



Interviewee: **Joycelyn Banks**

Interviewee Number: **09**

Interviewers: **Athena Aardweg, Judy Barricella**
& Tony Buba

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Joycelyn Banks
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Track 1

Interviewers: So you're Joycelyn.

Joycelyn: Yes.

Interviewers: What's your last name?

Joycelyn: Banks.

Interviewers: Oh. Okay. Joycelyn you know about the project. You know what it's all about right?

Joycelyn: Yes.

Interviewers: So we're going to get started. Are you ready, Ton? The...If you could just start out by giving us your full name and where you live and anything about your parents or your siblings or your husband or children or, I don't know, you look pretty young. I don't know.

Joycelyn: My name is Joycelyn Faith Banks and I live in McKeesport. I'm the oldest of five children, of four boys and actually if you want to be honest, six. Three boys and one girl who is currently in Iraq right now.

Interviewers: Who's got...Who's what?

Joycelyn: Who's in Iraq.

Interviewers: Oh.

Joycelyn: My younger sister.

Interviewers: Your sister?

Joycelyn: Who is 25. Let's see. I work here at UCP. Still single with no children. And let's see, what else? I actually, my father. I'm an adopted child with cerebral palsy and my father passed away when I was 18, but my mother remarried and that's how I ended up with three younger siblings. Or actually, yeah, three younger siblings and I have a brother who's 20, 28, so. And love pets. I have a little puppy named Annie. She's about five now. I can't keep her. My mom and dad keep her, so. My dad's a pastor and my

mother is a... Or my step dad rather, is a pastor and my mother's a interior designer for Ethan Allen Home Interiors in Monroeville.

Interviewers: For what Home Interiors?

Joycelyn: Ethan Allen.

Interviewers: Oh, yeah.

Joycelyn: Yeah.

Interviewers: Hmm. One of my favorite stores.

Joycelyn: One of the most expensive ones. I'm looking...I'm looking for a bed and last week I was supposed to meet her at the store. I'm looking for a new bed. And she said...Access didn't work out so we couldn't get together and meet but she said, 'I'd rather that you get some ideas from Ethan Allen and then we'll go to Roomful or something...'

Interviewers: Yeah. Yeah.

Joycelyn: ...and get you something that's less expensive.

Interviewers: So do you live alone?

Joycelyn: Yes I do. I live alone with attendants. I have somebody that comes in two hours a night and helps me with housekeeping type of stuff, laundry, that kind of thing. But other than that I'm by myself and pretty independent.

Interviewers: Good. And you get...You use Access to get to work.

Joycelyn: Yes. Yes.

Interviewers: How's that work for you?

Joycelyn: It can be a long commute but it's not awful. I mean moms tell me, 'You need to come into Pittsburgh. You need to move to Pittsburgh.' And I'm like, why. I'm thinking to myself okay I move to Pittsburgh. Well do you want to pay half the rent because I know even my place in McKeesport is going up, so I know that when I...If I would go look in Pittsburgh it's probably around \$650, \$700. So I'm like I can't do that. Not on this salary.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: So it's like.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: I'm like do you want to pay half the rent. And she just laughs at me. I'm like well that's why I stay where I'm at.

Interviewers: Where does she live?

Joycelyn: She lives in Murrysville which is Westmoreland County which isn't good for me because Access doesn't go that far.

Interviewers: How did you end up in McKeesport?

Joycelyn: Well actually when my dad was living he was a pastor of a church there and we just stayed there until we found a place in North Huntingdon. And then when I went... Then when I decided I was ready to test my wings and fly a little bit we found an apartment complex in McKeesport that was perfect for me. So that's how I ended up there.

Interviewers: So do you have a lot of community support? Do you know your neighbors? Do you...

Joycelyn: No I don't. I basically do my own thing and they do their own thing and we keep to ourselves. I know a few of them. Most of them are older.

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Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: I call them the tabloid crew because they watch me and they watch for me to come home. And it's like, hey, I'm 30 years old. I'm not, you know. And I'm not a baby.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: And I don't like it when people... I mean I don't mind if they're looking out for me but if they're just being nebbby to be nebbby, which most of them are then I don't like that. So.

Interviewers: I don't think you can stop them.

Joycelyn: No you can't but I don't like it. Like one of my neighbors the other day, she didn't see me. My aid was a little bit late and she didn't see me. And I was there at my computer so she runs over to the neighbor that I know real well and says, 'I haven't seen Joyce.' My neighbor's like, 'What the heck. What do you mean you haven't seen her?' And she...She went over and she's like, 'She's sitting right there.'

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: I was sitting at the computer doing something.

Interviewers: I think they're just watching out for you.

Joycelyn: Well, yeah, but...

Interviewers: Don't you?

Joycelyn: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. I mean the fact of the matter is they sat there last summer. I went out with a guy friend of mine and I saw them early in the morning. And then when I got home they were still sitting in the same place. It was as if they were waiting for me to get home for some reason.

Interviewers: It sort of brings...We were talking about housing earlier. So, you think it should be...It seems like, it's been like Chas Collins also, he lives with his parents because of a housing issue. Do you think that's an important issue for younger people with disabilities because you always seem to be pushed in with seniors?

Joycelyn: And I know...I know Chas very well also because he and I just completed a project. Well we actually just started a project together. It's through the Center for Civic Leadership in downtown Pittsburgh called the Citizens...Citizens Leadership Initiative. And um...So for the last 12 weeks I've gotten to know him very well. And he and I get along well because we have the same type of spirit. He's very fiercely independent and so am I. But to get back to your question. Absolutely. I mean I think as far as my apartment goes it's not a Section 8 apartment or anything like that. I pay the same rent as anybody else. I just happen to be stuck with a group of nebbly older ladies. But, yes, it is an important issue for us especially when we are young. We need that space. We do need that space to stretch our wings out and to fly a little bit because some of us do want to fly. Now some of us can't. There are people with disabilities who could never leave home even if they wanted to. But for those of us who can I think the opportunities need to be there. For us to be around people our own age and to be close enough to the community that we can get out and do things. So, yes, I think that's a very important issue and I think that the...the federal...on the federal and even on the state levels the government really hasn't done all that much for disability housing because... I mean, yeah, we have Section 8 and stuff. But if you're in the middle or low middle or upper low middle, middle or upper income you can't get that, because of the...of the income

guidelines. So it's really difficult. It's like I always say this to people, 'You want a hand up not a hand out.' Those of us who are independent and are actually out there trying to make something of ourselves, we want a hand up. We don't want a hand out. We just want somebody to take our hand a little bit and say, 'Here. Here's a little bit of help.' You know. Instead of saying well you make too much money so. That's...That's the end of that. Goodbye. And I don't think that's very fair. Same with...Same with the transportation issues. Okay. Access. Okay. Believe it or not Pittsburgh has the most important, or the most copied Access system in the entire country. Okay.

Track 2

Joycelyn: Believe it or not with all of its flaws and everything else we are a model for the entire country. But boy can we make some improvements ourselves. Scheduling basically is...is the main one. And also force...Like my CEO says and I agree with it, it's like if you want to go to a party you have to...you have to make a decision before you go what time you want to leave. And that's not necessarily fair either. You didn't have to be rushed out of there, but it's either...

Interviewers: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Joycelyn: It's either do that or not go at all at this point.

Interviewers: How about driving? Have you ever thought about that?

Joycelyn: I have but my vision is such that even with corrective lenses that the state wouldn't trust me...

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: ...with my driver's license. My...My vision without corrective is 20/70. Corrective lenses only corrects it by 10 points and you have to have at least 20/50 to drive in the state of Pennsylvania.

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: So, they would say no. Which is okay. But boy do I wish...There are some days I wish I could drive.

Interviewers: What about the...Do you live close enough to a bus stop...

Joycelyn: No.

Interviewers: ...that you could use a bus?

Joycelyn: No. Even if I did it probably would not be safe for me to use the bus because I have no directionality. So I would get lost and I wouldn't know what bus was what until it was basically on top of me. So, it's actually safer for me to use Access. Now I was Miss Wheelchair Pennsylvania two years ago and I'm actually still what they call the queen by proxy because they have not found a replacement for me as of yet, so. But during my initial tenure I was able to go to Little Rock, Arkansas. And let me tell you what, their Para transit system stunk.

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: It stunk.

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: I got home to Pittsburgh going, what did I complain about?

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: What do I sit here complaining about? And because they only used... The drivers were very rude to start out with. There was no weekend service. Now all of our trips were coordinated so we got all of our trips taken care of. But I heard from the Arkansas title holder who uses that system frequently that there was no weekend service. They stopped at like 7:00, 8:00 at night. They only used the 2-point tie down system instead of the 4, which is not safe at all. 2-point means they tie two...two parts of the wheelchair, instead of four. The 4-point is where they put a strap on both sides of the front and both sides of the back. But in Arkansas they only used one side of the front and one side of the back and I almost flipped twice, so.

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: I got home thinking, what am I complaining about? Because we have a fairly, in spite of all of its flaws, we have a fairly decent Para transit system here to get people with disabilities out and about so that's a good thing.

Interviewers: Why do you think Pittsburgh has a better system?

Joycelyn: Because we have a lot of advocacy going on for better system. I mean from the beginning. You just saw Paul Dick in here. He was one of the main ones that got Access going. His wife works for Access. She is blind. John Tegg was one of the original Access people so I think it's because of the advocacy that Pittsburgh has felt that needed to be done that we were able to get the system that we have. Otherwise, we would be in the same position as maybe Arkansas or a state that doesn't have anything at

all. But I think it's because of the...the caring of the people of Pittsburgh. And I will say that Pittsburgh is the most livable city in America and last week I saw why. My mom and I went to a play last week and...

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Joycelyn: ...people were just very helpful. I mean people that we didn't even know would walk up and hold a door for us or do something like that. And I said...I said to myself, this is why. This is why we got the designation of the most livable city in America. It's because of the people. The people here, believe it or not, they genuinely care. Even if they don't know you they're willing to help you. You know. Which is really, really good. And people say well why don't you go to Florida or someplace like that? Someplace where it's warmer. My mom's always saying, you need to get to Orlando or something. Which believe me has been very tempting. But I would, I mean, Pittsburgh has what I need and I plan to stay here until I feel like it's time to go. But one of the reasons I stay here is that I know that it's safe here.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: So it's safer than a place like New York City, some of the bigger cities around. I mean, New York's easy to get around, but is it safe? No. I mean as far as the Para transit. I mean their buses all have lifts on them. I've been to New York City and all their buses and things have lifts on them. But is it really a safe city to live in? No. So as far, you know. So that's...So that's that. And as Miss Wheelchair Pennsylvania I had the chance to go and talk to the county council, talk to legislators and things, and that was one of the things I brought up is that we have a great transportation system but there's more that can be done. But I think it's partly the Port Authority's problem, too. Because they don't know how to manage their money. So, they just need to learn. And I can't blame the state for what they said, because the state basically said, we're not going to give you any more until you can prove to us that you can manage what you have.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: And I mean, I can't blame them.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: You know. And people are screaming and yelling and all this stuff. But when you hear things like they spend \$1,000 per person on a Christmas party. Come on.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Joyce, now I want to ask you a little bit more about that Miss Wheelchair Pennsylvania. How did you get involved in that?

Joycelyn: Actually I... Well let me go all the way back to the beginning. I graduated from Geneva College with a degree in elementary education. After that, but they did not allow me to have my teaching certificate. And I am the type of person, because they said I didn't have what it took to be a teacher.

Interviewers: Who said that?

Joycelyn: The school.

Interviewers: What do you... But you graduated.

Joycelyn: That is correct. I have a degree but not the credential.

Interviewers: And how do you get the credential?

Joycelyn: Student teaching.

Interviewers: And they didn't let you student teach?

Joycelyn: They would not allow me to student teach.

Interviewers: Isn't that, like, grounds for a law suit?

Joycelyn: Yes, but at that time, mom and I, because by that point my dad had already passed and mom and I were kind of trying to fight this on our own. And she was already married and everything but my step dad basically said, 'Hey, this is your fight. I'm staying out of it, because I'm kind... I'm kind of stepping in in the middle here so I don't really know what's going on.' I mean, he supported us. He would have supported us if we had decided to go on with it but the fact that it was a Christian college and the fact that we really didn't know how to fight ADA litigation, that we let it go. And then by the time I learned how to fight ADA litigation and learned that it was okay to fight, then by that point the statute of limitations was already up.

Interviewers: So what... When was that? What year was that you graduated?

Joycelyn: 2000.

Interviewers: Okay.

Joycelyn: And the statute of limitations was up in 2002. Because what it is, is ADA says you have two years from the time that you suspect discrimination to the time... You have two years from the time you suspect discrimination. So it's like, okay. By the time I

realized what...what to do and how to do it. I mean it was already 2002, 2003 so I thought...

Track 3

Joycelyn: ...what the deal, so I have a very indomitable spirit so I basically said, 'You know what, you're telling me no, but I'm going to prove you wrong.' So I went up to Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. And while I was there I met the current Miss Wheelchair Pennsylvania, which was Miss Wheelchair Pennsylvania 2001. Like any other little girl I had...I had been growing up on the Miss USA, Miss Teen USA, and I said, 'Hey, that would be kind of fun.' You know. And so, but I was afraid to enter the mainstream pageant because of the fact that nobody with a disability had ever won those, outside of 1995 Miss America who was deaf. And that...that was the only one that I'm aware of that had any type of disability that had won a mainstream pageant. So I thought to myself, why am I putting myself...why would I go and put myself in a main...in a situation like that, where I probably wouldn't win anyhow. But she told me about Miss Wheelchair Pennsylvania. And I thought, oh okay this sounds kind of interesting. So I applied and finally in 2006 I said, 'If I don't do it now, I'll never do it.' So I went to Harrisburg, filled out all the paperwork, I was accepted into the program, went to Harrisburg, competed, won.

Interviewers: Now tell us about the competition before you tell us about winning. What did you have to do?

Joycelyn: Well basically what they're looking for is the best woman in the state who could represent people with disabilities within the state of Pennsylvania. Not just people in wheelchairs but people with all disabilities. And that's what they're looking for. So it's basically all interviews. There wasn't any talent competition, evening gown competition, any of that.

Interviewers: It was all interviews basically?

Joycelyn: Basically, Yep. All interviews. They were looking for who presents herself the best.

Interviewers: So did you say the title was Miss Wheelchair?

Joycelyn: Yes.

Interviewers: And yet, but you don't have to have a wheelchair? It encompasses all disabilities or not?

Joycelyn: For...For the competition, yes, it is...you have to use a wheelchair.

Interviewers: Okay.

Joycelyn: But your scope of who you can work with can encompass any disability. Same thing on the national level, also. That you have to have a wheelchair to compete but your scope can encompass any disability.

Interviewers: Who sponsors that competition? Do you know?

Joycelyn: Actually it's a non-profit...

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: ...organization. Each state has their own. Well not each state. We have about half of them, okay. But they're trying for all 50 but they haven't had that much luck with it. This competition's been around since 1972 and they're non-profit organizations that are funded by public donations, fund raisers, those kinds of things. And then, of course, there's an entry fee and that kind of thing for both the state and the national levels.

Interviewers: So you won?

Joycelyn: I did win and was sent to Little Rock for the state com...or the national competition between 27 other young ladies who use wheelchairs. And it was very interesting to be around people that were like me, that were on the same page as me, and had the same mental capacity as I did. Because here were people that had bachelor's degrees, some of them had their master's, some of them were working on their doctorates. So it was really kind of cool to talk to them because I realized, hey, I can actually talk to these people on an adult level, you know. And I enjoyed that.

Interviewers: So when you won Pennsylvania what did you win? Besides the opportunity to go to Arkansas, the great state of Arkansas.

Joycelyn: Which was...Which was really cool. Don't get me wrong. I love Little Rock to death but... They gave you a crown...

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Joycelyn: ...and a sash and basically...And they gave you your entry fee back to put toward your national entry fee which was over \$1,000. And then you also got...There weren't any scholarships or anything. But you got the chance to go around and talk to people with disabilities and just reach out and touch them, which is what I wanted to do.

I spent a lot of time at Children's Hospital with a lot of the kids over there, because I was a patient there for many years. So I thought this is a way I can give back just to go in there and give them a chance to smile, you know. And I enjoyed that. That was probably the best part of it. Being able to go and bring smiles to people.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Did you travel around the state?

Joycelyn: I could have but I chose to stay at home.

Interviewers: Umm. Okay.

Interviewers: I chose to stay around home. The reason being is, because I wasn't sure how I was going to get around the state, because you have to pay for all your travel...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: ...expenses and stuff. They don't have the money to do that...

Interviewers: Um hmm..

Joycelyn: ...so. So I chose to stay at home. I figured Pittsburgh needs, you know, an advocate, and I can be that advocate. I did get a chance to go to Harrisburg, however, and talk with legislators and, which was really cool. The capital was a great place. And it was rather funny the other da...Or last year I went in and one of the secretaries from one of the representatives said, 'Can I help you?' And I said, 'Well I'm looking for this particular individual.' Because my representative's secretary had said to me in 2006 when I was there and I had just won a citation from the US, or...From the US, yeah, right. The state senate for being Miss Wheelchair PA and I had gone around the capital and to try to find my representative from my district and I didn't have much luck, because they said, 'Well he's not here right now. He's at home. But when you come back next year I want you to bring your pictures.' Because I went before the national competition. So 2007 comes around and I go back up there and I looking for this person and one of the other secretaries who was sitting in the little pod there said, 'Can I help you find someone?' I said, 'Yeah. I'm looking for Sue.' I think her name was. And they said, 'Oh, she's not here but here comes her representative. And I turn around and there he is walking through the door. And he says, 'Oh, there's my girl.' And I'm like, 'You talking to me?' And he's like, 'Yeah.' I'm like, 'Hold it. Hold it. Hold it. How do you know who I am?' And he said, 'I read.' He said, 'I read the Pittsburgh papers. I know what's going on.' And so he actually took me into his office and we had a chance to talk for a little bit and I was able to tell him some of the things that I was concerned about as far as transportation, housing, the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, which is right around the corner here. They haven't had an increase in

funding so they've had to cut back on some things, which I don't think is fair, because I think it's one of Pittsburgh's best kept secrets, honestly.

Joycelyn: And so...

Interviewers: Who was he? What's his name?

Joycelyn: Marc Gergely.

Interviewers: Oh, okay.

Joycelyn: That is my representative and my senator is John Logan from...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: ...District 45.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Have you ever met him?

Joycelyn: Oh, yeah. He's the one that gave me the citation.

Interviewers: Okay.

Joycelyn: And then Marc followed suit about a month later. And he said when I saw him in 2007, he said, 'I was so bummed last year when my secretary told me that you had been in here and I wasn't here.' So. But, yeah.

Interviewers: Joycelyn when you were growing up did you go to regular school? Did you walk on your crutches? How much do you use the crutches and how much do you use the wheelchair?

Joycelyn: Well, when I was...I went to regular school all the way up. I went to regular school from kindergarten all the way through 12th grade. All of my...Got accommodations that I needed, but, and I did...

Track 4

Joycelyn: ...have an IEP, you know. IEPs were new when I started school. I did have an IEP, however, all the accommodations I needed were given to me right there in the regular classroom. So I was not pulled out with the exception of in 6th grade for math. But that was it.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: I had a...I had a math tutor but that was it. And then the crutches I used til I was 17. They put me in a power chair when I was 18 because I was ready to go to school, go to college. And they said, 'If we don't put you in a power chair you are going to kill us, because you're going to be tired by the time you get to class.'

Interviewers: Who's they?

Joycelyn: My doctors.

Interviewers: Okay.

Joycelyn: My doctors and my therapist.

Interviewers: Okay.

Joycelyn: They said, 'If we don't put you in a power chair you are going to kill yourself by the time...by the time you get through school.' And they said, 'Then you'll want to come back here and kill us for not putting you in a chair.' And I just found the chair a lot easier so I've been using the chair ever since. Now I use the crutches to walk short distances or if the chair decides to make a mind of it's own and break down...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: ...then I'll use them.

Interviewers: So you at...So you do have a wheelchair accessible apartment? You don't...Or do you use your crutches at home?

Joycelyn: I do have a wheelchair accessible apartment, but there a few times where transfers are necessary.

Interviewers: Okay. Okay.

Joycelyn: From like my bathroom is too small to bring the chair into so I just jump out, walk along the wall...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: ...until I get to where I'm going.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Um hmm.

Joycelyn: But other than that it's pretty...It's all one floor. It's all even.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Um hmm. And what do you do here at UCP?

Joycelyn: I am one of their re...I'm on the rehab specialist team and I'm one of the teachers here with the people that we work with, which are adults with moderate to severe cognitive and physical disabilities. And what I do is I teach them what I like to refer to as life skills, but not life skills like an NT would teach. It's more life skills, cognitive life skills. Like how to plan something.

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: Self protection. Those kind of things so that's what I refer to it as cognitive life skills.

Interviewers: Is it...Does it take place here in the main building?

Joycelyn: Yes it does. It's right downstairs. Right downstairs.

Interviewers: So how many classes do you teach a day?

Joycelyn: Anywhere from three to four classes a day.

Interviewers: Umm. You work here full time right?

Joycelyn: Um hmm.

Interviewers: Three to four a day. That's a lot.

Joycelyn: Um hmm. It could be any where from three to four classes a day. Sometimes you get lucky and only have two, but...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: ...not very often.

Interviewers: So back to when you were growing up. You...So was your mom and after your dad passed, it was you, your mom and another sibling?

Joycelyn: Yes.

Interviewers: I sort of got lost in the numbers when you...

Joycelyn: You got lost in the numbers. Well I will straighten you out. I had, like I said, I'm adopted.

Interviewers: Right.

Joycelyn: My brother, Justin, was also adopted. He is now 28. When I was 20 and he was 18 my mother remarried...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: ...a guy with three other children.

Interviewers: Okay.

Joycelyn: So that left two boys, or he had two boys and then the one daughter.

Interviewers: And where they much younger than you?

Joycelyn: The youngest one, I'm 30, the youngest one's 18 if you put them in order.

Interviewers: Okay.

Joycelyn: Justin is only tw...Justin, he was my brother, is only 2-1/2 years younger. He's 28.

Interviewers: And a...Does Justin have a disability?

Joycelyn: No he does not. He is perfectly able bodied. The kid is hyper. He does everything. Runs from one end of the country to the other, it seems like. Likes to run all over God's creation. He's a percussionist.

Interviewers: Ohh.

Joycelyn: So he's in a band. So he runs all over God's creation, it feels like and...

Interviewers: What kind of band?

Joycelyn: He's always busy. He's in a Christian rock band.

Interviewers: Are they famous?

Joycelyn: Not yet.

Interviewers: What are they called?

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Joycelyn: I actually honestly I forget.

Interviewers: I thought you could give him a plug here.

Joycelyn: No they aren't famous yet, but they're working on it.

Interviewers: So when you came...When the blended family happened. How did the other kids treat you?

Joycelyn: The other three?

Interviewers: Yeah. Any problems with accepting you had a disability or anything?

Joycelyn: No. No. None at all. Actually the younger who's...The youngest is now 18. Would come up he was 6 when mom and my step dad started to date. And so he would come up to me after school. I'd be home, because college...college was let out in late April, early May. So I'd be home before school was out for them and the youngest would come in and say to me, 'Joycie. Read.'

Interviewers: Ohh.

Joycelyn: And I'd be like, 'Huh?' And he'd be like, 'I want you to read to me.' And so I would say, 'Okay. Go get your book.' You know. And he would hop up on my lap and let me read to him.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: So I mean there was no...There's no animosity. There's no jealousy. And even with Justin and I growing up, there was no real jealousy. He was the protector. He never let an...He could tease me as much as he wanted but let anybody else try it, they'd be on the floor.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Um hmm.

Joycelyn: And I can give you a story when I left high school that Justin was walking to class one day and there was a kid that was making fun of me. Justin and I always went to the same school.

Interviewers: What school did you go to?

Joycelyn: For tuition reasons. Wilson Christian Academy in McKeesport, Liberty Borough, West Mifflin. It's in West Mifflin now but... There was a kid that was mak...I graduated in '95. I was gone. And there was a kid making fun of me and Justin literally grabbed this child, threw him up against the locker and said, 'You leave my sister alone. If you don't I will hurt you.'

Interviewers: Wow.

Joycelyn: So he...Because he knew what he was making fun of and he wasn't going to stand for it. So even when I wasn't around he was still the protector. He's married now. No kids yet but...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: I think he's ready. She's not. I don't know. It's none of my business.

Interviewers: Well see I never...I never ascribed to that. It's your brother it's your business. That's what I say.

Joycelyn: Well if he...If he wants to...If they want to tell me then they'll tell me. If they don't they won't.

Interviewers: Right. Right. Joycelyn you're...You're still pretty young, but I want to ask you a question up unto this point. What are you most proud of in your life?

Joycelyn: I'm proud of the fact that I got a college degree. That...That's the thing, even though I didn't get the credentials that I was after originally, I am still proud of that piece of paper that says I did something that everyone outside my family said that I wasn't capable of doing.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: Well...I'll take that back. Every state agency, OVR included, basically told me when I told them what I wanted to do with my life, they told me I was crazy.

Interviewers: Why?

Joycelyn: Because they said, 'Yeah, you can never be a teacher.'

Interviewers: Why?

Joycelyn: Because of my physical limitations.

Interviewers: In the year...What year did you graduate? 2000?

Joycelyn: 2000.

Interviewers: So four years before that they were telling you this? In the '90s.

Joycelyn: They were tel...They were telling me this in 1995 when I...when I was about to graduate high school and go on.

Interviewers: What kind of teacher did you want to be? Elementary?

Joycelyn: Elementary...

Interviewers: Special ed?

Joycelyn: Elementary teacher but now my goals have changed a little bit. I'm planning to go to graduate school this fall to Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, and work on my master's degree in children's and family ministries.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: Because I want to work with...

Track 5

Joycelyn: ...children with special needs within a church setting.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: Because I feel like that that's one area where the church is lacking. They don't really provide that kind of support sometimes that children and families with special needs would need.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: So that is part of my reason for wanting to go back to grad school. And believe it or not, this time I'm not being told I'm crazy.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: By OVR who usually does not fund graduate work. They usually do not fund that. They say once you have a bachelor's degree that's it, you know. But, and I asked

them the other day I said, 'Why are you funding this if you typically don't?' They said, 'Because it's actually going back towards your original career goal from back when you were in high school.' So somebody actually looked at this and said, 'Hey. This can be done.'

Interviewers: And they're funding you going to a school out of the state.

Joycelyn: That is correct.

Interviewers: Which is very, very unusual.

Joycelyn: Yes. That is... That is correct. And actually when I started as a freshman I went to school out of state as well.

Interviewers: Really.

Joycelyn: Um hmm.

Interviewers: How did you pull that off? I mean normally they say if you can get the same education in the... here in the state, they won't pay for you to go out of state.

Joycelyn: Don't ask me. It was a God thing. That's all I can say.

Interviewers: Where did you go out of state?

Joycelyn: I went to Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, Indiana, east of the Marion College about 45 minutes south...err north of Indianapolis which was about nine hours from home. And I think one of the reasons that they said that they would go ahead and fund it is because they knew that I wasn't going to take no for an answer, and that I would fight them if need be.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Um hmm.

Joycelyn: And there was no school in the state that would take me at that time. So...

Interviewers: Why?

Joycelyn: Either GPA too low, SAT scores too low, or the fact that they were scared of the disability. I don't know.

Interviewers: Even Edinboro.

Joycelyn: At that time, to be honest, I wasn't ready for Edinboro. They probably would have but I really wanted to go to a Christian college because I didn't feel like I was

spiritually ready to handle the stuff that Edinboro would be throwing at me. And so, I didn't feel like I was mature enough.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: But once I left Geneva I realized you know what your mature enough. Try this again and go up to a school that really knows what they're doing. And even they messed up.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: So...

Interviewers: So you've been accepted to this school in...Where did you say it was, Minnesota?

Joycelyn: To Minnesota. I'm still waiting on my formal acceptance although I have received a verbal acceptance.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Did you have to take the GRE?

Joycelyn: No. Not for this program.

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: And I think another reason that OVR is not fighting me on this is because the fact that most of it is going to be online.

Interviewers: Oh, is it?

Joycelyn: So I will stay within the state for the majority of it.

Interviewers: Oh, but you're...It's gon...Okay...So you...But you'd still have to move?

Joycelyn: No. Uh uhh.

Interviewers: Oh, you don't have to move to...

Joycelyn: No. No.

Interviewers: Oh, you could stay here.

Joycelyn: I could stay here.

Interviewers: I'm a little slow, you know.

Joycelyn: That's okay. I can stay here. It's online. It's an internet based.

Interviewers: Oh, I see. So that...It sort of brings us back to the interview with John, he was talking about technology changing rapidly. Now with online education, which is really growing...

Joycelyn: Um hmm. Um.

Interviewers: And just spending the week...

Joycelyn: Distance ed.

Interviewers: Distance ed. and where, you know, you just spend a month at the other school sometime during... when you go there.

Joycelyn: Maybe two weeks. Yeah.

Interviewers: Yeah. So how do you see that playing in the whole future of...

Joycelyn: Of people going to college?

Interviewers: Yeah.

Joycelyn: Of people going to college? I think it's great. I have a couple young ladies...I have a young lady right now who's actually working towards...I think she's working on or towards a course online in community college. Which I think is great because she's very, very smart and she knows what she's doing. And I think it's really going to help people, young adults, with disabilities to reach for their dreams of a college education if they can... You know. As long as they can use a computer they can get their college degrees.

0:05:00

Joycelyn: They don't have to go, or they don't have to go to a traditional school. There's no need for it anymore.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: Just make sure the schools are accredited. That's all. I mean even the University of Arkansas at Little Rock has online programs.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: Both the graduate...or both the undergrad and graduate levels. So... I mean you can go to school out of state without even leaving your house.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Um hmm.

Joycelyn: You might have to go like John says, and I agree, you might have to go for a week or two but other than that, you know, there's not really any...There's not really anything holding you back except yourself. And that's what I always tell people. 'There's nothing holding you back except yourself.'

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: Because if there's a will, there's a way to do it. If there's the will to go to school there's a way to get it done.

Interviewers: So you're going to be able to stay working here while you're working on the master's?

Joycelyn: Yes.

Interviewers: That's good.

Joycelyn: I might have to go down to part time or whatever. I haven't really worked out all the logistics yet, but I'll be able to stay where I'm at. Which is good because I'm...I'm one of those people that doesn't like change very well. So the fact that I'll be able to stay where I'm at is really, really helpful.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Um hmm.

Joycelyn: When it comes...

Interviewers: Do you have a hero?

Joycelyn: In...Oh, yeah I do. In the disability arena yeah, I do. Joni Eareckson Tada. I actually had a chance to meet her. She's a Christian lady who was paralyzed due to a diving accident at the age of 17. And I had the chance to meet her when I was only 12. And we got a chance to talk a little bit and remember her asking...or I remember asking her this one question and it was, 'How did you keep from getting angry with God?' And her answer was, 'I didn't.' Now I was heading into the teenage years which are all mixed up anyway, and for a person with a disability they're majorly mixed up because the identity crisis is even more so. It's like, where am I...or who am I, where am I, where do

I fit. And she said to me, 'Don't make the same mistake I did. Don't get mad at God.' She said, 'You're only 13. You've got your whole life ahead of you.' She said, 'Don't...Don't make the same mistake I did.' And she said, 'Use your disability to touch other people.' She said, 'Don't let it stop you.' She said, 'Use it.' And I think I have.

Interviewers: Where did you meet her?

Joycelyn: At her church.

Interviewers: In California?

Joycelyn: Yes. In California.

Interviewers: Oh.

Joycelyn: How did you know that?

Interviewers: Because I know who she is.

Joycelyn: Oh, yeah?

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: Yeah. In California. We have...My mother has a brother that lives out there and one day our... We lived in Alaska for awhile and so we decided to take two months and come back home and visit everybody. And so we were there for his wedding and we were house sitting for him and his new wife while they were on their honeymoon. So we just decided to go to her church and I...Because my mom and dad liked the pastor, John McCartha, and so we decided to go to her church and we were about ready to leave and we saw a lady getting into a wheelchair equipped van. And mom said, 'Is that Joni Eareckson Tada?' And dad says, 'I don't know. Go over and ask.' So, of course, my mother being brave, went over and ask and she came over and talked to me for a little while. And that was the one thing she told me that I never got away from. She just said, 'Don't make the same mistakes I did. You have your whole life ahead of you.' So use it to touch people and let God work through you. And I think I have.

Interviewers: She was here several years ago.

Joycelyn: I know it. I know it. And I couldn't get off...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: ...to go.

Track 6

Joycelyn: But mom said, 'I wish I could've taken you' So was Rick Warren. She was here with Rick Warren.

Interviewers: Oh, well then she was here before that.

Joycelyn: Wait a minute.

Interviewers: You mean after his book was published?

Joycelyn: Yeah.

Interviewers: Oh well she was here before that. She was speaking out at a church in North Hills.

Joycelyn: Oh, yeah?

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: But that time she was here with the choir , I think it was last year or two years ago.

Interviewers: Oh.

Joycelyn: I didn't have a chance to go. I wish I would have.

Interviewers: Yeah.

Joycelyn: She probably wouldn't recognize me anyways. Actually I was good friends with one of her friend's son.

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: If you read her book *Choices Changes* the author of that...the coauthor of that is a man by the name of Steve Estes. And I went to school with his son Ryan. His son, Ryan, and I went to Geneva so...and we were good friends and Steve is a Evangelical Free Church pastor.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: Which is my denomination as well.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: So, we have a lot in common that way.

Interviewers: Umm.

Joycelyn: And when I realized when I put together Joni Erikson Tada and Steve Estes I'm thinking, oh my gosh. This is so cool. And it...And I understood then why Ryan was so attentive...

Interviewers: Ohh.

Joycelyn: ...to me.

Interviewers: Yeah.

Joycelyn: And to, you know...He wasn't like a lot of other guys who would run the other way.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: He's...He would stick with me and be my friend. And I understood why. It was...It was that he had been brought up not to be afraid of someone in a...in a chair or who used crutches or whatever.

Interviewers: Have you had that experience where guys run away?

Joycelyn: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I've had...I've had that experience. I've cried over that, you know. My heart's been broken...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: ...many a time. And like my best friend in high school, a couple of years ago. I get a wedding invitation from him. And I'm like, huh, what? You know. And my mother said, 'Are you okay?' And I said, 'Well, I guess I have to be.'

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: You know. But, yeah. And I think part of the reason is that they're just afraid. They're afraid of what to say. They're afraid of they might say the wrong thing.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: Who knows.

Interviewers: Um hmm. Um hmm. Or they're too self-centered.

Joycelyn: Well that, too. And a friend of mine says to me all the time, because I always complain to him, because he's like my best friend in the entire world. And even Ryan didn't even tell me he was going to get married, which hurt.

Interviewers: Ahh. Yeah.

Joycelyn: I found out in...I found out in the Geneva magazine.

Interviewers: Oh my goodness.

Joycelyn: That he was married. I'm like what. Okay. But anyhow, but one of my friends...One of my other guy friends that I've known for a long and who is good friends with me, he always says to me 'Honey, it's their loss.'

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: 'If they're the ones that choose to run the opposite direction and not take the time to get to know you...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: 'Then that's their loss.'

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: 'It's not your problem.'

Interviewers: That's right. So what are your plans for the rest of your life. You're going to get this degree.

Joycelyn: I'm going to get this degree, hopefully, and then who knows. I...I'll just wait and see what doors open up and where God leads. And hopefully, I'll be able to find a guy who sees me for who I am. Because I eventually want to settle down and get married and have a family.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: But right now planning to go to school that probably isn't the best idea. But, I mean, whatever the Lord has for me I'm ready to go.

Interviewers: Do you have a chance to meet guys?

Joycelyn: Not really. And that...And that's the unfortunate part of it because all the guys I know that are my age have been jerks. Okay. All the guys I know that are my age have been jerks.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: And then every guy that I know that is really nice and that I might be interested in is way older than me and we're talking 15, 20 years older. Which is a little like, okay.

Interviewers: Too old? Too old for you?

Joycelyn: A teeny bit. A little bit.

0:05:00

Joycelyn: You know. I would go for...Well I'll be honest. My best friend that I talk about...that I was talking about he is 20 years older.

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: But he doesn't see me that way. I think he just sees me as a really good friend, which is fine. But...

Interviewers: Um hmm.

Joycelyn: You know.

Interviewers: Oh wait a minute. You're 30?

Joycelyn: Um hmm.

Interviewers: Oh yeah 20 years would be 50.

Joycelyn: Right.

Interviewers: Ah yeah. That might be too old. I was 40 ten years ago (? - 0:05:25) I do want to get in before you go, we talked about a lot in other interviews about advocacy especially in Pittsburgh. And most of the people that we've interviewed have been older. And I kind of just wonder what your take is on advocacy now versus I mean we talked

about earlier in regards to Access, and really that's kind of why Pittsburgh has a good...a least a helpful transportation system. But what do you think about kind of like your age group in regards to the advocacy now and is it the same then?

Joycelyn: No.

Joycelyn: No.

Interviewers: Why?

Joycelyn: No. The reason is people my age really don't want to get involved in advocacy. Now don't ask me why because I wouldn't be able to tell you exactly why but...

Interviewers: Any guesses though or thoughts on why maybe it's not as prevalent as, I mean, you know, it was for the Access kind of crew. For lack of a...

Joycelyn: For lack of a better term.

Interviewers: A description, yeah.

Joycelyn: I don't know. Maybe they're just afraid to get out there. And that's what you have to do as far as advocacy. And that's what this thing at CORO, the Center for Civic Leadership has taught me, too. That...And the Citizens Leadership Initiative. You have to get out there. You have to be the one to be assertive and say, 'Hey, this is what we need.' This is...I mean I can think about...I don't know if you know this lady, Rachel Friend from the Mental Health Association of Allegheny County. She calls me up. I had just been crowned Miss Wheelchair PA. She calls me up and she says, 'Joyce. I want you to go on a legislative visit with me.' And I'm like, 'Huh? You want me to do what?' She says, 'I want you to go on a legislative visit with me. And I'm like, 'Okay. To who?' She said, 'To the federal representative.' I'm thinking "Oh God, no way." And at that time a bill was in front of congress, it's dead now. But it was in front of congress to make the Medicaid Attendant Program national instead of just state by state. And I said, I'm thinking oh my God that I figured I need the experience. I'll take it. So I told her that I would go and so I went in. Well first of all I went to John and I said, 'Help.' And he wrote me out some things and I put some things of my own in and I went in and talked to the representative, Mike Doyle, and he said, 'Well from what you've said that sounds like a pretty good bill and I will endorse the bill.' And I was so proud of myself and I called John and said, 'Guess what? He's going to endorse the...the MiCASA bill.' And John said, 'How did you manage doing that? I've been trying to get him to sign on for six months. So how did you manage doing it?' But I think it's fear mostly from my age group that we don't want to get...they're afraid to get their feet wet.

Interviewers: You think the opportunities are there?

Joycelyn: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I mean, the capital is way open. Harrisburg is wide open. It's...It's very easy to get around. It's wide open. I mean, they want to see you. Believe it or not legislatures want to see you and they want to talk to you. So opportunities are there you just have to take them. Now Washington, I haven't tried to do any advocacy in Washington so I can't tell you from the Washington standpoint. But as far as Harrisburg from what I can see, they are...they're wide open. They want to see you. And so we need to grab those opportunities when they present themselves.

Track 7

Interviewers: Any other questions? Yeah take a couple. Yeah. I was thinking... the office where my wife works a lot of young woman work there but they don't want to consider themselves...they distance themselves from the feminist movement. Where my wife says, I mean, she wouldn't have her job if it wasn't for affirmative action and the movement that took place before her. But the younger people just sort of, well that's not who...almost thinking they got there by themselves.

Joycelyn: I can see where she's coming from. I agree with that about the affirmative action and stuff like that. But I don't agree with some of the basic premises of the feminist movement. Like, you don't need a guy. Men are animals. Those kind of things. And those are the kind of things that I've gotten from reading feminist literature. That they...They are...They are man haters. And yeah, they've done some good things but what are their basic premises? You know. And I mean so I can understand where the younger...But I can also understand where she's coming from that we are where we're at today because the people that come before us. We didn't get there by ourselves. Believe me.

Interviewers: Um hmm. The others...like I was thinking as you were talking before about housing, it really seems like this almost would be a great opportunity for Pittsburgh to really move forward. They're building the new lofts and the new...All the housing they're trying to put in the city downtown to attract people live there. If there would be an emphasis placed on these builders to have units set aside. You know. To make...

Joycelyn: Oh that would be great. That would be great. If they would do that. And make it so that people can afford them. Because that's the big thing. You can... It can be as successful as you want it to be, but if you can't afford it, forget it. You know what, I mean, it could have every ramp, every environmental control in the world but if you can't afford it, what's the point.

Interviewers: Well that's part of why they don't do it. Because they don't...They don't think that people will buy them, rent them, whatever...

Joycelyn: We'll rent them just make it so we can afford them. You know what I mean?

Interviewers: Well, the market rent in this area is not affordable for a lot of people.

Joycelyn: Yeah tell me about it.

Interviewers: So that's the problem. That's the problem. Well Joycelyn I thoroughly enjoyed talking to you. Any last bit of advice you'd like to give to anybody out there who might listen to this?

Joycelyn: Little. Reach for the star. Reach for the star. Each of us have our own star, our own dreams and reach for those dreams. Don't...Because they were given to you by God. They were given to you by God and don't let them slip away. Because if you do, trust me, you're going to regret it later. And in spite...And don't let your disability stop you. Just reach for those dreams. You might have to do some things differently and it may take you longer to get to where you're going. But it really doesn't matter. It's just a matter of reaching for dreams.

Interviewers: Good for you. Thank you. Yeah, thank you. Good for you. Miss Wheelchair Pennsylvania. From now until forever.