

Date: November 28, 2021
Interviewee: Angela Ahbez-Anderson
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Location: Zoom Meeting

Juliani: Okay. So we're recording. Hello. My name is Angelica Juliani, and I am here interviewing Angela Ahbez-Anderson for the Paradoxical Paradise project on Asbury Park. Today's date is November 28th, 2021. So Angela, could you tell us where you're from originally?

Ahbez-Anderson: Hi, I'm originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Juliani: Okay. So what was it like growing up there?

Ahbez-Anderson: It's a small town, but it was fun. The zoo was several blocks away, the high school... Like I said, it's just a small air area, and very friendly, and great colleges there and a great medical center. So it was nice, but it was too small for me at the time. I had bigger plans, so I relocated to New Jersey in my early 20s.

Juliani: Okay. So did you go to college in Pittsburgh or New Jersey?

Ahbez-Anderson: Pittsburgh.

Juliani: And how was that for you?

Ahbez-Anderson: I attended the community college initially, and then Duquesne University. And it was great. Duquesne is a Catholic university, so it was something that I was familiar with, but there were kids that were there that were more affluent than I, so it was a little difficult for me. Because I was traveling by public transportation while my peers, they had new cars and things. So when you're young, you want same things. So I pursued a career in broadcasting, so that I could have those things.

Juliani: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your career?

Ahbez-Anderson: I started at WPXI TV, and I was working within the traffic department, and that was a department that maintained the station log. So all the commercials, public service announcements, everything that you see on television was on printed paper, and that would be given to the engineer, and they would follow the station log. But on the weekends and vacation days, I volunteered in the newsroom, and I worked with the reporters,

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learned how to edit. It was film at the time, and I learned how to be a broadcaster, how to produce. So I basically had on-the-job training there.

Juliani: Oh, that's awesome. Do you still work in broadcasting?

Ahbez-Anderson: Right now... I... not as a broadcaster. I do voiceovers for radio and television commercials.

Juliani: Oh, okay. Do you still do that? Is that for a local station or?

Ahbez-Anderson: No. I have an agent in New York, and then they'll send me out on audition, or a client will request me, someone that I've worked with before, and I'll do a voiceover for them.

Juliani: Oh, okay. That's interesting. So can you talk about a little of what made you decide to move to Asbury, and how you ended up here?

Ahbez-Anderson: My husband and I relocated here to New Jersey. We were living in apartments, and once we decided to start a family, we were looking for a home, and we always thought that Asbury had beautiful homes and treelined streets. Asbury was not what it is today. It was a blighted area, but I fell in love with one particular home, which we are living in now. And the house was very affordable, so we purchased it, and we have been living here for the past 25, 26 years.

Juliani: Okay. What part of Asbury do you live in?

Ahbez-Anderson: I live close to the beach, so-

Juliani: Okay.

Ahbez-Anderson: ... I'm on the ... east side of town.

Juliani: Okay. And what was it like when you moved here compared to now? Would you say it's been a big change?

Ahbez-Anderson: A huge change. Yes. We have a downtown section, which is Cookman. And at that time, there were only maybe two or three stores that existed. There was Gwen's Wig Shop, there was JB or J.J Newberrys, and I think Mr. Fashion. Those were the three stores that were on Cookman. Everything else was aborted, abandoned. The beach area now... The beach is flooded with summer sun bathers. But at the time, you had maybe two or three, maybe five people on the beach. It just wasn't a place that you wanted to be. Most people would travel to Belmar or Ocean Grove Bradley. They didn't utilize our beach that much. So there's been a huge difference from when we first moved here to what it is now.

- Juliani: Okay. And do you think there was a specific reason why people didn't want to be at the beach?
- Ahbez-Anderson: Well, yeah. It wasn't inviting. The Boardwalk wasn't... you had to be careful. You couldn't ride your bike there. The Boardwalk needed... it was in desperate need of repair. There wasn't anything on the beach. If you wanted to get something cold to drink, I think the only thing that was there was... I think madam somebody that reads your fortunes. I think she was the only person that was there on the Boardwalk when I was there. So there wasn't any reason to be there. It wasn't well maintained at all, so...
- Juliani: Okay. Did you ever go to the beach with your family, or did you also travel to a different beach?
- Ahbez-Anderson: I traveled to a different beach.
- Juliani: Okay. So have you noticed gentrification in the area that you're living in, in Asbury?
- Ahbez-Anderson: Oh, absolutely. What we have now is that... I've been serving on the board of education for the last nine years, maybe 10, and I have seen our student enrollment decline, steadily, and that's because many of those families that were attending our five schools, they can no longer afford to live here in Asbury Park. So there was a lot of Section Eight affordable housing, there was Boston Way, and that was the project area. And they imploded those buildings, and we lost about 150 families. Now, that's an approximate, but we lost at least 100 families there. Families are continuing to be pushed out, because they can't afford the rent. So we had a high student population nine years ago, and now we're about 1,500 students for four schools. And we had to close one.
- Juliani: Okay. Has it affected you and your family at all?
- Ahbez-Anderson: No, not at all. No. It has not affected us, as far as gentrification, but... Well, I shouldn't say no. It has, because our taxes have increased steadily. So I've experienced, I believe, two or three tax increases within one year. So-
- Juliani: Okay. Yeah.
- Ahbez-Anderson: The property value has increased, but so have the taxes.
- Juliani: And how do you feel about all of that happening? Do you have an opinion on it or...?

Ahbez-Anderson: Well, I'm like everyone else. I don't want to pay any higher taxes. That affects my purse strings. I know that now that we have this S2 Bill in place, and the S2 Bill is regarding cities paying their fair share, Asbury Park once was an Abbott school district, and so now that money has been... We're no longer an Abbott district, and so now the money that we were receiving is not coming from the state, and they're expecting the city to pay their fair share in taxes. So where the city may have been paying only \$7 million in taxes, according to the S2 Bill, the city should be paying at least 21 million in school taxes. So the only place they're going to get that is from the homeowners. So it doesn't make the homeowners real happy.

Juliani: Yeah. That's a lot. Can you talk a little bit about your position on the board of ed?

Ahbez-Anderson: I've served as the board president for the past five years. This is my last year of my three-year term. I'm a regular board member this year. My goal at the time... The board was divided, and it was dysfunctional. I believe that if you do not have someone that is student-centered, that there's going to be a lot of chaos, and that's what... When I came onto the board, we had... it was just dysfunctional from the top, all the way down. And when there's dysfunction, that filters out to teachers and students. My goal was to unify the board, and that is what I achieved.

We have what they call quality assurance, or QSAC, and we are scored by our governance and our governance score, which means our members attending board meetings, are they attending committees? Are there any [inaudible 00:11:04] charges? And all of that was running amok. And so my goal was to bring both sides together, and to focus on doing what was in the best interest for children, and I accomplished that. And our QSAC went for from 47, to now 95, possibly 100%, and we only needed a score of 80. And so we, as a board, as a functional board, achieved that goal.

Juliani: Okay. That's great. Did your kids go into the school system in Asbury?

Ahbez-Anderson: I had five children. My husband and I are adoptive parents. We have two biological children, and then three that we had adopted. So initially, they did. Three of them did attend the school district. But at that time, and that's why I ran for the board, it was non-productive. So I removed my children from the district, and I placed them in the charter schools.

Juliani: Okay. Are there charter schools in Asbury, or are they in another neighborhood?

Ahbez-Anderson: No, they're in Asbury. The only charter school at that time in Asbury was Hope Academy Charter School. And then my daughter, when she was in

high school, she opted to attend the charter school that is located in Belmar.

Juliani: Okay. Did you like sending her to Belmar? Do you think that she enjoyed it?

Ahbez-Anderson: She enjoyed it, but I didn't feel that they did any better than Asbury could have. Well, they were just maybe one step above Asbury. They had issues, as well.

Juliani: I think when we were on the phone, you mentioned your kids working with the police in the community?

Ahbez-Anderson: Well, they attended PAL, which was the Police Athletic League, and they-

Juliani: Oh, okay.

Ahbez-Anderson: ... attended that summer program that Officer Tyron McAllister had initiated. And they were a part of that, and became volunteers once they aged out. And then one of... for the summer.

Juliani: Okay. So what was that program about? What was it like?

Ahbez-Anderson: Teaching them responsibility, discipline, being accountable, but also having summer activities for them, so that-

Juliani: Okay.

Ahbez-Anderson: ... they just weren't running around the community with nothing to do. And they would have speakers come in and teach them, the young men, how to put a tie on, or girls talking about things that would be pertinent to young girls. But it was a lovely... And it still exists, it's a wonderful program.

Juliani: Okay. Do you think a lot of children in the neighborhood participated in that?

Ahbez-Anderson: Yes. Yeah. At least they had maybe 20 to 30 kids every summer. My kids have aged out, they're young adults now, so I don't know what the numbers are now. But I do know that they're still part of the city's recreation, and they have children that still attend.

Juliani: Okay. So back to the taxes and buildings and things, do you think that the luxury homes on the Boardwalk have had any effects on the neighborhood, and do you have an opinion on them? [crosstalk 00:15:01].

Ahbez-Anderson: Well, it increases my property value. So that's a plus for me. But again, for those who are not homeowners, whether you're a millennial or you're a family of four or five, Asbury is now kind of... it's not affordable for most families. If you're working at McDonald's, or you're a home health aide, you're not going to be able to afford to live here, or visit any of the eateries that are on the Boardwalk, because the cost is prohibitive for many of our residents.

Juliani: What about the music scene that's famous in Asbury? Has that affected you living there, or how do you feel about that?

Ahbez-Anderson: Some bands, I like. They're not within my generation, so... I forgot who was there. Oh, I can't think of his name right now. He's from Jamaica, and his father... Marley. He was here, Bob Marley's son was here this summer. So I could sit out... I'm not that far from the Stone Pony, so I could right out on my front porch and listen. So yeah, there's some things that I enjoy. The only problem for me is the traffic, the parking, and the speeding up and down First Avenue, which has to be addressed. But other than that, I don't have a problem with the music. And then you-

Juliani: Okay.

Ahbez-Anderson: ... have music Mondays, so that's over Springwood Park. And so you're welcome to go there and enjoy free, lively, entertaining music there.

Juliani: Besides the school, the board of ed, have you volunteered in any other ways in the community in Asbury?

Ahbez-Anderson: Yeah. I created a program for kids, it was called Eloquent Charismatic Orators, it's a mouthful. But it was a public speaking program, and it trained our girls how to present. And at the end of the program, I offered a pageant, an oratory pageant, and the girls were judged on their oratorical skills, not on their beauty. I had another program that was called Rebuilding Me, and this was a program that I offered to women who were living in the public housing sector here in Asbury Park, and this was helping them to work towards self-sufficiency.

Through my church, I led health screenings and smoking cessation programs. So I did a lot through my church. And then one other one was a courtesy camp, and that was real popular. And that program, I offered, at the visiting nurse association here at Asbury Park... had about 25 of kids that summer, and then offered it to Hope Academy Charter School as an afterschool program, and it was free to the children.

Juliani: That's a lot. That's so great.

Ahbez-Anderson: Thank you.

Juliani: Can you give us some more details on all of them, if you don't mind? You could start with the first program that you created, the Eloquent Charismatic Orators.

Ahbez-Anderson: Well, that one there, the kids were calling my home to speak to my kids, and they didn't know how to... They would call, I would say, "Hello." "Yeah, let me speak to so-and-so." And I said, "Okay." I said, "This is Mrs. Anderson, and you are?" And I just wanted them to know how to present themselves, so that they would be able to communicate, because communication is key. And I wanted them to learn to be active listeners. And so I created this program, and I offered it through St. Steven's Church. And I worked with the first lady, Alice Johnson, and we offered this program for several years.

As I said, and then the program culminated into an oratorical pageant, where the girls competed with poems, or even if they wrote their own poetry, they spoke about whatever it was that was important to them. And it was their presentation, it was their eye contact and their tone, and basically how they introduce themselves. And then they would win a crown, and there was a small, maybe \$100 gift card that they would receive.

So I really enjoyed that, and they did, as well. But in creating that program, it also helped them to become aware of themselves. And it's not all about the physical part of you, that you have gifts within inside, and you need to discover that and develop them. And they enjoyed it, and I enjoyed working with them. So, that was nice.

Juliani: What age groups of girls was that for?

Ahbez-Anderson: This was for girls between the ages of eight to 18.

Juliani: Okay. That's awesome. What about the second one, Rebuilding Me?

Ahbez-Anderson: Now, Rebuilding Me was for women that were living in public housing, helping them to work towards self-sufficiency. Oftentimes, we come depressed, and we lock ourselves into our own misery, and I wanted them to see that they had to stop playing the victim and actually look at the things that they were doing to themselves. Maybe you're in a relationship that's... Well, I won't go into relationships. Perhaps you're unemployed. Well, why? What can we do? What can you do to get yourself out of this situation?

So whenever they would say, well, I got bad... a bad deal of cards were dealt to me, and I have all of these problems, then let's work through them. And let's look and see what we can do. Let's stop doing... maybe let's stop drinking, and let me get you to a counselor. Or, you're spending your money, you're not budgeting. So let's get someone in place to help you with that. Let's look at the emotional issues. Because oftentimes, we're guided by our emotions. What are you angry about? What are you hurt about? And begin to discover yourself. But at the same time, not focus on your weaknesses or limitations, but to look at what you can do, and what did you accomplish? And let's build upon that.

As a result, there were some that I was able to help, some who had lost their children because of drug abuse or [inaudible 00:22:31] had gotten involved, and they began working through their issues and working with other people that were coaching them, and they have been reunified with their children. And I will see them today, and they have their kids or their grandparents, they're working, and they're productive citizens. And it's just basically just signing a light on them, helping them to see that, Hey, I can do this. I'm powerful. Regardless of what money I have or where I'm living, I can change. I have the power within me to affect change in my life and others.

Juliani: Where did you get... Did you get grants for those, or was it like a charity-based program?

Ahbez-Anderson: My husband was the funder-

Juliani: Oh, okay.

Ahbez-Anderson: ... for most of those programs, with the exception of Rebuilding Me. Initially, I had graduated from the Asbury Park Consortium's, New Leaders project, and that was back in 2000, and that was offered by Kerry Butch... I can't think of her last name right now. But she had a program, and it was a grassroots organization. And I received \$3,000... excuse me, from that as a seed grant, and that's how I was able to launch the Rebuilding Me program, and I just continued on. But my husband, basically, was the funding source for all of the programs. I even have a program now, it's called Mentoring with Angela, and another mentoring program called I Believe in Me. And I've implemented that in 2016, '17, '18 through the school district. And again, it was a free program.

Juliani: Okay. Excuse me. Can you tell us a little bit about the New Leaders Project that you said you graduated from?

Ahbez-Anderson: I believe it was a 16-week training program back in 2000, and we received training on how to start a business, how to start a grassroots organization,

how to write a grant, so that you can receive grant money. That's basically what I can recall. I loved it, and so I just took off with it.

Juliani: Okay. So let's go back to the rest of your programs. What about the health screenings through the church? How did you get involved with that?

Ahbez-Anderson: Through my pastor. My pastor linked us with the Visiting Nurse Association, American Red Cross. So we did health screens, cholesterol, high blood pressure, we did AIDS testing, we certified people for CPR, we talked about healthy eating, healthy cooking, exercise. And we used to have the church revivals, and we would have the revivals during the summer, and they would be on Springwood Avenue. And we would have a big tent, and we would invite everyone, come one, come all. And then we would give clothes, and the health screenings. We were really active in the community.

Juliani: That's really great. And I know you had... you mentioned four at the same time, and I know the last one turned into an afterschool program, but I didn't catch the name of that one. I'm sorry.

Ahbez-Anderson: That was the... was it the summer camp? We had the Eloquent Charismatic Orator, the P.r.i.n.c.e.s.s Program. I didn't mention that one, but it was basically... it was the P.r.i.n.c.e.s.s Program. All the programs were basically the same, it's just that I tailored them to meet these different age groups, even for women. So what I had put in place for Rebuilding Me, for the women living in public housing, I tweaked it to, and just changed the name for the girls, for public speaking, because I would just focus on thing with them, but still helping them to get to know themselves.

For the afterschool program for the little girls, the P.r.i.n.c.e.s.s Program, P.r.i.n.c.e.s.s was an acronym, and each letter represented one of the pillars that was important to that program. And then I have the Mentoring with Angela I Believe in Me program, and... I think that's about it.

Juliani: Okay. And you're running a mentoring program right now, right?

Ahbez-Anderson: I will be. Two of my mentees are in college, so I am still mentoring them. They'll call me. They're being big girls right now. I have one that's at Monmouth University, and I have another one that's at Rutgers. So when they have a problem, they'll call. But the mentoring program that I will be initiating will be online, and it will be free, and it'll be on YouTube. So I'll be doing basically the same thing that I have been doing in person, but this time it will be online.

Juliani: Okay. So how are you thinking of going about it on YouTube? Are you going to make videos about certain topics?

Ahbez-Anderson: Yes. And the first topic is going to be about fear and building up your confidence. Because I can-

Juliani: Okay.

Ahbez-Anderson: ... say to you, you know what, you are absolutely gorgeous, and what I would like for you to do is A, B, C, D. And you'll say, okay. And I can motivate you and inspire you. But then, once you leave me, then the fear, the negative thinking and the negative self talk is what you're going to hear. Oh, I can't do this. What will they think of me? Oh, they're going to laugh at me. And those fears are the things that are going to keep you from moving forward. The program that it I'll be offering, it'll be about you facing your fear monsters and punching your fear right in the nose, and being afraid, but doing what you need to do, regardless of the fear.

Juliani: So I would like to know where did you first think to yourself, I really want to make all of these programs to help women with these big life challenges that they have?

Ahbez-Anderson: Where did I?

Juliani: Yeah. Where did it come from?

Ahbez-Anderson: I guess from my own needs. I'm the eldest, it's just my sister. But I don't feel that there was anyone to really cut the weeds down for me. I had to cut them down for myself and make a path. And I thought, well, if someone would have done that for me, where would I be? I feel that I have accomplished a lot, but I believe that I could have accomplished a lot more. And dealing with my own fears, and feeling as though I wasn't good enough, believing in other people's opinions of me.

I attended a Catholic school, basically, all my life, and I was one of a few African American students. And the nuns, with the exception of one or two, made me feel as though I wasn't welcome. That affected me. So I want people to realize, I want women to realize that you have the power within yourself, but you have to know yourself. Instead of you trying to know what your boyfriend likes, and what this one likes, find out what you like. Go beyond the nail color and the hair, find out who you are, how talented you are, how blessed you are, how special you are, and realize that you have the power to affect change, and that more importantly, you have the authority to do it. So that's why I've created these programs for...

I've mentored little girls from the time they were five. And to see them now... And some of them have graduated from high school. To see them, and know that I had something to do with that, and I can see that, yeah, they have that confidence in themselves by the way they present

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themselves, or the questions that they will ask, or they'll say, "No, I'm not accepting that," I'm proud of them.

Juliani: That's really great. Would you say that you helped your sister, or mentored her? Was she like your first-

Ahbez-Anderson: [crosstalk 00:32:14]. Yes, definitely. I taught her how to read, tie her shoe, how to speak up. Because she stammered, and I said, "Oh, no." I said, "Do not allow that to prevent you from speaking. Say what you have to say." And so she and I would argue, and she would stammer a little bit, and I had patience, I would listen. And she ended up teaching. She's a nurse, and she's doing exceptionally well. But she realized her own power within herself early on.

Juliani: That's great. So I just wanted to touch on the Catholic school a little bit. What was that like, going to a Catholic school? Would you say you were raised as a devout Catholic or...?

Ahbez-Anderson: No. My mother did not want my sister and I to attend the public school. And so there were two Catholic elementary schools. One was some distance away, and that was for girls of Color. And the other one was for the Italians, and that school was maybe four blocks away. So I was in a walking school district, and my mother made application, and the priest Father [possibly Cheradini 00:33:46] said... And I mentioned his name only because he has passed on. But Father Cheradini said that I would benefit more by going to the other school. And my mother said no, she said that was too far. And he said, "It would be better for her to go, because there are kids that look like her." And my mother refused. And I don't know all she did, but I ended up going to first grade. And how I learned of that, because she had shared that with me once I was old enough to understand.

Going to that school, I was not welcome. There were birthday parties, I was never invited. Sleepovers, never invited. I was ridiculed, because it was just my mother and sister and I. So my mother was called names. I was this illegitimate Black child that nobody wanted to bother with. I still had friends there, but like I said, if there was a birthday party, I never... throughout the entire eight years. More Black kids began to attend, and so we forged and became... we befriended each other. That was frowned upon, because then they said that we were antisocial, and we were not including the other kids. But we still stuck together, because we felt more comfortable, and we were welcomed towards each other.

The nuns, not all, but mother superior.... If someone hit me, I was taught to hit back, but I was blamed as the one that instigated. So I was punished more so than the one who had hit me. So that was my experience there.

And through high school, I went through a public high school. I didn't have that problem so much. It was a diverse high school, so we didn't have that problem. But when I attended Duquesne University, I was smacked dead in the face with the prejudice then. So it's kind of... It hurt, but you put your big girl panties on, and you keep moving.

Juliani: Do you feel that you would've benefited more from going to a... maybe a non-religious college, or are you happy that you went there?

Ahbez-Anderson: I should have gone to Carnegie Mellon. That was my second choice. Actually, it was my first choice, I wasn't accepted by Carnegie Mellon. So I was accepted by Duquesne and... but I should have just transferred over to Carnegie Mellon. I think I would've been happier there. A better school anyway.

Juliani: And in hindsight, do you feel like your mother should have sent you to the other school, or do you feel like that experience maybe let you see what it was like to have to deal with those problems?

Ahbez-Anderson: Yeah. I learned early on what I was going to face, and it toughened me up. So no, my mother made the right decision, so I appreciate that. I don't know what the other school was like. So I just have to go on the fact that I learned a lot and I toughened up when I attended the other school. That's not to say I didn't have any friends. I have a friend right now, she was my best friend, and her name is Laura. She's Italian, and she's in Philadelphia, and we were best friends in high school. She wanted to invite me to her birthday party, or a sleepover of her, but her parents didn't. And I understand that, but it had nothing to do with how she treated me. And today, she'll see me on Facebook, and she's liking, and she... When I was in Philadelphia, she said, "Hey, let's get together." I just wasn't able to see her. So I had friends there, it was just that their parents had issues with it. So yeah, I don't regret going.

Juliani: Okay. Would you say that going there... since it was a Catholic school, did it have an effect on your own religion?

Ahbez-Anderson: Well, at the time, we were Catholics, you had to be Catholic to attend there. I went through confirmation. So yeah, I enjoyed that. And at one time, I wanted to become a nun, and my sister, as well. And I learned about God, and the sacrifices that his son made for us. So yeah, I have no regrets there.

Juliani: Okay. That's good to hear. Do you think that your children have dealt with any similar problems when they went to school, or do you now deal with racial issues living in Asbury at all?

Ahbez-Anderson: Well, two of my daughters are Caucasian, so they had the reverse, I guess, discrimination, because they were blonde and blue-eyed, and one is blonde with beautiful emerald green eyes, and them living here, in Asbury Park, with a Black mother and father and siblings, and attending Asbury School District. So I tried to help them to fit in. Sometimes I would corn-roll their hair if they wanted it. And they had their issues. They ended up marrying Black men, and they have children. My son attended a Catholic school, and he didn't really have any problems at the Catholic school. But he had attended another school, a private school, and there was definitely racism there, and he was treated unfairly. It was an issue where a young man had spat in his and... deliberately. He had chewed up a bunch of green beans, and then spat right in my son's face. And my son slapped him and left his hand print on his face.

So the parents, of course, we were brought in, and they wanted to give my son detention and schools as suspension, and nothing for the young man. And I said, "Well, okay." There was an altercation. I said, "Who initiated?" The teacher said, "Who did what?" Clearly, the one that spat in my son's face was wrong, but they felt that he had been punished enough because of a hand print that was left on his face. So they said they were going to... my son was going to remain in the vice principal's office for the remainder of the day. And I said, "That's not happening." And I said, "If they're both not being disciplined," I said, "well, mine will not."

So I said, "I will take my son home. You will see him tomorrow." And I took my son home and treated him to lunch and... But that young man kept his... he didn't spit on my son again. And they didn't think nothing was wrong with that. But I did. Obviously, my son did, as well. So those were the kind of things... I forgot the second part of your question.

Juliani: I'm sorry, that was a little long of a question.

Ahbez-Anderson: Oh.

Juliani: My second question was, have you recently had any racial problems, just in general, living in the Asbury Park area?

Ahbez-Anderson: No. I don't have any issues here.

Juliani: Good. That's good to hear. So I would like to touch on maybe some general questions about the Asbury community. I know that it does have a very large LGBTQ community. Do you have any opinions on that, how they're maybe represented in the neighborhood, or anything like that?

Ahbez-Anderson: No. No. To me, everyone should be welcome, and I welcome them, and hope that they welcome me, and... So no, I don't have any issue with them.

Juliani: Okay. And what about the... maybe the minority groups in the area? Do you feel like they are also well represented, the way that the... maybe the gay community is?

Ahbez-Anderson: No. I don't feel so. I feel that there's a lot of... And I hope I'm answering your question, but I'll answer it this way. I feel that there is racism that takes place, but there's an undertone to it. So for an example, years ago... I've been living here for about 25 years, 26 years. And I remember the time when there were just three stores on Cookman Avenue. I also remember some of the little strip malls over a Memorial Drive, down towards Seventh and Eighth, and it was just a little six or seven stores. There was a barber shop, there was a Asian restaurant, and there was a cleaners, and a guy that was selling ethnic clothes and things. The area, the building was not well kept at all by the property owner, but they were receiving rent.

As Asbury began to evolve into this beautiful place that it is now, those individuals, the rent was increased, and they couldn't afford to pay. So now the property owner rehabbed that whole area. There are canopies, the sidewalk, the... all of that was rehabbed. And all of those minority businesses, they moved out, and now you have White business owners there. And they're paying more in rent, but now the issue is, let's fix this up for them. But those minority businesses kept the property owner from going into foreclosure. Because whatever that rent was, they were paying. But they didn't feel they deserved to have that area cosmetically rehabbed.

So that's an issue that I have found here, the issue where you go onto the beach area; if you can't... I think when they had the water park open, most of our residents, they can't afford to pay for their child to play on that water part. I believe it was \$12 or \$20 per child. So the residents have to use the water park that is free over on... it's over at the middle school area, and it's just a tiny corner the city has provided that. But it's nothing huge and beautiful as the water park that's up on the beach. So those are some of the things that I have noticed.

If you go into the downtown section, some of the business owners are welcoming, but they're watching you to see if... expecting you, maybe you might pick something up that you didn't pay for. So you're welcomed with high, but then you're not welcome. And then the prices. Most residents here cannot afford to eat at a lot of the places here. So that's my take on that. I feel that everyone should be welcome.

Juliani: Do you feel like that's an issue that will get better or get worse?

Ahbez-Anderson: I think it's just going to stay the same. Asbury Park is a beautiful, one square mile town, but it's more for those who can afford to live here now.

It really is. So if you are not... Rent for a one bedroom, I was told, is \$2,000 a month. Who could afford that? That's a mortgage.

Juliani: That's a lot.

Ahbez-Anderson: Yeah. That's a mortgage. So the parking, I believe, is \$2 an hour at the beach, or \$3 an hour. Who could afford that? Someone I know is renting a studio, and it was furnished, but she's paying 13, \$1,400 a month for a studio that's a block from the beach. Most people can't afford that. And the apartments, all of the apartment buildings that once were here, that were occupied by many of our families that attended the school district, they have been... the rent has increased, and those are now condos. They rehabbed them into condos, and those families had to move out. I just feel that everyone should be welcome.

Juliani: Okay. I think I have few more questions left. So I did want to ask you, do you plan to... I know you're still working. So do you plan to retire and stay in Asbury Park afterwards?

Ahbez-Anderson: Well, I don't plan to retire for quite some time, because that's when you die. When you don't have anything else to do, you just sit around and rock. And sitting is one of the worst things that you could ever do. So I will not retire. Probably maintain the home that my husband and I live in, our... We have two children that are residing with us. But I'm just going to stay active, and probably stay here for... I'm looking to buy a place in the Poconos, near my sister. So that would be something that I probably would go to, but still stay here.

Juliani: So you plan on keeping your house in Asbury when you go to the Poconos?

Ahbez-Anderson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). My-

Juliani: Okay.

Ahbez-Anderson: ... husband's not ready to sell. Even though we get questions... we get offers every day, we're not ready to sell. But again, I shouldn't say... If the price is right, then yeah, maybe so.

Juliani: Okay. I think we are actually at the ends of the questions for. But if you have anything else that you'd like to say or add, we totally have time, so feel free.

Ahbez-Anderson: No, I think I've said enough. Asbury is a beautiful town. And as I said, everyone should be welcome. I think that the current body of government that we have in place, our mayor and deputy mayor, and our council

members, are doing a wonderful job. I will tell you this, I am planning to run for one of those council seats next year. One of those seats will be up, so I am planning. I've been asked to run, so I probably will do that once I complete my term as a board member. But it'll be you all up to what God has planned for me, as well. So we'll see. But that's it.

Juliani: Okay. Well, good luck on your run for council.

Ahbez-Anderson: Thank you. Thank you.

Juliani: You're welcome.

Ahbez-Anderson: You did-

Juliani: Okay.

Ahbez-Anderson: ... very well as an interviewer, as well. Yeah.

Juliani: Thank you. Thank you so much. I'm just going to stop the recording. Thank you for your time.

Ahbez-Anderson: You're welcome.