down and see these Emmett Till things because through my friendship with Mrs. Parks, Rudy, my son, and I met Emmett Till's mother when Rudy was 14, the same age as Emmett. I have a good picture on my phone of Rudy and Mrs. Mobley. Her name was Mamie Till Mobley. So we went to these Emmett Till sites, including these sites that are in the news, the river sites where they keep shooting up the signs because that's the way they roll down there, and it's two different signs in two locations that are being shot up. My son never has wanted to go to Mississippi, and when I try to say to him you should go, we can all go, let's go to Mississippi, you would like it, you should see things. My son's response

would be why would I ever want to go to a place like that? So he called me in the spring this year and said he wanted to go to Mississippi, just the two of us, to do two things. Go to the Emmett Till sites and go to the Mississippi State LSU football game. So that's why I just went to Mississippi two or three weeks ago,. However, when I went last year, and I'm on Facebook, I post pictures and everything and you always get the same reaction, and I said to those people on Facebook, I said you know what, I'm going to organize a trip to Mississippi, and you people need to come to Mississippi and see things. I'll take you around, and we can do things. And people seemed to be interested, including two people. One of my college friends, Randall Pinkston, a retired CBS news correspondent, and then my friend Patricia Ice, who is an immigration lawyer in Jackson. She and I are from Detroit. So Randall is originally from Yazoo City, and he had taken a couple friends around Mississippi last summer, so they were interested in putting together a trip, although we did not move forward on that. I had hoped to do it this year. Anyway, my son and I went, and I posted pictures and I came back and I said okay people I'm really going to do this next year, and this is how June's trip will be. Now one of the things I told folks is for whatever reason, Harvard is confused, and they send me emails, Harvard alumni travel and other Harvard alumni emails. Harvard put together a trip of the Delta last year, and the Harvard trip for alums was $4,900 double occupancy. A friend of mine who you talked to probably for this is a Vassar graduate, and Vassar is offering a

trip in March to Little Rock and then places in the Mississippi Delta, and the Vassar trip is like $3,600 or $3,900. I'm telling my friends you can go with June for $1,200 and have a really good experience. So that's what I'm working on now, and I have people who want to go. I have a tentative plan of where we'll go, and I know some other people, a good friend of mine, Joyce Ladner, who is from Hattiesburg and was a SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) worker and worked with Medgar Evers and worked on the March of Washington, and she and her sister are both in the new Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. I think she might participate and lead us around. As I said, we had coffee with James Meredith three weeks ago. I'm going to ask Mr. Meredith can we have coffee, if not a meal, with him. He was very talkative. So that's what I'm going to work on.

MR. WEAVER: We are close to wrapping up here. I think I have one more question. We've talked a lot I think about your grandchildren and aside from being a loving grandmother and recently a circus ring master, what stories do you hope that your grandchildren carry on? What do you hope that they will say about you and carry on with future generations?

MS. JEFFRIES: I want them, and you know Clara's a girl, I want her to say that grandma was strong. I want her to say that grandma was courageous in at least some ways, and grandma was encouraging, and that I was fun, and that I exposed her and stimulated her interests and encouraged her to pursue and that I hope she realizes she comes from a good legacy. I always teach her

when we go to the grocery store and we see the grocery store cashiers, I tell her that my mother was a grocery store cashier for 33 years and my mother's name was Bettie, so now if you ask Clara what was my mother's name, she will say Bettie. My son said they were at the grocery store the other week and when they went through the line, Clara told him that Bettie had been a grocery store cashier. I hope she will realize and Isaac too that they came from really good people and loving people and that they can do those things in life that they want to do, and I hope that they will instill those values. Clara saw me at the circus. She saw me do that somersault thing at the circus. So yes, that was fun and good too.

Then the lawyer stuff. I hope she knows about that. About the part where her grandma was a lawyer. I'm going to take her as she gets older meet some of those people that I've met and let her see those places. I brought her here to Georgetown Law School. Why were we over here. I don't know, but I got a picture of her right outside at the sign. It says on the corner Georgetown Law Center. I have a picture of her with that because I tell her that I went here in my travels when I go up to Harvard or go anyplace, I always get Harvard gear. She has Wesleyan gear. Her Yale family members had not been generous, but one finally gave her something last year, plus I went through New Haven, and I went to the Yale bookstore and bought her some things. And now there's Isaac too. My girlfriend's grandson is at Princeton, so she has the Princeton gear. She has stuff from her parents' colleges. Clara will wear any of your

school stuff, so if people want to send it. But I talk to her about colleges. I told her she could go to Georgetown. I went here. Her grandfather went to Georgetown Medical School. We talk about Yale. Sometimes we'll be running. Clara and I are now health buddies, and when we were running the other day, she declared us health buddies. So sometimes when we're running I tell her that she's running for Yale or she's running for Wesleyan. Her parents were swimmers and her mother and aunt and uncle were all on swim teams, high school, college, neighborhood swim teams, so I tell her she's swimming for Yale because I tell her Yale is her legacy school. She can go there if she wants to. I believe in legacies. I also believe in acknowledging that you get over sometimes if you're a legacy admission and that other people have reasons for being admitted to these colleges too that don't necessarily depend on absolutely your grades, and I acknowledge that, but people are disingenuous and don't acknowledge that, and some of their kids got in because they're legacies, not because they're brilliant people. But my kids are brilliant. So yes. I'm trying to instill that, and I want them to go to the college that feels good for them, whatever that college is, but I want them to know that there are places in their lives that they can go to that we've helped pave the way for them. That's what I want.

MR. WEAVER: Excellent. Well thank you to the Georgetown Alumni Association for letting us use this space and the D.C. Historical Society.