

**Oral History Interview of  
James Braxton**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez  
December 20, 2016  
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:  
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## Interview Series Background:

The Crossroads Artists Project encompasses interviews conducted by the Crossroads of Music Archive Staff members. They hope to document the creative process of artists and songwriters from all across the Southwestern United States.

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features James Braxton as he discusses his love for music and playing the violin and the saxophone. In this interview, James recounts his career in the music field, and directing and writing music for the Dunbar band in Lubbock.

**Length of Interview:** 01:35:24

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### Keywords

Jazz, marching band, West Texas music

**Daniel Sanchez (DS):**

My name is Daniel Sanchez. Today's date is December 20, 2016. We're at the Southwest Collection with Mr. James Braxton. Mr. Braxton, could you please state your complete legal name.

**James Braxton (JB):**

My whole name is James Jones Braxton.

DS:

Okay. When and where were you born?

JB:

Eighteen ninety-nine—1919.

DS:

Nineteen-nineteen. Let me move this a little closer to you. We might have to—I think that will pick you up well. Can you tell us about your dad? What was his name?

JB:

My dad [pause], James—let's see, what name does he—[long pause]

DS:

Well, let's start with your mom. How about your mom's name?

JB:

My mother [pause]—don't have much—

DS:

Can you tell us where did you grew up?

JB:

Where did I grow up? Tulsa.

DS:

Tulsa. What was that like when you were a kid?

JB:

What was it like?

DS:  
Yeah.

JB:  
It's hard to say. Tulsa was a—I guess it was just a small town.

DS:  
What did you do for fun?

JB:  
What do I do?

DS:  
Uh-huh.

JB:  
Well, I grew up in—all the way from the beginning to—up to my twelfth, you know.

DS:  
Uh-huh. Did y'all go play in the park or did y'all go fishing or did y'all do anything like that?

JB:  
Oh yes. Every Saturday; fishing, hunting.

DS:  
Where did y'all fish there?

JB:  
Where did we fish?

DS:  
Uh-huh.

JB:  
Well, in that area there were a lot of lakes where you'd go fishing. Either fishing or hunting in Tulsa.

DS:  
Did you go with family? Did you go with family?

JB:

I'm sorry?

DS:

Did you go with family?

JB:

With my family?

DS:

Yeah.

JB:

Oh, my dad and I mostly. Well, I have to go back. My dad was—came in to the—from nearby after he finished his college and he started there. His wife didn't live very long. She passed away. [Clears throat] So, she was kind of young. Then me and my brother were born. So, my dad then raised me and my boy. I don't know how much of all of it I want to say, but my dad came up there after going to college and he started there in Tulsa. My wife—my mother passed away at a young age and we were raised by neighbors. So, my dad took care of us and—by some lady—I don't know how much you want to hear this, but she and her husband worked with trains, you know, people operating trains. So, sometimes we would spend the night with the trains and some nights—something like that. So, we were pretty young when we came along, but the lady took care of us, me and my brother. My dad was teaching in the day time to take care of her—them—and she took care of us, so that's the way I grew up. Her husband, at first, lived in a train building near the airport near where we lived. So, sometimes she kept us there [inaudible]. My dad then taught school and she took care of me there.

DS:

What did your dad teach?

JB:

At first, chairs and nails.

**Crystal Martinez (CM):**

Carpentry.

JB:

He did that. He also worked in football, you know, stood with the boys. My mother, at an early age, passed away, so my brother and I were cared by a nearby lady who would take care of us.



DS:

What was her name? Do you recall? It's been a few years. [Laughter]

JB:

It was a long time, yeah. She took care of me and they lived in a train building.

DS:

In one of the freight cars?

JB:

Yes. My dad took care of us but a lot of the time, we'd take care of her at (inaudible). We knew about books and things. That was in Tulsa.

DS:

In Tulsa?

JB:

Yes.

DS:

You mentioned you went to the school system there.

JB:

Yes.

DS:

When did you start studying music there?

JB:

Yes. That's the first school that was in Tulsa—as a child. Then he married again, a lady from Texas, and she was in the school system where he and she taught too. So, experience of knowing her. We moved to a nearby—another house and that's where we lived in Tulsa. That's where I grew up.

DS:

Now, you mentioned football earlier. Did you play sports growing up?

JB:

More music.



DS:

More music.

JB:

First thing I took was the—

DS:

Violin?

JB:

Viola.

DS:

Viola.

JB:

Yeah. That was the first thing.

CM:

He had a big, fancy violin.

JB:

No, the little one.

CM:

Oh, okay.

DS:

The viola.

JB:

Well, you'd have to say that but you all are not old enough to remember. When I first saw it, it was one that [imitates sounds].

CM:

Plastic.

JB:

On the guitar. Then in the first grade later on, I had a chance to play with the saxophone instrument. I went to school there in Tulsa.

DS:

I think you mentioned something about when you started playing sax, that there was people there already playing sax so you had to—you didn't have a choice in what you played or something like that?

JB:

Well, see in the first grade, I did violin—well guitar, I meant—and about the third grade I was allowed to go to the band, but I was already with the violin in grade school. My dad wanted me to stay with the violin. The principal of the school was friends with my dad and he made it possible for me to take half of the period with the violin and half with the instrument. [Laughter] Politics. So, my first thought after—there wasn't a grade I didn't have the violin but in my junior year I started with the violin and saxophone. I took half of the period with one and the other half with the same [inaudible]. So, half of [imitates sound] and the other half [imitates sound].

DS:

So you were trying to learn two instruments at once?

JB:

Yeah, at the same time.

DS:

How was that?

JB:

Well, my dad and the principal were friends. [laughs]

CM:

And made it possible to—

JB:

And so, the band director—and he—it turned out that half of the hour I would do [imitates sound] and the other half [imitates sound], like that. That's what I did when I first went into junior high school. But then the next year, I was able to play the saxophone and the [imitates sound]. I had a beautiful, wonderful teacher in violin. I had him all the way through school.

DS:

What was his name?

JB:

I don't know.

DS:

He was just wonderful?

JB:

Yeah. Through school. So, all the way through school [imitates sound] but I still played saxophone. Then Tuskegee, went to Tuskegee. Tuskegee was the school that my dad finished so he sent me there. I don't want to bore you, but at that time all through high school, I had the habit of wanting to do things. I wanted to pollute—work with making things and all that, cars and [inaudible]. So, in school, I happened to contact with two people who were at—redid pipes, that kind of stuff. So, when I finished high school, I got a need for me to go take—be a plumber. [Laughs] So, I went off to school to be a plumber.

DS:

To be a plumber.

JB:

Yes. That's where I went to school, but I was in music, too. So, I'd go in the morning with the music, and then the afternoon until two. That went for a couple of years. Then that second summer as a college student—you know how college students leave and go into work and make money? Well, I came—I went out east, out east to Atlantic City during that summer the second year. During that summer, I didn't ever go back to college anymore. I was supposed to go back to college, my third year in college, but I didn't. "Next week I'm going back to Tulsa, then leave Tulsa, then go back to college. That's what I'm supposed to do next week." I went to a club with a friend and I went and sat in with my horn and played with the fellas a good while and the fellow got up and hired me. So, instead of going back to Tulsa and going back to college, I stayed in Atlantic City. That was the beginning of that. So, I went to Atlantic City and around all of there.

DS:

What was it like—

JB:

Did not go back.

DS:

What was it like being that young, being in Atlantic City, and starting to play in the music scene there?

JB:

I really don't—it's hard to explain. It was a friend and I were together, he and I. He—at the end

of that year, we were supposed to go back to college. He went back and I got with the piano player there and moved in with him. So, my business started with playing music. So, I went there.

DS:

You recall any of the places you played?

JB:

Clubs. [Laughs]

DS:

Just clubs?

JB:

Yeah just clubs.

DS:

Did you just play Atlantic City or did y'all go on a little tour of some kind?

JB:

It was Atlantic City. I was—all this started in the summer time there in El Paso. Well, I went to Philadelphia and around different places. My dad talked to me about coming back to Tulsa and he said, "You can go back to any college you want to go to." So, back to Tulsa I came. I'm sitting there in Tulsa looking around to see which college I was going to go back to. My brother went to Tulsa to go to college. All right, well, while that was going on, the people at Wiley College, they needed another player and I was there. So, I went to Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. Of course, this was a whole—she was there because my dad and my wife—my dad's wife, all of her folks were from Marshall, Texas. You know where Marshall, Texas is?

DS:

Actually, I kind of know. Don't know exactly.

JB:

Well, that's where they all lived. So, the band director wanted another saxophone player so he brought me to Marshall, Texas. So, I started with the band there. That brought a whole history of—yeah.

DS:

So what was it like giving up playing music to go back to school and play music?

JB:

Well, I—no—well, I'm just calling I'm not much of a [0:21:30]. See, Marshall, Texas—wife that he married and brought to Tulsa and became my mother, she came then and started teaching in Tulsa, okay? So, here I am in Marshall with those people. My brother ended up going to school there, too, in Marshall—you know where Marshall, Texas is?

DS:

Where's it located at?

JB:

Well, it's just south of Dallas.

DS:

That's where I was thinking, that area.

JB:

Yeah, well, I went to school there a couple years, and also was where my dad's—my mother, that's where they lived to grow up and move to Tulsa. So, I'm sitting here in Lubbock—I mean in college there and then finally it ends up with my brother was in that college, my brother-in-law—the college. More history.

DS:

In fact, before your brother-in-law, didn't you meet your wife there?

JB:

My mother—my wife—met my wife there. She was from near—she wasn't from Tulsa. She was down near there. She was at—in Marshall, Texas—I mean, in Marshall. So, you see, me there playing with the band and I met her. History came. Ended up marrying her. Also, my brother-in-law, her wife—he went to school there, too. This was also where the farm was, too. See, Marshall, all this was where—my father's wife lived there and the college was there. A big family of hers was all there so that just kind of pushed me into that. So, I went to school in Marshall, Texas.

DS:

Once you finished college there, where did you go teach?

JB:

Well, more history started. I'm sitting up here in Marshall, Texas and you all started a war.  
[Laughter]

DS:

I wasn't around. [Laughs]

JB:

I'm sitting here in Marshall, Texas in my first year and the war started. The Army decided that I didn't finish there so then they sent me to the Army, sent me to Oklahoma, a school there.

DS:

I think Crystal mentioned that you had been a musician also in the Army, right? During the service, you played for the band?

JB:

Yeah.

DS:

How did you get into that?

JB:

Well, see, I was in the band at the college and the Army brought me and went in there. I was sitting around waiting for my—what I was supposed to do in the Army. The war was going on and I was sitting there in the Army waiting for what I'm going to do. I got a chance to try out for the band at the—near—not too far from Tulsa. I had got a chance to tryout with the band, with the Army band. I was happy being on the band. That didn't happen. The Army—you know anything about the Army? They think what they want to do with you. So, I'm sitting up in the Army waiting—wanting—thinking the band was going to let me into the band at this base. I tried out for the base and was accepted to be in the band at the base. I tried out and I made it. I'm good. Then the band director called me and said, "No. They have something else they want you to do." So, they sent me on down south to take some training. When I went to training, they asked me about all—when you try this—for some reason, they know everything about you. They found out about my college [inaudible]. So then they sent me up north to take some other training. So, I'm sitting up in this other training waiting to be told what you're going to do and what you're doing. All that time I was playing the horn and so forth but they had me just [imitates sound]. This sounds so silly. It's hard to say it because the service does stuff [makes sound]. I was just sitting there one day and a fellow says, "They're sending you back to Oklahoma. They're going to send you back to the band," the band that I was supposed to tryout in. So, a few of those and so forth. They sent me back to Tulsa, to Oklahoma, to the band, where I wanted to be.

DS:

But you got trained. [Crystal laughs]



JB:

Okay. So, I was happy. "Everything is fine. Oh it's great. Good lord." The war was going on then. "This is fine." I went with the band. The band director decided he wanted to go overseas and take us with him. [laughs]

DS:

Oh did he?

JB:

Oh lord. I was not too far from Tulsa where the band and everything were. I had met the girlfriend and things were going all nice. They decided they wanted to send that band to the Philippines—not the Philippines, but to—where they sent me. So, I decided it might be good to—

CM:

They put you in a big, fancy hotel over there.

DS:

Did they—so you said you went to overseas. So, did y'all go where there was combat or just another—

JB:

They sent me overseas.

DS:

Where did y'all play? Do you recall?

JB:

Philippines. Not the Philippines, but—overseas. Fortunately, I didn't have to stay too—I didn't have to stay too long but I did have to go.

DS:

Did y'all fly or go by boat?

JB:

Went on a ship.

DS:

On a ship. Was that your first time on a ship?



JB:

Yes. That was rather interesting. You learned to swim—you know, those bays you get on down in those boats? I went overseas on the—there were five boats. We went to—over on that. Fortunately, they didn't keep me for so long. It was a funny thing, though. After I got overseas, the band director came by one day and said, "I'm going back home." [Laughs] Here I am way over in this little—not in the Philippines—over there and he was going back. [laughs]

DS:

The man that took you over there was coming back.

JB:

Left me over there. Fortunately I didn't have to stay long.

DS:

So, did y'all just play for those troops while you were there?

JB:

While I was over there? Yeah, I played. That's where—it was nice. Yeah. I could see the shooting over there. Back over in there they were shooting. Fortunately, I was over—they were over there and I was over here.

DS:

So, when did you come back from the service?

JB:

I came back—a history really took place. Went to this college, went to this college, went to this college, this college. But you see, I was in the Army. I was still with the Army. After I got back in the Army—I was looking around—at Wiley College I still had one—about three classes—some classes I had to finish, so I had to go back to Wiley, go back to college and finish that. Then I went to school for this. I could go to any school so I went to Nebraska. I had never been to Nebraska before. [laughs] But you see, I could go to any one I want to go. In the Army, they'll let you go to any [inaudible] so I went to Nebraska.

DS:

Why'd you select Nebraska?

JB:

Well, I knew somebody and somebody said, "Yeah man, he needs to [inaudible]," so I went to Nebraska. Went to school there for a year. Went back to Oklahoma and went to work as a band director. Then worked in Oklahoma, near Tulsa, and married the girl. Found out about another

place I could go and went there. Meanwhile, my brother-in-law came here, the same one that I had been with, you know. So, he came here, so I came here. So, now the two of us were here.

DS:

Because he was already at Dunbar and then he brought you into Dunbar, right?

JB:

Yeah. History. He came to here and then I came here with him.

DS:

And you brother-in-law was?

JB:

My brother-in-law, we both were—

DS:

What was his name?

JB:

Roy Roberts.

DS:

That's who I thought it was. I just didn't want to say it before you did. So, Roy Roberts, who we all know.

JB:

You know Roy?

DS:

We know all about his story here in Lubbock. So, Roy Roberts, was he already teaching the orchestra there at Dunbar High School?

JB:

Oh yeah. Yeah. See—okay—he came to that school there and I got a chance to come there, too. So, both of us are going to the same school.

DS:

Did your wife teach also?

JB:  
Yes.

DS:  
What did she teach?

JB:  
In a regular.

DS:  
So, what year was that that you started out at Dunbar?

JB:  
It's hard to say. I liked that. Yeah, we were in the shop place, in the band and so forth. We had the regular students then we had the band and we'd play at night, that kind of thing. See, he played saxophone and I played saxophone, too.

DS:  
Did you also play—did you play outside or did you just work or did you play any venues while you were teaching?

JB:  
What do you mean?

DS:  
Like, did you play at any of the—did y'all play at any of the clubs or anything like that?

JB:  
Oh everywhere. We played all over the city.

DS:  
What was the music scene in Lubbock like back then?

JB:  
What'd you say?

DS:  
What was the music scene like back then?

JB:

Oh just wonderful. Well, we were in the shop, he and I, and we worked with the students. At that time, it was a high school. There was a—we played football games and we had a group. He and I, we would play with the group at the clubs.

DS:

What was the name of the group?

JB:

Oh just, you know, what it was.

DS:

Was this around the time that—was it Virgil Johnson that had a group back then?

JB:

Johnson?

DS:

Virgil, Virgil Johnson. Didn't he have a music group back then that was playing music around here also?

JB:

I guess.

DS:

So, what was it like teaching band and orchestra?

JB:

Oh, enjoyed it. We'd go to football games. See, at Dunbar now, they don't have games. It's not—it's **messy** [0:41:20]. But see, it was a high school, so we had football games and we traveled. One day my brother went downtown and told a man, "We'd like to travel." So, they started sending all of us on those big buses, not those little ones but those big ones. I think the first thing that we played—the first time I played with the band they went to Dallas.

DS:

That's a good drive.

JB:

Oh yes. Yeah, he and I, we traveled all over Texas with the band. Those were the good days. I

was writing most of the music for them. By that time I'd learned how to write music. So, we'd write stuff that I could then play jazz. Our band—the band now—just a grade school now.

DS:

So, did you rely— when you were coming up with your songs for jazz music, would you rely more on what you had learned as a musician as opposed to in college or about the same?

JB:

Well, all that put together. When I went to college, I had the business to be able to contact with, you know—at the college, in the morning I'd go to my—[pause] I'm trying to remember everything. You remember, I was taking plumbing. Well, I was taking plumbing in the morning and in the afternoon in college, I was with the band. I don't know how [inaudible]. So—it's hard to say the context.

DS:

You mentioned your wife earlier. You have—how many children do you have?

JB:

How many children? Two.

DS:

Both of them played music at one point, didn't they?

JB:

Oh did they? Yeah boy. She went all to the top then changed.

DS:

Oh did she?

JB:

Yeah, Ruby. She's going to be here next week.

DS:

And she went all the way to the top? What do you mean by that? What did she do?

JB:

Well, she—we went to school there in—we went to school—she went to school there. While she was in school, she was doing—in my class and playing the piano because, see, I was teaching piano, too. So, in the latter—last year of her going to school, she was really serious in piano. So much of this. You have plenty of time?

DS:

I got all afternoon. [laughs]

JB:

Okay. I was at a—they sent me everywhere in town. This school sent me to this school, sent me to this school. So I was at one school and while in that school, she was going to school in that same school. We had a program at that school and a fellow from Texas Tech came to the program at that school that I was giving a program at the school where I was. After the program, he and I got the chance to talking a little and found out that my daughter was taking piano. Remember, I was the teacher there at this school there. He was at Texas Tech. We talked and talked. We sat out there the night that we were talking and was talking and talking and talking. He said, “You have a daughter [inaudible]?”, “Yeah.” He said, “I’d like to hear her play something.” He taught at Tech. She was going to college the next year. She was going to finish—and I’m the teacher there at this school. He said, “Yeah.” He said, “I’d like to hear her play.” So, he got to see her play and decided that he was going to teach her to play piano. Well, she was not in college. She was in her last year at high school. He said, “But I’d like to help—I’d like to teach her.” So, he had her—next year she went to college and she was his—he was her teacher. So, she spent four years at Texas playing the piano. She went all the way up. Just wonderful. Impossible. Great. Just way up with this same teacher all this time. She’s finished Texas Tech and then one day, she decided she didn’t want to play the piano anymore. Now, when that happened—I don’t know why that—I just—you know, youngsters just tell their parents [Daniel laughs]—she turned around and went back to college and took a year of business. Lived there and went to California and has been there ever since in business. She still can play.

DS:

She still plays piano?

JB:

Yeah but that’s not this. She’s in business—and she will be here next week just visiting. That’s why—I don’t know.

CM:

We need to ask her.

DS:

We need to sit her down for an interview.

JB:

Yeah. She was at the top of piano, at the top, then just one day just—



DS:

Decided—

JB:

Yeah.

DS:

I guess though you'd want to perform or teach it to really—to pursue that career because it's not an easy career, right? And how about your son, what did he do?

JB:

Oh him. [laughs] Well, there's another history. Okay. He's two years behind her. She was in El Paso [pause]—El Paso and into her life came a child in El Paso. I was enjoying working there. I was there for three years. She was there herself so she became pregnant and had this child and Tom came along. Then a couple years or so later we moved to Dallas—to here and he went to school here. So, she was here and he was here. Then he traveled all over the country blowing his saxophone and playing piano. Tom Braxton.

DS:

Did he play with No Compromise? Was that the name of his group?

JB:

Oh yeah. Played with everybody.

DS:

Because I remember them back—that was my era, so I listened to that.

JB:

Yeah. Tom Braxton. He grew up there and he traveled all around. He did very well; piano and saxophone. Then one day he decided to move south in the state and live there. [inaudible] He's in Dallas here now. He's still playing. Tom Braxton.

DS:

Did he ever go into teaching or did he just work as a musician all his life?

JB:

Teaching and traveling all over the world. He's been all over the world on the piano.

DS:

He's very much like you were, huh, just enjoyed going out and performing?



JB:

Yeah. See, I traveled around in the states. He left the world and went—China and [imitates instrument sound] like that, with his jazz. He lives in Dallas now.

DS:

Do y'all have any more Braxton's that are playing? Any of his sons or—[laughter]

JB:

Yeah. Well, he has two sons. One is at the college—at that church college. He just started this year. The other one's in high school. He's there. Two sons. We stuck with music. When she was in high school, she played the violin.

DS:

How about your wife, did she play music?

JB:

No. No, she's moved on upstairs to heaven. She's been gone about three years.

DS:

Well, you've been in Lubbock basically since 1960 or so, haven't you?

JB:

Been here?

DS:

Basically.

JB:

Yes, for a while.

DS:

Can you talk a little bit now about Lubbock, how much it's—how it's changed since you first got here?

JB:

How it changed here? Oh, it's a fun place. It's a different town.

DS:

What was it like when you first got here?

JB:

It was a nice little town when I moved here. [Laughs] It's a shame. Well, it's kind of funny. When I first came here, I knew about Dallas. I didn't know about this city. I didn't even know where it was but later on I moved here.

DS:

Well, you're probably one of the patriarchs over there now. You're probably close to one of the oldest citizens in East Lubbock, right?

JB:

What?

DS:

You, you're probably one of the oldest residents right now in Lubbock.

JB:

Just about. Well, see, you know, these things around the city? All that was built since I've been here.

DS:

Yeah. The loop?

JB:

Yeah, all that. It used to be you just ride to the other side of town. It's changed a whole lot.

[Inaudible]

DS:

Do you have any fond memories that you'd like to share from your time in the music?

JB:

Well, we had—I really loved all the time that I had at Dunbar. You know where Dunbar is?

DS:

Um-hm.

JB:

It was just wonderful. It's there now.

DS:

Yeah they made it a middle school now, right?

JB:

Yes. It was a high school.

DS:

In fact, this summer they had a reunion out there.

JB:

They try to have [inaudible]. Oh yes. We used to have everything. I would enjoy—I liked to travel with the band. My brother-in-law—see, when we first went there with the band, we had one of those—charge like that, you know. So, my brother went downtown and told the man, “We need to travel with the bus,” so then we started traveling with the bus. Shoot, we went all over the state just about. First thing we went, we went to Dallas.

DS:

And part of that was that’s during segregation so you only played the other black schools in the different sports and so forth, right?

JB:

Yeah. It was different, definitely.

DS:

So you had to go a pretty far ways to play your competition, right?

JB:

Yeah. All of us [inaudible]. One little thing, which you mentioned, one little thing like being here at Texas Tech—you know, we didn’t go to—come to Texas. My band—the church where I attend, used to go to meetings, meetings downtown. He met a meeting. Our pastor at the church—he’s elderly now—he went to the meeting, he got up and said, “This is crazy.” He said, “We want to go to Texas Tech,” I mean, “Come to Texas Tech” at the meeting downtown. They said, “Yeah.” Then the next—that year, I could come. It looked like—in my career, things happened just when it happened to me. See, we didn’t come to—we didn’t come to school here but he got up in a meeting and said, “I want to go there,” so then that summer I came to Texas Tech—to the college. So then I went every summer five straight times in your school out here.

DS:

Were you working on a master’s degree?

JB:

I already had a master’s—I had a master’s degree.

DS:

So you were working on your doctorate?

JB:

No, no. No, I took music. See, I'd have to—this is music. For instance, I'd take violin and flute, violin and [imitates instrument sound], violin and—just something each summer like that. About five years I did that. Then that last year when I went to the committee, they said, “You’ve had everything. [Laughs] You don’t need anymore.”

DS:

Wow. So, what year—so, you started like in '60, '61?

JB:

I don't know. I enjoyed it. It was just wonderful. Yeah. I just took everything at Texas Tech.

DS:

Was it Otis Price, did he play back then when you did?

JB:

Otis, yes.

DS:

What was he like?

JB:

I don't know.

DS:

You didn't know him?

JB:

Yeah. I've enjoyed it.

DS:

I appreciate you taking the time to come in and share your story. It's just—

JB:

After the war, I came [pause] to this area and he was here. Yeah, he came here first and next year I came. Been here ever since.

DS:

And you're talking about Roy Roberts again. What was he like?

JB:

Wonderful. I knew him when he was in high school. He's younger than I. Then later on I knew her as my girlfriend and then I knew him as a boy. The first year I came there, which was college, the next year he came there. You saw the jazz band? We were in the same band. The band director said, "We need a baritone saxophone," so he got [inaudible]. He was a wonderful fellow. [pause] It's funny that things—you go to a door, open it [knocks on desk].

DS:

It's kind of like your life was. You were—

JB:

That's what it was.

DS:

You went to Atlantic city and you wound up staying there.

JB:

I went to Atlantic City. "Next week I'm leaving and going back to Tulsa then going to school."

DS:

Didn't happen, did it?

JB:

All right? But on that day, there was a club opening, a little club, and I was going to go down there and see the new club. We were going to sit in. So I went down thereto this club just to sit in because, see, I'm going home. [Clears throat] The door closed and some fellow said, "Here's one. Let him in." So, I went in there, sat down and I started [inaudible]. The fellow came up to me and said, "You want a job?", "Now, next week I'm leaving. I'm going back to Oklahoma then back to college." He said, "You want a job instead of doing that?" I had a job then and turned back. That turned my whole life.

DS:

The first time we talked you mentioned something about how you'd been living as a man for, what, two years then you had to go back to school so there was some adjustment period for you.

JB:

This sounds crazy. Just think now. "Next week I'm going back to Tulsa and then going back to school," and this fellow says, "I want to hire you," and the rest of my life changed.

DS:

How did—what did your folks say when you called them to say, "I'm staying here and not going to school"?

JB:

Now that's the funny thing. I just want to—I can't say what they said when they found out that I was—they were looking for me to go back to college, and I was sitting up there. I started playing, and I got me a job and starting playing with a group. Yeah. I got with a group and so forth. And with the group over the road [?] [1:09:03]—I liked him and we got along good so we got together and things went on fine. Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. This girl killed him one [laughs]—you just—it's amazing. I played with him for a while. We were getting—sitting next—tomorrow we're going to move from Atlantic City up north up near New York and spend the winter there and come back to Atlantic City. Right? Okay. He was a contact with ladies and so and so, and one woman killed him. So, I did not leave there to go tomorrow halfway to New York. So, I spent that time, that winter, moved back to Atlantic City next. But all that happened together. It's funny. It's funny when a door opens and you go on and your doing this. But that happened, that kind of stuff. Here I am going to bed and tomorrow I'm going to get up and we're leaving town and we're going halfway to New York to spend the winter. But while this is happening, the fellow that was over the band and his wife get to fighting and she killed him. So, when I got up the next morning, we're not going to leave because he has been killed—her—I mean, she has killed him. They said, "What are we going to do? What are we going to do?" So, we finally decided that we were still going to go halfway to New York and play. So, we spent a month there and then after that month we moved back to Atlantic City there then we went around. It's amazing what can happen to you—like you're sitting here talking and you say, "Okay. All right. I'll go ahead and do this," and your whole life changes. It just turns around like that. Yeah. I'm going to go and go to bed and tomorrow we're leaving—going—and then she kills him. [Laughs]

DS:

Nothing you could've done about it.

JB:

No.

DS:

You're at home asleep.



JB:

Right. That's right.

DS:

I think at one point last time you had mentioned that your dad offered you an opportunity to go back to college. What brought up that offer?

JB:

Going back—yeah, that was funny, too. I was supposed to go back to college. Here I am in Atlantic City and I'm supposed to be—go back to college. I'm going next day or so and go back.

DS:

No, I meant, after all of that, when you decided to go back. What was it that brought you going back finally, when you finally went back?

JB:

When I finally went back?

DS:

Yeah.

JB:

Yeah. Well, my dad talked me into finally to go back. I'm sitting around Tulsa and my brother at that time, he was back in college in his second year. I'm sitting there and my dad said, "Well, any school you want to go to [inaudible]." While I'm doing that, the director at the school where my son was says, "I need another saxophone player." He said, "Well, my brother is"—that was me. So, he—so, back to Marshall, Texas I went. I don't know. I don't know why these things—so, we looked around and you see the band sitting there. There's my brother-in-law, there's my brother, then I, all sitting in the band. [laughs]

DS:

You were all saxophone players?

JB:

Yeah. We traveled all over Texas. We did, all over Texas. Of course, you see, that was where I paid our college. See, that was what—that's what paid for us to go to college. When we played, the man would collect the money and give us some. So, one week we'd go to Houston, next Dallas and this one [inaudible]. We just traveled all over Texas. That went on nicely until somebody going across the water started shooting another fellow and the war started. Okay? Then here I am in the college and the war started. Okay? It looked like that I would not have



been affected by that. I was going to stay in college. They just let me finish that year then—

[pause] [moves recorder]

JB:

It's amazing. It's amazing to—you say, "I'm going out that door." You got out that door and it changes your whole life. I've had that happen so many times. Next week I'm coming—leaving Atlantic City and going home. Unh-uh.

DS:

Life changes.

JB:

Yeah. Right.

DS:

We talked about your daughter playing music and giving it up then we talked about your son. Was he playing music around here while he was going to college? Because he went to Tech, right?

JB:

When he was in college?

DS:

Yeah.

JB:

He traveled all over Texas. [Laughs] Every week he went somewhere, he and his group. He got with a group. See, his ear is like that kind of stuff, kind of stuff [pounds table]. See, he played alto, tenor, and piano also. He played more piano than I did. He was in college and he was with some fellows. They were going [imitates instrument sound], like that. Every weekend they'd go play some place. So, he graduated and he wanted to know, "What am I going to do?" Well, he hit the road and did he, did he all over Texas. All over Texas. See, he plays piano, too.

DS:

Do y'all ever perform together?

JB:

Did I?

DS:

And your son.

JB:

Oh yeah.

DS:

In fact, did you perform last—was it this past October they had that jazz festival?

JB:

Yeah.

DS:

What was that like?

JB:

It was just wonderful. Oh yeah.

DS:

Did you bring the saxophone with you today?

JB:

[Laughs] You mean here? It's at home.

DS:

It's at home?

JB:

Yeah. [Imitates music]

CM:

He practices at least two hours a day.

DS:

You still practice a lot?

JB:

Oh yeah.

CM:

Every day. And every Sunday he has his violin at church.

JB:

Yeah.

DS:

You still play?

JB:

But mostly—I don't get the chance to play with the jazz but sometimes I'll play with the lady that plays church. See, I play church songs, too. I play with her sometimes.

CM:

You still play with the Dunbar band.

JB:

Oh yes.

CM:

On Wednesdays they've been asking him to go help and he likes it. It's crazy because they're junior high.

DS:

Crystal, can I get you to introduce yourself? That way the—

CM:

Yes. I'm Crystal Martinez and I am Mr. Braxton's caregiver.

DS:

Just for the record, can you state your date of birth.

CM:

April 26, 1983.

DS:

Because we have to do that. If we're recording your voice, we have to make sure that we have it all taken care of. See that line next to his? You can sign those, that way it's legal. Sometimes we need to interject so I'm glad you're doing that.

JB:

She's wonderful.

DS:

So, what have you been doing lately, just playing music, just hanging around the house studying music or practicing?

JB:

Well, see, I'm waiting for—the stand we're in now at the school is just kind of—and it's like that. We're just kind of standing still.

DS:

You played jazz, so has jazz changed much since you first starting playing it?

JB:

Oh I've enjoyed it. A whole lot of change.

DS:

Crystal said you still teach students now at junior high?

CM:

They don't listen to him. He helps the director. [Laughs] They say, "Do what Mr. Braxton does."

JB:

You can't tell them. They know it all. No, I teach—I don't teach now but I enjoyed it.

DS:

You advised.

CM:

Yes, he does. They still use his music. He wrote a lot of music the band uses.

DS:

Do you still have a lot of your original scores and so forth?

CM:

It's a Dunbar. They use it there.

JB:

Yeah. We used to have—we had—one time we had was when he and I were there, we'd have a

game coming up and he said, "We need some more music." Well, see, when these bands use music, a lot of times they buy it—that you buy at a music store and they're like [imitates music], that kind. Well, that's not what you want. You want those others, see. So, my brother-in-law told me to write some of those other jazz. So, I fixed up one and the band would practice it. When the game would take place, the game would start, the other band over there would be [imitates music] and we'd playing marches [imitates music], that kind of thing. Then halftime—we did halftime programs—then after that, then we did some of that other kind of stuff. [Laughs] We put it on the other band, too. And some of it would be stuff that I had written. My brother-in-law said, "Give them some," so then we'd give them some of that. We liked that group. Students love to do that, too, to play jazz. Well, see, it's hard to find that kind of stuff in a store so you write your own.

DS:

I remember back when I was in high school, our band director would do that. Because, I mean, back when I was there at—like, Santana was popular so he would write his own scores to the Santana music so we could use that in marching band.

JB:

It'd be funny. If you had a game, the other band would be over there playing [imitates music] and we'd—the first of the game, we'd play marches then the halftime program, then he'd [imitates music], that other.

DS:

I think even all the local schools back then here in Lubbock, they would point to Dunbar as that's who they wanted to play like. Because y'all had a lot of success in UIL [**University Interscholastic League**], didn't y'all?

JB:

Very much. We enjoyed all that. See, what we had—we had a jazz group that played, like on Saturdays and around like that. Then when we get in the football game, we play some of that, too. We had some fellows that went on up. Some of them went into the Army and went into the world, traveled around the world.

DS:

So, what's it mean to you to have that music not only with your kids but also with musicians like that, that leave that musical legacy—

JB:

I'm sorry.

DS:

What's it feel like to you to leave that musical legacy behind, of all those students that you've had?

JB:

I Just like it.

DS:

You started off and you mentioned your dad early on. Was your dad a musician also?

JB:

No. He sang in the choir.

DS:

He sang. I was just trying to think what got you interested in playing.

JB:

I don't know. In my first grade, I started with the violin. [Imitates instrument sound]

CM:

That's what did it.

JB:

That stuff. That's where it started.

DS:

That's where it started. I don't think you can do that nowadays, right? You had to do it in private lessons because in the school system, they don't start till the fifth grade, right, when they start band and all?

CM:

Not in first grade.

DS:

They start like fifth grade, don't they, the official programs?

JB:

Yeah. I helped taught some. I taught students doing that. On Saturday, have students come out and teach them. And our church at one time—we don't do it now—but in our church, we had a choir—an organist, and in the group, we'd practice on Saturday the songs that we were going to



play [inaudible]. And my daughter, when she went in, she was in—we did those things. At our church now it's tough. At our church now, I'm there by myself. [Laughs]

DS:

You mentioned your daughter. Was her name Ruby?

RB:

Ruby.

DS:

And she's coming in this—she's coming in for the holidays?

JB:

Yeah Ruby. Ruby, she was all—the top of the world on the piano then went back down. Now she—she can still play.

DS:

Did you ever ask her why she did that?

RB:

I don't know. She went to college and got a degree then all of a sudden she just went back to college and got another degree in business. So, she's in business. Yeah. Then the company that—when she finished, of course, the business sent her to California and put her to work and she's been there ever since.

DS:

Back when we had talked, like, eleven years ago when I first interviewed, you mentioned something about—and it kind of ties into your daughter—you were talking about how you teach people music but some of them are going to be professional musicians, others are just going to be professionals that can play music. Your daughter fell into the latter category, I guess. She went onto the professional life but she still has music with her.

JB:

I really don't know. We were in the junior—in the grade school. We had a nice little orchestra there—here, in this city. She was in that class and this fellow started her off. She said—he said, “She can play,” and from then on up she went from there but then she went on through college, just up, all the way up. She even—I can remember one program—the teacher here gave a program and took all of his students, all of his students that he taught, have her there, and she sat down and played for all of them. She was that good. But I don't know.



DS:

You know, Mr. Braxton, I think we've kept you, what, about an hour and a half you'd say?

[James laughs]

CM:

Yeah.

DS:

Do you have closing thoughts for us?

JB:

I've enjoyed it. I'm glad to see this and I know that this is something that you can really do.

There's so many things that we can do for these students now. I don't know whether they realize the things that can—I think of things that were just handed to me, passed to me. But when I think of the things where I just walked in the door and did it, that's just too much.

DS:

Well, I think I want to thank you for coming by and we can take another tour of the building.

[Laughter]

JB:

Yeah.

DS:

Thank you, Mr. Braxton.

JB:

Certainly.

DS:

Thank you.

*End of Recording*