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Interviewers: Angelica Primmer, Braelyn Jefferson, Sam Heaney, and Tori LeFevre

Interviewee: Alredm Washington, Jr.

Disclaimer: I removed crutch words and false starts from this transcription; I have also removed ums, ahhs, and uhs.

Braelyn Jefferson: We are all going to sate our names again. I'm Braelyn Jefferson-

Sam Heaney: Samantha Heaney

Angelica Primmer: Angelica Primmer

Tori LeFevre: Tori LeFevre

BJ: And then you say-

Alredm Washington: Alredm Washington Jr.

BJ: Were gonna start just asking you questions-

AP: Can you spell your name, can you spell your name out for us please?

BJ: spelling your name out

AW: A-l-r-e-d-m W-a-s-h-i-n-g-t-o-n Jr.

BJ: Where are you from, how long have you been in the area?

AW: Prospect, Virginia and been here all my life.

BJ: All your life- that's awesome

SH: So tell us about your family. Do you a wife? Kids?

AW: *Divorced*, (laughing)

SH: Really that's awesome.

AW: yeah but I got 4 kids- I got four young men. They all grown though.

BJ: How old are they?

AW: The oldest one is 24

BJ: 24- Are y'all all really close?

AW: mhm-

BJ: They Look up to you-

AW: Yeah

BJ: They look like you?

AW: Yes ... don't ya know

BJ: Identical- (*laughing*) What made you want to become a fire fighter?

AW: I got excited when I was small seeing the trucks going down the road.

BJ: Do you have a specific role in the department?

AW: Mmm, not really.

BJ: You just do a little bit of everything?

AW: Mhm- Whatever they need me to do I do.

BJ: Do you ever drive the fire trucks?

AW: I do-

BJ: Do you do the pulling out the hose and that stuff?

AW: Yeah we have to do that too- certified to do all that too

BJ: Certified to do all of it- that's cool

SH: So how long have you been volunteering?

AW: 35 years

SH: Wow that's awesome

BJ: That's really cool, so-

AW: Free of charge

BJ: Can you tell us about the harvest festival?

AW: Well the Harvest festival, what you see what they are doing here now, is to raise money to pay for the trucks and the maintenance on the building

BJ: Y'all make a good amount of money that y'all need?

AW: Not really, but today you see what its doing? [Points to rain] It's going to put a damper on things.

BJ: Oh the rain, Do y'all have, when its not raining, a good amount of people come out?

AW: Yeah, we had to cancel it in October because it rained

BJ: No way-

AW: Yeah

BJ- And now its raining again.

AW: Raining again, you see we had that big rainstorm in October, so we had to cancel, and now it's raining again. We hope it holds off, but still- ...

BJ: I hope it does to so everyone in the community comes out.

AW: From all around

BJ: From all around, to help out-

AW: Right

BJ: So y'all- do they buy stuff? And that's what the donat-

AW: Well the stuff is all out in the yard out there, they auction it off

BJ: Oh ok

AW: So they bid on it and the highest bidder gets it.

BJ: Gets it- What kind of stuff is it?

AW: Everything people donate-

BJ: Donate-

AW: Furniture, clothes, stuff like that ... and then here they sell the food in here

BJ: Sell the food in here?

AW: Yeah

BJ: Ok cool, let's see. Is this the only way the department raises monies by the harvest sale or do y'all do other things?

AW: Well we next month we have our Christmas show. We gotta sell food, sell food in Farmville.

BJ: Oh that's cool

AW: yeah we have to sell food ...

BJ: It's a Christmas Show? Now what kinda-

AW: And then the Saturday after that we have a pig picnic

BJ: Ohh that's cool

AW: We cook a whole pig out back

BJ: What's your favorite one to go to?

AW: All of them-

BJ: All of them-

AW: Just to help out

BJ: You gotta be at all of them.

AW: Right, if I got a chance I'm gonna be there.

BJ: That's awesome, its your turn

SH: Yeah, so how was your experience in training? Like what did you have to go through to become a volunteer fire fighter?

AW: Well when I started, it wasn't that ... but then since the state got so much restrictions on it we now have to go through training, ... (too much background noise to hear) it's a long process-

SM: It is-

AW: mhm but I did some training

SH: Ok

BJ: How long did it take or-

AW: Well now it takes 18 weeks or something like that for training. You go through the same thing a paid fire fighter goes through but we not getting paid.

BJ: Do you have like ah-

AW: Same training

BJ: Really? Do you have like ah oh what's it called, not a speaker but like a thing where you get calls like at your house? Where like you can here what's going on?

AW: Oh this? [pulls out pager]

BJ: Yeah!

AW: That stays on me 24 hours

BJ: 24 hours, and so if goes off like-

AW: If it go off right now you gonna see all of us run outta here.

BJ: that's probably exciting, very adrenaline rushing

AW: Yeah but when I was young I used to have the alarm go off and get excited. You not thinking you can mess up. See the older the get the calmer you calm down.

BJ: Yeah, takes experience.

AW: Right see when your young you just I get to go put out a fire

BJ: Mhm, my dads a volunteer fire fighter so he would always get calls in the middle of the night and he would have to go.

AW: Yeah about 2 o'clock in the morning

BJ: Mhm yup.

AW: Sometimes he goes and false alarm, go to car wreck, the people go and the car not there. They drunk drivers they done ran. We get those a lot too.

BJ: They just run from the seen?

AW: Mhm

BJ: Do y'all eventually figure out who it was?

AW: Well we hand that to the police department we don't get involved in that.

BJ: Gotcha, um lets see how close is the family feel in the department?

AW: We are really close, just like one big happy family but we have ups and downs sometimes, you know how family is, but we make up and get over it.

BJ: So y'all are all really close cause y'all are with each other all the time. Do you have a best friend in the department?

AW: Not really all of them are best friends

BJ: All of y'all are best friends really close-

AW: You know you got some of them closer and then some of them aint close.

BJ: But all of them like you though

AW: Right all of them-

BJ: You're the favorite- I can see it.

AW: Somewhat-

BJ: You seem like a funny guy.

AW: I try to be. She seem super fast the way she typing

(laughter)

SH: Do you have like another job other than this?

AW: Yes I work for the school system

SH: Is it like hard to mange both of them? Or do you get calls while at the other job?

AW: Well see if I am at school I don't leave, except if there was a big fire or if something big I leave. But if not I don't leave.

BJ: Do you like have to tell your work like that you're a volunteer fire fighter and this my happen-

AW: They already know, yep.

BJ: Which one do you like better? Or do you like both jobs?

AW: Well the job I get paid this one I don't. See you don't get paid for your gas if you to go to a fire call you don't get paid for that. Comes out of your own pocket.

BJ: Your just doing it out of the kindness of your heart?

AW: Right, I like helping people, but as long as the fire alarm don't go off I feel better because the trucks stay new and stay good. Once you leave this building you aint never gonna know whats going to happen or if we gonna come back or not.

BJ: Scary-

AW: yeah everyone runs out the house we run in.

BJ: That's really cool though, all right. What changes have you seen in the department since you've been here?

AW: The regulations from government.

BJ What kind of reg- What is-

AW: They almost dictate to you what you gotta insurance have on the truck, the kind of training, but they don't give you money to buy the stuff.

BJ: That's annoying. So very strict, they're getting stricter?

AW: They getting stricter all the time.

BJ: You've been here 35 years?

AW: yes, the last truck we got was \$385,000. That's for one fire truck. And at one time I know we paid about \$20,000 for a truck. Every year they go up and up.

BJ: I know the gas to put in it is just so much and like everything to put in it.

AW: Well see the diesel fuel, the taxes there we don't have to pay as much as the stuff me and you have to do. That helps out some, then you gotta out insurance of the truck, that's way up there. Then you gotta put insurance on all the member, that's way up there

BJ: A lot of money

AW: Right, see if they paid then we wouldn't have to worry about. Paid fuel and everything and the truck.

BJ: So the governments being too strict.

AW: They getting stricter all the time.

BJ: That's annoying, but y'all gotta push through-

AW: You gotta do it cause if you aint got no volunteers what cha gonna do? The closest paid fire department is Chesterfield and then Lynchburg, those are the closest paid fire departments.

BJ: If a fire happened they would take forever.

AW: No if you aint got no volunteer what cha gonna do? You got to have them.

BJ: It's very nice of you to volunteer your time and do that.

AW: you know you can't get paid for everything you do in life, gotta have a little volunteer.

BJ: That's really nice of you though.

AW: Like y'all are doing now you volunteered to come up here and be with us.

(laughter)

BJ: We love to do it.

SH: So how often do you get calls?

AW: Well, last month we had 7 calls.

SH: Just 7?

AW: Just 7.

(Wows)

AW: We get maybe 100 a year.

BJ: What kind of calls were they?

AW: Cars, chimney fires, house fires, but when it gets cold we get more chimney fires house fires. Most thing we have is car wrecks.

BJ: Car wrecks-

AW: Which the dears, a car wreck if the ... don't come out we have to clean that. Use to not have to do that but now with the Government EPA we cant have all this stuff going into the creeks.

BJ: More regulations.

AW: right, more regulations. Then you have to worry about the airbag going off and all the stuff on the car. You gotta worry about the new car, the electric car because they might take off on ya.

BJ: Stressful

AW: You just gotta watch out because they put knew stuff on cars you know nothing about.

BJ: And y'all have to clean up everything, what about if it was a big wreck and there was like glass everywhere-

AW: We gotta clean the road up and make sure the highway is safe for the other folks to go though, then you gotta worry about- Well we call the rubber necks, if you got a car wreck and we are waving folks on through and they paying attention to car wreck and then a car stops and they cause another car wreck. They so busy be looking over here to see what's going on they don't pay attention.

BJ: So it happens a lot.

AW: right sometimes they be on their cell phones trying to take a picture.

BJ: Oh my God, that's crazy.

AW: Yeah we see them slow down and speed up they stay like that will get them, because they are supposed to slow down especially on 460.

BJ: Is there where most of the accidents are?

AW: Yeah and at that road why were y'all came in 626, right at that intersection, we have a lot of wrecks right there. There is a road up here called dead mans curve we have a lot of wrecks right up there too.

BJ: The name says it all, dead mans curve. I don't want to go on there.

AW: Well you probably would because you wouldn't know it and since we named it we know where its at.

BJ: Cause y'all get so many calls from that spot. Ok, What was your most memorable call?

AW: Longwood University

AP: Ahh you were there.

AW: The whole block-

BJ: The whole block-

AW: The whole block was on fire.

BJ: Didn't a lot of companies come out and-

AW: But we got 7 departments in this county right? When they sound the alarm they said all departments come to Farmville, all of them.

BJ: So y'all knew something was going down?

AW: Well we were going in the road, well you probably don't know where it at, but when you go back into Farmville down at the corner-

BJ: yeah yeah

AW: you could see the whole building was on fire

BJ: Was it at nighttime or daytime?

AW: Well between 5 and 6 o'clock but you could see it, and I stayed there from then. From 5 o'clock that evening to 5 o'clock that morning. And then had to go to work.

BJ: Oh my God

SH: That's crazy

AW: Yeah, the whole block was on fire.

BJ: How long? Were y'all just putting out the fire the whole time?

AW: The whole time. And then still had to stay out there. ... it would come back.

BJ: Oh so y'all thought it was out and somebody had to come back

AW: sometimes you have to go back because you cant smuther and it bale back up.

BJ: Was it scary?

AW: No, I am use to it. The only scary part of it is if you have a fireman go inside and he wont answer his radio, that when you get scared, think something has happened to him.

BJ: Yeah that's very scary.

AW: And then you got call for a mayday firefighter down or send a team in there to try and find them

BJ: Have you ever had to go in and-

AW: no, but I had a training one time and recruit. That's a hard training. Teach you how to bust through walls cant get to back to a door in order to jump out a window.

BJ: That's crazy though.

AW: I know its crazy, but somebody has to do it.

BJ: Yeah someone's gotta do it.

AW: Yeah but I love Longwood body of students because I had my son with me and he wasn't nothing but five, and had my personal truck and I parked right there in front of Jarmen Auditorium, and the girls said they watch him and they did all night, but he would not role that window down for them, but enough for me to see him. He stayed there all night with me.

BJ: Were they Longwood Students?

AW: Mhm, cause- see- when we hooked up the fire hydrant and took the water, nobody in Farmville could really flush the water, because we were taking on all the water from them and putting it on the fire. So then the town of Farmville had call someone to cut the pumping station back on so that we could work it.

BJ: So y'all were loosing pressure?

AW: We was pumping everything Farmville could give. In the water hydrant.

BJ: Wow yeah y'all are taking away all of the water. But ya know it was such a big fire though

AW: See image the truck we got pumps 1250 gallons of water a minute, then you have some at pump 1500 a minute. That's a minute for those gallons. And they can't keep up and we had 7 departments on the same thing.

BJ: So all of the trucks like emptied out so then you had to use Farmville?

AW: No we use the hydrants- See sometimes ... (disturbance) that's why they got the tank to keep them full.

BJ: Ahh ok, that so scary to have that big of a fire though.

AW: Yeah that was a big fire-

BJ: That was the biggest one?

AW: Defiantly, I have been to a couple of tall buildings but I mean the whole block was on fire.

BJ: Like going down.

AW: Yeah wherever you would go there was fire.

SH: Alright so you've basically answered my question so you go.

BJ: It was what was the closest scariest call you've ever had, that was probably that one?

AW: Well that was probably that or we go to brush fire, we go into woods and fight the fire and then it- The wind would shift on you and then your surrounded by a fire and you gotta be careful and get out of there.

BJ: Yeah it could come back at you.

AW: Yeah the wind could shift and then you really-

BJ: That's hard to control probably, cause like one little spark here goes that way and-

AW: Yeah one time we went to a fire and the wind shifted and the smoke came back on us. We couldn't tell which way we were going, into the fire or out so we just kept driving

BJ: Just kept driving, that's scary.

AW: Yeah especially at night, you can see the fire and then when you put it out everything is pitch black and you gotta find your way back out of the woods.

BJ: That's crazy.

AW: Somebody gotta do it

BJ: Ok so-

AW: But we don't get no fire like California gets, not yet.

BJ: Not yet. Never know. It could happen.

AW: No you never know. But then you have chaos

BJ: How many bush fire have you ever-

AW: Well so far we aint had to many, we have had some we had to go over to another county to help them.

BJ: has it ever happened with having someone throw like a cigarette out of there car?

AW: Well some have been set up.

BJ: Tent fires?

AW: No set up. Fire set up and sometimes you can tell they did it and then folks burn trash, and then throw and now you got a fire.

BJ: Hmm gotta watch out.

AW: yeah one year someone was setting fires in Farmville.

BJ: Setting fires?

AP: Like on purpose?

AW: yeah I forgot what year but one of them was a building and then another and then another. (too loud to understand).

BJ: It wasn't at Longwood, but somewhere else in Farmville?

AW: yeah but still right in Farmville. I think it ...

BJ: Wonder if it was a student.

AW: I can't say.

BJ: Cant say [*laughing*]

Aw: You know people just do that to see a fire truck come out. And little criminals out here see others being ... crazy.

BJ: They want to see all yall come out.

SH: They want the attention.

BJ: yeah the attention. Ok so what do you get out of this experience of being a volunteer fire fighter? Like what do you-

AW: Helping people.

BJ: Helping People.

AW: Well I help people and then car wrecks I don't like them too much. Especially when someone gets hurt.

BJ: Have you seen some pretty bad things.

AW: Yeah mhm.

BJ: Do you ever have like bad dreams about it? Like where it pops up in your head again?

AW: Well you got to blank it out, because if it gets to you, you wont be able to do your work ... just think that its not your family. You're just helping somebody. Don't get to emotionally involve because you can't focus.

BJ: That's like my moms a nurse and like when she has people come in the ER she can't-
like she wants to cry-

SH: Same thing with my mom.

BJ: She can't get emotionally attached.

AW: If your gonna cry, go behind the fire truck and cry. Don't let the see you cry, gotta be
tough, go behind the fire truck.

BJ: I bet that's really like- I cant imagine-

SH: Emotionally taxing.

BJ: Being able to all of that.

AW: well we have seen that some people just can't take it and we keep them off to the side.
You can't help the person if you get all emotionally involved. Do it afterwards.

SH: Alright so what advice would you give to someone who wants to become a fire fighter?

AW: Well, are you sure that's what you want to do, its not just running down with the fire
truck flying, its to help people. If you can't drive the truck you can help with the equipment
and all that stuff. Its not easy.

SH: No not at all.

BJ: Gotta make sure you really wan to do that ya know.

AW: It's not just for attention. If it were my thing I wish the truck could stay in the building.
Just come out when we need, cause once we leave this building someone's life is on the
line or someone's is loosing their house.

BJ: Do you- Have you had calls that like cat in tree like not a big deal or all of them are
pretty like-

AW: I don't know cat, he got up there he can get back down. I'm sorry.

(laughter)

BJ: So only like serious stuff though?

AW: yeah, I mean but some people take of advantage of, like the rescue department, most time the fire department were coming out for a reason. But someone hits there toe or something wrong they have lie five cars out and they could have driven themselves to the hospital.

BJ: Yeah like they got a cough and they gotta go.

AW: Right, they could drive themselves in there. I know your mom already told you about that, cause the people got to get out there bed and get the quad and then go up and infuse treatment. Waste of time and there's others who really need them and cant get them.

BJ: yeah that makes sense. Lets see, is there anything else that um- Cause were gonna keep these documents for like a hundred years, if we pull them out in a hundred years if there are gonna see if things have changed. Is there anything else you would want to put in?

AW: There is always gonna be changes. Always. I mean the price of the truck, the training gonna be different, there's always gonna be changes.

BJ: Technology

AW: Right, but we don't have it, but some fire departments have it. When the alarm goes off they gotta screen up there by the door to tell you exactly where the fire is at and which way to go and then in the truck they got a laptop to tell you how to go there. We don't have all the right now.

BJ: [pointing to his hand with a finger missing] what happened?

AW: When I was small I was riding on the back of a tractor I was falling and tried to grab something and my finger hit the gear and I pulled it off and got 120 stitches, when you lose a finger all the pain will shoot up your arm if you hit it was hanging

BJ: Cause it hurts if you hit it, probably the nerves-

AW: It doesn't anymore but it did at first. and they wrapped and drove me to the hospital.

(Can't understand some of the conversation)

AW: What are y'all doing in school?

BJ: I'm sociology major

SH: criminology major

AP: criminal justice and business.

TL: Criminology and Homeland security.

AW: Well we have to many criminals.

BJ: So do your kids like you being a firefighter?

AW: Well they use to come on the calls with me when they were small and I had them sit in the truck.

BJ: My dad would end up doing the same thing! So what the color of the Trucks?

AW: Yellow trucks, when the yellow trucks come the fire will be put out

BJ: And the shirts?

AW: Shirts, blue, red and yellow

BJ: Remarried at all?

AW: NO NO NO

BJ: Have you ever gotten calls randomly?

AW: We have been at lunch or dinner, but I love what I do. The wintertime is the hardest when you have to get up in the cold and try not to wreck your car in the snow in order to get the truck, but I have had to leave before to be able to make it there. Anymore questions you got before I get my check?

(Laughter)

BJ: Any other comments you may have?

AW: Stay safe and in school, no wild parties. You can cut that off now.

(laughter)

