“JM”

Interviewed by Allison Seyler

March 5, 2019
Okay, so this is Allison Seyler here with JM on March 5th, 2019, at the Eisenhower Library, for our first-generation college student oral history interviews. So, just to get started, if you could tell me where you were born and maybe a little bit about your family.

Well, I was born in New York City, I have lived there pretty much the entirety of my life until I came to Hopkins. Both of my parents are New Yorkers as well, and neither of them went to college, I think they primarily just finished high school. There are members of my family who have attended college, like my aunt and my brother. I think he did complete his year recently, and I am not sure what else to say.

Okay. So, do you want to talk a little bit maybe about what your parents did when you were growing up for their jobs or anything like that?

Okay, so my dad is disabled and he has been that way since I was a little girl, so most of the time I was being raised by my dad, and then as I transitioned into being older, I got to spend more time with my mom, which was good. To the point where I love hanging out with my mom now, she visits me once a month here in Hopkins – so much fun. And there was a difficult situation in my life when there was a fire in my father's apartment which led to a pretty sharp transition in my life, especially in terms of how I interact with my family and being able to see them on a regular basis. They're all fine right now, but it's important to talk about because it did shape a lot of who I am as a person and why even that I chose to go to Hopkins.

And in terms of things they did that were really helpful for me growing up: in New York City there's a school called Horace Mann. And they have this summer preparatory program called “Summer on the Hill,” and I did that for six years I would say,
yeah, six years. It was pretty much what I got to do instead of going to camp, I went to “Summer on the Hill.” And it was fun because it was getting me ahead academically but also we got to do a lot of cool things, like –I didn't learn how to swim—but they had an opportunity to swim. We had tennis, we got to go on field trips to this outdoor camp called John Dorr, we had theater class, there was a lot of stuff that we got to do, and some of my best friends were in that program too. So, I'm grateful that I had that opportunity, and it helped propel me forward.

AS: Great, that's a really useful thing. So, it sounds like both your parents really knew that education sort of held a key in some way. Could you talk maybe about how you talked about education with your parents or what they advocated for?

JM: So, I think what my parents primarily advocated for was me doing whatever was interesting to me; it was a program that the teacher had brought to my dad's attention. And my mom was skeptical about it just because my mom's skeptical of change just to begin with, so she's always wary when I'm trying something completely new. But my dad's like, "100 percent. You told me my daughter's gifted. We're going to go for it." He's that braggy kind of dad. So, I went for it and I love it and they've been that way for a lot of other things that I've done throughout my life. Like my dad's always been like, "If this makes you happy, I'm going to let you do it and I'm going to support you the entire time."

My mom's always a little more cautious and skeptical, but it's always good because she provides me with a different perspective to think about – she's providing me like the early opposition I guess and it's like: if I'm really willing to fight her on this topic, that means I really want to do it. And for all the things that I've done, I have, and they've really been beneficial to me, so I'm glad that my mom provided – I don't want to say opposition, it sounds so weird, but [laughs] it's kind of the truth.

AS: Maybe balance.

JM: Balance, yeah.

AS: Okay. Could you talk a little bit more about your experience growing up in New York? And maybe your high school and maybe expand a little bit on the program that you mentioned earlier?

JM: I'm a true New Yorker at heart. I still argue with my boyfriend about which is better, New York or Baltimore and he's just
constantly a pain in my butt about it. And I think being a New Yorker has shaped who I am completely, because New York is an extremely diverse place. I have grown up with people who were Hispanic, who were from the Middle East, who were white, who were Asian. So, I've gotten to meet and interact with a lot of different people. So, I think that made me really comfortable with just people from all cultures and all backgrounds. And I didn't ever feel awkward when I went into a new situation.

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And then I think New York is just such a different kind of place, I don't really know how to explain it. It's just that there are so many opportunities available to people that hopping into one is super easy but also really challenging because you have to pick: is this the right one for you?

So, it takes a lot of thought process to go into it. I did Horace Mann was when I was super young, I was like second grade. So, my dad basically made the decision for me, though he said I came out of the pre-screening test super calm. Everyone else was panicking and I was just like, "Yeah, I finished. So what?"

[Laughs]. So, that was the best part of living in New York: just being exposed to so many different things.

The sad part about me being a New Yorker is that I have not been to so many places in New York. Most New Yorkers don't go to – I hate Times Square. Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building – I worked down the street from the Empire State Building for the past two years when I'm in New York and I have not been. But that's pretty normal –

AS:
You stay in your neighborhood sort of?

JM:
I'm a homebody, so I really don't like to do too much stuff outside. Unless someone tells me, "J, we're going to go do this," and I'm like, "Okay, that's totally fine." But otherwise I'm like, "I'm good. I'm going to stay in the house, I'm going to read, I'm going to watch TV, I'm going to relax." because most of my days are super busy. I went to high school at High School of American Studies. And that's a specialized high school in New York, and there's a special test you have to get in, and people are telling me, "Oh, you should have a backup school like a non-specialized high school." And I was like, "Nah, I'm going to American Studies. End of discussion." I got in, I love that school, and I still go back and visit it a lot. Because of the fact that the people there were really fun
and really quirky, like even my teachers. I miss them as much as I miss the people there. Sorry.

_A_S_: You're fine.

_J_M_: And then it was also pretty heavily intensive in terms of education and school work. To the point where my mom complained about it a lot: how much homework I was doing. But I think it was beneficial because I came into Hopkins and I wasn't overwhelmed by it. I thought it was pretty on-level with how much work I had to do in American Studies. And here I got to pick my own schedule, so if I didn't want to do six classes a day I didn't have to. I mean, three classes a day still feel like six classes a day, honestly. But I can adjust my schedule as I wish. And the teacher there, Mr. Mansdorf, was the reason I came to Hopkins. I applied there pretty much on a whim, just because I was like, "Well, if I get in here then I want to go to grad school here."

And I got in, got pretty much of a full ride, and I wasn't sure because I wanted to stay in New York, because that really is my comfort zone. But Mr. Mansdorf was like, "No, you need to do this. This is a fantastic school for you to go to and I don't want you to stay inside your own bubble. I want you to go out and expand who you are." And I was like, "Okay." Also, Columbia didn't accept me so that was also the reason. So, I came down here having only been to Baltimore on trips—like I didn't even come and tour the campus before I got here. I came in and it was the best decision I made, so I owe Mr. Mansdorf a lot when I graduate. I'm sending him a thank-you letter, like, "Thank you so much for making sure I actually went here."

_A_S_: Yeah, that sounds like you had the sort of right self-motivation but also some good supporters in your high school career too. So, can you talk a little bit about being the first person in your immediate family going to college? And maybe your family's reaction when you were accepted to Hopkins?

_J_M_: So, it was definitely difficult just because of the fact that I wasn’t – I'll admit I wasn't the most proactive when it came to applying to colleges. I really applied just before the deadline for most of the colleges I applied to. And I've just been that way with big changes in my life, so I kind of learned to accept that about myself, I'm trying to change it but it's just a fact about who I am. But my parents have been supportive but also – same issue that they brought in when I was going to Horace Mann. My dad was super excited, really braggy, like whenever the acceptance letters came
in, he was just running around the house like, “I got accepted into
this.” And it's just like, "Oh my God, Dad." So, he was super
excited about it and was just pretty much open to it. He wasn't
super hands-on in the application process.

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And my mom didn't want to be hands-on in the application process
but then she ended up being that way, to the point of annoying me.
Because my senior year was really tiring and really stressful and I
was like, "Mom, I'm trying to finish my homework. Please do not
ask me about questions about college right now. I need to get this
homework done first," essentially. And my dad was super excited
when I got into Hopkins because – well, he wanted me to go to
Syracuse so he could go to the basketball games, but he was
excited that I got into Hopkins and they gave me a lot of money.
My mom was very against – I wouldn't say against it, just very
uncomfortable with it.

And I primarily think that's because my two other siblings live in a
different state than my mom. So, my sister lives in Philly and my
brother was in Texas up until recently. So, I think she just didn't
want her last child to be so far away from her and she was also just
worried about what would happen, especially because I entered
Hopkins the semester after the Baltimore Uprising.1 So, they were
super worried about my safety, but eventually I convinced my
mom. I was like, "No, I'm going to do this and you can't change
my mind about it. I appreciate your concern but this is what I
wanted to do." And eventually she got behind it and now she's
fully team “Johns Hopkins.” To the point where she says to me
randomly, "Oh, you're growing up so much. That Johns-dude is
doing such a good job with you." And it's just like – because I'm
learning how to adult I suppose.

AS: She's fully embraced the Johns Hopkins experience I see.

JM: Yes, she loves it. And she loves being able to come down here, like
my best friends are now like her kids as far as she's concerned and
she'll text them in the morning as well as me. So, it's kind of funny.

AS: That's really great. Okay. That is a great segue to the next question:
could you describe your first few weeks of undergraduate? The
transition to moving to Baltimore and maybe about your living
situations that you've had either on campus or off campus.

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1 The interviewee references the widespread protests and the civil unrest that arose in Baltimore City during
April 2015, after a 25-year-old African American man, Freddie Gray died in police custody.
Okay. So, I'm going to say that my first transition into Hopkins was super hectic. Primarily because even my first day was just stressful. We were supposed to have a rental van to drive me down, that got messed up, and it was like we were supposed to leave early in the morning and we didn't get to leave till late afternoon and then we had to use our van instead of a rental van, which none of us wanted to do. So, we traveled down and then my family had a fight in my dorm room the first day. And I kicked them out. I was like, "I can't do this with you people right now. You're stressing me out and this is not about you guys; this is about me. So please take this out of my space." Especially because I was in a shared space, so I didn't know when my roommate was coming back either. So, I was like, "I don't want her to come in, see my family losing their minds right now." So that was my first day at Hopkins.

And being a freshman was difficult for me, not academically, but because of socially. Everyone I know is from New York and I don't have any family in Baltimore, and I didn't have any friends who applied here, either my year or previously, so I was pretty much by myself. And I'm a person that I thrive with my family. I'm a person that in high school, I used to hug people as I walked down the hall. To the point where my friend, Reshma, for an entire year, did not hug me because I hugged her too much. She's like, "J, I need a break from you." But I love hugs! So, it was hard for me not having people like that.

Eventually I did find a group of people in my major who are my best friends now. So, I was glad to finally get in that social circle and have those friends that I needed to emotionally survive here. And then in terms of my living situations, let me think, freshman year I lived in a double in AMR II. So, basically a room – I wouldn't say much bigger than this – that I shared with another girl. It was completely random, because obviously I didn't know anybody at Hopkins, and she was cool. We weren't the kind of people that would've been friends if we weren't put together in the same kind of environment. Especially because we're super opposite in terms of our sleeping habits, our eating habits, so that caused some tension.

And then after that I was like, "Well, I'm not doing that again." So, I moved into McCoy and even though I was in a triple, my room was a single. So, it was like I had my own room where I don't have to interact with people if I don't want to. Which was good, I needed my own retreat, and living with roommates is always crazy hectic, as you can imagine. Because you always have different
personalities, and stupid things will cause issues: like my roommate in sophomore year – she was a vegan and she cooked all her own food. But that meant that she filled up the fridge with every single thing that she had to cook and even though I don't cook for myself like that, I do want fridge space. So, it was always irksome to come in and then it's like: we had two fridges but they were full! So, stupid things like that make you really upset when you have roommates.

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And then junior year I transitioned to living in my own apartment. I live in the Marylander and I live in a studio. And it was good for me because it's not too much money and it was a decent-sized space. I have my own walk-in closet, which was like: "Yes!" I love clothes. So, yes to my walk-in closet. But then soon after me being there, my dad had the situation where he got evicted.

And he had to live with me for like two months. And I offered that to him, I was like, "Dad, you can come down here and stay with me." And that was fun but also hella stressful. It was a studio apartment, good square footage but not big enough for my dad's personality. And then I was just starting dating for the first time also [laughs]. So, it was like all of a sudden, I was back in high school, it was ridiculous, I'm a junior in college and it's like dating is hard now because my dad's here. He left after two months and then my boyfriend actually moved in with me pretty soon after. And we've been living together for almost two years, oh my God.

AS: Time flies.

JM: Yeah, time flies. And it's been good, it's definitely strange living in an apartment because there's bills to take care of, there's utilities; you have to worry about if your plumbing's messed up at the moment, you have to know who to talk to, and so that's really stressful, but I'm glad to have him with me for this whole part of it. Though he makes me crazy, as you can possibly imagine.

AS: It's the whole adulting thing.

JM: Yeah, adulting is not fun.

AS: Okay, great. It's really interesting to hear all about the different sort of transitions that you've had. So, when you got to Hopkins, did you meet any other – you mentioned you had some friends within your cohort from your major, but did you meet any other students
that were first-generation college students? Or is that not something you've encountered?

_JM:_ So, the thing is: I don't even know if they are first-generation. Which is funny, because I know their family, I just don't know if their family went to college. A bunch of my friends are minorities, which is good, like my friends, Justin and Rafa, are black. Maia, who I walked past when I was coming up here – she's black, my friend, Anna, is Peruvian. And then I have a group of people who are also Hispanic and Asian, so I have a diverse group of friends, which was super important for me. But then I don't know if they are first-generation; I know that we're all struggling with the college life pretty much at the same rate, even if I'm the only one that's first-generation. But they've been super supportive, and it's good to have someone who's on your level at that moment because you can vent to them without seeming crazy, because they understand, they're at the same point in their life. I don't know if any of them are first-generation.

_AS:_ Okay, yeah, I don't know if it's a qualifier that people sort of use to identify themselves. So, I think one of the important things about this interview too is to talk about your program of study. So maybe if you could describe how you chose that and maybe what you see that's valuable about your area of study.

_JM:_ Okay, I'm an environmental engineer, that's my major, and then my minor is classics, so Greek mythology, Roman stuff. And I chose environmental engineering because for three years of my life I worked in the parks in New York, at Van Cortlandt Park, and I got to do a lot of different things with them. I got to work on the trails, I got to do forest restoration, which means removing invasive plants; got to run volunteer days, got to interact with donors, worked in the office to help plan events; so, lots of different things that I got to do with them.

And I think for me it's like the end goal for me, even if my career out of college isn't the parks, I want that to be the end thing that I do. Because the parks is what started it off for me and made me happy. I had to get there at like 7:00 AM every morning and I got up at 5:00 AM, no problem. I didn't even want to stay in bed later because I loved being there so much even though bugs and heat were not fun, but I loved it. So, I originally was going to do civil engineering, but then I transitioned to environmental engineering. Because I was like, "I need to come back to the park, some way, somehow." And that's what I chose to do.
And my first friends were in this major. And we call ourselves “Enviro Squad,” which is kind of funny. And so I've had four years with these same people who drive me insane, but it's nice that I'm with them all the time academically, like I always have somebody in my classes who I can work with, we can do homework with, study with, scream at the universe with.

And the major isn't primarily geared to what I want to do, just because environmental engineering is such a huge field, it's geared to more water and waste treatment at Hopkins. And for me I want to do something that's more of an environmental/civil combination, so like green buildings, green roofs, urban planning, landscape architecture, lots of things like that: a combination of enviro and civil engineering. So, I'm finishing my year but I really want to go into a master's program. One in DC – I have to apply, amidst doing all my homework.

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And that program is more geared to what I want to do. And I don't know what I'm going to do after that, I want to do trade school at some point in my life as well. So, I don't know exactly what my plan is out of college, and my family is like, "J, you need to know," and I'm like, "Homework though."

AS: You've got a lot of goals. It's okay to have a lot of goals. [laughs] Do you have any specific professors or classes that were sort of your favorites or most memorable?

JM: So, a lot of my Classics classes are memorable to me because Greek mythology is like my escape, that's like my obsession. If I thought I could do Classics as like a career, which I personally don't feel like I could, then I feel like that probably would've been my major, just because I love Greek mythology that much.

But in terms of my environmental engineering teachers, I've had a lot of them multiple times because it's a small department. So, Hedy is one of our teachers, and it's funny having Hedy is a teacher because, first off, his voice sounds like Mrs. Doubtfire, so he's soft-spoken and really nice. [both laugh] And he's the nicest teacher ever, which was really good coming into Hopkins, like he wasn't crazy about deadlines, and if you needed time for more understanding or help, he was 100% with it. And so I've had three classes by him, and I'm actually a TA for him, for the past two semesters, so I love interacting with Hedy, he's writing my recommendation letter for graduate school.
And then there're a couple other teachers that I've had that were pretty memorable: Lynn Roberts was one of my teachers, she teaches emerging environmental issues and environmental engineering lab. Environmental engineering lab is death: it is death.

**AS:** I’ve heard that about chemistry too. [laughs]

**JM:** Chem lab is 100% worse! Orgo lab is the worst because that's five hours! But mine's pretty up there. We had this one lab where we were supposed to get out at like 5:00, we did not get out till 7:00. And we were all working continuously; there were three of us in the group working continuously and it was that long. But she taught us how to write a good lab report, which is important when you're an engineer, you're going to be doing research all the time so you need to know how to do it properly. So even though that class caused me an exhaustive amount of stress, I'm thankful for the skills that it taught me in terms of that. Also, she has three collies and they're in her office sometimes, so it's cool when we go down there and the dogs just come and sit on our feet when we're talking to her.

**AS:** Who knew? That's great.

**JM:** A bunch of people on campus have dogs in their offices. It's pretty normal, at least in my department it is.

**AS:** That's great, definitely cheers you up a little bit. Okay, so, did you join any clubs or do any activities on campus in your time here?

**JM:** So, I actually didn't and the primary reason for that was because in high school I really burned myself out. My senior year – everyone says "senioritis," like you chill during your senior year, that was the exact opposite for me. I was taking four AP classes, I was taking college classes, I had volunteer work after school in two different areas and then I was also working on the weekends. So, I pretty much drove myself into the ground senior year. And so when I got to Hopkins, even though there were a bunch of clubs that were interesting, like music ones, dance ones, other than auditioning once or twice, I wasn't really trying my best to do that, just because I wanted a break from it, I wanted a break from all the work that I did.

And eventually what happened was that I primarily focused on my schoolwork and then working, so I've had two to three jobs the
entire time that I've been working at Hopkins. So, my classes and then my working has pretty much taken up my schedule. I live the club life vicariously through my friends who have way too many clubs that they're running and they're burning themselves out and I'm just like, "See? This is why I didn't do it." But it works for some people, it just wasn't for me.

AS: Okay. Do you want to talk about your jobs then? That would be a really neat thing to elaborate on.

JM: Okay. What's great about Hopkins – I don't know if all schools do this, I assume they do – is that there's a student job website which lists constantly all the jobs that are available for people to have. And that's good because I honestly had no clue how I was going to get a job here on campus, because my job in high school was completely separate from my school obviously. And then my first year I worked as a gardener and even though that was what I wanted to do I was the only gardener there besides my supervisor. So, I stopped doing that because it was kind of weird for me. When I work with people, I like to work around people, I don't want to be by myself, that's too much time with my thoughts as far as I'm concerned, so I stopped doing that.

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And then I've been an office assistant with the anthropology department for the past three years. It's a pretty chill job, I make posters for colloquiums, help set those up, scan things for the teachers, just do a lot of miscellaneous stuff. And I get to sit and do my homework the majority of the time, which is pretty cool: I get paid to do my homework. So, I really appreciate that.

I've been a TA for three semesters, a different TA each time. Being a TA is different depending on what class you're teaching for, because some classes require you to teach a section, so you have to come up with problems for them; you have to go over the material, you basically have to make a lesson plan. Some of them require you to be a grader, just grading the homeworks. All TA jobs require you to have office hours so people can come and ask you questions, so those are extensions to my time on campus a lot, but I like being a TA.

And then for the past two years – this is ridiculous when I'm talking out loud, realizing how much stuff I've done. For the past two years I've been working for Vector, Vector Marketing. And I

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2 TA is shorthand for Teaching Assistant.
feel like anyone who's going to hear this is going to think, "Oh, the knife job. It's such a scam." It really is not, it really was a transformative experience for me, I sold $16,000.00 my first summer.

*AS:* Wow.

*JM:* I didn't think I was going to be there for more than two weeks. And I did it and it brought out a lot of confidence in me because I didn't know I could do that. I'm not saying I'm at where I want to be confidence-level, but it definitely helped with that. And I always credit Vector with me ending up in my current relationship, because it gave me the confidence to be with him, and I asked for his number first actually [laughs].

So, the job gave me a lot of confidence that way. And then it's also given me a lot of professional skills. Like this last summer I worked as a branch manager, which means I had my own office, that was in New York City, and it was a shared space. But I had my own team that I was running. And that was hectic. I was running interviews all the time. We were running trainings that had like 100 people in it in a small space, and then I had to keep up with my team, make sure: "Hey, how are you doing in terms of selling? How are you doing in terms of personal goals? Are you where you want to be? What is the reason you're with Vector? Are you doing it just for money or do you want to do it for personal growth? Or do you want to be here longer – the way I have?" So, I've been doing that for two years with them.

Right now, I'm honestly on a break with them just because the last year of preparing to be branch and then being branch and then relaxing from branch was honestly a lot. Opening your own business at the age of 20 is a lot. So I'm kind of detoxing from them right now, but it doesn't mean that I don't love them and I don't think that I wouldn't go back to them, it's just like: sometimes when you're driving yourself crazy you gotta take a break from them even if it's things that you love.

*AS:* Those are some really great accomplishments. You should be really proud of yourself.

*JM:* Thank you.

*AS:* So, speaking of that, I guess sort of: I assume that during your summers and breaks that you have worked. So maybe could you
talk about going home to New York or what you did during your summers and breaks?

JM: So, for my breaks, I've just constantly been working since junior year of high school, I've constantly had a job. So, I worked for Van Cortlandt Park most of the summers and winter breaks that I was back and then once I stopped with that, I started with Vector Marketing, and I've been working for them and just seeing them. So, I work during my longer breaks, so, during my summer break and my winter break. My fall and spring break, I really am only there for a week and then I spend half of it getting my hair redone, because that's the lady that does my braids, she's in New York, so I do that. And then I try to see my family, but a week is a really short amount of time, and I don't feel like most people realize that until they're trying to get a lot done in it and then you're like, "Holy crap. I can't do everything I want to do." But I'm primarily used to working.

This was the first winter break, this past winter break, where I actually chilled most of the time. I actually saw people I haven't seen in two years, so that was good for me. I was seeing a bunch of my friends and reconnecting and talking to people that I missed. I came back here early because I still need money, of course, but it was nice to have an actual break for once. Most people don't do work-cations, that's just what I typically do.

AS: That's good you were able to rest. So, could you talk a little bit about maybe your support system while you've been in school? And that can take many different forms, whether or not it's friends, family, or anything like that, professors maybe.

JM: So, "Enviro Squad" are my best friends, and, like I said, having them for four years has been really helpful because we're going through same classes with each other. And we're with each other through the ups and the downs and the struggles of it. So, they're my support system and I feel like we all support each other very equally, to the point where my mom was confused the past year, like, "What? You're not doing homework with Enviro Squad? Why not?" It was just because our schedules are all so busy this year that it's just hard to connect the way we want to, especially once you live off campus.

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Because when you live in dorms, it's like there's only three spaces you could possibly be in, but when you live off campus, it's like:
my friend Justin lives all the way near Shriver, and then my friend Anna lives all the way at the academy, varsity, and then I live somewhere in the middle. So, it's not convenient travel-wise either. But I think it's great because they're there academically but they're also there for me as a person.

My friend Anna is really my best friend here, and we've gone through a lot together. We work together, we've been in school together, we've complained about the boys in our group together, and she's the person I talk to whenever I'm really stressing out. When it's not something that I don't need to vent to my boyfriend about again, I tell her and she's a different perspective but also a feminine perspective, which is super important for me.

And then my family has been really supportive, especially emotionally, because my parents know that I'm the kind of person that I'll work myself down, to burning myself out. And my dad instilled this thing in me when I was growing up called “mental health days.” So basically, where there were days where it's like if he could see that I was unusually stressed, he would be like, "You're not going to school today." Which sounds crazy, but he did that for me to make sure that I wasn't burning myself out on a constant basis. So that kind of taught me that there are times where you need to stop yourself. Yes, this class is important. Yes, your jobs are important, but if you're bringing yourself down then it's not going to matter in the end all the stuff that you're doing, if you're not enjoying it or not around to enjoy it either.

So, I take mental health days when I need to, and I think we all do sometimes, which is also good about having friends in all your classes. They understand, it’s like: "I cannot be in today for XYZ," and they're like, "Okay, I got you with the notes. Don't even worry about it."

My mom has been even more supportive the past couple years financially, coming down to see me, she takes me to Cheesecake Factory, which is super fun. There's not a close Cheesecake Factory in New York but here it's super close, so we go enjoy macaroni balls. Those are good – you should get them.

AS: I'll take a note for that.

JM: Those are so good, I'm not even joking! To the point where my mom doesn't even ask me about that; she's just like, “J, just pick your entrée. The appetizers – we know what we're getting." And then my boyfriend has also been really supportive as well, just
because of the fact that he sees me at the end of the day. He sees what the school and what my jobs do to me when I don't have anyone where I have to put on a façade for, I suppose. So, he's the one I can be really open with about the struggles of working, especially with Vector, because we started dating after Vector. So he has seen all the ups and the downs and he has no problem being completely open with me, like, "I think you're doing too much" or "I don't think" – well, I say this about his job sometimes, where it's like: "I don't think they appreciate you enough." So, I think we have a good communication, a good camaraderie with that, but we're also both trying to grow, so he's not the person who's going to be like, "Oh, just do whatever." He's like, "No, I'm going to push you, to a good point. Like not past your breaking point."

**AS:** That's a great thing to have. Is he a Hopkins student as well?

**JM:** No, he's not.

**AS:** So, I think one of the things that you touched on a little bit about – and maybe going to Cheesecake Factory is one of these things, but could you talk about maybe how you've explored Baltimore or what your experience has been with the city?

**JM:** So, I definitely haven't explored it as much as I should have. Primarily because I'm a homebody, I'm the kind of person that, at the end of the day, and I've done a lot during the day, that I like to just relax on the weekends unless someone's telling me, "We're going to go somewhere." But usually when my mom comes to visit is when I go out into the city, I've been down to Inner Harbor. Inner Harbor is super cool because it's, first off, on the water, which you don't get to see much when you're in New York City, surrounded by buildings all the time. And then we love to shop, as you can imagine [both laugh]. So, we love to do little shopping trips in Inner Harbor, get food, there's a giant Barnes & Noble's there, it's super amazing.

And then Towson is another place I've been to multiple times, another shopping center, I like to shop [laughs]. And so those are places that I've been to multiple times, I haven't explored Baltimore a lot. The only times I've been around Baltimore more is because me and my boyfriend are driving somewhere, and then that's allowing me to see more of the city. Especially because he's from Cherry Hill, so it's like a completely different vibe from the middle of the city, especially around the college campus. So, I get to see more of what Baltimore's about, but I think it's just also that
I'm such a New York City person that it's like: if I can't – the transportation here is trash – I'm sorry, but it is.

AS: That is a valid point.

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JM: Public transportation, after being from New York, depresses me. So, it's just not as easy as I want it to go and do a lot of things. I think for some people it's completely different because they're not from New York City where it's like public transportation is like – the only time we've ever had public transportation be closed was during Sandy, the one hurricane – otherwise it's always running, it's always – I wouldn't say "good," but it's always functional.

AS: Consistent.

JM: Yeah, consistent, and here it's not, so that was a shocker for me, to have to deal with that. Thank the Lord my boyfriend has a car, because otherwise I probably wouldn't go places [laughs].

AS: Yeah, it's interesting: the city transition life – moving from one city to a smaller city. Okay, so you did touch a little bit on life after Hopkins. Did you want to talk any more about that? And maybe are you looking at grad school programs or are you going to take a gap year? You can expand –

JM: So I'm super indecisive about it, just because I think that's how I am when it comes to big changes in my life, but I want to do grad school at George Washington University in DC, primarily because it has the master's program that I would want. And also, it's close to Baltimore, I need to stay close to Baltimore because my boyfriend has a daughter. And I love her to death – so I want us to be able to be in her life, which is why even though there are grad schools that fit me in other cities, it's like, "No, I want to stay as close to here as I can," at least for the next two years, because she's like super young, so I think that's important. So that's the school that fit me, and their applications aren't due for like another month, so spring break that's all I'm doing.

And that's my main thing that I want to do, I've been to one or two job fairs the past year, so I've been seeing what kinda jobs are out there. And it is kinda stressful when you're applying for jobs because of the fact that it's like you want to do a certain thing and that thing may not be open to you at that moment. Like there's this joke: "you need experience to get a job and a job to get
experience.” So that's super annoying and stressful to have to deal with. And my friend Anna is way more ahead of me in terms of this, so I'm proud of her for that. But I don't know, I'm just not 100% certain what I'm going to do. I know where I'm going to be in the next year but I don't know exactly what I'm going to be doing.

**AS:**

I think that's okay after a life of making big decisions and being so proactive in your own education, I think it's okay to take a moment. So, I guess one of the things too I'd like to ask is: would you recommend Hopkins to other first-generation students? And is there any advice that you'd give them if they were to come here?

**JM:**

That's an interesting question. I think Hopkins was really the best place for me, just because of the fact that the environment was right, it was still in a city. So, I could not go to a rural area or a small college, I could not do that. I'm used to being around a lot of people on a regular basis, so I think this school fits me environmentally. And then also the kind of people here, it's pretty diverse, so if you want to continue to be around a lot of people who are different than you or if you just want to be around a lot of people because you're from a big area, or you're from a small area and you think it would work for you, then I think Hopkins is fantastic.

Academically I couldn't speak on it primarily, just because each program is different. And it is a lot of work, it's Hopkins, there's no way in hell it couldn't be a lot of work. And some people are prepared for that; some people are not. And I think in the first year of people being at Hopkins, they realize. So I think in the first year you can really tell: "Is this academically where I want to be? Is this environmentally where I want to be?" But I think those are factors for people to think a lot about, because I didn't even come here, which is also crazy, I didn't do a campus tour. But I just kind of knew what I thought would work best for me and I did it.

And in terms of being at Hopkins, the advice I would give is – and I actually just did a college panel a couple of weeks ago – so the advice I would give is to prepare yourself in high school for college. So, especially if you're a first-generation student, because of the fact that you're going to have – you're not going to have a lot of people in your immediate circle who know what college is like.

[0:40:00]
So, when you're struggling, even though they're going to be supportive, they're not going to really know how to help you in the most proactive manner because they haven't gone through it themselves. So the best thing to do would be to interact with a lot of people where you're going and just a lot of people who have been in college, who maybe aren't first-generation, because then you can speak to their parents about what it's like to go to college, though college back then was different – definitely.

And academically prepare yourself, learn yourself, learn how you study. Are you comfortable being around a lot of people when you study? I don't like that – because if I want to get mad, I want to get mad and not have people judge me. So just learn yourself and learn your best way to study, because once you enter college, no one's there to hold your hand. Which is good because it's like the transition years from yourself to adulthood, so you really need to learn how to stand on your own. So, I think learning about yourself and learning how to be comfortable with who you are is super important when you're in high school.

You're going to have time to do that in college but there's no guarantee of that, especially because you're going to be bombarded with lots of new things. So, when you're comfortable with who you are and your boundaries, especially when it comes to partying, that whole kind of thing, I think you'll have an easier transition.

\textit{AS:} I think that's really wonderful advice.

\textit{JM:} Thank you.

\textit{AS:} So, I guess ultimately, after all your years at Hopkins, is there a way that you would maybe summarize your time here, or is there sort of an end cap you'd like to put on it?

\textit{JM:} My time here at Hopkins was extremely transformative, like when I think back to who I was senior year of high school, it's like I'm a definitely different person. I'm the same where it really matters, of course, but I've definitely changed. I've gained a lot of confidence, I've gained a lot of experience in terms of working and academically, personally, so it's definitely – I thank the Lord that I was able to do this. This was the best decision I made to come to Hopkins, even though it was really a scary thing for me to come to Baltimore, where I don't know anybody and do my experience here, but I don't regret it in any way. And the people that I met here have changed my life and they're going to be in my wedding. [both
Laugh] To the point where my friend is like, "I'm going to wear a blue dress at your wedding." This is a guy, by the way, and I'm just looking at him like, "What if my colors aren't blue?" and he's like, "I don't see your point."

AS: That's great. [laughs]

JM: But these are the kinds of friends that I have now.

AS: That's a good friend.

JM: He's crazy. So, Hopkins has given me a lot and I think my college experience is more positive than a lot of people, but also my high school experience was more positive than a lot of other people. So, I just love Hopkins though. If I could transport it into New York, it would be a thousand times better, but it works for me either way.

AS: That's a really great point to end on. I've run out of questions. So, I think my last thing for you: is there anything else that you'd like to add to the interview that I didn't ask, or things we didn't touch on?

JM: So, I would think that a lot of first-generation people are also minorities, just because a lot of people who are first-generation have immigrant backgrounds. They're coming from different cultures, different lifestyles, and I think it's important that when you come to a college, especially one as big and diverse as Hopkins, is not to lose who you are or what your family stands for. You're going to grow and you're going to become an individual, but I think it's important to stay connected to your roots because that is what brought you here and that's what shaped who you are. So, if you're able to find people on campus who are similar to you – we have a lot of cultural groups on campus. We have Vivaz, we have Caribbean cultural groups, we have Asian cultural groups, like a lot of different things.3

Broaden your horizons. But I also say: surround yourself with people who understand who you are not just as the Hopkins student but as a first-generation student, as an immigrant, as a black minority or something like that. Because especially in the world we're living in now, culture and ethnic backgrounds are super important and to the forefront. It shouldn't negatively affect your life, but it's something that you must be aware of. So, I think that's something to keep in mind as a first-generation student.

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3 Vivaz refers to a Caribbean dance group on campus.
AS: Yeah. I think that's a great point, and I think that's one of the things we're really trying to get at with these interviews too. So thank you for sharing that. Okay, so that concludes our interview, I'm going to stop the recording.

[End of Audio]