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**Victor Robinson**

**1/4/2008**

**10:00 AM – 1:00 PM**

**Washington, DC**

Caldwell: Well, the first part of the interview is to talk a little bit about you childhood and what it was like growing up. The first thing is, do you mind sharing how old you are now?

Robinson: I don't mind. I don't mind. I am 37 years old right now. Well, I have a twin sister. I did have an older sister who had passed away. My twin sister is married right now. She has been married for about nine years. I do have a nephew, well two nephews, and one niece. My twin sister and I were born in October. It was the third of October. We don't get a long too much, but we try to work things out well sometimes. A few times when I was very small I always looked on her whenever I needed help, whenever I had trouble. Also, my sisters helped me out when I was about five or six years old. I was having so many seizures and everything. I didn't really know what exactly to do or how to control myself with the seizures. My family always knew what to do. They always had to try to maybe control or uphold me. I am not sure how they did it, but I came through this, up until about maybe ten or eleven years old.

When I was about five years old my friends always used to tease me a lot and used to always get on my nerves a little bit. They used to push me away from things I wanted to be in. They used to play games outside. They knew about my disability. My sisters used to help me out because they protected me. Whenever my sisters were not around I always tried to protect myself, but I couldn't do too much. One time I did have a few friends that used to live next door to me and they used to help me out. Well, they moved away by the time I was a teenager. When I got a little older than that we moved on. By the time I was about five years old I was in a special ed school, but before I got to the special ed, I was in a regular school, Pentworth Elementary. I was a patrol guard –my my sisters and I were the same thing. I tried to do lots of things with other classmates but couldn't really get that much and get that far. My sisters advanced ahead of me and I had to go to a special ed school.

When I got to the special ed school, I think I did a very good job. I had to drop back a year. I got into the school by maybe helping other students. I was helping them out but working with them. I saw that they needed more help and I said to myself, "Nothing is going to stop me from helping them." When they needed help, I transfer myself by saying to myself, "I have to do something." So what I did was encourage myself and my other friends by saying, "We have to get through this by not looking at us as being so unable to do things." So, my best friend, who was in a wheelchair, he

couldn't really get too much done. He had muscular dystrophy and he had a little asthma and he couldn't really get a lot and do too many things, but I was always his best friend and I always helped him out a lot. We did a lot of things together. We played games. We went to the movies. We also graduated from high school and elementary. We also had a group called the Kawanis Builders Club which was like an advocacy group.

Caldwell: What club was that? Was that all people with disabilities or people at your school?

Robinson: Well, with our group, it was more just for youngsters who wanted to try to maybe start an advocacy group by helping people in different ways, like maybe helping elderly people. We didn't know exactly how to do it, but when we formed, I said we should try to maybe help disabled people and form it as a disabled group by working together –try to help people with disabilities and maybe just regular students. We did a lot of stuff. I was president for eight years.

Caldwell: Was that when you were in school or was that after school?

Robinson: Yes. When I was in elementary I was there for about eight years. From sixth grade up until the eighth grade they needed a president. No one else wanted to take that place so I took that place.

Caldwell: So you were president? And it was the Kawanis Builders Club?

Robinson: Yes. And the science teacher was the main person that organized it. She thought I was a very good person to uphold that because she thought I was a very good leader in trying to speak out for everyone, thinking that I had a good mind to think about things and how I was always wanting to uphold things, wanting to help everybody or encourage everything and wanting to move things forward. My English teacher wanted me to do the same thing. She helped me out by doing the same thing. When I moved over to high school I was doing lots of other things. Being an advocate by going to some groups that she involved me in by going to some meetings they had downtown or out in Virginia or Maryland. If they had like a town meeting, I would go to those and take the name of the Kawanis club.

One time before I graduated, I think about a year before I graduated from high school, I wrote a story about President Bush –not George Bush but his father. The story was about homeless people. The point of the story was that this man and lady were living together. They had children but the

man lost his job and the lady got evicted from her apartment. He got kind of lost on how to hold his family up. He didn't know what to do. He ran out and didn't think he could do this. The name of the story was "One Plight for One Homeless Family." The wife was trying to uphold the family of her two children. She saw that her husband could not help her. When he left her a letter, that night he was maybe watching her from time to time in the alley or something. When he saw her a few times walking around with the children when they got evicted, they were going from shelter to shelter, he was in the shadows watching but he didn't want to show his face to his children because he was kind of embarrassed about it. One day when the President's wife was in an accident, she saw what happened and she helped the first lady. The main point was that when she saw the first lady in trouble, the first lady helped her by getting a job. About a month later he came to her to see if he could get a job. He wrote to her to see if he could get a job. One day when the first lady saw her speaking to her husband, she said, "Who is this you are speaking to?" She told her who he is. She said, "Sure, I can try to help you with him." She gave him a job as a gardener on the grounds of the White House. So it came out a nice ending. They were living on the grounds of the White House. She was a maid and he was a gardener. The children were taking classes and everything.

The letter I wrote to the President and the story, I mailed it over to the White House. He read it and a year later he mailed it back and the response was that the first lady like it and he himself liked it. Instead of having President Bush I had Kush, because I didn't want to offend his name. He said it was a really good story. I just had it that way. I think I do have a copy of the letter he wrote to me and I think I do have a copy of the story. It is a very good story that I wrote. I like to write mystery stories and do puzzles or play games or anything like that. So those are the things I like to do. I also play with Special Olympics. I have been with Special Olympics since I was in elementary.

I know that things do change. When I was trying to go around in high school, things didn't work out too much. I was robbed a few times, maybe about two times, but I know that that did not stop me. They were going to be very rough in high school because they thought they could take over a disabled person. But I said "No, that is not going to help by trying to stop me." So, what I did was to push on to them. What I did was keep on thinking and focusing on graduating from high school. I helped my other

friends in classes like for English and reading and I was awarded a plaque for outstanding student for helping other classmates. I was also awarded with other classmates the Congressional Award for 1990. I was also awarded the Silver Medal for that in 1991 –two times for 1990 and 1991. That was when Mayor Marion Berry was in office. I have lots of times gone to meetings with the mayor. I have seen lots of people. I had a chance to meet Alex Haley. I have had the opportunity to meet many important people from the newspapers and everything. I have had lots of education on maybe trying to do my best on how people should encourage other people with disabilities and things I do.

On Sundays I go to church and sing in the gospel choir. In church I try to encourage some of the youngsters to sing in the choir. Not too many in church do that but it is kind of hard to get youngsters to sing in the choir. We have lots of elderly people in the choir that are starting to get a little bit too old. We want more people in the choir to sing. We had one other young person, but we need more people in the choir. I also try to do other things, like helping out. If there is any trouble downtown with the mayor's building, I try to give my response by maybe responding to what he gives out. If there is any trouble on the streets I will try to encourage how things could be handled. Some of my friend with Project Action, we try to work with that, the self-advocacy group I am with right now. I am the treasurer right now. We have been working with lots of other things. Before Chief Ramsey left DC, we were working with one project called PACTS. PACTS is dealing with how people with disabilities should not be assaulted very fast by the police. They should be come up to and asked in a calm way and have protection and security and nice communication. It deals with how the police should have training on how to work with disabled people with the whole community in any precinct –the fourth, fifth, and maybe eighth. Before he left we did have a video of how cadets should be trained before they left the academy. We showed this to lots of other people.

I have also worked with doctors and nurses on how they should focus on one patient at the time they arrive at the emergency room –because not many people with a disability who come to the emergency room are not really focused on by the doctor very clear. If the person who doesn't have a disability comes in they focus on them and then they get out of there very fast. But then the person who does have a disability will have to wait at least five or six hours because they are not really focused on them.

They are maybe seen by one doctor but then they are transferred to another person and then they will have to wait another two hours. Then they have to go and sign these things but they don't have a translator to interpret. If the person cannot really interpret what they are saying or understand they can't really do anything. So maybe they should try to slow things down on how they try to do things in the hospital or speak to someone on the street.

That is one way that the police should try to have their training –not come so fast and come up to the person and try to arrest them. Like if the person is just sitting on their steps trying to get some air or just wanting to sit there on the steps. We have had a few of our friends who have been arrested for no reason. Like our president, Ricardo Thornton, he was arrested for just sitting out on the steps of his house. He was just sitting there. One day someone saw him sitting there and the next day he was arrested. Another friend, who is the sergeant of arms, his name is Lindsay, we was taking a walk down from his job when the police came and arrested him; I think he was having a seizure or something and they arrested him for no reason. You know, they just arrested him very quickly without asking him, "What is his name? Why is he acting like this?" Without asking any other things.

Caldwell: It was because he had a disability or was having a seizure?

Robinson: Well, they didn't know exactly what the problem was. They didn't ask any questions. They just came and arrested the person. With Ricardo, the person across the street was looking out the window and they saw him sitting on the steps. When the person called the police he was just sitting on the steps and trying to get some air. Next thing you know the police comes and arrests him. Ricardo Thornton, he has made a movie about himself. This was a few years ago, I think in 1996 or 1997 when he did make this movie about himself. It was about his family and about his life. The main point of the movie was about he and his wife were living at Forest Haven. He wanted to get his rights and how he wanted to live. It is about how he was living there and how things were not being operated civilly, things were not being handled correctly. They were trying to move out of Forest Haven and they were trying to move out of there. They didn't have that many rights over there. Then when they did get a chance to get married and they moved out of that place. They had a child and they have a place of their own. They have a 17 year old child and he is in college now.

Caldwell: So Forest Haven was an institution in Washington DC?

Robinson: Yes. It has been closed for about 15 years now. You might know this family, the Evans family. Their daughter was living there and they had a case on Forest Haven. They are still trying to help other families with disabilities who have had problems with that. They are trying to help other families who have their sons or daughters in institutions their whole life. They are trying to close institutions down now. We are doing the same by shutting all institutions down in different ways. We are having lawyers from the legal system and other people from the government working with us.

Caldwell: Are there still institutions in DC, like institutions for people with developmental disabilities?

Robinson: The only one I know right now is the Kennedy Institute. It is more like a job training area. That is the only one I am working at right now. Basically, they are trying to help people find a job and try to train them in different areas –clerical, food service, and maybe custodial. Another one I think is Melwood; it might be out in either Virginia or Maryland. They are trying to do the same thing. There is also the DC Arc .

Caldwell: So those are services for people with disabilities, but they are not the institutions like Forest Haven?

Robinson: Right. Forest Having was a big institution. It was more like a campus.

Caldwell: Did you ever go there or see it when it was there?

Robinson: No. I have never been there but I did see how it looked on tape. When I saw the view of the tape and how it looked back in the fifties or the sixties it was a very big mess of how people did live. They didn't have a chance to do anything back then. They didn't have much encouragement. Well, they did have encouragement from their families to try to get places or do things, but the supervisors over there at the place did not really give them a chance to do anything or go to any place. They never had a chance to go out and do things on their own. If they wanted to have a job and to get money, they never did have them do that. That is one thing they always wanted to do try to do: have money in their pocket. But if they were going to have money it was social security money. That was about it. If the facility was going to give them money, it was going to be seven dollars, maybe less than that, for them to spend on food or for washing their

clothes or something like that. That is how much they would have to spend. Some of them did have jobs at the place but they didn't give them much to spend.

Caldwell: Now, Project Action, did that form when they closed Forest Haven? Was that part of it?

Robinson: Well, Project Action did form after they closed Forest Haven. Rebecca Salon, she is the main person who formed it. She was part of the Kennedy institute. She was the president of the Kennedy Institute and she formed it. You might know Phyllis Holton, she is from Quality Trust. She and Rebecca formed that group. By them helping us, we tried to form other groups for people living in group homes out in Virginia and out in Maryland. Try to come together with DC members who were living in DC areas in the southeast and northeast or northwest. We have them come together. We have meetings every other month or every month on the second Saturday of the month. We would have everybody come together and talk about the things that happened and meetings we wanted to plan coming up. If there was a TASH meeting coming up, going on that next year or sometime within that year, we would try to fundraise some money –maybe like maybe have a cookout or a dance or something like that –to maybe fundraise some money for some of us to go to these meetings and bring back the information from that TASH meeting.

So we would go to these meetings and then have them notified about these things. We would always have everything all together. Whenever everybody went out to these things we would always have a whole lot of information from every area. If I went to one in the DC area from MRDDA, which is now DDS, I might get some information there. If somebody had gone to one from the hospital for sick children they would get some information from there. If somebody from Metro Access or some other transportation group we would try to get information and transfer it over to other people who wanted to know about transportation. So we would try to get things in order. We would organize it and then transfer it to everybody and let them know what is going on and how it will operate. Then we would ask them some questions, like “What kind of things do you think we should try to have done in the next meeting?” or “Should we have a forum with these council members or legislators?” We want to understand that we are pushing forward and we are not going to stop until we get these things done. Just like ADAPT is moving. We want to push forward as fast as we can. I did get something from ADAPT about how

they are moving. When they had that march a couple months or weeks ago they moved up on the Capitol and had that march over there.

Caldwell: Do you go to those marches or rallies with ADAPT?

Robinson: I have been to a few of them, like when they have a national march. I was at a few of them. When they had one out in Seattle about four to five years ago, I was out there. When they had one here from New Jersey to DC, I was on that one. The one from Georgia to DC, I was on that one. I was at a few marches they had.

Caldwell: What are those like?

Robinson: Well, they are very interesting. I would say they are very open. Lots of people from other states like New Jersey and Delaware –they come from all over. They want to get to know you and have more information about you. You want to get to understand how they operate. You want to understand and get to know why they are there. When they did have a national conference here in DC a while ago, the ADAPT president, I did have one conference with him. He was talking to me about how things should change here in DC. It was before they had the President to sign some kind of slip to have their own bill. They wanted to get that bill passed. When they had that, I was very outgoing. Everyone was pushing for that. The legislative and the Congress did not want that bill passed, but ADAPT pushed everybody so much. They were very happy about how everything moved. The President could not do much because he saw how everybody was looking and how everybody was moved. When everybody was moved about this, he was feeling sorry for what he had said he was going to do, because he said he was going to stop it and not pass this bill. But when ADAPT came to him and said we want this bill passed because most of the things you are doing are not working out very proper or working out very good. So what he did was, “I will sign this and make sure everything comes out the right way.”

Caldwell: So how long have you been with Project Action?

Robinson: I have been with Project Action for a very long time. I would say about twelve or thirteen years.

Caldwell: Was it when they first started or were they already going before you got involved with them?

Robinson: About maybe two years after they had already started.

Caldwell: How did you get involved with them?

Robinson: I was with the DC Arc, before they changed their name. Before I was with DC Arc I was with a different organization, I named myself. It was called DC Self Advocates United Together. That was what I called the group I had over at DC Arc. I wanted that group to have lots of people united with nondisabled people –have them working with us in different ways doing the same things Project Action is working with: helping with homeless people, have them fight for their rights, and have people working in other different areas. When I had a job at Dulles Air Force, when I was in training at the DC Arc –I can't remember her name right now –she taught me how to be a leader in one way by stretching out my hand to people who need help. I will reach out my hand to people and say, "My hand is here. If you need help, come to me, and I will help you in any which way. If you want some help, I will give my hand out to you, by holding my hand up in a spiritual way or maybe by just using my hand if you want to hold you up. If you need help by maybe support, I can do that." I was always trying to help other people in different ways. I wasn't really thinking about myself that much. I was always wanting to help lots of other people in other ways. That is what got me into doing things like that. When I was in high school, I was always wanting to help other people. That is what pushed me into being a self advocate so mush and so hard. I said to my family, "Nothing is going to stop me from being an advocate and from getting any other things."

Caldwell: Where do you think you got that desire to help other people? Where do you think you learned that or where do you think you got that?

Robinson: I think I got that encouragement from my family, from my mother, basically. She likes to help lots of other people and when she is at church she likes to get involved in lots of other things. I am basically like her; I like to always help other people. When I am with her I like helping other people, doing things. If I am not with her, if I am with my other friends, I see that they might need some help. So then I will jump into something and try to do things by getting involved and helping out with my hand and just trying to assist with some things. I don't care what it is that I can do, I will just help them out in any which way. If there is any kind of problem they have, I will just try to assist them. If there is any encouragement that anybody needed I would just try to help them. My high school teacher

said I could try to help other people by doing that because I was always good at writing poetry. I know that other people like to hear poetry. I might be good at writing poetry in some way by maybe saying something like, "Here is a hand, but if you can, listen to me, and you will see."

Caldwell: So even before Project Action, you had another self-advocacy group going at the DC Arc. Did you start that group?

Robinson: Yeah, I started that group back when I graduated high school. I went straight to the DC Arc and I was taking work skills over there. When they needed some help over there by wanting to have an advocacy group, I said to myself, "I will take that job. If they need help just call me." I said, "I will be the president." No one else wanted to take that place. I said, "I used to be the president of other groups. Why is no one else going to take it?" I guess they didn't think they could try to take it so I said, "I will take that spot." I tried to encourage other friends to try to join in on the group and help other homeless people on the street. Then one year when DC Arc was losing some money, I helped them save some money by going down to the DD Council. I gave a speech about how they were not really being treated very well because the money they were trying to make was not being approved by the DD Council. It was losing money by trying to pay students on their jobs and how they were losing money by trying to pay the employees and not really getting much. That year, when I was at the DD Council, I did give a very good speech. Everybody did like that and thought that was a very encouraging speech. They wanted me to be president for that and to encourage more people. Then I left to go to Bolling Air Force Base. I got a job out there for about five years. Then in 1995 is when they started laying off government jobs off. So I had to get dropped off over there.

Caldwell: What kind of work did you do over there?

Robinson: I was a stock clerk over there. The hours I was working was from 7:00 PM until 3:00 AM in the morning.

Caldwell: So night shift?

Robinson: Yeah. It was a very tough thing to do. Sometimes I did have seizures out there but I did make it through. I had a few problems with some of the co-workers but nothing did stop me from getting through. There was a few fights out there. One was one fight with someone who did not have a disability. He did not like me too much. I told him I did not want to fight

him and I didn't want anything to do with him. He kept teasing me about my disability. One day when I was putting my uniform on, changing into my clothes, he pushed me up against the locker. The next thing you know, he hit my head up against the locker. I did not like that, so what I did was I turned him around and I twisted his arm and bent his head down. I did not want to do that, but... I got in trouble. I still was working there for a long time, but he got fired for what he did to me. I kept telling him over and over to leave me alone. It was a very good job out there. I did get paid very much.

After I left Bolling Air Force Base, I had a chance to work as a dietician aid at Children's Hospital, but they did not keep me very long. When I was there for only about three months, they thought I was working as custodial but I told them a dietician aid. When I went for the interview, I told them I was going for a dietician aid but they told me to work as a bus boy. When I had one seizure there, they fired me right there. They didn't pay me for that day or next month. Then I found some other job at the Martin Luther King library. It was doing very good over there. Then I found another job at HAE as a clerk. I was working there for a while before I went to the Kennedy Institute as a student.

Caldwell: So that is where you are at now, the Kennedy Institute?

Robinson: Yeah, as an employee.

Caldwell: Okay, so you were a student first. What is the Kennedy Institute?

Robinson: It is a job training area for people with disabilities, Catholic community training area. Before they were at two different areas, and now it is back over at the headquarters which is 801 Buchanan Street. That is where they had the school but now it is the job training headquarters for job training and the school.

Caldwell: So when you are a student there, what sort of things do you learn? Do you take classes? What do they help teach you?

Robinson: As a student for job training they teach you in different areas. Like, if you want to learn food service, I am an assistant teacher for that. They will teach you how to work in a kitchen: what kind of utensils you need to use, how to cut the food, how to handle the food, what is basically done in the kitchen with the food, what kind of diseases might happen, what kind of microorganisms might happen. With custodial, they will show you what

kind of things need to be done around handling and how to do it very quickly. With clerical, it is basically how to work on the computer or on a typewriter, see how fast you can type on a keyboard. If you are really good at that they will try to see if you can get a job like that. Also, they will try to see if you can go to an interview and they will try to test you on an interview. If you find a job somewhere on your own, they will try to take you to the place. I am not sure how long it will take. They also do have a GED class over there. If you already have the skills at working on the computer and working as a secretary, you will have that much already known, but there might be something else you want to learn, like if you wanted to take on math or education on some other things.

Caldwell: So now you work as a teacher at the Kennedy Institute?

Robinson: Yes, I used to be a student there for about three and a half years, but then I advanced very fast.

Caldwell: Do you like it there? Do you like being a teacher there?

Robinson: Well, it is very good. I have been a teacher there for a very long time. I have been working there for about 17 years, but as an assistant teacher for about five years.

Caldwell: Is that a full time position or a part time position?

Robinson: It is a part time position. I only go but two days a week, Monday and Wednesday. It is a very good job. I was promoted to get that job with Rebecca Salon when she was still working there. When I was a student she asked me if I wanted to take a job working over there as a teacher and I said yes.

Caldwell: I wanted to go back and ask you some more questions about growing up. So, have you always lived in Washington, DC your whole live?

Robinson: Yeah, I have always lived in DC for all these years. Well, I say that I have had no problems with living in DC. They have had lots of problems around DC, but living with my family, not too many problems.

Caldwell: So with your family growing up, you said you had two sisters –one sister was a twin sister and then your other sister was older?

Robinson: Yes, my older sister's name was Carmen Robinson and my twin sister's is Victoria Robinson. Her name now is different. She was at the Commerce Department.

Caldwell: Your mom and dad?

Robinson: My dad used to work at the Treasury or Interior Department; I am not sure which one. My mother used to be a teacher at C. Melvin Sharp School, where I used to go to school to, on 13<sup>th</sup> Street. She is retired now because of her health problem, but she is still making it around here. My father, he is retired for a very long time. Well, I do get a little bit of encouragement from my family from time to time for doing things. When I was a very young kid, I didn't have too much to do because of my disability. I was always having so many. I always wanted to go out and play a lot. I was an active person. That is one thing my mother wanted me to be. I know I couldn't do too many things, but I always wanted to be very active to help out around the house and always help other people. My twin sister helped me out in different ways. My older sister, who passed away about a decade ago, she always helped me out, lots of times. She had lots of trouble with different other things, but she came through it. She graduated from Wilson High School. My twin sister graduated from the same school. I graduated from Roosevelt. It is a very good story about my family.

Caldwell: What other memories do you have about your childhood and growing up?

Robinson: My mom always wanted me to be very active in church and not be a quite person. I was always wanting to play around with other kids. Sometimes I would always stay in the back and not really do too much. She wanted me to be active and wanted me to get out and do things. I always wanted to be around and do whatever everybody else wanted to do. I always tried to get into it, but I couldn't do much. So what I always had to do was to do less on being active, but I had to maybe encourage myself by doing other things. So what I did was maybe do a crossword puzzle or, maybe if not that, I had to help around the house. If that is being active by doing that, it is the only thing I can do. I could not ride my bike. I could not go outside and run around too much. I just couldn't do much.

Sometime before I was twelve years old I did have a car accident. That happened when I did try to ride my bike. When I did ride my bike I was supposed to be looking all four ways, but the driver did not. The driver of

the cab, he came speeding passed me when I was coming towards this way. The driver just came speeding this way. The person in the back of the car was screaming when she saw me. The cab driver, he saw me, but then I think he stopped. He got out. The person in the car got out. The driver got back in the cab and then took off. I flipped over the cab and I landed in some glass and hurt my knee caps. They had to call the ambulance and everything. The person who was in the cab did help me out. I was in so much trouble right there. Everybody did not understand what happened. I told them how it happened, but they kept thinking that I had a seizure, which I did not. I kept telling them that the cab driver came in front of me and I flipped over the cab. He came so fast, I did not see the guy. I looked from the back, right, and forward, and nothing came. Next thing you know, flying over.

Caldwell: How would you describe your family?

Robinson: From the past or right now?

Caldwell: Both, really.

Robinson: Well, back in the past, my father, he was not to encourage-able. He goes to a different church than what my family does. He is a Baptist Church member; I am Catholic. He did not really do too much with me. He did take me to the movies when Star Wars came out. That was about the only thing he did take me to do with me. He did take me to the movies; one other thing was maybe just go outside and just look at me and play. That was the only thing he did. He did not really do too much or too many things with me. My mother, I know that she is one person that did a lot of things with me back in the past. She always protected me so much and she has always kept her eye so close on me. I have always been like the baby in the family, even though I am only a few minutes after my twin sister. I am like the baby in the family.

My older sister, she sometimes always wanted to play jokes on me. I didn't like it. I know it was kind of crazy, but I didn't like the way that she played them. Sometimes it was like a bad joke and I would get in trouble for the things she was supposed to get in trouble for. Well, I would get upset sometimes and I would cry about it. Sometimes after the next thing, I might forget about it. I would say to myself, "May as well forget about it and just let her pass." But then my twin sister followed in her tracks a little bit, but by the time she got to junior high school she followed in her own

tracks. She always wanted to be very tough and strong on things that she did. My twin sister has always protected me so much. I didn't want her to be protecting me that much and I always wanted to do things on my own. I know I have to thank my sister a little bit for helping me out.

Caldwell: She helped you do things on your own?

Robinson: Well, right now my sister and I have a joint banking account. I do thank her for that, for helping me out with my money sometimes. Also, if I do have trouble getting to some places, she is there to help me out. If I need to maybe travel out of town, she might be there to get me to the airport. If I lose something, like my money, she is there to help me right there. That has happened a few times. Like last year I lost my cell phone. I was on my way back from the pharmacy and I lost my medication and my cell phone. That was at the Rite Aid on Georgia Avenue. She lost her temper. She was upset. She was kind of confused about what happened, how I lost my phone and how I lost my medicine. I tried to let her know. Sometimes she can get a little out of hand and a little blown up, but then sometimes she can be understandable. I do thank her for some things when things can be arranged.

Caldwell: You talked about your mom and you think you got your desire to help people from your mom?

Robinson: Yeah. She is the one that I looked up to more. My twin sister looks more up to my father. I look and act more like my mother. My mother is more open and she likes to help a lot of people by just handing out her hands and trying to just do things for everybody. Me, I am almost the same way as her. My mother is Hispanic and American. She is from the Dominican Republic. She left that place years before I was born. I did know that I wanted to be like her. With the ways that she was always acting and the things that she has done, I was always following in her tracks. With my father, he didn't really help me too much. He may have helped me with my education a little bit, but as for being encourage-able, being an advocate, doing other things, being athletic, he didn't really do that much. I guess he didn't think I could do that much. But my mother thought that I could do that, because when Special Olympics have the things they have that would do it in a special way. They would do it in a light and not that much of a hard way that regular Olympics would have it. So I always looked up to my mother. How she always handled me, how she always talked to me, how she always talked to other people in different ways, like

how she used to talk to my nieces and nephews if how they were talking back to their mother. Or if some Hispanic people were having some problems, she would try to encourage them or other families on how they should do some things together. I was very observant on how she was always encouraging other people, how she was always helpful, how she wanted to be friends with a lot of people, and be more useful for a lot of people. I think that is what got me into being more of an advocate and leader. I followed in her tracks. I think she is a leader by doing that. My mom has always been a leader to me. She helped me in high school and when I was in elementary. When I was just a little kid, every time when I was like going to the doctor or something, I was a little scared when I was three or four years old. She would say, "Don't be scared. She is just going to ask a little questions. You might have to get a blood test, but don't be scared to take it."

Caldwell: You know, in your story to the President and some other things, you seem real concerned about helping people who are homeless. Where do you think you got that? Where did you get your desire to help people who are homeless?

Robinson: Well, where I got that was it was more like a mystery I wanted to think of. I was looking at a movie on TV one day. I saw how this man was hiding away from this lady. He was making himself how he wanted to help this lady but he didn't know what to do. He didn't know how to show himself to this lady. I said to myself, "Maybe I should put this in a way like a homeless man or a homeless family." It is called "The Plight of One Homeless Family." He wanted to help his family out, but he was kind of embarrassed and too scared to help out. When I saw this movie he didn't really understand his feeling. He really didn't have anybody to encourage him or help him on the street –nobody who was homeless or nobody who was there as a friend. He was more like a homeless person. When I saw this movie, I said to myself, "I think I am going to try to write something like this to the President. I am going to try to write this story and have it with him looking at a homeless person." This man is evicted with his family from the apartment. He is trying to get together with his family but he is too scared or too embarrassed to be with his family, his wife and children. He is trying to protect them but only looking at them in the shadows. Then when he sees what happens with the first lady and his wife, months later he comes back and tries to get a job after she gets one. She gets the job for him and then they have a nice life.

Caldwell: Were you trying to tell the President something?

Robinson: Yeah.

Caldwell: What were you trying to tell him?

Robinson: I was trying to let the President know that homeless people are finding a way to live. Even though they are low on cash and low on money, taxes are running a little high, people who are poor are trying to live out there. He should try to understand what kind of things are going on out there with homeless people. A homeless person who is living on the street can't live in shelters too long. They cannot really live out there on the street because they will be running from everyone and will be too scared. If they have children, what are the children going to eat? How are they going to eat? How are they going to feed their family? What are they going to be doing? Are they going to be eating out of trash cans or something like that? That is what I tried to tell the President.

Caldwell: Were you trying to tell him to do more to help people who are homeless?

Robinson: Yeah. If he wanted to help out people with disabilities and a person who was homeless, he had to help more. If he was going to do that then he would in a way have a very steady focus and a very steady hand on how to do it, a strong way of doing it too. It was not going to be a very good way if it was going to be on one subject, so he had to do it on at least on three things he had to find.

Caldwell: You have done other work to help people who are homeless?

Robinson: Yes –a get together, having a get together, like a barbeque. We did have a fundraiser at DC Arc in the summer time. We did have enough money to get some boxes and baskets and send that over to the homeless shelters. We sent about four or five boxes filled with lots of food and everything. Same thing you do at a church, we did the same thing. We had some churches filled up with boxes. We wanted them to bring anything they could –can food or bag food or anything.

Caldwell: I wanted to go back to your school. Did you go to a separate school just for kids with disabilities or was it an integrated school.

Robinson: Before I went to C. Melvin Sharp, I was going to a regular elementary school. When I got to special ed was when I was about five years old. I was in the sixth grade by then, but then they had to drop me back that

year. They wanted me to drop back. I had so many seizures that year that I lost one year. When I was in C. Melvin Sharp, that is a special ed school. It did have a satellite program with Roosevelt, but that didn't come up until four years after the sixth grade.

Caldwell: So was it all kids with disabilities in the school?

Robinson: All kids with disabilities, kids with behavioral disabilities. They had one annex on the side and one with wheelchairs. They had a swimming pool down at the bottom. It was more like a regular school, but only with children with disabilities.

Caldwell: What are some of your memories from school?

Robinson: I did have an English teacher. I did have a computer teacher. We had a photography classroom there and I did take a photography class. I graduated from that class. They had other things going on. They had like a little choir in elementary. I was in that one. When I was in elementary, they did have Special Olympics. I was on the basketball team. I was on the science team. I was the A student for that one. They had a spelling bee; I was the first runner up for that one. I did lots of other things. Besides that, everything else went fine.

I was helping out lots of other friends with their problems. We had one little gang –my friend Joe, Bobby, Torrence, Janelle, Jean, Tina, and a few other friends. We had like a little gang together. We would go all together around in classes. Whenever they needed some help I was there to help them. I was more like a guardian angel that helped everybody. Sometimes whenever they had a fight I was there to stop it or block it. I was encouraging them not to fight. I told them, "If we want to be friends, why fight about something that we are not going to be doing something right about?"

Caldwell: Most of your friends had disabilities, because they were in the same school?

Robinson: Yeah. We were all in the same school and most of us were in the same classroom. Sometimes whenever school was out we sometimes had time to go out and have fun. Like if they went out on a trip someplace, we all went on a trip to Hersey Park or some other place.

Caldwell: You talked about the Kawanis Builders Club. What kind of things did you do in that?

Robinson: Well, basically we were trying to fight for our rights. It was kind of more like how Project Action always worked. We always wanted to help other people in ways by maybe encouraging youngsters to help homeless people. We tried to get them involved in working with older people. If they wanted to maybe work around their church we could maybe try to encourage them to do that. I tried to encourage them by finding ways to help them do things, like if they had a clean up on the street somewhere with the mayor, some of us could try to do something like that. I know I tried that a few times with the mayor. Every year when they do that I try to help out. When they cleaned up the schools a few years back then, I tried to do that.

Caldwell: So that was a group at the school? Did you meet at the school?

Robinson: Yeah, we had a meeting always at the school. I think we paid dues – maybe like a dollar for dues.

Caldwell: And you were the president of that group?

Robinson: Yeah.

Caldwell: So in high school, were you still with all kids with disabilities or did you go to a regular high school.

Robinson: I went to a regular high school, but only it was a satellite program with C. Melvin Sharp –Theodore Roosevelt is right next door. When I was in high school, the second year, I was there I was helping all my friends by maybe working with them very much and trying to encourage them by not having so much weakness on trying to graduate. One student had a chance to graduate and go to high school, but that person did not want to graduate because they said it was going to be too rough on them. I tried to encourage that person, but they said they did not want to do it and they just dropped out of school. We kept on going. My best friend, Joseph, he and I went over to Roosevelt. I was really good at helping my other friends by working with them, by talking with them about how they should try to go to some of these town meetings and try to work with other people, and looking in to finding jobs in other places, because when they do get out of high school they are going to have to find a job some place.

Some of them really did not think about doing that. My family did encourage me on how to do that.

A year before I graduated, I was still thinking about wanting to go to these meetings out in Maryland, out in Virginia, and in DC downtown. When they did have these meetings out there, I did go to these meetings and observe how these things were going through. Most of them were very useful because they were understandable about how they should be moved to people with disabilities. Some of them were about housing and how they were not being handled very well. People who do have a regular house are not being handled very well. Some of the people who don't have a disability are not really looking at people in the right way who do have a disability. They might ignore them or not work too much with them. They might look at you but then say, "Oh, okay, how you doing?" They might give you a funny face or something. If they are going to look at you in a funny way, give you a funny face or a funny hand, you know that is not the right attitude.

Caldwell: So, let me ask you, when you look back at your life, how do you think you developed your leadership skills?

Robinson: I think the way I was encouraged from high school and from maybe elementary. I think it was all right. Nothing else has stopped me from moving forward because I always told myself, "Nothing is going to stop me from helping any other person who needs help and who wants help." I always wanted to be a leader in doing other things. I always wanted to bring things out by working with the self organization. I did that when I was in elementary and when I was with Arc. I am still working with Project Action as the treasurer and they are encouraging me to do other things. When I was co-chair of SABE, they encouraged me very much on how to do that since I was the co-chair. I think other things can really move forward. I see how people in the legislative councils are working hard by trying to help people with disabilities here in DC. I see how some people are talking more about helping people with disabilities in health care. Also, people in group homes and how they should be helped more with housing and treated more with respect and things should be moved up in different ways.

Caldwell: You are the treasurer now of Project Action, did you ever hold any other offices with them?

Robinson: Well, I tried to get to president, but I never did make it. I had a slight chance to make it, but then they never did have a treasurer so I took that spot.

Caldwell: How did you get involved with SABE?

Robinson: One meeting when they had a TASH meeting, I was at that conference and SABE was there. I think it was in Georgia. I wanted to go to one of their sessions. I went up to them and asked them, "Why do you have every other state expect for DC involved in self advocates?" They told me that they didn't think that Washington, DC would be involved as a state. I said that we do have different people in other cities and that DC is a main Presidential area. I said, "You do have New York City, so why not Washington DC? I can try to get information and help you out in different ways out there." When I told them that, they were moved about it. They never knew anything about that and they never knew me before. When I told them who I was and what kind of project I work for. I said, "Why don't you have a group out in Washington, DC that you can try to keep in contact with and get more information about more legislative information out there and get more top information?" They had me as a representative for about three or four years and then the next year I was a co-chair of SABE.

Caldwell: You were a co-chair? Who was the chair then?

Robinson: Chester was the chair person.

Caldwell: How long ago was that?

Robinson: That was about four years ago.

Caldwell: You did that for about how long?

Robinson: For about two years.

Caldwell: Now you are on the board as the regional rep?

Robinson: Yeah, for DC, Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey.

Caldwell: So let me ask you some questions about the self-advocacy movement. What challenges do you think the self-advocacy movement faces?

Robinson: Well, one of the challenges they face is the new vote on Presidential candidacy. Now that we have new candidates coming through we want to

see who is going to be the president and we want to know if this President is going to try to hold up on what they are going to say. If they are going to try to help us with health care for people with disabilities, we want to see how they are going to try to hold up on this strategy on working with more people with disabilities across the nation. We want to understand what is their strategy, how they are going to take it about, and what is the most strongest thing they are going to try to understand from us.

Caldwell: So you think the Presidential election is a big challenge?

Robinson: Yeah.

Caldwell: What other things about the self-advocacy movement across the country? What other challenges do you think it is facing?

Robinson: I say that one other thing is that it might be for people who are trying to live in low district areas. People who have low profit are not really being encouraged to have more money. People who are on legislative councils, and DDC Councils are not really helping people with money that much, because if we are trying to form these kind of situations we are trying to ask them to help us by coming together with disability rights. We are trying to have civil rights together. We want to have a civil rights council and a legislative council by a political legislative person. We want them to understand that they can open their door to understand what is going through and what is going on. They have to focus on us and what is our needs –what are the needs of people who are really low on money, low on profit, and low on education. More education is needed with them. I also think more education is needed with people who are in political areas.

Caldwell: So, with the self-advocacy movement, where would you like to see it go in the future? What is your vision for the self-advocacy movement?

Robinson: My vision is that more people who are very interested in this should try to get very involved in this. They should try to get more educated about this. If they want to understand how people are feeling and what is involved in this, they should be encouraged in helping people in different ways. From coming across the nation and working with people with disabilities, everybody should try to have an approval from, not just their organization, but maybe their families and support person –maybe they find some person who is working in the media or on the radio, any which way.

Caldwell: Let me ask you about younger self advocates or the next generation of self advocates with disabilities. What sort of things do you think the younger people with disabilities, younger self advocates, need? Do you think there are any differences between that generation and your generation?

Robinson: Well, there might be a slight difference because the ones that are very young are not that very much educated on how things have been happening from the past. They do not know what how much has been happening from the fifties and sixties. They want to know what has been moving up and happening from then. If they already know from the eighties or from 2000, then that is all the information they have. But if you educate them back from the past up until now, then they will be encouraged to know more; they will have more education, more encouragement, and a boost to go with things they want to go with. If they want to be an advocate and be an analyst on how to get things moving, they will have to move on with fighting for people's right. Maybe just give a speech out in the open, or a forum, something to help educate them about how to do it and what to do. They will have to understand what areas have been happening from their past, what has been going on from right now, and what should be going on in the future.

Caldwell: Are there any other supports you think would be helpful for the younger generation?

Robinson: Maybe if they understand how things can be moved on, like going through the media. Maybe they could try to get a little stronger on that. If they do understand about how electronics work now, maybe try to get it on a DVD. They will understand what is new right now –you got ipods out there right now. You have lots of other things out there.

Caldwell: So, let me go back and ask you some questions about leadership. What would you say leadership means to you?

Robinson: Well, leadership means strength and power. You have to be very strong to do things. You have to have a strong mind on thinking. Strength, you have to have that encouragement from yourself or from maybe someone else that you think might be able, to help you and that power that you want, to push somebody to keep on moving. If you got that power, you can have enough to keep on going straight through and not stop. When you have power that gives you more energy, more boost to not stop. That

will keep you going for days, and days, and maybe years. You will just keep going straight through, like a bullet. If you got that bullet to move very fast, you can move fast. It is not just power, but I would say it is more like spirit. If you got that spirit inside you, if you are very strong minded, you can think about lots of things you want to know about and be involved in.

Caldwell: What skills or qualities do you think it is important for leaders to have?

Robinson: One is for a person to understand how they should be handling things. Two, what they should do in cases of problems. Three, they should try to be calm in situations like if there is a bad situation if someone is being criticized on something. They should try to maybe not be encouraged to talk back to them and find a way to ignore something that is being talked about very bad about you. Another one is that if you are going to be a leader, you are going to have that much strength to have walking power if you are going to march. If you are going to march you are going to walk with a band of maybe a thousand people. That is another one of them, to be encourage-able.

Caldwell: I wanted to ask you more about leadership. When you think about leaders, who would you call a great leader? Who are some of the people you have looked up to as great leaders?

Robinson: Well, one person I would say is Chester Finn. He is a very bright and very tough person. I know he has encouragement. He tried to get me into being a co-chair. He has very god knowledge about how to work with lots of other disabled and non-disabled people and people who want to work around the communities in any which way.

Caldwell: So he encouraged you to become a co-chair?

Robinson: Well, in one way he did. Maybe not encouraged me, but maybe by me observing how he does it. By me looking at him being a chair person, I observed how he was acting. When giving a speech, how the way he was handling things. That is what encouraged me, by observing how he does it; and I can see how Julie Petty does it. That is what encouraged me to do things.

Caldwell: Anybody else you look up to or somebody you would call a great leader?

Robinson: I would say the president of ADAPT, Bob Kafka. One other person I would say is Judy Heumann. She is a very encourage-able person. She has had lots of information and training about things. I have read about the things she has done. I have understood about how she has move around the world and did lots of things through the states. From the time I have been working with SABE, I know how she has done lots of things with Tia and Chester and lots of other things.

Caldwell: Have you met her?

Robinson: Yes, I have worked with her on a few of the councils I am on.

Caldwell: Now she is in DC working with the service system.

Robinson: Yes, I might be able to work with her sometime soon. Her husband wants to promote me to one of her legislative councils. They said when I gave a speech about how the legislative council should try to try to understand how people with disabilities are not being listened to and heard, she and everybody was impressed. When I came to the DD Council and the DC chairman was asking me, I told him everybody should try to understand by opening the doors and helping other people with disabilities and looking at their needs. We do want them to work with us, maybe working on a few congresswomen and congressmen in the building. If we do get a chance to work downtown in the Congress, that might help out.

Caldwell: All the people you mentioned have disabilities too. Do you think that is important for people with disabilities to have mentors or role models like that?

Robinson: Yeah. It is more like if anybody has a role model, they will try to be encouraged by their role model. Ever since I was at Kennedy, I was a role model for the students. By me getting a job at Kennedy, I was helping the students to stay in there and not trying to step out the track. Staying in the system and helping out with other students, that is like being a role model for everyone else. By me staying in there and not letting go, being a tough role model and helping out.

Caldwell: I think we covered most everything. Is there anything else you wanted to talk about or add?

Robinson: I can tell you that lots of other people who do need some needs, do want these doors open and want to help other people. People without

disabilities should look more into working with people with disabilities, because we are looking for jobs out there and working hard to try to talk with you. We want them to get to understand what is the need for everybody, equalize the system between people with disabilities and non-disabilities. If there is no equality between you and me then nobody can live with each other. It is almost like with Dr. King and black and white people. He was trying to civilize everything, with a person who was black and a person who was white. Well, he got that straight and now we are trying to civilize things with a person who has a disability. Trying to get jobs and get people with their rights and everything. Well, we are trying to do that now. We have been trying to do it since the fifties but nobody did listen, but now ADAPT and SABLE and people across the country are working now with us.