

Finding My Voice

Jonathan C: You've been looking forward to this for four weeks,

Valerie Jarrett: so long. Hello everybody. We cannot see you unless you're in their first or second row, but we know you're there. So thank you for coming out and spending a little bit of the evening with us.

Jonathan C: All right, so I just want to dive in because the, uh, a major message of your book comes in on page 11. For those of you who have the book, please turn to page 11. Um, and you write on that page that your father had experienced success based on merit and hard work just as my mother had years earlier. By the time she graduated from college, and thanks to both of them, I grew up believing that was believing that was possible. It's much easier to be what you see. My parents were role models and they gave me the early impression that my potential in life was limited only by my willingness to work hard and be resilient, combined with a good bit of luck. My Mom and dad had taken me across the color line and around the world showing me what was possible so that I could dare to imagine any kind of life I wanted. And so there's no better way to start this conversation than talking about your parents, Jim Bowman and Barbara Taylor, and also the fact that you were born in Iran. So why on earth were you born in Iran and what took Jim Bowman and Barbara Taylor to Iran in the first place?

Valerie Jarrett: I get that a lot. Like what on earth are you doing there? So that's where my mother was, where she got, she gave birth, so that's why I was born there. My parents, well, let's see, so Barbara and Jim Bowman. My mother grew up in Chicago and my father grew up in Washington DC and they met and fell in love and got married right after my mother finished college and my father was doing his residency in Chicago and Oh, it's a little distracting, so I'm not going to look at him while he does that. Just smile for a moment and then I'll get back to it. Anyway, it's a pretty serious story. So when my, after they got married, my father got signed up for the military and he was in the army and when he was leaving the army a couple of years later, he was looking for a job at a major teaching hospital in the United States.

Valerie Jarrett: He wanted to do research. He was a pathology pathologist by training and he could not find a job at a major teaching hospital, uh, in a position that would be comparable to his white counterparts. And so he and my mom, who I will tell you our adventures adventurism spirits to say the least decided, well, let's look for opportunities outside of the United States. And so after much due diligence and searching, he landed a job offer, chairing the department of Pathology and help me to start a brand new hospital in Shiraz, Iran. And so off they went. They knew nothing about the, the language, the culture. They never been any further than Europe by that point in time. Their family said, don't go, what are you

thinking about? Now obviously the United States and Iran had very strong diplomatic relations. At the time. Thank goodness. Um, and so off they went.

Valerie Jarrett: And so he went from being considered a black doctor with a brick on his head to an American physician, judged by the merit of his accomplishments. And he thrived in Shiraz and I was the second baby born and then a Mozzie hospital. They practiced on some other baby first. We're still not quite sure what happened there, but I came along as number two and we lived there until I was five. And from there, my father, uh, well, while in Iran, he started doing research on fava beans. We're not going to talk about the father being researched, but look it up if you want to. It was groundbreaking research and it caught the attention of folks at the golden labs at University College of London. And so after five years, my parents decided it was time to start make migrating their way back home. So they went to London for a year and don't you know, he gave some paper at an international conference while he was at the golden labs and it caught the attention of the dean of the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Valerie Jarrett: I know. And he got offered a tenured track position in my mother's hometown, in the community where my grandmother and my aunt and a huge extended family had settled when the restrictive covenants were deemed unconstitutional and people, black people in Chicago, we're free to move anywhere. They all moved into Hyde Park. And so there we went. And it's a, it's interesting because when I was growing up, my dad always said to me, sometimes the shortest distance to where you want to go means you have to be prepared to take the long way around. Well, they certainly took the long way around, but he spent the rest of his career right where he always wanted to be at the University of Chicago and he was the first African American to receive tenure at the University of Chicago's division of biological sciences. Thank you very much. So

Jonathan C: I can't remember if it's before they went to Iran. I think it's after, after they came back and he went to work and they told him not to come.

Valerie Jarrett: No, no, no. This is the forest. So when my father went to Chicago, he was the first African American, a lot of that. He was a trailblazer to do his residency at St Luke's Hospital in Chicago and that's where he and my mom actually fell in love and decided to get married. And uh, they told him he could not live in the dorm for the other residents, which was on the property cause he's black other than these, the only black one there. And they said, well you can't live with the other residents. So he had to commute to work a five miles back then in the black community by street car. Not An easy thing to do while everybody else is getting a good night's sleep. He's been an hour each way on the, on the street car. And then they also said, you have to come in the back.

Valerie Jarrett: And he's like, you know what, I am not going in the back door. That is a bridge too far for me. And so the first day of work, he went in the front door and no one's said anything. I mean, no. And that's kind of how Chicago was. They had

these rules, but if you didn't abide by them, maybe something happened, maybe it didn't. And so the next day when he showed up at work, all of the black folks that worked in the hospital, so the orderlies and the nurses and the administrators were all gathered in the front of the hospital. And as his story goes, everybody walked in the front door and that was the end of that role.

Jonathan C: And so that, that is a, you use the, the, the, the

Jonathan C: perfect word here. And that's trailblazer. Um, my favorite chapter in the book is entitled, um, inheritance or the inheritance. And you know, her father isn't the only trailblazer in the family. I'm just going to read this and you correct me where I, where I get it wrong. Your great grandfather, Robert Robinson. Taylor became the first black student to attend MIT 1888 and his father, he and his father was a slave.

Valerie Jarrett: His father was born a slave in Wilmington, North Carolina was freed during, after the civil war and started to work as a carpenter and decided that the path forward was education for his son. And so he saved enough money and who knows why he thought of Mit, but that's what he thought of in my great grandfather was accepted. And then he went to MIT and I used to always imagine what was that train ride from Wilmington to MIT like for my great grandfather. And what was his father thinking? Seeing his child go off north where I'm sure he had never been before. So he was a trailblazer.

Jonathan C: Um, we'll keep on Robert Robert Robinson Taylor. He then went on to become America's first accredited black architect. He was hired by Booker T Washington to build buildings at Tuskegee Institute. Right.

Jonathan C: Well, that's what I was like, what does that right. I know, but wait, there's more.

Jonathan C: Your great, great grandfather. Victor Rashawn was one of the first black legislators voted into the Louisiana House of Representatives during reconstruction. But wait, there's more. Your grandfather, Robert Rashawn Taylor graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in business and he is the person for whom the Robert Taylor houses were named for.

Valerie Jarrett: Yeah. Not Our proudest moment as a family. Yeah.

Jonathan C: What'd you write about in the, in the book? Um, and I think it's either you or your mother, like it pained either of you to drive by.

Valerie Jarrett: Gotcha. Well, so my grandfather just for a second, was a businessman and he was successful in banking and insurance and he was asked chair, the Chicago Housing Authority that oversees all the public housing in Chicago. And he had a vision for public housing, uh, that involved making sure that it architecturally blended into the community so that it didn't stick out. It was indistinguishable. He thought they should offer social services and job training and opportunities

so that it would be a temporary waste station and people could move on from there. Uh, he believed that there should be strict rules of behavior and conduct and screening. So he was kind of a person way behind before his time. And finally he resigned from the housing authority and frustration because he couldn't get the Chicago city council no surprise to allow him to build housing in areas that were um, white and the restrictive covenants, all the black people lived in one place with all the white people live somewhere else.

Valerie Jarrett: And so he resigned. And he also believed that housing should be low density and that you should have a front yard and a backyard and a sense of ownership and feel responsibility. And that doesn't come with big, high rise monstrosities. And so there was a certain irony six years after his death when Mayor Daley, Mayor Richard J. Daley dedicated the largest public housing development I 16 high rise buildings right along the Dan Ryan Expressway in Chicago. And he named them after my grandfather. And so I attended the opening and it was all these mixed emotions. There were people who are moving out of horrible tenements into these brand new buildings. And for those families, this seemed like a step up in a and a sense of progress. But I overheard my grandmother and my mother and my aunt talking and the conversation was refreshed every time on the nightly news you'd see Robert Taylor homes always associated with something terrible and they said that it was the exact opposite of his vision for public housing.

Jonathan C: And that's your, your father. Um, Robert Taylor is successful in real estate and banking became the first black chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority, uh, in 1941 and I'm sorry, that's your, that's your grandfather. Your grandfather. Who is your, your mother's father? Barbara Taylor. She went to Sarah Lawrence. Um, she's an educator. Um, she met and married your father on June 17th, 1950 just 69 years ago. Last week. Talk, talk about your, your mother, Barbara, Barbara Taylor. Now Barbara Bowman.

Valerie Jarrett: Well first of all, she's 90, which is hugely important, right? She made it to 98. She still works full time. I know she goes to work every day. She drives herself. That's another story. I'm trying to get it a ride Lyft time on the board of lift on my mom. You could ride a lifted, you could go on, come anytime you want to. She's like, oh, I have to drive myself. Uh, but that says a lot about Barbara above and she's also quite frugal. So for example, when I went to college, she calculated what every class cost. I mean like every day class. And she gave it to me on a piece of paper and said, if you are ever tempted to cut class, this is what it's going to cost your father and Maine. Um, but my parents love me unconditionally, provided me with an enormous safety net to take all kinds of chances just as they had a knowing that they would catch me.

Valerie Jarrett: And they set very high expectations in terms of effort. As Jonathan mentioned early on, they didn't care what I ended up doing. They just wanted me to work hard and be determined and resilient and give it my best and that that was no guarantee. And my parents would look, you have to work twice as hard. They

never finish that sentence, but I knew what they meant. Uh, but if luck breaks your way, that maybe the sky is the limit and don't let hard work prevents you from trying that for your goal. And so that was kind of the spirit of how they raised me in and my mom and my dad are polar opposites in only one way in that my dad sees the glass is like 99% full always. And My mother, no matter how good things are, she is planning for the disaster.

Valerie Jarrett: And in fact the worst fight they ever had was over how they were going to spend the lottery proceeds from a lottery that they had not yet, nor did ever when my dad had all these expansive plans and my mom was like paying the taxes on it and setting up trust accounts and I think maybe \$5 was left over and they literally had an argument. They stomped upstairs fussing about this lottery proceeds and I was like shaking. My head was very embarrassing. My boyfriend was home from law school staying at our home and he's like, do they fight like this all the time? I said, I've actually never seen anything quite like it by no one thing. They will not go to bed angry. And in fact they did figure out how to make up and they never, never won that lottery. But they had very, very different approaches to the world. And I think I tilt towards my father and my optimism, but my mom always said too, like if things don't go your way you'll be fine. And there was that sense of even with and her with our practicality that you just have to figure out another way of one way doesn't work. Just like they went off to Ron will then you swerve and figure out your own path,

Jonathan C: what you talked about the, the safety net of family and community, uh, there in Chicago. But that didn't mean you were immune to hardship. And by Hartford, I'm thinking about your early on when you've come back to Chicago from Iran, I'm from London and now here you are, I think you say in the book, does bare skin freckle faced red head kid with the British accent

Valerie Jarrett: and it did not go over well. And she's Smith Elementary School, let me die you

Jonathan C: and and did I take you open one chapter with a ton from

Valerie Jarrett: hey red, hey red. Yep. And I knew it was going to happen because it happened all the time. She grabbed me from behind, knocked me down. And fortunately I had a younger cousin, she was six months younger and about 10 pounds lighter and she would continuously come to my rescue, which was a embarrassing but be very helpful because she had two older siblings so she could fight. And I had not learned how to fight, but I got bullied for, well the way I look, the fact that I came from, I was born in a country, no one had ever heard of the British accent. Why I lost that by the first week I was like, that's not going over very well here. And I just want it to be like everybody else. And I think there are a lot of kids out there that feel different.

Valerie Jarrett: And I have a sensitivity to that because I felt that way. Even though I had these loving parents and our grandmother who was my rock put and I called her this extended family, but I still didn't feel like I quite fit in. And even though they

love me tightly, when I went to school, it was taught there for a minute and then I figured it out. And unfortunately I stopped. Well I told you about the British accent, but I also stopped speaking Farsi and whenever my mother would speak in public and she knew, she was so proud that she was fluent in this language and I country she only lived in for six years. And so when she wanted to say something to me and you parents out there, you know the thing that you didn't want anybody else to understand, she would speak to me in Farsi. And he usually was sit down, be quiet, come here babe. But I would shudder when she would speak in Farsi and it took me decades to appreciate that, you know, we are our stories. I mean we are all our stories and whether it's different or not, it's part of what makes you who you are. And I had to really be a grown adult before I learned to appreciate and own my story.

Jonathan C: So, um, can you still speak a little Farsi?

Valerie Jarrett: Barely. But what I can do is I understand it better. And so if you're on an airplane and you start speaking Farsi, don't assume I don't understand what you're saying. That has happened a couple times. Uh Huh. And what about French? Cause you franchise still speak moderately well.

Jonathan C: So the teasing, I brought up the teasing because that factors into a big part of your personality, at least back then. And that was shyness. Oh, I was very, very shy. Yeah. And that worked its way. All the, you write that it wasn't until well until in your adult years that you were able to get over the shine.

Valerie Jarrett: Yeah, I think some people, I don't know, somebody you might be shy a temper mentally, I just wasn't, I've, I've tried to analyze it. Maybe it's because we moved around so much when I was a kid and I kind of played in my own little fantasy world and I was insecure because each time I got plopped down somewhere, I had to adjust to it. For whatever reason I was painfully shy. And now as you can tell, I simply cannot stop talking. But it took a long time and I, I mean, look, I remember the first time I spoke in public, I was in my early thirties. I was, uh, I had been appointed to run the Department of Planning and development in the city of Chicago. Nobody told me public speaking was a part of that job when I signed on for it. I mean, not in law school.

Valerie Jarrett: And when I got called on, I would cringe. Like the first day I got called on twice. I didn't think there'd be a second day. I mean, I really shied away from public speaking and when I had to give my first speech, I wrote on a note card in ink every, you know, the seven different points I wanted to make in this speech. And then I got nervous before the speech and I started to perspire and I was holding the note card in my hand and all of the ink I know, I know it was a disaster and I didn't notice it until right before I spoke and I opened my hand and it's blue and I cannot read anything on the paper. And I'm trying to figure out what to do with the blue hand while I'm speaking. And look, I got through it.

Valerie Jarrett: It wasn't pretty, but I got through it. And I think that's kind of the point is, is Ed. I just had to keep trying and I kept having to do more and more speaking and every time, like the first time I did something on television, I could tell you exactly what that experience was like. It was also not great. Um, but you repeat it over and over again. And I think part of the challenges, being honest with yourself about what you're not good at and then deciding what you want to work on and then just keep practicing it over and over again and eventually you'll start to enjoy it. But it took decades.

Jonathan C: Some of another reason why I brought up the, the, the bullying and the teasing is also because you right. Um, very forthrightly in your book about the color line and color issues and being, uh, being light skin and being from a family that's, that's fair skin. And you ride two instances. I found fascinating. One that on a drive down south, um, you know, there's a whole movie, you know, Green Book about people, African Americans, knowing where they could stay on those trips, but your family would do something different.

Valerie Jarrett: Well, so my, as I mentioned are you mentioned Jonathan, my great grandfather stayed at Tuskegee for most of his career and when he wasn't there, he retired. He went back to Wilmington. And so in the summers my mom and her sister and my grandparents would drive to either Tuskegee or Wilmington. And as you all now know from the, from the movie, if for nothing else, there were a lot of places around the south where African Americans could only stay in African American colored only hotels. And there were also patches where there were no hotels. And so usually my grandparents would try to find people that they knew and stay with them in the areas where there were no hotels, but they hit a patch where they didn't know anybody and there wasn't a hotel for colored people. And so my grandmother, who is fair than I am with dead straight hair when and checked into the motel while my mother and her sister and my grandfather kind of hid out in the car and one of the clerk wasn't looking.

Valerie Jarrett: They scurried into the motel. And so there was a certain privilege that went along with that complexion that my grandmother had it then there was also blow back that went along with it too. And I know I tell a story about my grandmother taking me to Marshall Fields in Chicago. Don't have any of you from Chicago, but there was a walnut room, Chicago in the house. There was a restaurant called the walnut room. And when I was very young around the Christmas holidays, we dress up and my grandmother and I would go down there and I realize in years later that like people thought we were white. Only people that probably figured it out where the guys, the servers in the restaurant who were black, that was a privilege. And I now I look back and I was like, well, why would she take me to a restaurant where we knew black people weren't welcome?

Valerie Jarrett: And I think she just wanted me to have a nice experience, but again, that was a privilege, one that I'm sure other people resent it. And I asked my mother as an adult, well, how did other people feel? And she said, they probably wish they

could go to that Nice restaurant too, but recognize that that was a privilege that you had. And there's a cost that goes the, there's a both a benefit and a cost that goes along with it. And I think frankly in the black community, we still haven't reconciled, reconciled with the challenges that we give each other, let alone with the rest of the world does to us because of hair texture and skin color.

Jonathan C: Well, it heretics are you also write in the book that of all the cousins, you're the one who didn't get the long flowing his hair. Okay. Um,

Valerie Jarrett: I did and I wanted to have Eric just like all of them. And so there was that too.

Jonathan C: We're the first one, the audience who know Valerie, we have worked with Valerie. You will understand the look she just gave me. It's so, so in you. Um, for those of you who read, becoming, or listened to becoming, you know that Mrs. Obama had a plan. Like she had her checklist of things and this is the way her life was going to work. And what's fascinating is when you read Valerie's book to see how similar these two women are from completely two different stories in Chicago, but really very similar ways of going about things. And you had a 10 year plan, um, one was graduated Stanford to graduate from Michigan. Three, discover my career, passion for fall in love and marry. Five, have a baby. Six be a fulfilled, satisfied and happy wife and working mom of the six. Oh good Lord. One of them didn't pan out. And you write about it in such a way that is to my mind, reminiscent of Katharine Graham's autobiography and the way she wrote about her relationship about our mother, the way she wrote about the suicide of her husband. Very raw and very real. And that was your writing about Bobby Jarrett, your husband Laura has dad, how did you meet him and what went wrong? How much time I got? We got you. You got two.

Valerie Jarrett: So I, uh, I knew Bobby for as long as we lived in Chicago. So maybe since you were eight. I developed a crush on him at about age eight when he was 12. Um, my mother and his mother, well he was the boy next door, figuratively, but really almost literally my mother and his mother grew up in the same apartment building. The, my grandfather managed, um, our fathers were friends, our grandmothers were friends. Uh, he was a doctor. My father was a doctor. I used to go to church with my grandmother because he was an altar boy. And I used to always say, I'll go to church. And it was really just to see Bobby Jared and of course because I made and he's 12, he paid no attention, Jimmy, totally unrequited love all the way up until 25 and at 25 I know it took a long time to get him to turn around and look at me.

Valerie Jarrett: But finally at 25, we were at my cousin Kyle, his wedding and we were, I was standing outside with all my cousins laughing about the fact that her, uh, her maid of honor had dropped the ring inside the church and it like went all down the, all the, we read rehash that a hundred times and up walks Bobby Gerrick with my godfather who was in his nineties at that point and I saw him coming. I was like, he's coming my way. And Lo and behold, he like looked at me for the

first time and I thought, I'm going to marry you because I've been trying to get you to look at me since I was eight. And I gave up on it as much thought to it as that. And I did marry him and as I said, plenty went wrong. And I think I thought I could just, we'll him to be the fantasy that I wanted him to be.

Valerie Jarrett: And my parents were so happy and I thought, okay, he looks great on paper and I'm thinking about the biological clock. So I got to get going at 26 the child that I was. And so I did marry him and I tried really hard to make him into my father. And you know what? He just was not my dad and I should have known that I should have done a little more due diligence before I got into it. But I thought I was, it was important to be open about it because when it, when it didn't work and when I finally just thought, this isn't going to work and I can't make it work, I felt like a failure. And I don't want people to feel that way about marriages that don't work. Like you'd give it your best and if it doesn't work, then that's okay and you learn from it.

Valerie Jarrett: And in a sense I had been looking for Bobby to completely and, um, I wanted to be married so I would never be lonely. Well, let me tell you something. There is nothing lonelier than an unhappy marriage. So for all of you who are out there thinking, if I can just get married, I'll be happy. Well, do your homework first. Don't marry the wrong person. And if you do, get over it, move on. And I think I say, I know I say in the book, I can say this now because it's been 30 years. I didn't say this at the time, but now with the benefit of lots of hindsight, I realize my failed marriage was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Um, I tried. I thought, well, having a child would make it better. Another piece of advice, it does not, it makes it a lot more stressful.

Valerie Jarrett: But having my daughter was at by far the best thing that has ever happened to me in my life. And having her and looking at this child may be really question everything. And I thought, I'm going to a job that I feel very unfulfilling. I was in a really fancy, big corporate law firm in Chicago, and I begin my book talking about looking out the window at this magnificent view of the Sears tower. And I would sit in that office and cry, and I thought, I don't like my husband. I don't like my job. I do like my daughter, but I'm believing her every day. And I thought, well, what am I going to do about this? And it was the first time, Jonathan, that I actually remember listening to the most important voice. And that's the one inside. And I thought, I got to get out of this marriage and I got to get out of this job.

Valerie Jarrett: And I had a really dear friend who had worked for mayor Harold Washington and had left his law firm to go work for the mayor and the law department. And he said, these words I'll never forget. He said, why don't you consider public service? You'll feel a part of something bigger and more important than yourself. And that resonated with me. And so I took this leap of faith and I joined the law department of the city and just one more bit on Barbara Bowman for reasons I don't remember. She drove me to work my first day at City Hall and maybe the reason she offered was to say this as we pulled up in front, she said, I

can't believe I paid all that tuition for you to come and work here. What are you doing with your life? And I was like, thanks mom. And I walked into city hall. It took about two decades before. She said to me maybe two and a half decades before she said, okay, maybe you were right. It worked out okay for respond with the Obama years. Yes it does.

Jonathan C: The book, for those of you who don't have it on page 49 is a very sort of back to Bobby j very wrenching scene that Valerie writes about very openly and honestly I'm not, I'm not going to,

Valerie Jarrett: don't give it away. I'm not going to read it. But page 49 and then in terms of,

Jonathan C: in terms of your daughter, in terms of Laura, you raped. My daughter once said to me that my marriage was the best mistake I ever made. I know what she meant, but I would put it differently in my wrongheaded last ditch attempt to save my marriage. The very best decision I ever made was having my daughter. When you read this book, the love, uh, for Laura leaps off the page, um, she's about to make you a grandmother and our bad a month, less than a month,

Valerie Jarrett: less than a month. Oh my gosh. So excited. I was expecting you to go on. More going to say, on that note, my mother recently said to me, you know what, really the only reason to have kids is to have grandchildren. I'm like, mom, I'm right here. I'm your kid. And what are you saying? She said, trust me. You'll understand. And now you, now I'm getting ready to

Jonathan C: understand. All right, I want to, um, BASF forward through some things you went to work for the city you were in to work for, for mayor Washington. He passes away in office. You decided to stay and work with Mayor Daley. It was there during Mayor Daley's, a administration that a young woman comes walking into your office by the name of Michelle Robinson and I think it's, if you call it the best decision, you, well, aside from the best hire, hire, hire you ever made. So she comes into the office and you also write that you had no authority whatsoever to offer her a job and yet you did.

Valerie Jarrett: Have you met Michelle Obama who wouldn't offer her a job instantly? Yes I did. I looked. She walked in. She was tall. She was elegant but simply dress, no makeup, hair pulled back. She looks me right in the face, shakes my hand, sits down with competence. She sees her resume on my desk. She never mentioned a word she figured I could read and into. Instead she tells me her story and she opens up. And will you all now know that it's the quintessential American story growing up on the south side of Chicago working class family, parents who valued education and the excellence and instilled in both Michelle and her brother Craig, this sense of to those who much is given, much is expected and they were a humble family but they gave them love and support and also as my parents didn't tell him, you have to go do this, but whatever you do do it really, really well and work hard at it.

Valerie Jarrett: And interestingly, I left city government, I think because of having my daughter and are left the law firm because of having my daughter, Michelle was searching for something from her big corporate law firm because the year before I met her, she lost both her but lost both her father and her best friend. And so we were both motivated by the sense of life is short and you have to make an impactful. And I wanted to make my daughter proud of me and I didn't think she would be proud if I stayed in the firm and Michelle wanted to do something that was meaningful because of these terrible losses that she'd had. It's so early in her life and we talked about that when we first met. And I think what's so important, and sometimes you go in for a job interview and you're so busy selling yourself that you forget that there is more to you than just what's on your resume.

Valerie Jarrett: And that she just struck me as a whole person. And also like 20 minutes into the interview was supposed to be just 20 minutes long hour and 10 minutes it lasted. She totally turned the tables on me and started asking me really, really hard questions about the job and I had just been promoted. I had no answers for her. I didn't know. It was like, we'll figure it out. And she didn't seem that was, that wasn't quite good enough. And so really to stop the conversation, I gave her the job offer and I thought, well, let's just get all these questions I can't answer. And she did. Myran said, let me think about it. I'll get back to you. And so we're chatting a few days later. And I said, well, what do you think? And she said, we have a problem. I said, well, what's the problem? And she said, well, my fiance doesn't think it's a really good idea.

Jonathan C: Can I read this line? Yeah, you can be in the lies. So taking, she and I had really clicked. I wasn't expecting that wild card. All the other applicants were clamoring for a job in the mayor's office. And you sit, you write that, you said to her,

Valerie Jarrett: who the hell is your fiance? And why do we care what he thinks? I'm not proud. But I did say, and I did wonder it too. And so she said, she laughed at me and she said, look, he's started his career as a community organizer on the south side of Chicago. He has some reservations about me going from a law firm, right to a political mayor's office. You practice law for four years for the city before you went to the mayor's office and he kind of thought maybe we should all get together and talk it out. And I wisely said, okay, what do I want it or I would have, of course I would go have dinner with her to try to convince her to do this and at the dinner, what struck me most about them as not only where they obviously in love, they're about to get married, but the mutual respect that they have for each other and for all the people who have since then when they hear this story, I said, well why did she need to have her fiance at the table?

Valerie Jarrett: I say there wasn't a single decision in his entire career where Michelle Obama wasn't sitting right there for the decisions as well. And if she had said, no, don't run for the Senate, although we did try to talk about running for the Senate or she'd said, no, don't run for president. I don't think he would have done it. And

so I think it was an indication of the kind of partnership that they were about to form where they made decisions together. They listened to one another. They both got me to open up. He got me talking about Iran, which I already told you I never did, but he said like, where are you from? I said, Chicago. He said, did you grow up here? Yep, sure did. Were you born here? Well, no, I wasn't born here. He said, well, where were you born? I said, long story, but I was born in Sherozzy Ron.

Valerie Jarrett: And he leaned in and he said, tell me why. And he was curious and he was interested in and he wasn't making any judgments about it. And then he started telling me about his childhood and Indonesia and we started comparing notes and we had very similar experiences in these countries so far away. It's so different than our own that it gave us an appreciation for the United States. It taught us that we could walk in a room and find something in common with anybody in the room because we were used to being with people who had very different backgrounds in our own. And we also talked about how we believe that the United States is a great country already. A great country has been a great country. I'm sorry. Couldn't resist.

Jonathan C: All right. I'm happy to segue does no, not yet. But

Valerie Jarrett: also even though we are great, we are not the only country on earth and then we can actually learn a great deal outside of our shores.

Jonathan C: So

Jonathan C: we go from that dinner where you're about to hire Michelle Robinson to eight incredible little skip the Senate.

Valerie Jarrett: Well, let's just mention she did come and work with me. Yes.

Jonathan C: Yeah, no doubt. Okay. Right. No, it all worked out. Yeah.

Jonathan C: Um, and you, the three of you end up, you described yourself as what? Like the big sister or a cousin.

Valerie Jarrett: I used to be an older sister, but you know, with all that gray hair he has now, I think we're just siblings. I don't want to be the older sister anymore.

Jonathan C: And so what ends up happening is there, there is this, this friendship, this deeply rooted friendships that lasted through, that's still ongoing. But in terms of the, of the White House, you're the longest serving senior adviser to the president ever,

Valerie Jarrett: ever any history. How crazy is that? That's like a Guinness Book of World Records. I don't know why anybody would leave one moment short of eight years.

Jonathan C: Well, I remember one of the first interviews I had with you in your office now occupied by Kellyanne Conway,

Jonathan C: um, where you were. I asked you whether you, my idea that he'd do this interview, um,

Jonathan C: you said then you know, you serve at the pleasure of the president and if that means being there to click the lights off at the end of hopefully eight years, that's what you would do. And if you follow Valerie on Instagram, you saw there is that picture of you clicking the lights off is

Valerie Jarrett: after the Obamas had already left for the inauguration, still hanging around secret services. Finally, ma'am, you got to go. You just gotta go. And so what,

Jonathan C: one of the big things of, of many things at from the eight years of the Obama years, and this is going to be my segue, is the, you write about the birther controversy and the, that was pushed by then private citizen, Donald Trump. Um, Michelle Obama writes about it in, in her book, you write about it in your, in yours. How damaging was that to, um, not to the administration, but to the president and his family and you?

Valerie Jarrett: Well, it was, it was, it put him and them in harm's way was very damaging. It was very irresponsible. It was hip hop or fall. It was known to be untrue. And you had to question, well, what was the motivation? And the motivation was clearly to deep de legitimize his candidacy and then his presidency. And as a result of it, it, I mean it, there are very few things that get me really angry. Um, well maybe that's not true lately. There are more and more. They didn't use to be a lot that get me angry. But I thought, why would you want to do that? Why would you want to do something that is intended to incite hatred and anger when you know that this is somebody who has a spouse and a family and children and people who love him and he's another human being, why would you feel the need to do that to another person? And I think now that seems kind of coin and naive, right? But why, what was the point of that other than to try to, to hurt him?

Jonathan C: So of all the things that um, he's done, he being the current, the current president that's made, made you angry. Is there one

Valerie Jarrett: in particular? What per minutes that, that has

Jonathan C: made you the most, the most angry

Valerie Jarrett: Jonathan look. Um, and I am rarely speechless, but where do we begin? It's just hard to say. I mean, I suppose right now I am apoplectic about what we've been seeing happening with these children on the border and how they're being treated and the callousness to go into court and basically justify the behavior, the thought that they are being treated in ways that we wouldn't treat animals.

And that somehow because they're here seeking a better life than that, that's okay. That they're being used as a pawn in some sort of a checkers game. I don't understand. I, I find it unconscionable. I'm worried to death that by pulling out of the run the Iran deal, the President Obama negotiated together with Great Britain and Germany and France and the UK and Russia and China. This was not just the United States alone. We formed a consortium of all the other world, major world powers to put pressure on Iran, not to develop nuclear weapons and thinking that that solution was the one that keeps the world the safest us, the safest, and by pulling out on that, now we see that we're in this crazy kind of game of chicken where 10 minutes before striking around.

Valerie Jarrett: Fortunately the president thinks better of it. Once he finds out that 150 people whose lives can be destroyed. How do you not know about that? Before you ordered the strike, while I was about to ask you, you've been in, in the White House in a senior position, did you believe that? That he didn't know that before you deeply troubling if it's true, I have no idea if it's true cause how do we know what is? But it's deeply troubling. And in fact, Susan Rice, Susan Rice wrote a, an interesting our bed that's in the New York Times for tomorrow, kind of describing this whole situation and the path forward and said, look, it's a good opportunity to restart and have diplomatic conversations and let's see if we can keep ourselves from the edge of a war that isn't good for anybody. Um, so yeah, on any given day, but I think also I'm glad my daughter is grown because I think that there are some reasonable expectations of what we hope for a president in terms of the tone he sets or she sets from the top right.

Valerie Jarrett: And I'm worried about that. Thank you. I'm worried about that right now in the message. It's sending not only all of our citizens about what's acceptable behavior because part of our society and the democracy relies not just on the laws, which are really important. And we tried hard to make sure those laws were, uh, supporting people's civil rights. But it's also depends on social norms. And when you start to eat away at the fabric of those social norms, we're sending a message of way beyond our shores. And, and part of what we try to do here as this beacon of hope for democracy is to set the tone by example. And if we're not adhering to those very important principles of a democracy, then what are, how are we going to be able to say to other countries, you should follow our lead? And then were do we all end up? So the tone from the top troubles me desperately as well.

Jonathan C: So then should he be, the other conversation is leave aside tone, ignoring subpoenas, telling former staffers not to testify before Congress, not handing over the tax returns after a legal order from a congressional committee. There are plenty of reasons out there, oh, I dunno. 10 documented episodes of obstruction of justice in the [inaudible]. Part two of the Mueller report all that to ask in the whole conversation that's happening in the country about whether president Trump should be impeached. Where are you?

Valerie Jarrett: Well, you know, listening to that list is quite painful really. And um, because we do the rule of law is the basic tenant of democracy, right. And so if you're not adhering to that, then we haven't even gotten to the social norms yet. Um, so on impeachment, I really do put my trust in Speaker Pelosi. Nobody knows her caucus better. Nobody has a feel for politics better. Nobody appreciates the art of the possible better. And believe me, the, I learned that having had the privilege of working with her, uh, when she was the speaker before and we were able to pass the affordable care act would, you would not have happened without her support and which I then will be transformational for our kind of is and will always be transformational for our country. I don't think they'll repeal it. The reason why I don't think they'll repeal it is cause you won't let them write.

Valerie Jarrett: You will not. I will think you will not let them. Um, so if she says it's not time, then I say it's not time. And so rather than second guessing her decision, what I'm trying to figure out is what can I do to improve my kind of mental health at this moment in time? And I think the best thing I can do is to encourage people to get civically engaged and a vote and, uh, care about who's running for office and, and, and what I talk about in my book going through the stages of grief after the last election. And that, I think I described it as kind of, um, soul rent, gut wrenching. And I sometimes went through all those stages of the same day. They just anger and denial kept coming back around, back around. And I think out of that, I thought, well, what, what do we do?

Valerie Jarrett: And, and what troubled me most because I couldn't figure out what happened exactly. But I do know that 43% of eligible voters did not vote. And when that happens, it's not a democracy. And so Mrs. Obama last summer and I started an organization call when we all vote and it's nonpartisan and we intentionally decided to do it nonpartisan. Not because we aren't strong Democrats, but because there's something going on in our culture that is allowing people to feel disengaged and shunning institutions rather than thinking that they are empowered to go in there and improve institutions. And because our democracy rests on a whole range of institutions and uh, without government we don't have a democracy. I say if you don't like the people who are representing, you change them. And I'm going to start with changing this one.

Jonathan C: And so we've got 24 to choose from. I think it's 25. Now, when somebody else announced today who announced to somebody not announced today, some guy, some guy will know who he is, but yes, somebody else announced. All right, so now there are 25 people and embarrassment of riches, don't you think? Yes. An embarrassment of riches. So among them, anyone can catch your fancy. A lot of them are catching my fancy, but you know what, I'm, let me, I know I'm not going to answer your question. I got to ask. Well, so this is the thing. So

Valerie Jarrett: spoken with several of them and I, and I give them all my advice because my view is this, whoever emerges as the nominee for the Democratic Party, I am going to get behind and work 1000% because they're

Jonathan C: all better than what we have now. Every one of them, even the guy, I don't know, he's better even he's better. So, so that's kind of my attitude. And I say the same.

Valerie Jarrett: I say, look, be authentic. Don't be a fake. The American people can sniff out a fake, which means you have to know why you're doing this. You have to realize that it is a marathon. The campaign is a, and you've got to get out there every single day and earn the trust and confidence of the American people. And that's as it should be because you are their servant. And so you have to prove to them that you are worthy, not just with a vision, but how you're going to execute that vision, particularly in this climate that is so toxic. What are you going to do to bring us back together again and make us feel as though, you know, we have more in common than we have differences. And that's between social media and the tone from the top right now, that's not an easy thing to do.

Valerie Jarrett: Um, and I also say to them, and this is I think perhaps, but, and I said this a few weeks ago, not because of current events. Don't beat up on the other guy or Gal. No. For two reasons. Number one, I can figure out about them. I don't need you to tell me about them in the Democratic Party. Um, but also if you do that, then don't we go into the general election with whoever the is the nominee in a weakened position. And we can't afford to be in a weakened position. We have to be in a strong position after the general election, after the primary.

Jonathan C: So you've had candidates talk to you is was one of them, vice president Joe Biden.

Valerie Jarrett: We're not going to get into the individual names, but you can assume that I've talked to several of them.

Jonathan C: Um, okay, fine. So,

Jonathan C: well let me ask it. Well, the reason why is first of all, I want to,

Valerie Jarrett: maybe they'll come to me and talk to me without wondering whether or not I'm going to tell Jonathan Capehart everyday

Jonathan C: and boom. Right. Otherwise they won't call. And I like the big, well, I'll, I'll come in and that this way they got it really good before the vice president is in visceral segue into talking about Vice President Biden. Well, I'm getting there. Yeah. So I mean, he's now in a, in a,

Jonathan C: and, uh, another controversy this time talking about, uh, past segregation is senator he worked with, um, which, you know, okay, I can understand why you're bringing that up. But what rankled me is the fact that he said that this senator never called him boy, always called him son.

Jonathan C: I don't know why he said that. Call me crazy. But that's the whole thing. That's the most, yeah.

Jonathan C: Problematic thing in that.

Valerie Jarrett: As you know, I have worked with people with whom I strongly disagree on a whole old's divisions for eight years. For eight years, I worked with a whole lot of people I didn't agree on, so maybe he didn't choose the right, right. Um, example. Who knows? But I think what we have to do is realize, look, don't let one thing make you decide, okay, I can't support you for president because nobody is perfect, right? We all have baggage. We all have and they're all perfectly legitimate. Everybody should be talking about whatever they want to talk about. As I say, they should all be prepared to lift up their hood, kick their tires, figure out whether or not this is a person that you can trust. And everybody has to kind of make their own judgment on what those issues might be. Right? But as I said, there's nobody in this field so far, including the guy we don't know who I don't think would be better than what we have. And so you can't, and this is not, I'm not talking about Vice President Biden in this context, although he did use a, he had a pretty good quote, um, that he used to say all the time when he was campaigning for other people. He said, look, don't compare them to the Almighty. Compare them to the alternative. And I think there's something,

Jonathan C: something to that, right? Yeah. Especially for 20, 20, um, in the, in the little just like, what did you, what are you saying? Oh, because of the state. Yeah, because of the stakes. Now it's for real. It is real. It is. It's for me. Oh, real. Oh, Rio Rio. It's intense. All right, we're laughing. But this is no laughing matter. I mean, I really, this is serious

Jonathan C: in the little bit of time that we have left. I want to bring you back to the book you were writing about.

Jonathan C: MMM.

Jonathan C: Like trying to juggle everything, being a working mother. And I failed to note the page number here, so my apologies. But, um, you talked about the fact that you, at that time women were all about in the work. In the workplace all about showing how you're just like the guys, like nothing else was different. You're just, you're just like the guys. Yeah.

Jonathan C: And you take

Jonathan C: and you write about your science and not saying anything. My silence stemmed mostly from my shame and feeling alone as though I were the only overwhelmed working mother. I told myself that if I was just smarter, more organized and more efficient, if I just tried harder and slept less, perhaps it all wouldn't be so hard. As women of my generation fought to gain equity in the

workplace, we made an unspoken pact to pretend even to one another, that we had it all under control. We didn't, we couldn't possibly.

- Jonathan C: What is the hope? I mean, here's a smattering of like golf applause but working mothers. But um, what, what, what
- Jonathan C: do you say to, or what did you say to Laura? What do you say to Laura's friends? The, this, this next generation of young women, women who are trying to juggle it all. Are they more aware and more open to no longer being silenced or has that been carried over generations?
- Valerie Jarrett: Have you worked with any millennials? Oh yeah. They're not so quiet about this stuff, which is good. I mean, I think, I mean, I, I obviously have a great relationship with my daughter and I've always talked to her very openly and I, and I told her the mistakes I made of trying to, you know, was like ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, you're dancing backwards with high heels on. And I thought that it was important to prove my worthiness by pretending there was no life outside. And I thought that if I didn't do that, then the guys wouldn't take me as seriously. And when I started verbalizing what was going on in my life and I was in an environment where people actually cared, they responded to my needs. I mean, I had a great mentor who supported me in a crazy way. She'd come to my home after work so I could put Laura to bed before we would work after Laura went to sleep.
- Valerie Jarrett: Well, you know, most people aren't going to do that for you. But if I had never told her I was a single mom and I needed to get home for bedtime, then how would she have ever known? And so I am encouraged that this next generation is a little bit more, um, willing to first of all to expect more from their, their partners, their spouses in terms of contributing. I know my daughter and her husband have had many a conversation about their joint expectations in parenting. We just gave them a baby shower yesterday and it was coed. And people were like, well, why are the guys coming into the shower? And I said from the beginning, they're starting this as a partnership and they're doing this together. You laugh, you try to come and show it was fun. No Games, we don't play games. Um, but, but I think part of my message is, look, uh, the question is, can you have it all?
- Valerie Jarrett: Well, we set an unreal expert, unreal x, but unrealistic expectation that having it all means doing everything to perfection. And I thought I was super human and I could do it all. I can work all day. I could come home, I could put Laura to bed, I could work some more. Then I would make baby food from scratch in the middle of the night. What was I thinking? Don't do that to yourself. Don't set yourself up to think that everything has to be absolutely perfect. And I think the best example of that would be Laura, when I started my book tour, Laura flew out to Chicago and was interviewed with me and the person who was moderating the conversation ask Laura, what surprised you in the book about

your mother? And my daughter said, I had no idea. She felt so guilty. She said she was a perfect mom from her vantage point, not from mine, from mine.

Valerie Jarrett: I was a lousy mother and I, and I was lousy at everything when she was really young. And that's not how she saw the world. And, and so I think I want working parents to give themselves a little bit of a break to realize that you are doing a great job and don't let perfection be the definition, the Almighty comparison. Exactly. But also to remember that life has multiple chapters in the each app tradeoffs and you make decisions and then you have to live with the consequences of those decisions. But for me, what I realized when I started listening to my voice and I started realizing how much power I could have if I spoke up and I started making decisions where I listened to the gut inside of me as opposed to what everybody else was defining as my life. That's when the adventure began. Not craving the comfort of the straight line that I had charted out for myself. But the exhilaration that comes from taking advantage of opportunities that knock at inopportune moments and the exhilaration that comes from being scared to death about trying something new and then figuring out, oh, I can do that and conquering it and then swerving again. So Zigzag is kind of my message to the young folks.

Jonathan C: Your, your word is it embraced the Zag. I think in a Michelle Obama's book, it's a brace, the swerve,

Valerie Jarrett: all of the above and Libya because of Michelle Obama and I both had not swerved out of what was expected of us into public service. Who knows where we would all be today.

Jonathan C: Right? You might be mayor of Chicago. You decided not to run for mayor Chicago because you didn't want to be an elective office. You just didn't want to.

Valerie Jarrett: This one. I thought about it long and hard. At one point in my life, I thought about throwing my hat in the ring to, to replace President Obama when he was first elected in the Senate. And I think in the end, I, I have come to appreciate that there are many ways to serve and you have to do a gut check before you do elected office. And just as I described my early days in city government where it's 24, seven and people come up to you in the grocery store, in the dry cleaners and lobby your daughter, all of that is what you have to be prepared for when you run for office. And at this stage of my life, don't hate me, but I wake up every single day and I do exactly what I want to do, right? I mean, I worked really hard to get to this point and I work, I think as hard as ever, but on issues I care about and I define them ice at the time I set the place, I determine the agenda. And I also really am looking forward to being a grandmother. And I don't want to be, um, a public official when I'm trying to be a grandma. That's just me. Everybody has to make their own decisions.

Jonathan C: So we started this conversation by talking about sort of the mantra of your, your, your parents about, you know, your willingness to work hard and be resilient and have a little luck and you can only take advantage of luck if you are fully prepared. And it's right after President Obama has been elected on election night. There's a 60 minutes interview. You're sitting with your parents watching this and um, I'm going to read what, what, what you wrote at the end of the interview, my mother looked over at me. How did you know that he could, when she asked, not that he would, but even that he could because of you two. I said a bit of a bit of surprise in my voice because you both raised me to believe that if you work twice as hard as anyone else and sacrifice for what you believe in and luck is on your side, the sky's the limit. She shook her head and said softly. I never believed any of that. And the kicker, my dad chuckled and said he agreed with her. Valerie

Valerie Jarrett: read the rest. Wait, the best party loved Arthur.

Jonathan C: Oh well that, oh, I'm sorry. I stared at him in disbelief for the first time. I realized my parents had raised me aspirationally, instilling in me a set of core beliefs that they didn't actually hold themselves. That here's the best line. And I did underline this. Their gift to me was not to shackle me with their reality, but to prepare me to own the full potential of mine. And that is the best way to end this conversation with Valerie Jarrett, author of finding my boys, my journey to the west wing and the path forward. Thank you.