

Chris Jones Sr.

Interviewed by Alyssa Lucas
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Robstown, Texas

Transcribed by Alyssa Lucas

[Alyssa Lucas]: [Ed. note: the recording cut this first few seconds off: Hi, my name is Alyssa Lucas and today is November 7, 2023. I am here with Christopher Jones in Robstown, Texas. We are going to talk about his life as well as his time in Hillcrest. May I have your permission to record.]

[Jones]: [Sure.]

[Lucas]: So, can you tell me a bit about your background and early life?

[Chris Jones]: Okay, I'm from the Hillcrest-Northside area, call it north—Northcrest for North Hillcrest, you know, grew up in the Projects, D. N. Leathers, um, went to Coles Elementary, Crosley Elementary, Bethune Daycare, you know, coming up early and Booker T. Washington, you know, my early years and like pre-elementary, preschool and just grew up in the Northside. There was nothing like it. It was just awesome. I—me and my people, you know, that grew up there, we always talk about how we would love to go back because, at the time, like, it was hard times because everyone was pretty much brought up in poverty, but it was awesome. It was amazing. There was so many—there was so much family and camaraderie back then. It wasn't like it is now, and it was just fun. It was just awesome. Everybody knew everybody. Like, if you did something, like, it wouldn't just get to your parents, but, like, other people in the community would get on you, like if you were doing something wrong, and your parents wouldn't get mad at you—get mad at them back then because then you would get in trouble with that person, and you would also, by the time you got home, your family would know about it, and they would get on you too, so it was just an awesome time.

[Lucas]: Can you tell me about your parents, your grandparents?

[Jones]: Okay—

[Lucas]: —great grandparents—

[Jones]: —okay, I grew up to a single mother, which my mom's name is Claudine. My grandmother's name is Bessie Lee Jones, and my mom, she grew up, she was a single mother of two boys. We grew up in, like I said, in the Project area, Northside, and then as we got older, we grew up in Hillcrest, so, you know, we went to school in the early years. My mom, she worked. She worked at Spohn Hospital, and she worked at Holiday Inn, which is the Emerald, Emerald Beach Hotel now. She worked those two jobs, and my grandmother, she worked for CCISD [Corpus Christi Independent School District]. She was the bus driver and a janitor, and it was just awesome, you know, growing up under them, learned a lot. I grew up around women

because, you know, men, like uncles and cousins, you know, my father wasn't present so pretty much raised by women or the men in the community, and it was just awesome because—I keep saying awesome because the kids now don't have—what's the word I'm looking for, fortitude to be able to talk to older men in the community because the community's gone. Like, when we were coming up, we could always talk to the older youth or the older men, and they would tell us, you know, "You're doing this right, you're doing this wrong," and they would just keep us up to par on what it is to be a young man or just talk about the neighborhood.

[Lucas]: Um, did your grandma or your mom ever talk about, like, what Hillcrest was like for them or what it used to be like for them?

[Jones]: Yes, my grandmother. Man, my grandmother was a wealth of knowledge. She always told me about how Corpus, you know, she's talking about up in the—they call it the Cuts or the Streets up on the Northside, that it was the Chitlin' Circuit, and the Chitlin' Circuit, I was just talking to my son about it today, the Chitlin' Circuit is where they used to come to Corpus, B.B. King, Fats Domino, Ella Fitzgerald, you know, a lot of the blues. The blues—and they call it the Chitlin' Circuit because, you know, it's from the South like Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and all those celebrities used to come through Corpus, and she used to tell me how the clubs was, like everything pretty much was in one side of town. They had a doctor over there. They had dentists over there. They had grocery stores over there, restaurants, you know. You pretty much didn't have to leave the community. Everything was in one area, and it was a tight-knit community, so it was—it was great when you think, when you look back. You know, all that's gone and all you have is the memories. A lot of people don't pass it down to their children, but I always talk to my children about it.

[Lucas]: Yeah, were there any ever problems with Racism in Hillcrest, or was it was mainly outside in the Corpus Christi area or—

[Jones]: Well, pretty much in the neighborhood growing up, we really didn't see it that much and if it was present, like, the adults kept it from us. You know what I mean, because, like, they met all our needs as far as food, and everybody had pretty much the same, didn't nobody have more than the other person or the next person so if it was, it was outside of the community that you dealt with that stuff.

[Lucas]: So, after school, what did you do for a career?

[Jones]: Well, as a youth, I dropped out of school because I wanted to—like I said, my mom, she worked two jobs and, me, being one of those kids that wanted to fit in, I started selling drugs, and I was in and out of jail, and that was just like—and I wasn't raised that way. I just wanted to fit in because being around a lot of people I grew up with, we're pretty much all doing the same thing, so I just wanted to fit in, and I started slinging drugs and got out of—we called it slinging, but it's selling drugs, and it was just a fun time. I know it sounds crazy, you know, going to jail, selling drugs all the time, and just getting arrested for trespassing, stuff like that. I never did any hardcore crime, but it was just a fun time, and there was so much money in it. You're making a lot of money, you're young, you don't really know anything about life, you don't really care at that time. All you care about is getting the money but when my son was born, like, all that

stuff—it was time to man up, you know what I mean. You can't do the same thing before a child as you do when you have a child. Once you have a child, you put all that stuff away, and you got to man up and take care of your child, your children, and that's what I did. Once he came, there wasn't no more me. It was all about him.

[Lucas]: So, what did you do next for your job?

[Jones]: I started working at the refinery. I was a boilermaker. I started at the bottom as a laborer and then in a couple of weeks I moved up to helper and a couple of weeks after that I moved up to heavy equipment operator, and I moved up pretty fast because during my lunch breaks, I would get on equipment or learn the next job up because I didn't want to just settle and stay at one position. I wanted to always keep elevate—excuse me (Lucas laughs). I wanted to always keep elevating. It's not of my nature just to stay put. I just wanted to keep on elevating and then after heavy equipment operator, I got my CDL [Commercial Driver's License], and I've been driving ever since, over eighteen years driving big, big rigs, and I love it.

[Lucas]: Um, yeah, can you tell me any more about your family, whether, yeah.

[Jones]: Okay, I've got another story for you.

[Lucas]: Okay.

[Jones]: Um, when I was eleven, twelve years old, my—I was at my grandmother's house over, you know on the Ayers-Richard area, and it was some city equipment they would just—back then, back when we was coming up, they didn't have sidewalks. It was ditches, so the city was starting—the city of Corpus was starting to put drainage ditches, I mean, better drainage ditches and sidewalks in all the neighborhoods in that area, and there was some heavy equipment across the street and as a little kid— it's crazy how, you know, you look back on it, but I was a little kid. I was one of those kids that was wanting to always know something or see what something was made of and one day my grandmother and my mom and my step-grandpa, they had went to the grocery store, so Mr. Chris, I called myself, go across the street and get on the—it was called a backhoe, a tractor, and I was just (machine noises), you know, and it's crazy how I wound up doing that later on in life, but I started messing with it, messing with it, messing with it, and I know I'll never forget it. I noticed it like—it started raining, so I waited and seen this big old rig was coming, right, and it was a United States Postal Service truck, and it was coming down a small street, and you know that, big rigs like that, they're supposed to go down regular residential streets, so he was trying to make a wide turn, and he couldn't get it. He had to keep backing up to position himself to go down the street, so me calling myself—I was a crazy kid. I get an idea in my head because, like, on the back tires, in the back tires of the trailer is bars, so I got off the tractor. The truck was coming by. I got on the bars, and I know that it was raining, so I could ski, so I caught myself on the ski, the water ski, so I got on the back rail, and I started sliding, and I slid under the back tires, and it crushed my pelvis. It ran over me, crushed my pelvis, so all I could think about was, "I'm going to get a spanking because my mom told me not to be out in the—outside of the house while they're at the store." So, by this time, my aunt come over there, and she—we're similar in age. She's a couple of years older than me, and she was like, "Chris get up," and I'm like, "I can't," and she's like, "Boy, stop playing, get up," so the

lady that was behind, there was a Hispanic lady, was behind, and I know that she was in a green Corvette. I never forget an old school Corvette, and she was like, “I seen what happened. He got ran over,” and I was trying to get up, but I couldn’t get up, so the lady helped my aunt, and this was crazy. We got into the car with this lady that we don’t even know, an innocent bystander. Thank God for her. I wish I knew where she was at or if she was still alive or whatever, so I could thank her. Well, anyway, she picked me up and all I could remember is, you know, we got in the car, and she took us to Memorial Hospital over on Morgan and all I could remember is her right door, and I’ll never forget this because I was in and out of consciousness because I guess it was so much pain for me that I couldn’t stay up, so all I remember is at her right door, like it was—something was messed up or something. All I remember is the hanger, and I could see the street. As we roll into the hospital, I could see the street, you know, the lines in the street because her door was open. It wouldn’t shut all the way, and I seen the hanger that was keeping it closed. So, anyways, I get to the hospital and all I remember is, they didn’t take me right into the emergency room. I guess it was so packed or whatever, but they had me on a hospital bed outside the emergency room, and there was just a clock right there, and I look back on that now, and it’s crazy. There was a clock right there, and I just kept going in and out of consciousness, in and out of consciousness, looking at that clock. Every time I woke up, that clock was right there. I don’t know how long it was, but I was in a hospital for three months, and I was in leg braces for over a year.

[Lucas]: Oh my gosh.

[Jones]: Because it crushed my pelvis, and they told—the doctors told me that I would never walk again. I would never play sports, and I did all that stuff in high school and junior high. So, whenever they say, doctors say something, the Lord has the final say so on what happens, but that’s just a story that happened in my life, and it’s crazy how I say all that to say this. Like, you don’t get to pick your destiny and journey, it picks you, and it’s crazy. You would think that I wouldn’t even want to be around big rigs because of what it did to me, and that’s what I drive. That’s my occupation. Crazy, huh?

[Lucas]: Yeah (laughs), um, if you have any more stories, always feel free to go back—

[Jones]: —Okay—

[Lucas]: —but going back to Hillcrest, about how old are you now and about how long did you live there.

[Jones]: I’m forty-nine years old, lived there till ninety-five, till he was born and once he was born then me and his mom had to live together for a few years in Hillcrest, me and his mom.

[Lucas]: Um, can you describe what you remember the area looked like?

[Jones]: Everything was still there, but a lot of stuff was already starting to close and like little by little, like very slowly, houses started disappearing. Like, all the buildings that was there when we were growing up was still there, the pool, Hillcrest T. C. Ayers pool was there. T. C. Ayers recreation where we grew up as kids was still there. The basketball court they used have

outside of T. C. Ayers, they used to have Northside Nightly basketball, and children would come from all over the city and play in that league, the basketball league, and that was still up and running. Um, everything was pretty much still there, but, like, by then I think Crosley Elementary, one of the elementaries in Hillcrest—there's two main elementaries, Coles Elementary, which now is a high school or a charter school or whatever, and Crosley Elementary and if you grew up in the Hillcrest area, you went to Crosley, across the tracks, you went to Coles, so those were pretty much the two black schools or predominately black schools for elementary in the community, and those are still there, but I think Crosley was already getting ready to close or closed already, but the building was still there. It's been set on fire a hundred times (laughs) since then. I don't know how it's closed up and still they keep getting catching it on fire. I don't get it but okay. But, yeah, everything was still up and running. It was still, like, the shell of its old self, but it was still fun. A lot of the people were still there and one thing about Corpus, like, you have a lot of people left to—a lot of my generation, speaking for my generation, went to Houston, Austin, Dallas, San Antonio, lot of them locked up, lot of them died, my generation, so pretty much, you know, the last of the Mohicans from my generation.

[Lucas]: Before we started, you talked about flooding a little bit in that area?

[Jones]: Yes.

[Lucas]: Could you talk a little more about that?

[Jones]: In the area, D. N. Leathers area where the new Harbor Bridge is being built, there was homes, a lot of apartments or whatever, and they would flood like crazy when it would rain. They wouldn't—storms, it would be bad flooding. It was a flood zone, and that pretty much was another thing they used, you know, to force us out of that area, saying that it was a flood zone. Then why build the apartments in the flood zone, you know what I mean? So, that's what they did.

[Lucas]: Is there anything environmentally or how the area looked that you can recall?

[Jones]: Hm, what do you mean, like, in which way?

[Lucas]: Appearances, parks, greenery, were there as many refineries as there is now?

[Jones]: Like, the Projects (laughs)—the Projects' Apartments, and I'm not laughing. It's just I'm thinking back, they say that the apartments, not only was it a flood zone but the paint that they used in painting them, you know, the buildings, it was lead-based, filled with lead, so, supposedly, a lot of people got sick from that, and why would you build apartments and paint apartments with led paint and build those apartments in the flood zone? I just don't understand that. What's the purpose in it?

[Lucas]: Um, but was the Hillcrest area—because I know you said it was like, it was closing down during this time, but was it like a pretty area or was it more of a—

[Jones]: Well, it's always going to be a pretty area to me, close to my heart because my blood,

sweat, and tears are there. I grew up there. I had fights there, ate there, slept there, you know, there was Hillcrest Park. That was like—Easter Sunday, oh my God. It was like all the black community from babies all the way up to the elderly, like, it wasn't nothing like Hillcrest Park on Sundays, especially Easter Sunday, and everybody would just get together and just have fun. I mean, it was crazy. Some people played basketball. Some people would dance, fashion show, music, food. It wasn't nothing like it.

[Lucas]: Um—

[Jones]: And then the black community is not as close as it once was and if you can compare it to anything, kind of, it would be compared to the Molina area. Have you ever been to the Molina area. It's similar to over on the west side. It's similar to that, you know, because both—everybody had, from the Northside area had family in the Molina area and vice versa, so it was pretty much the same but not the same. It's hard to explain unless you grew up in it, but it's just family. I mean, back then, families was four, five, six, seven children.

[Lucas]: Big families.

[Jones]: Yes, big families.

[Lucas]: You talked about some of it a little bit, but were there any businesses or restaurants in the are you remember, any favorites?

[Jones]: Yes, Ms. Erma's. It was a restaurant called Ms. Erma's. Oh my God, they had the best soul food. Oh my God. People came from everywhere to get a plate at Ms. Erma's, and one thing about Ms. Erma, you going to eat. You going to eat. I would go in there and order my food, and she was like, "Uh, uh, baby, uh, uh." "I'm going to get it to go." She was like, "Uh, uh, baby, you're going to sit down. You're going to eat this food. I'm going to make sure you're going to eat it," so she would give me my cup of tea. Oh, she had the best Lipton tea in the world. That tea was, (exclaims), that tea was good. And like, servings, the food, like, not only was it very tasteful and so flavorful and good, but she gave you a lot of it so by the time you're leaving there, you leave out of there, you want to just take a nap right there while you're walking, but Ms. Erma's—we had, like I said, grocery stores, but they were like little convenience stores slash grocery stores, called Manual's and Henry's, and they sold everything. They had meat, like, you could go in there and order lunch meat. Shoot, pretty much any kind of meat and, you know, not only get the stuff you need for your family like groceries like toilet paper and stuff like that that you need for the house. We had that right there. We had barbershops right there, and there was three main barbershops that I can remember. In Hillcrest, there was two, Holt's Barber Shop, Mr. Sam's Barber Shop, and up on the Northside, by the Projects was—Projects slash Northside was Mr. Elmo's, and you go in there, and it was so much history. Everybody would talk about their day, talk about what's going on in the community, and you would just go in there and get a wealth of knowledge from the older cats or the younger cats, you know, whoever. When I say cats, I mean, like men or homies, homegirls, and it was just a wealth of knowledge. It wasn't nothing like it. It wasn't nothing like it. It was an awesome time.

[Lucas]: Are there any other restaurants or favorites or?

[Jones]: Hm, that's pretty much where I ate at. You know, of course, there were other restaurants like out of the community but as far as community—well, another restaurant they had, Mr. Andy's Barbecue, you know, he was an older gentleman that he had, man, he had some good barbecue, Mr. Bell's Barbecue and Bigger Burger was a burger and fry joint. They sold other stuff too, but they were famous for their bigger burgers, for their burgers. Man, they had the best burgers in the world and just go and just enjoy.

[Lucas]: I saw Bell's—some old ads for Bell's Barbecue.

[Jones]: Um-hm.

[Lucas]: I was wondering if you had known.

[Jones]: Yes.

[Lucas]: Um, can you tell me anything—you talked a little bit, again, but anything about your neighbors or—

[Jones]: Like, as far as the neighbors, everybody was your neighbor, and it was just, like I said, so many people in one area, one community, and it was just—it was a lot of black people back then. Like now, Corpus don't have nowhere near the percentage of black people that it was back then, and it was a few Hispanic families here in the neighborhood. The neighborhood was cool. We all got along. We all went to school together. It was just an awesome time. You had to be there to, like, you can't—it's so much stuff that you can't just tell it all in like one interview. It would take all day, and I'm a yap, yap, yap yapper, and it's just like, when I start talking about it, it just makes me start remembering like, it was awesome. That's the only word I can use, and I'm not just trying to blow it up. It was. Our childhood, like, at the time when you're going through it, like I said, you don't appreciate what we went through and the sacrifices that our ancestors and families, you know, parents, grandparents made but when you think about it, it's just mind blowing because it was so fun. Everybody—we had bullies in the neighborhood. We had comedians. Some of the best athletes in the United States, like, Corpus, Corpus was awesome back in the days.

[Lucas]: Can you tell me about any neighbors who had a particular impact on you though, any names you recall?

[Jones]: The whole neighborhood. It's just so many, it's too—it would be difficult to just pick out one because everybody had a different impact on you, and there was people that taught you how to fight. There was people that taught you how to cook. There was people that taught you sports, people that taught you break dancing. It was, like, different people that you learned so many different things.

[Lucas]: You want to do a couple, we can do two?

[Jones]: Um, shoot it's hard to—you mean like names?

[Lucas]: You don't have to, I just wanted to know about any particular stories about someone—

[Jones]: —Okay—

[Lucas]: —or how they—

[Jones]: Okay, like one, I'll just say—I'll just say his name, Jim. And, like me, I wasn't not necessarily a fighter because I didn't want to fight. Like, if you grew up in the hood, the neighborhood, the hood, you had to fight, and me, I wasn't necessarily a fighter at that time. It's not that I couldn't fight, I just didn't want to fight because I'm more of a comedian but looking back I was an instigator too. I would start fights and then didn't want to fight, so one day a guy named Jim, he taught me how to fight. "You're not going to run no more," so he would rough me up, and he said, "If you run, I'm going to toughen you up," and that's what he did, and that stuck with me even to this age. Like, you think about that person, you see that person, he had an impact on you—on me, and that's one of those things that I'll never forget because it kind of made me who I am. Like, I don't go around just fighting people, but I'm not scared, and he gave me, in other words, he gave me confidence. Like, the streets gave me confidence that I didn't have already.

[Lucas]: Did you keep in touch with anyone from Hillcrest, do you still?

[Jones]: Yeah, the ones like—that's why Facebook, social media's a good thing because you can connect with a lot of the people that are still alive and that I—some of the people that I grew up with. Like I said, a lot of people moved out of town, different towns, different states, and a lot of people, you know, are in jail and when they come home, you get to see them. Whenever they come home to visit or whatever, you see them in the club. You see them on social media all the time. You can just shoot them a message.

[Lucas]: Do you know anyone who still lives in Hillcrest?

[Jones]: Yeah, I know a lot of people, but not a lot of people, but I still know a few people that stayed in Hillcrest.

[Lucas]: Have you heard them describe how it's been lately?

[Jones]: I go through there all the time, not only to check on the progress of the bridge, which I worked on the new Harbor Bridge for the—it's crazy because—and I know a lot of people really wouldn't say this, but I'm going to say it because I've seen—like, it's weird. Starting over is hard and rebuilding is hard, but rebuilding is also good too. I've seen a lot of things that were good in the community, and I've seen a lot of things that were bad, and I think the way they—the way that the circumstances of how we lost our community was not good at all, but it took a lot of bad away. You know, there's always going to be bad everywhere, but there was a lot of bad over there, a lot of bad. There was a lot of good. There was a lot of bad, and the bad was really bad, so the new Harbor Bridge, you know, is a good thing, and I wound up working on the new Harbor Bridge for two and a half years, the new one, and some of the stuff I've seen on the new Harbor

Bridge, let's just put it this way. I wouldn't feel safe getting on that new bridge, and I'm not saying that because I'm from the neighborhood because I'm one of those that, you know, change is good. If you're going to do good with what you changing, what you adding to what was replacing, what was there in the first place, but that new Harbor Bridge is not safe at all, and I'm not just telling you from something I've heard. I'm telling you from what I know because I worked on it from the ground, so I would just advise people, just if you can, just use the Joe Fulton Corridor, and I'm being real with that.

[Lucas]: Why were there some reasons you were concerned about the bridge?

[Jones]: Okay, I'm pretty, like I know the—and I know the name of the people, but I ain't going to say the people.

[Lucas]: Um-hm.

[Jones]: Well, I ain't going to say not the name of the people, like the group, which is TxDOT [Texas Department of Transportation]. I know they earmarked a lot of money, set aside for new materials for the Harbor Bridge to be implemented, and that wasn't the case in the beginning. Like, for instance, we used to go to—and I'm talking about me and the company I work for. We would go over on Flato Road, and I don't know if you know. It's a crushed concrete place over there, recycled concrete. We was going over there, loading up with crushed cement, and delivering it to the new Harbor Bridge to build the pillars when it should have been new concrete.

[Lucas]: Hm.

[Jones]: That's what the money is set aside for. Why would you build a bridge with recycled concrete? And then, it's crazy because months ago, I've seen that some of the bridge was chipping off. I wonder why?

[Lucas]: Well, dang, that one was more out of curiosity. Uh, but going back to those who still live in Hillcrest—

[Jones]: Can I say this real quick?

[Lucas]: Oh, yeah.

[Jones]: And it's kind of like, kind of like Karma. You kicked out—I'm not talking about you (Lucas laughs), but people kicked out a whole community of people, displaced a whole community of people, and the thing, the very thing that you're putting in place of those people that you displaced is starting to fall apart, and it's been falling apart, and the Projects is severely behind. I wonder why? It's Karma, in my opinion.

[Lucas]: For those who still live in Hillcrest and what have they talked to you about. Have they talked about how it's been impacting them or what do you know about that?

[Jones]: A lot of them, not that everybody was die-hard Hillcrest fans, Hillcrest residents, but the ones that are still there, they said they're not leaving yet. They're not going to be leaving until they're forced out, which I understand because a lot of those houses in the Hillcrest area, before they started tearing them down and buying land, you know, if whoever buy them, the refinery, whatever, like a lot of those houses were paid, paid off, so the little money that they offered people to—firstly, like I said, they designated the land as being contaminated, so, of course, that drops the value of the community, of the land so by them doing that, they can pay as little as possible as they want for people to get out of the land because it's not safe anyways, so they say, but they're building, like I said, they built a waterpark. A lot of those houses were already paid for and the little money that they give you to, you know, buy-out, is not enough to go buy you another house on a different side of town. It's just not enough. You can put some of that money down, and they knew that a lot of people that did take the money, they going to go, you know, use most of that money or all of that money to go buy them a new house or a house that's already standing there, so they know how some blacks are going to mismanage the money. They knew what was going to happen, in my opinion.

[Lucas]: And I remember you talking about that there was some bad stuff going on.

[Jones]: Um-hm.

[Lucas]: How much of that are you willing to share?

[Jones]: It's just public knowledge. I've seen like crack, crack cocaine came into the community in the eighties and just depleted a lot of it. Crack cocaine was like—was like a bullet. It just went through and just total destruction. It ripped, it tore up families, it tore up just everything in its path. Crack cocaine, heroin, but mainly crack cocaine. Crack cocaine just did some things that—and, you know, when I was growing up, all I've seen was the, you know, like I said, I sold crack cocaine, and all I seen was the—I didn't do it for the money because I'm not a money person. I don't care about the money, but it was more of like the fame and being accepted, for me. I can't speak for nobody else but for me, you know, that's why I sold crack cocaine, and now I, for years, I asked God for forgiveness. I've asked some of the people that I've seen that I sold it to when I was younger for forgiveness, and it like, you know, "We accept your forgiveness, but it was just a stage," but that was a pretty damaging stage, as far as the whole community, but that's not what took out the community, greed and just the city and state being bullies and taking our community. They didn't do that—why didn't you go on the southside and do that? Why didn't you go on the westside and do that. Why didn't you go on the eastside and do that, but they came to the Northside and did it because of the refineries.

[Lucas]: Do you know—why did you end up leaving Hillcrest or when did that happen.

[Jones]: Uh, once my mom moved away to Seattle, Washington, you know, I wound up leaving a little while after that, and it was just time to move on, start the next chapter of my life. I was older, and I made my own decisions, and it was time to go.

[Lucas]: How did you feel throughout that process though, making that decision?

[Jones]: It's hard.

[Lucas]: Yeah.

[Jones]: It's hard because you feel like you're turning your back on your community, and I'm one of those people who I want to bring others with me. When I go up, when I get up, I want to bring people with me. I don't want to leave my people behind. That's just not in my nature so—it didn't happen that way, but my heart's still there. My heart's always going to be there, and I always go back and ride through there and reminisce what it was like in the old days because, like I said, it was awesome. That's the only word I can use to describe it.

[Lucas]: Yeah, you've talked about it a little bit. How do you feel about the changes in Hillcrest in the last ten years?

[Jones]: Really haven't seen that many changes except the bridge. That's pretty much it, but there's really not much over there anymore but just people leaving. I was going through there, it's sad, going through there and little by little the landscape is changing, like, house after house after house after house, and you can ride through every street and know where your friend lived, know where your family lived, know where your pastor lived, your preacher, and they're not there no more, and you still can visualize where everybody lived at. You know what the houses looked like, every house. Like, I can visualize—I'm one of those people, like, I wear my heart on my sleeve, and something like that, it's sad, it bothers me, but you got to keep on going. Yes, it's the past, but you go to keep on going, and they can take the land, they can take the community, but they can't take the memories, and I'll have all those memories until my memory leaves my body, and I'll never forget them until then.

[Lucas]: I'm trying to remember something I was going to get back to. And you said like the businesses were—I'm just going back to a couple things.

[Jones]: No, you're fine.

[Lucas]: Some of the businesses, you noticed, were slowly closing down.

[Jones]: Yes.

[Lucas]: Was there like a specific point where it like really all started closing down that you were there still or was that after?

[Jones]: Yes, I would say in the, hm, middle to late nineties the businesses started closing down and like that, after that it was a domino effect.

[Lucas]: Do you know what really started it?

[Jones]: Um, I can't really—they buying up the land and moving people out, in my opinion. I think that's what started it.

[Lucas]: That was going on in the nineties too?

[Jones]: Yeah.

[Lucas]: Do you know why?

[Jones]: The land was contaminated. The air quality was contaminated, so they said, so the people said, and it's crazy how, like, a few times, the refinery exploded because I worked there. The refinery exploded, and it was getting people sick. So, they said, it was getting people sick with, I guess, cancers and stuff like that.

[Lucas]: Did you ever have any anxieties about health problems in the area?

[Jones]: No.

[Lucas]: No?

[Jones]: But other people had health effects (unintelligible), but I didn't, and I worked right there. I'm not saying it didn't happen, or it hasn't happened yet, but it didn't happen to me, and I didn't have any anxiety. I loved that area. I loved that area, and I drank water from the faucet just like everybody else so—but I'm not disputing that people didn't get sick. I'm not disputing that, but I'm disputing that that land, in my opinion, is not contaminated because if it was, why would you build Brewsters? Why would you build Whataburger Field? Why would you build the water park if it was contaminated? Why would you build a new bridge through it if it's contaminated?

[Lucas]: I'm trying to think of a less pessimistic way to phrase this last question. Um, what do you think—where do you think you can see the memory of Hillcrest going in the future, or what do you think the future is for Hillcrest?

[Jones]: That's a good question. I would say—I would answer that, in my opinion, they did a pretty good job of erasing all the history from the Hillcrest Northside area. You know, the ones that was there know about it but as far as the history books and passing it on to the younger generations, it's not really—the younger generation and the older generation, there's a gap, and we still haven't met there to pass it down, and that's not just in our community, it's in pretty much every community, the Hispanic community, the Anglo community, like, our generation didn't pass down the stuff that was taught to us, to the younger generation. That's why so many youth are lost today because my mother's generation and my mother's mother's generation passed stuff down to us, but our generation, we're so caught up in what we're doing and trying to better ourselves, and—that we're not passing, you know, like I would say stuff like recipes, like cooking on Thanksgiving, like cooking dinners, Sunday dinners for the family. Like, everybody want to go to McDonalds and Whataburger and fast food, instead of cooking as a family. Our generation didn't pass that down to the younger generation, so a lot of that stuff has disappeared, and I would say the same thing in the Northside area, like, history just evaporated, and they made sure of that.

[Lucas]: If there was any piece of history about Hillcrest you could preserve, what would that be?

[Jones]: It's just family, family-oriented. Everybody was family. Everybody was a tight-knit community, and we stuck together back then, and I would say faith was a big part of it, a big, very big part of it. There was a lot of faith, a lot of faith, a lot of God, Jesus, and I would just say, you know, that's pretty much just faith, community, love, camaraderie, just passing stories down from the older people, like giving us knowledge, but we didn't continue that, so it's gone, and the younger generation really don't care because social media, you know, their minds is too busy with Xbox, PlayStation, and social media. Everybody's on their phone, here, here, here, here, here, and our generation, we couldn't be in the house during daylight after school. You had to be outside playing and before the light come on, you better be in that house, or you're going to get a spanking, and we was just outside. The kids today, you know, babysitting with cellphones and video games.

[Lucas]: I'm going to check this really fast, ow. Okay, still fine. So, is there anything else you would like to add about the area or your life, or we still have plenty of time for any more stories because that earlier one was crazy.

[Jones]: Which one?

[Lucas]: The one where your pelvis got crushed.

[Jones]: Oh, yeah.

[Lucas]: Yeah.

[Jones]: Oh, yeah. That's a true story, and every story I'm telling you is true. I have receipts (both laugh). Oh, what's another one, man, there's just so many. Oh, how in the mornings walking to—it's crazy how Hillcrest Park is a cemetery. I don't know if you knew that.

[Lucas]: I don't think I did.

[Jones]: And when we used to walk to school in the morning, to Crosley, you would have to go through the cemetery to get to school, and sometimes it would be foggy, like, over the headstones, and there was headstones everywhere through the park, and we wasn't scared or nothing. Like, when you think about it, it's kind of creepy, but it's crazy how that was a big part of life over there, walking through the cemeteries, seeing the headstones, and walking around them, walking with your friends. Everybody would walk in groups. And, another thing too, when I was going to Coles—that last story is from Crosley but when I was going to Coles, like, I told you about the area are called the Streets, the Cuts. We used to walk from Northside Manor to Coles, which is about, I would say half a mile, and it was drug dealers, prostitutes, you name it, everybody right there, drug dealers, everybody, and they never messed with the little kids. They never messed with us, and we were in groups. We was some bad little kids. We probably would have fought—jumped whoever was messing with us. We're like—the adults never, you know, they would be like, "Hi, how are y'all doing. Hi, good morning," but they never (unintelligible)

like tried to rob us and stealing and all that. It wasn't all bad over there. It was a lot of good stuff going on, and some of the older people would give you change, like fifty cents, and that was a lot of money back then, and they would give you change. You would go to the store for the elderly in the community, and they would give you change. Back then, that's when food stamps—there wasn't a card. It was paper food stamps, and you could go, you know, they would give you money to go to the store for them. Like, kids could—the parents could write the kid a note, and the kids could go buy cigarettes for their parents with the note, so it was a lot of fun stuff back then. It really was. You just had to be there. There's nothing—it's just hard to describe. It really is unless you were there.

[Lucas]: You're doing a good job, and also—

[Jones]: Thank you, and I'm kind of nervous too, but I'm good.

[Lucas]: Were there any clubs or groups or—

[Jones]: Oh, yes. There was a lot of clubs, the Cotton Club, the Players Club from the old school, the older days before my generation took over called Creasy's Club. Shoot, they had movie theaters over there in the hood. They had, up on the streets, they had a movie theater, liquor stores. They had liquor stores everywhere and just, like I said, grocery stores, churches, a lot of churches.

[Lucas]: Do you have any memories from your church down there?

[Jones]: Yeah, a lot of memories. Yes, Saint Matthew's, man, it was just good back in the days. Man, if I could go back, it was—if I was to go back, I would—I love my children. I'd like to just go back for the one day just to relive everything in one day. I would try to do it all in one day, which I know I couldn't but try to do forty-nine years in one day, but, yeah, it was awesome.

[Lucas]: And the clubs—were you part of any of the clubs?

[Jones]: No, I used to go to the clubs, but I wasn't a part of them. I'll go—in my generation—but, like, the Cuts and the Streets, there were like two stages. There was the older generation. Before, our age, my age, couldn't go up there, it was only for adults and I think in the nineties, my generation took over but before the nineties, the fifties, the forties, it was all older people. Not older, I don't like to say, excuse me, elderly, or over the age people, like adult age and after that, my generation took over and once my generation took over, that was kind of like the beginning of the end because that's when, you know, we were doing a lot of crazy stuff. My generation was wild. We were doing a lot of crazy stuff, and they shut it down.

[Lucas]: Um, I think that's everything I have though but if there's any more details, I still got plenty of time.

[Jones]: Oh, there's another story. Like, this one man named Paul (laughs), he used to come through the neighborhood and pick up a few children, like, normally regulars, and he would take us to Alice, you know, different small towns, and we would sell pictures, candy, just whatever,

and then he would take us back to the neighborhood. That's another story, oh man. While growing up, you know how they have the Olympics and gymnastics? You know what gymnastics is, right?

[Lucas]: Yeah, oh yeah.

[Jones]: We would see that in the neighborhood every day. That's all we used to do growing up, breakdancing and gymnastics in the neighborhood. The stuff that they doing on mats on stuff, we were doing that on the ground, on concrete, off of buildings. We used to go on top of Coles Elementary, the elementary where we grew up, and backflip off the buildings.

[Lucas]: Wait, you said hip-hop, was there any music culture in Hillcrest or things that were, bands that were popular?

[Jones]: Oh, shoot, yeah, Hillcrest-Northside, yeah, the music, there was a lot of music back then, a lot of rappers, a lot of DJs. Corpus was pretty big for the music scene back then, but I was too young. I wasn't caught up in music back then. I wanted to run the streets.

[Lucas]: Were there any prominent names in Hillcrest you can remember though in terms of music whether that's jazz, rap, hip-hop?

[Jones]: Oh man, it's many, my cousin, Bobby Lewis. Man, so many. Man, it's a lot. They're older cats. There's so many to name everybody. I can't remember all of them off-hand. Like I said, I'm kind of nervous. There's another one, Bobby Lewis. That's pretty much all I can remember off-hand, but I know there's more.

[Lucas]: You're good, but, yeah, I think—unless you have anything to add, we're good.

[Jones]: Um, I would just like to thank you for doing this, you know, about Hillcrest because the story or stories need to be kept alive (coughs). They need to be kept alive because it's a lot of history there, and a lot of history was there, and a lot of new history is being made, so I think the past, the present, and the future history of the Northside area should be preserved. It should be talked about more than it is, and it's sad that it's not getting passed down. It's not being talked about. It's not being spoken about, and it's just not right because it did exist. Contrary to them trying to delete it or erase it, it did exist, and it was awesome.

[Lucas]: Well, thank you so much.

[Jones]: You're very welcome.

[end of recording]