

Interview with Patricia Taylor (Momma Pat)

November 25, 2024

Summary: Momma Pat describes growing up in Newport News in the 1950s, early memories of coal and coal dust, and daily life. She describes the tight-knit character of her neighborhood and family, and the effects that had on her perspectives on organizing. Momma Pat talks about problems she sees with how people connect to each other today, and issues a general challenge to prioritize one-on-one connection, listening and care.

[00:00:00]

Momma Pat: What do we, what, how do you, tell me how you want to start? I'm going to sit.

Adrian: Yeah! Um, could you say your name one more time?

Momma Pat: Okay. It's Patricia Taylor.

Adrian: Okay. And you were saying that you, that you haven't lived here your whole life. When did you get here?

Momma Pat: I lived here until I graduated high school in 1963. And of course, back then, nobody was paying any attention to anything, hardly, environmental. I know that. So, um, I left not really wanting to leave home, but the job opportunities were nowhere near what we needed, um, for the community.

There were hundreds of young people from my generation all around, all colors, and there was no way that this community could absorb all of that because there were so many young people who were educated. Um, by the time I got to the 11th grade in high school, um, I was typing, we were offered shorthand, um, young men were doing engineering, brick mason-- they could start their own business. There was not enough in this community to absorb all of us at that level.

Adrian: Do you know how many people were in your graduating class?

Momma Pat: 213.

Adrian: Oh, wow.

Momma Pat: I just looked at it the other day. Because my yearbook is like my other Bible. We were looking for someone, my friends, which we do often, and I said, 'Wait a minute, they didn't talk about our class.' So I opened the yearbook and I was looking for that person and in there is one of our classmates there that, um, ah-- like that she tracked us from there. The time we were in the elementary school until the whole class that entered high school in the eighth grade. So that was in a written, she documented and typed it up. And so I looked at the list, I said 'He didn't even go to Booker T. Y'all, that's the wrong person.' So we do that all the time. That's our Bible, that's our go to.

So a lot of us left for opportunity. But. To tell you how strong and powerful the community was back then. We started a Newport News group in the Maryland area. The first meeting was at my house.

Adrian: What kind of group was it?

Momma Pat: It was. It was a gathering of people from this area, in particular, the school that I went to at that time. It was Huntington High-- excuse me, Huntington High School. That, when I was little, that was the only high School in this community because Newport News stopped at like 39th Street. So once you went on the other side, you went to another school, but on this side of 39th Street, it was the only school for you in Newport News.

Um, so we, we always fellowship together. We always have been close. It's just how we grew up, you know, for a generation. We knew each other's parents. We knew each other's grandparents. Aunts and uncles, you know, the whole family. And so that just doesn't go off, you know, wash out in the river. That's something that stays deep.

So when we would, people would come back and forth-- home, come visiting. And then we realized that we would see a lot of people up there and say, well, let's see how many folks are up here. And we made the mistake of putting it on the local television station. And that was it. Because we were going to be in my backyard, but that didn't work.

So we went to the um, the park. We lived in the area called Fort Washington in Maryland, and there was a park there. And so we ended up going to the park, and that was the beginning of us having a Newport News group. And we carried the legacy. That's that's all we would talk about, our time here. We asked each

other what's going on with you and, you know, your family that has developed over that time.

But we always came back to here. Always came back. So a lot of us missed the coal dust atmosphere and what was going on and how it evolved because of that.

So we kept up with each other because our history is important to us. And here we are. I've been back here for a little while. I wouldn't be anywhere else. Someone asked me about, you wouldn't move to Hampton? I said why? Why would I? Give me a good reason.

Adrian: When did you move out?

Momma Pat: I've been back home 25 years next year.[00:05:00]

Is it 2025? Uh huh. Because I started working part time at Target. Target had just opened. Right onn Jefferson? You all don't even know that. The one on Jefferson, um, was one of the largest Targets around here at that time. And, um, in 2000, it was a big thing. Everybody was all excited about this 2000. And I sat in here 25 years, so I've got a special celebration next year.

Um, yeah, I worked there part time for a while. So that's why I, that's how I count things by that.

I don't regret it. I'm good. I'm real good. I'm not doing it.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: You said that you missed the coal dust area, but you didn't because you grew up through it. And when we talk to, like, people that are from your generation, like, they talk about going out there and playing on the coal and stuff like that.

Momma Pat: But we didn't know.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: You didn't know?

Momma Pat: That's what I'm saying. I don't mean I wasn't exposed to it. But it was not a topic of conversation like it is today.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: I

Momma Pat: think that's the beautiful

Yugonda Sample-Jones: part of what's happening now with the movement now, because although you didn't know, you were still impacted by the coal dust and you have stories that you can resonate about what life was growing up with this fugitive dust. Playing on it, tracking it in your households, moms fussing at you about cleaning it up.

But then being that you moved away to DC, you did all these great things. And most of you have moved back here. Like you still have that enthusiasm and know how and wisdom of how to activate people and get things done. So when we go to city council, it's mostly your generation that's packing the room saying, 'No, this is our experience.' And you're bold enough to make a change.

So that's why it's so important for people like you to share your story because it activates us to be able to, you know, ground us and say, 'No, this is really what's happening.'

Momma Pat: That part is true. I, um, you know, the environment was, wasn't a huge subject for anyone. I don't care who you are. It was not. It was because we, we came out of the time during-- like my parents lived through the Depression.

So the, the country was re, um, invigorating itself. And by the time the forties came, um, we were starting it. There were jobs everywhere. Everybody start working. I mean, you know, people who had their own businesses and because they were so careful about things, they-- you kept things needed clean. So maybe you didn't see the coal dust as much because they were sticklers for cleaning and sweeping and making sure --trick, you just better not put anything down on the street. You were in a lot of trouble. My grandmother would say, 'Did you put that paper down there? No, no, pick that up and take it home and put it in the trash. Tell your grandmother I said so. Throw that paper down in front of my house.' They were very careful in particular, so they were always sweeping and cleaning. So you, some things-- I mean, even the windowsill, just wipe everything down. And I'm like, oh! When I think about it, we did a whole lot of cleaning. Mopping and cleaning and cleaning, taking the curtains down.

You've got to wash them and starch them and get them straight and then put them back up-- because polyester did not exist. Okay. So everything was cotton or had to be done. Something had to be done to it to make it look like.

Work! Constantly dusting, but we didn't know why we were constantly dusting. And that was part of it, because that coal dust was creeping.

Adrian: Do you remember seeing the coal?

Momma Pat: You mean like settling on things? Or just, well, we heated from coal now. You gotta remember that. When, when, when I was a kid, um, Booker T. School on Chestnut, there was a coal plant next to it.

That's the word I want you, well they call it coal yard. That's right. You could go there and buy coal. So in the winter, my grandfather and other men would take their wagons and they go get coal for the block. So they come back because you heated by coal and that's the convenient place. It was right there by the school.

But nobody thought that that was going to trickle into the school because you needed the coal. So the environment was a small thing to think about at that time. So Bible was the first thing. So you know you got to get all the coal together. So they go [00:10:00] with the wagons and they come back with buckets of coal.

So to make sure that they all had coal and somebody, so maybe Mr. Smith across the street was an older man and he couldn't get there. They bring a bucket of coal for Mr. Smith to, or to,

to make sure.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: How long did a bucket last?

Momma Pat: I don't know. Well, the thing is though, that you, you could mix coal and wood. See, coal would be the base to keep it burning, just like, you know, it's the derivative. This is derivative of coal, charcoal. So you put wood on top of that. And the wood would go faster, so you've got chopped wood now, so you're still working.

And you put the coal in to keep the heat going, so you wouldn't have to worry about making sure that your fire didn't go out. Because, you know, the wood would burn up. I can't tell you how long a coal thing would last. I can't tell you that. But you could buy coal there in, um, in volume. But almost all of the stores sold coal in bags like this.

I need to go on there so you all can see them.

How you doing? Alright.

They would be about like that. So you could lift it. And it would be an extra thick, um, paper wrapping with a wire around the end of it. And you could go and buy a bag of coal from the store. It was a regular thing.

Adrian: Do you remember seeing the trains carrying coal coming in?

Momma Pat: Yes, yes, but we, because we lived, we lived near, we lived near the Booker T. School. And my mother went, they all went to that, and so did I. The train would come across, um, Chestnut. The train track is there now. And so the train would come across Chestnut, going into Hampton, and come back.

That would, that was one of the routes. So you would see it, you know, every day. It was like, these things are everyday occurrence. You, you see, 'Oh, here comes the train.'

So you'd hear it, and everybody's standing there, and watch it go by, and wave, and then it'd be gone, and then you'd go about your business.

Nobody thought about the cold because they were too busy trying to survive. That's the first thing. Coming up out of depression, making sure everybody was fed, making sure you had what you needed, that was secondary to the environment. And so many things have fast forwarded in the past 60, 70 years. You might have two cars on my block.

We didn't drive. We walked everywhere. That's it. So we were always out in the air breathing whatever was out there. We spent a lot of time outside. Windows were open. Nobody thought about it like that.

Adrian: Did you notice it when you moved back?

Momma Pat: I did. And didn't really know what it was. Um, it

Adrian: What, what did you notice?

Momma Pat: I, what I noticed was on my window sill, um, where I moved-- the house had been recently painted, right? So I was, um, I had the window up. And I went to the windowsill one day, and I was like, 'Well, what in the world is that?' Because dust is gray. And I said, 'What is that black stuff?' I wiped it up, and I just happened to mention it to a friend of mine who had been living home.

She said, 'Oh, that's coal dust.' I said, 'What?'

Adrian: Was that in this house, or?

Momma Pat: No, it was, I lived on Marshall Avenue. Down that way a little bit. Uh huh. Well, I called her. Because the window was facing this way. And then the, you know, and then I was upstairs. Cause I love to sleep up and look out at the tree. I said, 'It's coal? That's way over here?' She said, 'Yeah, it goes all over the city most hours.'

The blast thing is what she talked about. We never even heard that conversation when I was going up, never.

Adrian: Did she say anything else about it?

Momma Pat: Not really at that time. Later on some conversations came, um, about the effects of coal dust and what it does. But for some reason, that did not seem to be the dominant topic for them to talk about. I think that now the younger people see it and understand, uh, because we grew up with it. Like, you know, I guess it's not now it's not a big, big issue to you, but it is true that, uh, devastated that we have to [00:15:00] live anywhere that we can't breathe well. It makes a difference. It's just not a topic of conversation for us for the most part.

It does come up sometimes in our talking, but-- but we don't seem to stay on it or dwell on it.

I think the thing, too, is that you guys are, we've had our fights. By the time you get to this age, the fight is not, the fight is that you've got to get up every day and make sure that you can walk. You haven't had a stroke during the night and which doctor you're going to from head to toe. So that's not our fight.

That's what I want to share. We've had our fights. You know, I was right in Washington D. C. when Martin Luther King came. I've met two or three presidents. We have had our fights. This is the time for you guys to speak up and talk about what you see and what you know needs to change. You can be there to be supportive, but we've had our fight.

By the time you get to be almost 80 years old, you've done some fights in this time. Um, it's, it's just different. It's just different. Um, you all see some things, and remember this, because, um, you all have all these things that have actually magnified themselves in the past 40 years, but even when my children were growing up.

We had, we had, It was a while before we put a television in the bedroom. We had one television. It was the big TV in the bedroom. Because when you shut that down, everybody went to their room and went to bed. To sleep. It was a while before we put a television in our bedroom. In my adult life. You go to bed.

So we finally was talking about that and my husband and I decided we were gonna put a small television in the bedroom and we did and it was okay. But we had so many more things to focus on just living when I was growing up that the environment, not for anyone, was not a huge issue. We didn't have all these cars with emissions.

See, a lot of things have changed. We didn't I mean, anything that you think of now, you, the package stuff that you put, anything just radiates bad stuff out into the atmosphere. We didn't have it. The clothes we wore were cotton. Polyester didn't come for years. All of that's changed.

One television. I had like the first television on my block.

I had to remember that too. My friend of mine told me, 'So you knew you had the first television on your block.' In 19, it's been a year before my grandfather died. It had to be 1954. I was nine, eight or nine years old. People just didn't go and do a whole lot of stuff because they had to take care of home.

You know, everything was fresh. I didn't see packaged meat for years because the butchers were at our store. They sliced anything, bologna, cheese. It was a long time before I saw something in the package. You had to go out of our neighborhood to find it. So, all of that makes a difference to me in, holistically, how you live and how you think about things.

What do we do with all that stuff now that we package everything? We put it somewhere and it affects the environment.

They had wax paper. You see the old, the butchers still do that now. They had the wax paper, which will go away, and they put everything in the wax paper, just like you go to a butcher now. We had, that was, that was normal for us. We had fresh seafood. You just go to the corner and tell them you want so many fish.

Now I got to try to find out, 'Well let me see, where am I going to get some seafood?' Where you going to eat? I, we just didn't do that. And so all of that I think impacted the environment negatively. That we started packaging things.

What are we gonna do with this stuff when we finish with the wrapper? It makes a difference.

It starts to pile up somewhere. Where is it? It was a long time before I saw styrofoam. I'm like, 'What are you talking about?'

Where does that stuff go when we finish with it? [00:20:00] Everything seems to impact us so much more than we realize. So many little things. And because we're right here where the coal dust is, that just happened to be a big thing.

But I, I just, I just know, I feel that when our conversations, that, that's not our fight. We just, we've done so many fights from the 50s to the 60s. People I know and live with, it's, it's just not our fight. Thank God that you guys are doing it and look at some stuff and we can tell you what we tell you.

But it's, I know that's our conversation. It's just not our fight. Our fight is to struggle to stay alive and to make sure that things are taken care of for us. Cause that's a, that's a whole nother issue. Making sure we have what we've worked for all these years, getting help, good health care, how that has all changed, how you can't seem to go to the doctor and make sense out of what they're telling you.

That's our fight. It's to have good health care and stay healthy.

Adrian: Yeah, just to, you know, speak of that, being from here and knowing a bunch of folks who also grew up here and a lot who seem to come back. Um, do you or do you know some folks who have things like asthma or like breathing stuff-- just struggle breathing?

Momma Pat: Um, a couple of those people have passed away and I don't know what they attributed to. A couple of them have passed away. No one in my little immediate circle right now, um, but I do, we do know a couple of people that um, had breathing problems, respiratory problems, and they passed away.

Um, I, I don't think that we, um, some people may have had some illnesses related. We may not know, you know how it started.

One lady had a problem and she got better. And, um, what they told her was that she had, uh, it was asbestos related. And she said, 'I've never worked in the shipyard,' but they told her what she did was she washed her husband's clothes. And I was like, 'Oh wow.'

(Car speeds past) Okay. Speed bumps. We're going to get you.

And I thought about that from years ago.

I was like, my grandmother used to watch my grandfather. But we suspect he had asbestos too, but of course we didn't know or -- it was something. Mm hmm.

Adrian: Was that, um, did he like work at the shipyard?

Momma Pat: Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. He sure did work at the shipyard. Passed rather young. Cause he died in 1955 and I was 10.

Mm hmm. And, uh, I was like, uh, you know, thinking back, I said, Mm, I bet it has something to do with his breathing. Mm hmm. Heart. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

So, but I think that's mostly kind of how we feel that, um, we, we've had our battles.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: Mm hmm.

Momma Pat: Not that we don't recognize and see it and understand where you guys are coming from.

Totally agree with you. Hope you can keep moving forward with it because it is a reality. It does exist. And someone needs to speak on it and address it. So I'm glad there's some folks doing that.

Adrian: What kind of, um, what kind of battles have you dealt with around here?

Momma Pat: Around here?

Adrian: Mm hmm.

Momma Pat: You mean that just period or atmospheric?

Adrian: Um, like, uh, around, uh, your

Momma Pat: The city?

Adrian: neighborhood or in Newport News.

Momma Pat: I love this place so much I guess I probably minimize any battles. And one of the things is that I have evolved to be, um, a person that can go anywhere. I can go, I stopped the other day and I saw this young person just, just bent over, you know, probably what was going on.

And then there were two younger people around him and I was like, what is going on with that child? And I just stopped and I asked the kids, I said, 'Are you guys alright?' And-- And they turned and said, 'Yes.' But it's obvious that older person was with them and probably had gone, done something they weren't supposed to do, and they were just bent down, and I was like, 'Okay, don't, I don't,'-- I can't mess with that.

But I don't, I don't really [00:25:00] see any issues big enough for me that I can't handle at my level. If I think that there's something that's-- then-- going on, I've got these people, we're involved with a lot of, just stay connected with your community. That's what I tell people. If people say to me, um, there's a lot of folks who make the statement, 'What they gonna do?'

I say, 'Who you talking about?' What 'they'? Who, who is it? They, 'The city.' I say, 'You talking about the people that you elected? Did you go to the polls and vote? So you voted for somebody, you hired them, and now you got a problem with them. Go talk to them.'

Don't just speak out of the air. 'They' who? 'They' what? And this is the other statement that I stopped some folks from saying, well, you know, 'I know they have a plan for us.'

I said, 'Well, you need your own plan.' Where's your plan for you and your family? Their job is to have a plan. That's why they work over there, is the plan. There's a planning department. Where is your plan for your life and your folks? Start with your house. What is your plan for you and your neighbors and your, the people around you in your circle?

Years and years ago, I read, um, um, um, a statement in the parade. There used to be a little magazine, the Macombian newspaper. We called the parade that they'd have questions and answers. And one of the, um, um, professors from Yale University said, 'We throw the word 'smart' around. Too much for me.' He says 'smart'-- for me, and I've adopted that.

It had to be 30 years ago already. He said most people can be educated. You can go to a higher learning of education and get all kinds of degrees. In his opinion, he said it doesn't make you smart. It just means you're well read. You have a good memory. When you can put those things into action and make a good life for yourself and the people around you.

You're then smart. So that's what I think. The worst thing is for me to meet somebody who has at least a master's degree and can't find their way from point A to B. But you're not smart. You're just well read. You have a good memory. Doesn't mean a thing to me. That's why I have notes. I have notebooks. And somebody could write a book on my, I keep a notepad by me constantly every day.

There's one on my table, one on my nightstand, and people think I know stuff. They don't know I write it down. But 'wait a minute, I bet you Pat knows.' Somebody's been living here for years. Her, she and her sister were talking about this place. And she, so, sister, she said, 'I don't know.' She said, 'Wait a minute, let me call Pat.'

Now they've been here all their life. I lived here. You know how I know it? Because I wrote it down.

I saw you there. You were talking about the entertainment center over on Mercury Boulevard. Write it down. That's why they cut down all these trees. Because you don't have enough trees. I keep notes. I am a serious note taker.

And what I try to keep my spirit so that, uh, people, my family at first can come to me and we can talk about things that you might not talk about with other people. You can share it with me. Those are my battles. I, I'm leaving this stuff to you guys because I know you can do a good job with it. But my thing now at this age is my family, keeping myself healthy and making sure they're okay.

I have a, I have a particular position in my family because all of my, um, mothers, uh, sisters are past. They've all gone. And so I've lived through my grandmother and my mom and my aunt and all of her sisters. And I have two of the sisters names.

And neither of them had girls. So when I realized where God has placed me, I have to carry that on. And they think that's, they now think that's the position. They put me in that position. I am a mother and a grandmother. I am a stepmother. The oldest grandson called me last night. His grandmother passed, his natural grandmother passed in New York.

And somebody said something, and so he needed to talk about it. And I said, so I had put my phone down. So I went back to my phone and looked at it, and I said, 'Lamont called me.'

So I thought he was just telling me something about her service or something. So I called him, I said, 'Hey, Donnie,' I said, 'Hey.' Fifty years old. I said, 'You called me?' He said, 'Yes, ma'am, I did.' I [00:30:00] said, "What's happenin'?" So someone said something to him-- because he has a mild manner about him. He said, 'I just needed to talk. I just need to hear your voice.' That's my job. Those are my battles. Now, you know, when I was younger, like you guys, you don't have those generations past. So now my focus is on me and what I can do for my family.

That's the role that I see now. If you come and tell me that it's coal dust-- because I trust her. I know I'm in because I trust her. I know that she's gonna come to me with something legitimate. And I said, 'Oh, yeah, that's true.' Yugonda an' 'em are working on it. They, they feel it like I do about their community. But that's not my fight anymore.

This, this is where I am. I gotta stay around these people, talk to them, be available for them and her too. You know, we do these late night calls. You have to have some people in your life that you can lean on and just go, just vent and just say, 'Oh gosh. '

And then the next thing after I hear you say all of that, and I say, 'So what's wrong? Get yourself together. What are we talking about?'

Yugonda Sample-Jones: She's a mate-- she's a, our community matriarch. Like everything she says, she says it's her fight, like that is her fight, but that's who she is as well. But it's like, because of her personality, it's only fitting that you start and meet Mama Pat first, because all the, the things that we come to her about aren't necessarily her fight.

She's still a connecting piece because she works and heals the person. Yeah. Versus looking at, 'Oh, okay, it's all this work.' She'll, she's that person that's like, okay, God put you here for a purpose. You're going through this experience for a reason and get yourself together and start connecting the dots.

Like it's plenty of times that I'll call and cry and be like, 'I don't understand. I don't know what's going on.' She said, 'Yes, you do! Get it together.' You know, and we need that person that holds us accountable, but also supports us. And

anything that we bring to her, whether it's environmental justice, taxes, historical preservation, like anything, because she's just so well rounded.

And she has such a loving spirit. You know, even the mayor, you know-- it started right here on this, on here, but I'm getting jealous because I call her, I started calling her Mama Pat like 10 years ago and now everybody calls her Mama Pat. I'm like, 'No, you're mine.' I don't like this, but I've learned to share her with the community because I know that she's just a light that everyone needs to be connected with because she empowers you to do the work that God has put you out here to do.

So we love Mama Pat.

Momma Pat: I love you guys too. I wouldn't be anywhere else. Newport News is my, this is my place. I told my kids, I said, 'Okay, when I'm changing everything, I'm going to take,' um, um,-- and we're working on that now, um, I'm not going to, I'm going to sell my lot at the cemetery and be cremated. I want to go down, I'm going down Pickett's Beach, I said, just put me right down in that sand.

And I'll be good. I can look at that water.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: Aww.

Momma Pat: Don't put me locked up in something and, you know, you gotta try to figure out when you can come and see me. Put me right down here. These my people.

That's right. I love them. I love it.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: But that speaks to your engagement like on the CAC, right? On the Citizens Advisory Committee with the neighborhood team and how you're bringing in new investors and new businesses in the community and it's like you're marketing downtown and you're someone who really knows how to balance the conversation around the environmental justice issues.

You've been an advocate and a champion for the seafood market for years. The thought even came about from your-- was it your group that came up with this seafood market? Out of the neighborhood leadership series. So like with you asking new businesses to come in, What does that look like when they have a conversation about the coal and the environmental issues?

Momma Pat: You know, probably because I personally don't ask them Um, I think like, uh, Uncle Nick's when I went in and was talking to them.

And, uh, everything starts from the seafood market, so we started with that conversation. And people are so excited about newness and things coming fresh. So, I don't think that it's going to be really hard when you see some other people there. Like, they're coming, [00:35:00] the new health center's coming. The conversation usually starts with the seafood market and what's going on with the neighborhood. I'm so busy trying to market and sell, you know, when I'm talking about the neighborhood, the good stuff. And so, where was I when I said, 'I'm only gonna bring good news in Newport News...?'

Something.. Where was-- anyway. Who knows where I was. Um, that's my new focus. So, again, I'm letting you guys handle those things and I'm handling what I know right now at this level is something that I can promote. And I can promote the newness of the neighborhood, which needs to be talked about. Um, taking pictures of the new houses and what's going on, sending them to people out of town.

And they're looking at me like, 'What? What?'

Yeah, it is actually happening. So, I don't get to that level of what you all are talking about because I'm too busy with the other stuff. Which needs to happen.

This is what's coming. This is the new stuff. This is the good news in Newport News. You know, you guys are handling that other stuff. I can do this. Okay, so we all don't need to be on the same street at the same time. But we do need to have the same kind of conversation. So if you're on the street talking about this, and you're doin', and I'm talking about something, we all are going to be heard.

So we don't all need to be talking about. It's so many things to talk about in all of the newness in Newport News. We need to be talking about the good news in Newport News. So that's where I come in. I can do that. I have this talkative.. Something that I have no idea where it came from. I was very quiet as a child,

Adrian: saving it up,

Momma Pat: saving it up.

First, you have to look, pay attention. Be quiet, listen, watch, and then you can speak. When you start talking right away, I know you don't know what you're talking about.

I'll just do like that. Okay, so you don't know a thing what you're doing. Um, that's where I am right now. I'm not saying that is not a fight. We have several levels of what we need to do for our city and for our community, but I'm just more on this part of marketing and selling. Good news in Newport News. I can do that.

People still right now, if you even talk about anything, you all go to the churches or someplace in the community to talk about coal dust or anything that's going on. Folks are like this. People are like this. I was like, 'Wait a minute, honey.' I said to someone because I had the pictures of my church, which is right on Jefferson Avenue.

She knows I'm talking about. Right on Jefferson Avenue, and I have the pictures and so we're talking about it And there's some people are standing around and one person said well, 'Where is it Pat? Where is it gonna be' and I start describing on the way to the park and when this man said 'What park' I just looked at him I said What did you say?

If I say 'we're on Jefferson Avenue, and we're going down toward the park,' well that's the park. When we grow up, the park at the end of Jefferson Avenue was the park. So I looked up and I said, you don't know a thing about your community. You, you come to church here, I don't know where you live, but you don't know anything about your community.

That's why you have the issues that you're having. You're fighting so much. It's because people are like this today. I've never, I've never seen people like that so much.

With their blinders. Oh my goodness. They wait for-- people call me, well, maybe not this year, I don't know, to ask me who we voting for. And I look at the phone like, I said, ' Vote everybody Democratic.'

If, you know, you're asking me who I vote for, let me just tell you. I'm not telling you who to vote for, but I'm voting for the Democratic Party, the whole ticket. I'm just like, 'What do y'all read? What is it?' We're so distracted by this. Oh, where's my phone in the house? And that television. We're so distracted.

We're not on top of our game. We are not on top of our game. That's why you have, that's why it's such a fight. We're not on top of our game anymore.

Adrian: What kinds of things would you like to see? Or like see popping up or like,

Momma Pat: I would love to see more new businesses. We thought it was just [00:40:00] mentioning because that's how we grew up.

We know it's never going to be that way. Anybody with common sense know the whole, you know, everything has evolved and people drive everywhere. We had to walk, which was good. So in our whole community, there were two drug stores -- two drugstores that we go out to. One drugstore was the first Black pharmacist in the state of Virginia.

And he was licensed to do, um, things that other drugstores couldn't do. Mixing medicine up. You call it a compound when you put more than one together. Like in a cream or something. Everybody was licensed to do that. He was the first Black pharmacist in the state of Virginia. Smith's Pharmacy. I just talked to his nephew the other day.

On Chestnut. See, we lived on that corridor of Chestnut. There were three grocery stores. So you just walked up to the store. And if you needed some pork chops or if you needed a steak, you just go in the back and the butcher cut it for you. It's just all of that has changed. So now if you're walking and you're going up to the store because we used to go for other people too. You're gonna see people on your way. They ain't gonna see you. You meet each other in the community. You talk to each other. When you get to the store, those people know you.

How your mother doing today? How's your grandma? Dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. They look out for you. That's not true anymore. I would love to see a little bit more of us being, um, community oriented. It's not gonna ever be the same as it was in that time. That's totally gone. But to at least treat each other with, um, respect and common decency.

That's what I'd like to see. I don't care who you are or what you think. We all need to respect each other's wishes, desires, what we want, and think different. It's okay because we are different. That's all I'm saying. But to be able to go back in this corridor of Jefferson and see some more stores, a little bit more shopping, that's what I'm hoping will grow.

That's what needs to grow to make it really work, is to have a little bit more shopping. Where people can say, 'Oh, I'm going up, I'm going to go get this.' And I can walk to get it. You shouldn't have to drive to get everything.

Adrian: Right, so being able to like walk to take care of your daily needs.

Momma Pat: Absolutely.

Adrian: And all the things that come with that, like running into people.

Momma Pat: Absolutely. Even pay your utility bills. They used to have, it used to be local that you could go somewhere. See, there's just, what I'm saying, there's so many fights.

I went to, I'm on the board for the Newsome House Foundation in Newport News. And, um, we have a hotspot for Verizon, right? So I go to pay the bill, cause they didn't put, my name wasn't on the account, so you can't get anything online. Okay. So I said, what in the world is going on? So I go to the Verizon Center.

Well, the first thing is, for me, 70, plus 75 years old, is on the door there are no hours. So I'm just looking and I said, OK, it's not open, it's 9 o'clock. I'm looking all around. Right on the door is this little small notice that said, Scan this barcode for hours.

So wouldn't it have been simpler just to put, just, just write, not any larger than that. Hours of operation. I mean, what in the world? So as I'm looking, I'm like, 'Oh my God.' So the young lady comes up and I'm just shaking my head and I said, you know, having the hours. She said, 'Yeah, right there you see it.' I said, 'You know what, all this time I've been doing all that, couldn't I just have read that and got back in my car?'

So now I've got to go and get my phone, scan the barcode, look on it, and see what the hours of operation is. Find that location.

Why is everything so complicated?

Adrian: What's uh, is anything new going on with the Newsome House?

Momma Pat: New is, I think I told you. Just recently, um, [00:45:00] again, we're talking about the closeness of the community. There was a, um, a teacher that wrote a book about Huntington, the school. This lady wrote a book about Huntington, about the school. People have written three, there, three books in my lifetime written about Huntington. There, there was another one when I was much younger. But that school carried so much weight in this community.

It's the only school in this (sic) country, the only Black one. There might be another one somewhere. But ours was still the first, named after Collis P. Huntington, who built the shipyard. It's the only one.

Adrian: He built the coal terminal too.

Momma Pat: He built everything around here, just about. They built the city.

He and the engineers came. And this was the first houses, I didn't know that until I read the history about this.

These were the first houses built. When the, when they, when they came to be here, this is where they started. Okay. Okay. Right. The engineers and developers came here to work on the shipyard.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: So Huntington Heights is one of the first commu--like, neighborhoods.

Momma Pat: It's, it's in one of the books that they, they have, I don't know what I did with mine, they documented with the city that these were the first houses built in Newport News.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: So who lived over here when you were growing up?

Momma Pat: The developers and engineers from the shipyard. All of the muckity muck people lived over here.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: Muckity Muck? What's that?

Momma Pat: Yeah, they lived over here. Cause that's where they start, (coughs) started living, excuse me. And so, um, Uh huh. This community has always been here.

And of course, probably some people came back then cause they were making not the ridiculous money they make now, but they were making enough money still to sustain themselves you know. and have people to come and work for him and help him. And, um, the community has always been like that. The higher, higher end marketing, what people have been told him a long time ago.

I, um, wait a minute. I'm sorry. I'm back to, uh, telling her what Ms. Hattie Lucas did, um, that wrote, she taught and then she wrote a book about

Huntington. So everybody knows her basically from that. The Newsome House is one of three houses now that came from their families to the city. And, um, Miss Hattie Lucas was a teacher and her estate was settled recently by the ex mayor of Newport News, McKinley Price.

They were cousins. Well, it was supposed to go to Sabrina from the funeral home. Did you remember her? No. You don't remember? Okay, the Black girl had a funeral, her own funeral. Mmm, okay. Anyway, Sabrina passed away. So, she was the first one on the will, so she passed away, so it went to McKinley. So, he's just getting around to getting everything done.

And, um, they called me and was trying to find out who was the treasurer and whatever. And I told them who the president was and I was the treasurer. So, Joni Ivy said, 'Oh, I can talk to you then in confidence.' And that's when she told me that Miss, um, that she had left some money. And I said, 'Oh, okay, that's so nice to the Foundation.'

So I'm thinking, you know, maybe five, at the most 10, 000. I didn't ask to be polite. But when McKinley Price came with that check, and I looked at it and it was 31, 000. Yeah.

I looked at him and I said, he said, 'I know that's nice.; You know, I got emotional. I said, here's this Black woman still supporting her community from the grave and you can't get people to do it. I'm just saying, I looked at him, he said, 'That's a good way to look at it.' I said, 'It's the truth. She's still supporting her community from the grave and you can't get people because people have lost their their sense of--' They got these.

I'm telling you now. It's like this, and that's hard to motivate people when they're like this. It's hard to make them see outside of that. And at one time, because it was a security issue, when I was growing up, the safety net was there staying close and people looking out for each other and not going far.

You can be, you can make an impact. You can [00:50:00] do something. And you guys are doing something, and I'm grateful for it. Whatever you're doing, however you can do it.

It's going to impact us all. Eventually, and that's what we have to remember. It's going to impact all of us. We all have to live on this planet, to treat each other well. Whatever we can do. It doesn't matter who you are where you came from. We all --One thing Jesse Jackson might have said out of his mouth make sense.

'I don't care what ship you came over on, we all in the same boat now.' We all -- We all in the same boat. We all breathe the same air. Walk these same streets with dust affecting us. Foolishness. Too much foolishness. We just grew up with foolishness wasn't allowed. So, you know, that's the word I used. The older people just didn't tolerate.

They had a very low tolerance for foolishness.

Get yourself together. Get on your job. You have a responsibility. If the only thing you have to do is sweep this porch off and make sure that it's neat and clean, make sure you do that and do a good job. If, if you're the government and your job is to make sure that we have good air quality and better things for people, get on your job and do your job.

Just, I send a mail text all the time, people don't know what we be talking. And I'll comment about something. They working on a new gun control bill. I want to see how that might work. Those folks need their time. They gotta have a security plan.

They're saying now, okay, they don't want you bringing them in government buildings. I don't disagree.

We're way, way, way away from where we should be. We like this.

Adrian: Why do you think that is?

Momma Pat: Because so many things have an influence outside of that home. Like, you know, we were kept close to the house, close to the family, close to the neighborhood. And I don't think that that is the same for so many young people.

The reason why we're, we started a group up in Maryland, because we still like that. We have that connection. We do texts to each other every day. Every day. We have a group from Maryland. We have the, these are the three that I get every day, the other people I see, when I see them, that I read. My, my close friends from Maryland, and, uh, the children.

And then, um, another friend of mine that sends me prayer. But that's every day. Those folks from Maryland, we, we text every day, Monday through Sunday. It's not, cause young people don't, we don't have any, we didn't have any outside influence. All of your influence was in that house, on that block, in that community.

Now, because young people have so many choices. It makes it complicated for them to make the better choice, I think. You had minimal choices there. Maybe three. Can you imagine there were three stations on television?

NBC, CBS, and ABC. NBC, CBS, and ABC. Three television stations. In black and white.

You need to, you need to check yourself. There's not enough checking. The discipline, if you love somebody, you discipline them too. It goes hand in hand. You see, animals still get it. We're the ones that have law. If you watch animal programs, they still do what they did hundreds of years ago. Birds build nests.

They automatically know what to do. They automatically know which parent and what, what culture is gonna bring the food. Sometimes they come and both parents bring food. We are off track. You watch herds of elephants where the aunts in that in that herd help those children protect them from the lions and tigers and bears that be after them.

It's not just that mother's responsibility. Those aunts [00:55:00] step up and make sure those children are okay. You can't call some people's aunt to do a thing for them today. They are doing something they-- When I ain't got, I ain't got time. Nobody's, nobody's. And that's why if you have a problem with the government, it's because they know we're not really paying attention.

We're so self centered.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: That's why I love you so much. When I first gravitated to you, it was about, what, 10 or 11 years ago? Something like that. When the first conversations around rebuilding Huntington have happened.

Momma Pat: Oh.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: But even in those meetings, like, you were the one person that would stand up and be bold enough to hold everybody in the room accountable, including your classmates.

Because, like, this happened under our watch. They slowly took people, children, out of the school. And then, you know, they had the conversations, we weren't watching the budget, and then you stood up and actually explained to us how the budget worked, even in a space where our elected officials didn't understand how it worked with the five, the five years, and you broke it down.

Unbelievable. So even in your accountability in checking people, you still bring the education and encouragement on how we can do better collectively. That's what it's about. You embody it in your conversations and everything that you do.

Momma Pat: I try. I think you have to feel it. That's the first thing. You have to feel it.

You know, you can't just talk it. You gotta, you gotta feel it.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: Well, you have the connections with the mayor. Make it happen!

Momma Pat: You so crazy! That boy don't even stay here much. He be gone. He be gone

Yugonda Sample-Jones: now.

Momma Pat: Oh my God, they be gone. Well, she's talking about Mayor Jones. When they first got, somebody else that called me, Ma Pat, Um, um, she, the person that introduced him, when he was talking about what he wanted to do and his vision, he said he wanted to see if he could help seniors.

She said, 'Well you need to talk to Ma Pat, let me call her.' And, um, she came, well, I said, 'Well, okay, we can sit on the porch.' I said, 'Who is it? What's his name?' I said, 'does he know anything about the city? Did he--' she said he did work on a commission. I said, 'Okay, well, he might know something.' Ex military. My kids are ex Marine.

So when he came up, he was coming up the steps and I was looking at him and I said, 'Well, okay. new, next mayor of Newport News.' and she said, 'See, that's what I'm talking about, that positivity.'

They worked, he and his current wife there, they worked, they walked neighborhoods, they canvassed. She lived in Massachusetts, I think, and she would come down on the weekend and they would canvas the neighborhoods. The last weekend before the election, that Tuesday she was here and they called me and asked me, well, um, um, Dorothy was with them.

She, she's the one that introduced me. And they said, can we, I said, 'Well, I think I'm not doing a cold call or none of that. But I'll feed you all when you come on the weekend.' Cause she knows I cook. Come and get some food, eat,

take it with you, whatever you want to do. So this was the end of it. And, uh, my neighbor pulled his grill out.

Put the grill up. I had food inside. We had the wine bottles. I said, come on, let's get the champagne out because it's all done now.

Adrian: Yes.

Momma Pat: I said, you leave it in the hands of the Master. You've done all you can do and let's go with this because we're going to win this. When they called me and told me how he won, I was like, 'Oh my God, that was a convincing win.'

He won over the current people on the board that ran for mayor that had been on the council.

Time for a change. So that night, this is so amazing too, that night that they had his, his reception, his mother was there. And I have a picture of his mother. We all kind of talking and everything, fellowshiping. So his mother called me from across the room. And she got up and walked away. I mean, I walked away and we just started dancing on the floor and everybody was like, and they filmed us.

And then, you know, we just hugged each other and cried. And she said, I just thank you so much. I said, 'It was my pleasure serving,' serving. That's all I did. So her sister came to me later and she said, 'I just came over to ask you how you get her to do that.' And I said, 'Got her to do what?' I said, 'She don't dance much.'

She said, 'Never.' [01:00:00] I said, 'What do you mean you've never seen?' She said, 'I've never seen her dance.' And I stopped and looked at her. I said, 'Oh, so you came because you thought it was me.' I said, 'It was him. Giving her the spirit that her son, her child, that she brought in this world made history today. It wasn't me. I just happened to be here. I'm just a dot connector, that's what I do.' She said, 'I've never seen her dance.' I couldn't get over it.

She called me from across the-- I said, 'Yes, darling?' And she reached out to me and we were crying and dancing. It was just the two of us on the floor. I still have it on my phone.

I was like, 'Oh my God.' He is amazing when he gets into something. So, that's all I do. And then move on to something else. And his wife too, she's amazing. I love all these young people. They have amazing spirits. Um, they're thinking

about their families and their community. It's just what I like to be around and just what I promote.

Um, they know I'm so family oriented that no matter what's going on in your life, your family's first. Take care of them. Make sure they're okay the best you can. And your life is going to be better. If you do that, because that's the way it's supposed to go. That's what the spirit wants us to do, is make sure that we're all okay.

Let's get on this porch, let's get under this teepee, and, and let's celebrate life. And I've got these amazing pictures on my phone of us on my porch that night.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: Mama Pat. But last week, you remember when I called you upset?

Momma Pat: You serve a purpose and a good one.

Oh, get yourself together. Get on top of your game. You have to have your own plan. God just wants to know what do you want to do. If you don't have a plan, he'll be just waiting for, well, I guess you don't want to do anything. I guess that's where you're running. You're not, you didn't say anything. You don't want to do nothing.

Okay. But the minute you start moving, there's the old saying, if you, if you take one step, he'll take two. So that means you're already ahead of the game. You still have to be moving in the direction that you want to go for him to understand, do you really want this? So if you do stupid stuff, he's going to say, 'Oh, you want to do that, do you? Okay, good luck with that. I can't help you, but you know, good luck with it.'

He ain't gon' help you do nothing stupid. You're on your own then. But when you do things that involve your family and people in your community, you're going to have to deal with it. He's on board and that's how it always ends up. Folks just don't understand that the reason why that they have some of the things they have.

Not anything that they've done on their own. It's the people before them and some spirits that are surrounding them because they affect other people. They may not understand that that God is using them because they're affecting his people. And they bringing something you might think it's you, but somewhere down the line, he's going to let you show, he's going to show up and make you understand you ain't in this by yourself.

It's not you. It's all me because you're helping my people. He use anybody. The Bible is full of those stories. You know, he'll use prostitutes, anybody to get his people taken care of. He's a master chess player. I just, sometimes I'll say Where did that come from? Just, but you got to be moving toward that goal.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: So what's your big plans for 2025?

Momma Pat: You know, I think the Newsom House is gonna really keep me busy.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: She's gonna be president.

Momma Pat: I have no real idea. They still need so much help, though.

I said, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to develop a plan for 2025 for us and show it to the board members and say, well, what do you guys think about my suggestions? I'm not saying I'm getting in front of the chair, but here's what I think we could do and how we could go get these things done.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: That's why you need to run for president.

Momma Pat: Well, we'll do that and

Yugonda Sample-Jones: --you're running away from your purpose. How can you encourage us? Because

Momma Pat: They got a time for the president to be elected. The election is in August of next year.

Yugonda Sample-Jones: Oh, okay. So we're going to get you prepared this year, so you can be president and do some policy.

Momma Pat: I'm going to already know everything.

(both laugh)