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Cole Roberts, Amanda Meszaros, Greg Rahner, Tevin Brown, Jaylin Mason

I removed crutch words, false starts, ums, uhs and ahs from this transcript.

Greg Rahner: OK, so, like I said, my name is Greg. I am 19 years old. I'm a sophomore. I'm from Northern Virginia, and one of my major-. My major is actually biology.

Carl Eggleston: Biology?

GR: Yes

CE: That's a tough course.

GR: Yeah, it is, it's actually, it's pretty hard.

CE: That's a tough, I had some of that, I don't want no more.

GR: So, go ahead and introduce yourselves.

Cole Roberts: I'm Cole Roberts. I'm 19. I'm a freshman, and my major is math secondary ed.

CE: Math

Amanda Meszaros: I'm Amanda. I am 18, and my major is nursing.

CE: Nursing, yeah, I think you told me that before

AM: Uh-huh

Tevin Brown: I'm Tevin. I'm a freshman, and my, my major is business.

Jaylin Mason: I'm Jaylin. I'm 19. I'm a sophomore, and my major is criminal justice.

CE: OK

GR: So, I just wanted to get a little know you about now, we'll get to your childhood a little bit later, but just now, if you don't mind, just saying your age, where, like do you live around here?

CE: Now I'm, I'm 65 and I live inside the town of Farmville.

GR: OK, do you like it?

CE: Been here all my life, born here in 1950.

GR: OK. So, how's this business? How, how, how's this going?

CE: It's going real well! I mean, ya know, it's kinda rocky when I started.

GR: Mmhm

CE: I started the business in 1983.

GR: OK, so-

CE: So I been here, what? Over 30 years now.

GR: Wow. So, would you say it's increased more?

CE: Oh most definitely!

GR: OK, so-

CE: Most definitely, most definitely. Because the first year, 83 I didn't have any services.

GR: No?

CE: Nope, and 84 I had 1, and 85 I had 7. So now I had-, have had as much as 96.

GR: So would you say that it was a lot like, did you have to, you had to invest a lot of money for this because you weren't, you weren't getting a lot of services you said?

CE: No, I wasn't.

GR: So, it was a lot of out of pocket.

CE: Out of pocket, and I had a, a job working for a guy that was running for governor.

GR: OK, so-

CE: I did political, I do political consulting.

GR: Yeah, I, I heard actually, I, I wanted to get to that.

CE: Yeah, Yeah.

GR: Your, your opinions on the politics coming up? An- Any-

CE: You mean the, the one that's today?

GR: No, no, the presidential-

CE: Oh! The presidential race! OK. Gee, I don't know what to say about that, I guess it's.

GR: It's jus-

CE: I noticed just yesterday that Carson has went past in the CPS pole Donald Trump.

GR: Mmhm

CE: And I-

GR: What, what do you think of Donald Trump?

CE: Well, he a shrewd business person, I know that much for sure!

GR: Yeah, I think he did-

CE: I have one of his books I think, yeah I have a book from him

GR: Yeah, I think he did very well for himself-

CE: Yeah, he did-

GR: I, I just don't see him in politics.

CE: Yeah. Well he's very fortunate, his, his father loaned him a million dollars to get, get started, so that's-

GR: Yeah, I saw that

CE: If somebody loaned me a million dollars I can get a good start too!

GR: Exactly.

CE: But then, a million dollars to get started, but yeah.

GR: So, back to the funeral home, did you always want to do this?

CE: Mmhm. That's, well since they asked us when we were in 11th grade I think it was, promoted, getting ready to go to the 12th, what profession would you like to be or what you ambition to be eventually.

GR: Mmhm

CE: And I said a funeral director or a lawyer, and I decided to be a funeral director.

GR: Wha- wha- what's the interest of law? Did you- Did you-

CE: I always had a fascination for law.

GR: Was it the arguing? Or was it just like the-

(laughter)

GR: Cause I, I, I'm interested in law too, it was just bio or law, and I picked bio, but the interest of law is actually, I became very argumentative.

CE: Court. I think I, I would like the courtroom. I think I would like the courtroom law. I think I would like courtroom law. You deal with clients you ____ this case before. _____ second court, or Virginia court.

GR: What kind of ca-, would you do felony, civil?

CE: I would probably, not do felony, I don't think I would like that so well, but probably civil, probably civil mostly, mostly. In courtroom law.

GR: Ok, so now we're going to get back to your childhood. What did your childhood look like? What- Where would you say you were on the financial standings? What did the society around you look like?

CE: Well, at that point in time, this was back in, I guess I was born in the 1950, so you talking maybe 56' or 58'?

GR: 50's, 60's between there, when you were younger.

CE: We- It wasn't fantastic, but my, my parents had a little small business that generated some income, that they were probably a little bit ahead of the folks in the neighborhood. Cause they had their own business.

GR: What was the- what was the business?

CE: They were furniture. Furniture restoration and reupholstering furniture, like finishing.

GR: That's actually, that's actually really interesting. Did you, did you work there?

CE: Mmhm

GR: What does your family look like? Do you have any brothers or sisters?

CE: Yeah, I- Originally there was six of us, now it's three.

GR: I am sorry to hear that.

CE: I had 3 brothers die within 10 years. From 19-, from 2003 to 2013.

GR: I'm sorry to hear that. But now you sisters?

CE: I have 1 sister and 1 brother's left.

GR: How are they doing? Are they around here? Or did they- did they move off?

CE: 1 of my brother's teaches karate.

GR: Oh, ok.

CE: He's got a karate school on Third Street, and one in Richmond.

GR: Oh, ok, so, so it's going broader.

CE: Well, yeah, he has one in Richmond, and one here.

GR: Is he trying to branch out more, or no?

CE: He said he's interesting in doing it, but I think he is interested in doing something else like Quiznos, maybe like a Quiznos franchise or something.

GR: Oh wow, that's actually really cool.

CE: Yeah, that's what he said he wants to do so, but he's much younger than I am.

GR: Mhm- Oh, what is the age difference? Is it-

CE: Probably 12 years

GR: 12 years

CE: 12, 13 years

GR: Now going back that childhood. Did you have a lot of friends growing up? Or was it mainly, mostly family, or?

CE: It was family and some friends mostly school friends like that.

GR: So like when, when you got home would you-

CE: Well I didn't, when I got home I-I worked with my father.

GR: Okay!

CE: His business, so I didn't have-

GR: A lot of time

CE: A lot of time between- as a matter of fact my father used to make me come here before I'd go to school.

GR: Mhm, so you would go from working to school, back to working.

CE: And then I would come back to work, and then I probably had to study in the evenings so yeah.

GR: Wow, that's a lot of work.

CE: A lot of work.

GR: Were- so-you, would you say you were the quiet type, or?

CE: For the most part, for the most part.

GR: Okay, so you kept to yourself. The community around you any-any drastic changes or what was- was it- cause I've seen a lot of pictures from back then and it was very scarce buildings, restaurants.

CE: Yeah, oh yeah it was getting real scarce then. It's grown, Farmville's grown a lot in the last fifteen years.

GR: Would you say that's because of the school? I mean the school was still around, but become more popular.

CE: Partly the school, and Hampton Sydney, the Moton Museum. I mean I guess just Farmville's a hub for Prince Edward County.

GR: Yeah

CE: Little, small businesses imprinted, and there's always been I guess a proactive counseling, proactive to attract particular small businesses.

GR: So like yours yourself.

CE: Yeah, yeah like mine.

GR: So, how was the view on minorities in Farmville like obviously-

CE: It's a segregated community by all means.

GR: So there was-

CE: Not a lot of interaction with other races and ethnic groups. No, very little.

GR: So mainly it was like Blacks or was it Hispanics, Blacks?

CE: Now it wasn't many Hispanics. It was mostly whites and Afro-American.

GR: Whites and African Americans.

CE: Maybe a few Orientals, but not a lot.

GR: Okay.

CE: There's more now than then. A whole lot more now than then.

GR: And so did you get kicked out of school or did you leave or I remember hearing about the Moton Museum. Some people left, were you a part of that?

CE: Yeah, I was promoted to the third grade and then two years I didn't go to school at all and then the schools were closed for four years and the fifth year was the free school. And then two years I went over to Cumberland County, my parents rented a home, but they maintained the house here too.

GR: So-

CE: So I went to school in Cumberland County for the last- Okay they closed in '58, from '59 to '60, I didn't go to school at all. From '61 to '62, I went to Cumberland-Cumberland County schools and then of course the free schools in 1963, so I came back over here. My parents maintained an outdoor residence.

GR: So did they move to Cumberland County? Did they possess that house for you guys to go to school?-

CE: Oh yeah, the purpose was the reason they had the house was they rented the house and it was a farm, they rented a farm because they wanted us to go back to school, and my siblings and I. That's why they had the house.

GR: So, so they had to- They-they had kind of two businesses running at these houses. One was a farm, one was a furniture store.

CE: Yeah.

GR: Oh wow so-

CE: But they didn't. It's a farm and it's a house, but they didn't really work the farm, but the farm was part of the house they rented.

GR: But it was still going. How did you react to not going to school? Just one day, just not going.

CE: Well, it was a strange thing that other people was going to school and you wasn't going to school.

GR: Yeah, exactly.

CE: So that was kind of strange and kind of odd, but my- at that point in time they had, particular first Baptist Church downtown, had something like, it's pretty much like a year round vacation Bible school. So maybe like a half a day for some people down there and they had some parents who would try to get you to read and teach you how to write and some basic skill, but it wasn't accredited and you didn't get and credit for it whatsoever.

GR: So like, as I know me like if school didn't happen I'd be like happy but then I'd realize that oh no nothing's going on.

CE: I'm more sure that we all was all kinda relieved cause nobody at that age at 8 years old wanted to go to school. but then eventually you kinda get 2 years, 4 years down the road and you realize you missing so much education.

GR: How was the family affected? I know that- that now they have all these kids going to school before you were shut out, and now they're not shut out, now they have to take care of these 6 kids and run a business as well do you think it impacted them a lot harder or was it-

CE: I'm more sure it was emotional for the most part, but my mother really never worked so she kinda looked out more for us and our father was doing more of the working. So it's and it was always the case, she would always help me here, but she she never worked other than that.

GR: So did all of your family start working at the furniture store once you guys got kicked out

CE: My brother and I and the others didn't.

GR: Okay.

CE: Ya see when , no it was just my brother and I.

GR: And then the others were a lot younger.

CE: Oh yeah a whole lot younger, a matter fact when my father died in 1996.

GR: Mhmm

CE: So I was about 16 and the others were about 2.

GR: Wow.

CE: So you know.

GR: Mhmm.

CE: They couldn't do much.

GR: Mhmm the community, is it a lot more populated.

CE: Well, the town right about now 7,500 people right now the population and that includes the Longwood students so I guess it- the folks who were here all the time or grew up here were about 4000, something like that.

GR: So do you think they stayed?

CE: Who?

GR: The people who grew up here originally?

CE: Well the- some stayed and some, most of the people then stayed- the parents, you talking about the parents or the students?

GR: Both. like they-

CE: Well the parents stayed for the most part because most of them owned tobacco fields and things like that.

GR: Their little businesses.

CE: Yeah things like that, the job at the drugstore, little things like that. But the students probably half of them maybe stayed and the other half went in other places.

GR: Do you have any friends that you were a child with like- are they still anyone you know that's still around here, running their own business?

CE: A guy, One guy named Oliver Stiff, He's still here, He has a little tiny business. Yeah he in Farmville. And not a lot that you mean continue to stay here?

GR: Yeah, I mean like so you had friends when you were younger. Did you grow up with them? Are they still around? Like do you know anyone from-

CE: The majority are not here now and that's because of- there's very limited jobs here and once they got educated they went to other places GE. and all these other places to go find nice jobs like Richmond, Philly, Baltimore, and a few stayed here, but very few that was back when I was here and are still here now.

GR: So you mentioned these little baptist churches

CE: Churches

GR: Schools, what were they like? Like you said you could go there for half a day, Was it controlled? Was it in the church?

CE: The church- the church leadership was the one in charge and there was like maybe 10 to 12 of them all in the different areas.

GR: Yeah.

CE: And county cause transportation wasn't as great then, and people didn't have vehicles much then like they do now. so it was like first baptism in farmville, There's one in prospect, one in Hampden Sydney, it was kinda spaced out.

GR: Yeah.

CE: Like satellites, so they went to that little school, and it really wasn't a school, as it wasn't accredited so like a vacation Bible school.

GR: So it like kids who parents who wanted their kids to learn without getting credit.

CE: They wanted them to come at least have, at least do basic skills like-

GR: Reading.

CE: Math, reading, maybe write some things down, that kinda stuff. Basically for the most part, real basic skills.

GR: So it was like a , daycare kind of?

CE: Like a... yeah.

GR: But like a learning daycare?

CE: Yeah.

GR: But with the basic skills?

CE: But some of them was like, some of em must've been like 10, 12 years old. So I mean like you know.

GR: Yeah they were already-

CE: So I guess you could consider.

GR: Not a daycare as in the sense of little kids, I was just saying somewhere to go while-

CE: To keep em off the streets.

GR: Yeah

CE: For the most part. And kinda keep em some basic skills.

GR: Okay and - Were they crowded at all? Like were there a lot of-

CE: Yeah, yeah.

GR: Cause

CE: A lot it was kind a lot of people, but they was spaced out.

GR: And where lunches involved?

CE: Mhmm the church would provide a little lunch and they would read to the students and things like that, and somebody get people who come to try to motivate them to do something

GR: Kind of be a role model.

CE: Yeah.

GR: And say I know you're in this tough situation, but things are gonna get better.

CE: And there were some that were former teachers.

GR: Oh okay.

CE: Peppin school retired schools who said come, but it wasn't accredited, they didn't get any credit for it.

GR: It was just.

CE: No point in being there.

GR: Just on their own?

CE: On their own, all voluntary you either come and if you didn't wanna go you didn't go.

CE: Did you usually go? Or were you working?

CE: I go most of the time, but sometime I was doing some work.

GR: Oh okay. would you say you enjoyed your childhood? Given, and I know that's a hard questions to say no to, but would you say that given the struggles you had, would you say that you had a good childhood?

CE: For the most part yes. With all things considered, yes!

GR: Okay so the family everything was.

CE: Yeah we never got into trouble. Nobody been arrested. We didn't drink too much then, we didn't smoke anything so yeah it was I guess it was very elementary. So it was good!

GR: Okay so it was pretty fun, and what were some of the main struggles you had? I mean I know you had- you were young and it was a while ago, do you have any significant struggles that you can think of? Like what- was the working ever too much or was combining the work, the scheduling?

CE: It was more than i wanted to do!

GR: I mean any kid wouldn't.

CE: Well I mean the struggle was because I had to get up like 5 in the morning go to work for about 2 hours then come back, change, and go to school.

GR: And then come back.

CE: And then come back about four o'clock.

GR: And start working.

CE: And start working and stay til about 6:30-7 and then have to do my homework and then go to bed at around 9 at that age maybe 10.

GR: Did you see yourself being successful in school as well? Because I know studying, getting strained on studying that'll affect school work. Did you- how were you as a student when you were in school?

CE: I made the honor roll some years.

GR: Oh okay.

CE: I made the honor roll a few years and then, I was probably an average student with maybe a B.

GR: B average! I mean that's-

CE: C+- B

GR: That's still good.

CE: Yeah somewhere, and sometimes a B+. Yeah, I made the honor roll a few times, it wasn't really- you know I guess average.

GR: Yeah.

CE: Average student.

GR: So was that before or after the 2 years.

CE: This was after.

GR: Okay so after the shut out you still-

CE: After.

GR: You still remained-

CE: After.

GR: On the honor roll.

CE: Yeah, yeah, yeah, afterward, yeah all me.

GR: Okay so were you studying a lot?

CE: I was probably a fast learner.

GR: Okay.

CE: I guess you could say-

GR: Were you like a-

CE: A matter of fact I went to a college, I think it's on the wall there somewhere, That Saint Paul's College and I came out with a 4.0 average.

GR: Wow really?

CE: Uh huh, but that was back- I went in I was 55 years old and I came out back in 57. but I graduated with a BS 4.0 average.

GR: I mean that's still phenomenal.

CE: Yeah at that age, but you see what happened is it basically the governor and the state, and a guy named John Clugey gave- John Clugey gave a million dollars, and the state put a million dollars and all those that were affected by the school closing was allowed to finish their education with their high school level or community college level even up to a doctorate if that's where you wanted to go. And even at this point if I wanted to go back I could go back to doctorate school and they would pay for it.

GR: So no matter what if you were affected in this country, if you wanted to go back to school after it they would just pay for it?

CE: Definitely. They would pay for it now if I wanted to go get the doctorate, but you gotta realize most of the people then was 54 and above.

GR: Okay

CE: Maybe 52 and above so they weren't young people and they was already settled in.

GR: Got a job and yeah.

CE: Got a job and already doing something, had families and didn't really wanna do it.

GR: Didn't have time.

CE: No!

GR: That's a lot of time and commitment.

CE: Yeah yeah!

GR: How did you find out about the massive resistance? Like in school was there any talk about the walk out, or- we read about the walk-out how everyone just one day-

phone rings

CE: Turn this off. Okay, I wasn't actually in the walk-out. That was 1951. I was one year old. So I wasn't really a part of that at all. I was involved in the school closings back in 1958, but not the walk-out.

GR: So did you know why?

CE: Well, yeah, I had some idea that there were some people in Farmville who didn't want to integrate the system. So to avoid integration, they withdrew- they didn't actually close the schools, but the county's Board of Supervisors withheld the funding, so they had no money to operate. So in essence-

GR: So technically, they didn't close the schools, but they did.

CE: They did.

GR: Because they had no money.

CE: They had no money. They didn't give any money, so they automatically closed them.

GR: Do you think the closing of the school and the emotional effect of seeing these things happen had any effect on your upbringing? Like people you met- knowing that these people didn't want me to go to school with them- any- I'm trying to word it. Any like impacts that this had on you? Like did you get angry at all?

CE: No, I didn't get angry. I probably was disappointed more so than that. Because I realized- it wasn't the people- it wasn't the people who closed the schools or didn't appropriate the funds for it, it was actually their outlook with their children. So they weren't actually responsible, it was the parents or aunts and uncles. It was all them that had something to do with that.

GR: Well, I mean, if I got shut out of school, I would kinda resent the community. I would- you said it wasn't the community. It was the-

CE: Board of Supervisors.

GR: Okay.

CE: They're actually the one. The community, I mean- those members of the Board of Supervisors by majority vote decided not to appropriate the money for education- public education.

GR: Okay.

CE: So that in essence closed the schools. So that means it wasn't the community- it may have been the majority of the community thinking, but they didn't have a force or a vote during that-

GR: There was no say-

CE: No, they didn't have any say-so. Only those eight members of the Board of Supervisors.

GR: So when- how- what age were you when you decided to become the funeral home-

CE: Well, at that time, I was 33. When I first started?

GR: No, when you first thought. Like you-

CE: Oh, I was 18.

GR: You were 18.

CE: I was 17-18.

GR: If you think you went to those schools- the schooling for those two years, do you think anything would be different?

CE: I graduated- I think I graduated when I was 19, probably would've graduated when I was 18. Probably.

GR: Okay.

CE: Yeah, I think I made up a year during the free school system.

GR: So you like jump- so you like jumped-

CE: I'm about one year behind. Yeah, yeah, when the free school opened up, it was like a non-graded- a non-grade that if you could master certain skills, they would promote you or skip you a grade or two.

GR: Yeah, so it was like a testing program.

CE: Yeah.

GR: So you did better than most of the kids, you-

CE: I did- I did most- I did better than most folks. Put it like that.

GR: Yeah, okay. . . . Did you ever experience racism in this community?

CE: I mean, experienced it personally myself or like as a community?

GR: Have you seen any or- have you seen any racism or have you yourself experienced?

CE: I probably- yeah, I think I have when I was coming up- when I was the first Afro-American on the Board of Super- on the town council.

GR: Oh, wow.

CE: Yeah, out for 200 years. I was elected to the council in 1984.

GR: Okay.

CE: And I was the first one, and I served four years. I haven't been on since then, but yeah, I had some problems there, and I- the Board- the council didn't want to- I asked the town council would they abandon the at-large system of voting because several Afro-Americans had tried to get elected.

GR: But they didn't.

CE: They didn't because it was 24% Afro-American and 76% white.

GR: Okay.

CE: So I asked them if they would abandon that and develop a ward system.

GR: So, instead of the percentage to go to whoever's the best-

CE: Everybody elects you, then you divide it up into portions, and then some of those portions would have to be in a majority Afro-American seat or district. So, that put two Afro-Americans on council.

GR: So there was only- So while you were on the council there was- was there- you were elected first, and then there was another?

CE: Yeah, there have been about four or five. About four since then. But there's two on there now.

GR: How many other ethnicities are there on there? I don't know how many-

CE: There are seven members and a mayor, the mayor makes eight, but, we still have two Afro-American, the rest of them are white males.

GR: Ok, so obviously there's the difference.

CE: There was a lady who was elected to council back in probably 86 or 87, but she's deceased now. But she was elected. And one more person was another lady who was elected since then about ten, about twelve years ago

GR: How long can you serve on that?

CE: You can stay there every year, if you want to get reelected. There's no term limits.

GR: It's just if you get reelected?

CE: Mmhm.

GR: Did you ever think about staying? Or did you just-

CE: Well actually, I moved out of the district I that was in. I served four years, and I moved out of the district.

GR: Do you think you would have been elected back?

CE: From that district?

GR: Yeah.

CE: Oh most definitely.

GR: So they liked you.

CE: Yeah, and I drew up the ward plan for the town, so I drew the town up, and I- I'm most sure I would have.

GR: Did you ever see in your numbers? Did you know your voting numbers? Did you ever see a difference between yours and other black males, or African American males?

CE: Mine's was probably a little bit higher than they were, but I think was mainly because I'm probably more high profile. And I was in business, and things like that, so it was a difference- it's different than the neighborhood who was not in business.

GR: Are the whites numbers a lot higher than yours? Could you see as a community-

CE: Most definitely, most definitely, because it was higher, but when I came on council I had, by that time, drew up this plan to the justice department accepted and broke it down. So, it's not like I running against the whole town, I'm only in this particular area, and that area was majority black.

GR: Did you involve at all with the community, did you ever get any, I don't want to say e-mails, people coming up to talk to you? Was it predominately African American? Community that would talk to you?

CE: The district I had was 65% Afro-American and 35% white, so I had some white support too.

GR: So there was some support.

CE: Mmhm, there was some.

GR: Do you see a change in the community between, I don't know if you know, the percentages of now as opposed to-

CE: There's been a big change, it's probably economic change for the most part, I still don't think a whole lot of Afro-Americans, and whites, and hispanics socialize a lot together, but it's economically, yes

GR: But, for the social part, did they get along at all back then, for the social part?

CE: No, it was totally, it was basically divided into our own racial masses.

GR: So it was two races living on their own, and then now, is there still that segregation? Or is there a drastic change-

CE: No, it's a drastic change, because I ran for mayor once, and running for mayor is always at large. And I had something like 625 votes, and that guy who ran against me had like 850. So it wasn't a big difference.

GR: Was he African-American or was he-

CE: No, he was a white guy.

GR: Do you think that had any impact?

CE: Well, that probably helped a whole lot. I mean, it had not changed, back then, this was 1986 I think it was, or '88.

GR: So there was still that-

CE: Yeah there still was, there still was.

GR: Would you say, are most of your customers, I don't want to call them customers, but-

CE: Clients

GR: Your service clients, are they predominantly African American?

CE: It's probably about 74, 26. Something like that. It's some division.

GR: When you were a child, in our class we talked about how white kids, some of their parents didn't make them go to the new school either, they kept them out to work or something.

CE: Yeah, or sent them away to their aunts or grandparents or something like that.

GR: For those kids who did go to the new school, did you have any friends that went to this new school?

CE: No, no, I don't remember any.

GR: What about feelings, like why- how did you feel getting kicked out of school while other kids were still- did you understand it was solely a racial thing?

CE: Oh, well, most definitely. It was pretty much unequal justice. I guess you might say, because at that time, they wanted to be separated, but the bad part about it was that they took some money from the county to help start a private school. They should've never done that.

GR: So even as a child you knew that- you knew everything that was going on was wrong and . . .

CE: Mhm. Mhm.

GR: Do you still see some of- do you still see some of the things that happened back then go on today? And, by that I mean representation of African-Americans and whites and in the school program- blue-collar versus white-collar- the whole- mean income salary between ethnicities . . . Do you still- do you think it's because of what happened back then?

CE: Just to a certain degree, but now, it's a little bit different. I mean, I think the pay is pretty much equal to everybody. Everybody is getting the same pay. Back then, I don't think that was the case. Back then, but now- and I think economically it's better because right now- well, after today, there will probably be three Afro-Americans of the 5 Constitutional Officers- will be Afro-American. The five Consti- the Clerk, the Treasurer, the Sheriff, the Commonwealth's Attorney, and the Commissioner of the Revenue. So after today, because a young lady is running unopposed for the Commonwealth's Attorney- her name is Megan Clark- so she's probable to win today so that'll be three of the highest paid jobs in the county.

GR: Wow, so this is a pretty successful business, it looks very nice. So would you say- do you think that a lot of kids that had this happen- same, same situation happen to them-

CE: No.

GR: You don't think that they are doing this well?

CE: No. Well, I think that had to do a lot with- a lot to do with your drive, individuality. Like, I started this business, and I'm trying to sell it for \$2 million.

GR: Oh, wow.

CE: So I come from \$0 to \$2 million.

GR: Wow.

CE: That's was the assess it at.

GR: Wow, that's actually really impressive.

CE: Yeah.

GR: Do you think it had anything to do with- do anything- not do anything- do you think anything resulted from your parents? Like, did your parents- were your parents the main one-

CE: Well, I think that was one, because-

GR: It drove you?

CE: Yeah, it drove us to teach us to try keep struggling, keep moving on even though-

GR: Even though things were bad.

CE: Even though things were tough. Keep- because most of my- most of my siblings was- did real well.

GR: Mhm.

CE: Like, one is in karate school, He's living real well in Powhatan. And I had another brother- he died in 2013- and he was an . . . E9 in military and that's the highest-

GR: Rank.

CE: Before you can go to an officer. He's the highest enlisted officer.

GR: Was he gonna go-

CE: He spent like 23 years in the military.

GR: Wow, that's a long time.

CE: So he was obviously doing real well.

GR: So if it- if it wasn't for the parents drive, would you say you yourself pushed yourself?

CE: Yes, most definitely. I really pushed myself, no doubt about that.

GR: What would you say was the hardest part about- was your focus more on the schooling or was it to help your family or was it to help your dad's business?

CE: Well, it was him some, but then again, I was young when he died. But- and then not on that- but because of his teaching, it helped me a lot, and I wanted to help the family as well and help my brothers and sisters, maybe some of them wasn't doing quite as well. And then, of course, my mother never worked, so I kinda supported her.

GR: So was there any ever- was there ever any point where you were- kinda realized- because I know taking care of part of a family and doing school would be very complicated. Was there ever any point where you were like- kind of- not abandoned but lack of help- help by family but not as much and focus more on education? Was there- was there ever any point where you needed to focus?

CE: No, not really. I was basically working and going to school at the same time. And I was- as a matter of fact when I went to community college, I was actually not working, but when I went to the four-year college for the B.S. degree, I was actually working full-time.

GR: So you were working full-time when you went to the college?

CE: Mhm. Mhm.

GR: Was that difficult?

CE: That's always difficult because you got to balance a work schedule, and not only just showing up for work, I was the one running the business. So I had that to deal with the studies and the classwork and showing up to school-

GR: Showing up to classes.

CE: All that stuff too, yeah.

GR: And you said that was all paid for so I mean that was-

CE: Yeah, now well- yeah, I payed for the community college-

GR: I thought-

CE: The community college agreed- was to become a mortician, a funeral director. So I worked and paid for that. Now, the state paid for the B.S. degree.

GR: Okay.

CE: The state paid for that.

GR: Okay. So if you wanted any continuation after the B.S. degree, you would have to pay out of pocket.

CE: If I wanted to apply, I can apply and go to get a master's or even a doctorate, and they would pay for it.

GR: So then how- I'm just confused- how come you had to pay for the four-year- the B.S. degree?

CE: Oh, it didn't come. It didn't- I didn't have to pay for the B.S. degree. I payed for the community college, the two-year degree, but I did that back in '75.

GR: Oh.

CE: And this thing that came about- this fund wasn't available until 2004.

GR: Oh, so it was just two-

CE: Yeah, so it's only- it's new. So it's only been- well, not new, but it's been here about 10, 11 years. But after.

GR: Yeah after. Most of your time would go to school.

CE: After- Now I was 55 then so I paid for mostly community college and all that stuff.

GR: Mhmm

CE: Yeah

GR: Any regrets or changes that you would have made? Kept in touch with friends? Maybe- I mean you look like you like this- this business.

CE: I love this business.

GR: So

CE: I mean, probably so- I probably wish I would've had more time to socialize and do different things but this is a twenty four hour business. Twenty four hours everyday. Holidays, it doesn't matter. And I'm the person responsible and I've got people to help me, but I'm the one responsible for it. So you're kinda like glued to it.

GR: Yeah

CE: For the most part. And some jobs you're not. You're off for- You're off Friday afternoon to Monday morning. Uhuh. I'm- I'm twenty four hours everyday. everyday. I'm responsible and on call.

GR: So you're pretty busy all the time.

CE: Yeah I'm busy all the time.

GR: We tried to schedule you a couple times.

CE: I'm busy all the time. All the time there's something to do.

GR: I mean do you like- I mean I know a lot of people who like constantly doing things, do you ever get tired of it?

CE: No, I'm at the point now that that- I turned 65 about three weeks ago. About a month, as a matter of fact the fifth would be a month. So, I figured now is the time to, if I'm going to enjoy any of it, I need to-

GR: Retire?

CE: Well, I got to sell it, I can't just retire.

GR: Well, I mean after you sell it.

CE: After I sell it? Yeah, yeah.

GR: Do you have any offers on this place?

CE: I have some people who are interested, but they are interested in various reasons, some just want the spot because we are main street, and they say well, I don't want a funeral home, I'm going to put a service station or a Wawa, or something else up there on that lot. The problem I'm having is finding people who are interested in the business itself.

GR: Before you would just sell the place, you would rather someone take- not necessarily take over, but in the same category?

CE: Yeah, I want somebody to come in and work, become the manager, then decide they are going to buy part of it at a time until eventually they have the whole thing. Or they can buy the whole thing from the start, but it's hard to come up with a couple million dollars.

GR: Do you think it's going to be hard to let go of this place? I mean you've put in so much work-

CE: I mean, probably emotionally because this piece of property has been part of the family since about 1960.

GR: Yeah, it's like an emotional toll.

CE: Yeah, it will be- it will definitely be there, and I've been tied to it since probably 83'.

GR: Are you- Sorry, are you married?

CE: Mmhm.

GR: I don't know if someone said that might be your son?

CE: It is.

GR: Does he see-

CE: He doesn't like the business

GR: He doesn't like it? How come?

CE: Get up at 3 o'clock in the morning, and he doesn't like touching dead people, I guess. He said he didn't like that, so that is a part of it, the embalming and things is a part of it. He doesn't like that.

GR: How long has he been working here?

CE: He's been working here 10 or 15 years maybe.

GR: How old is he now?

CE: He is 38.

GR: OK, so did he go to school here?

CE: He went to Southside Community College. But totally different.

GR: This wasn't in his future.

CE: No, no, it never has been.

GR: After you do sell this place and retire, where do you see yourself going? Do you see yourself staying here? I know a lot of people move further down South, I don't know if you fish.

CE: I probably would- No, I love playing golf, but I probably would, maybe, have a place in Florida. Then maintain some ties here, have a little place in Florida on the beach or something like that, and travel and play golf, and stuff like that. I'd probably want to do that.

GR: Do you play golf around here a lot?

CE: I play at the Mandarin, and I'm a member at Longwood up there it's like the 9-hole course.

GR: Yeah, I think there's like- Is it a frisbee golf?

CE: No, it's a 9-hole golf course.

JM: It's 9 holes.

CE: So, I practice up there a lot, and then I go- yesterday I played at Winter Oak in Richmond. I play all over Virginia.

GR: Are you pretty good?

CE: No, no I'm not that good, I'm probably 80, 82, 83.

GR: What are you shooting? (To JM)

JM: I don't play golf, I just know about it.

GR: Oh, ok.

CE: Now, a par golf is about 72, So I'm about 8, 10, or 12-

GR: So, what's a drive looking like? Give me your numbers. What are we-

CE: Well, the highest I've ever had one was 309 yards, which is a good little distance. But since of the age and all of that, I'm probably about 275, 260, which is still good for the age.

GR: Do you see yourself going to Florida a lot?

CE: I do it now. But I mean, I just go down there, with- I'm with a national golf group.

GR: Oh, ok, so do you travel a lot?

CE: I travel with this national golf group sometimes. When I can. But they have 4 national tournaments a year, and it was in Florida in February. It was in Vegas in October.

GR: Did you go to Vegas?

CE: Mmhm.

GR: How was it?

CE: Oh, I loved it. I've been there before, I was there last year too.

GR: Oh, ok.

CE: And then we went to the Dominican Republic, and played golf last year.

GR: Oh, wow. So it's-

CE: Oh, it's a national golf group, It's not on the head, but it probably is a national golf group. And I belong to the Richmond chapter of this golf group. So we do a little bit of traveling with that. But it's usually like 3 days, we go on a Thursday-

GR: Do a tournament?

CE: Yeah, a tournament, then do 2 or 3 days of golf then come back. So it's mostly on a Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, then come back Sunday.

GR: So, it's like a break away from work, or are you still getting calls on the golf course?

CE: Oh, yeah, most definitely. Most definitely. 24 hours a day, every day. But my son is here, and my wife, she volunteers, she is a retired school teacher, so she is here. And there are some

other guys that come in and out, so even though I may not be here, I am still the licenced director for the business. Even though I may not be the first point of contact, but eventually a couple times that day or 3 or 4 times, I have to be on the phone with the clients and things like that, even on the golf course.

GR: What does your wife think of it?

CE: She doesn't really particularly care for the business.

GR: Mhm, but she is willing to help out?

CE: She's willing to help out, she is retired, she has nothing else to do.

GR: And you said she is a retired school teacher, is she in Prince-

CE: She taught at Prince Edward Elementary.

GR: Ok, how long was she teaching?

CE: 33 years, 34 years.

GR: So, was she teaching, I guess it would be-

CE: She was elementary so like K through 6, K through 5? Something like that

GR: Yeah, so I mean that's the questions I have, I don't know how we are doing on time.

AM: We have 15 minutes.

GR: How many?

AM: 15 minutes.

GR: We have 15 minutes? I mean that's all the questions I've had.

CE: What, you all individually-

GR: Oh, no, that's just all I've gotten.

JM: We all collectively came up with different questions.

CE: Oh, and gave him the questions, well that's nice of you.

GR: Thought I would help out.

CE: Tell me, what are you all doing a paper on? Why are you interviewing folks? That's what I'm trying to get that.

AM: We are trying to see how the school closings are still influencing Prince Edward county now. So I actually-

CE: I probably wouldn't be a good example of that.

AM: I was going to look more at the business side of it. How do you say that, as far as African Americans owning businesses, has that increased too?

CE: Decreased.

AM: Decreased. Because people left?

CE: Most of them left, as a matter of fact, right now, I'm probably the only Afro-American owner to own real estate on the main street. And years ago, it was probably 10 or 12. There was a service station over there where the ball field was, black owned, there was a couple doctors offices downtown, there was a dentist office downtown. There was a pool, and all of that's gone.

GR: Do you think- I know I see a lot of houses now, did they-

CE: What happened was, they did the work, but their children were not interested, or they went away and never came back, then got a nice job at IBM, and said I'm not going back to that mom

and pop grocery store when I got this big job with IBM or GE or wherever, so they just never came back, so when that person died, the business died too.

GR: Do you think the school- I know they are mostly houses, Do you think the school bought- Because I know the school is growing, do you think the school bought that property, and that's why they left?

CE: Well they had eminent domain years ago, they took somebody's property, I mean they gave them something for it, but they had no choice. As a matter of fact this road to the new Appomattox center is, up to that corner was black owned. And one was a grocery store down there, years ago, I'm talking about in the 60's, late 50's.

GR: Has the school ever tried to buy this place?

CE: No, I don't think they have. I have some folks who are interested in it, and I have a guy now who wants to buy the real estate, the building and all of that, and he wants to give me a million dollars for the building, because it's main street property. But I want something for the business itself, I can sell it for that, but then I've worked in the business part of it, the good will and all of that is zero if I do that.

GR: So then all this work is just going to-

CE: Yeah, but it's been estimated as 2 million dollars for the business and the real estate.

GR: So if you were to just sell the real estate it would be a million like you said, but-

CE: But then nothing for the business. But now I can go sell the business for an additional million because of the clientele, and the number of business we do here, and that. And then the real estate is separate. Because you can buy the business and either stay here or move to your own building, but you continue with my clients, my repeated clients. You see a lot of clients I have now I have buried their mother, their granddaddy, and all of that. So it kind of repeats. So they will buy the name, and they will continue on under the name. But if somebody just buys the business, it's gone.

GR: But if they want both, then that would be-

CE: I'm going to sell both, I'm not going to sell just the real estate. But I have other properties too, I have another funeral home in Crewe.

GR: How far away is that?

CE: About 18 miles, going down 460. And that real estate is worth about a half million, the real estate. And that business is worth about, maybe another hundred thousand? It's not as great as this one, this is like the flag ship I started.

GR: This is a nice one.

CE: This is another one down. And then I have some other real estate holdings too, so if I were to sell everything I own, my accountant said it would be about 3.5 million dollars.

GR: Wow, that's a lot of golf.

CE: If I sell everything I own.

GR: You don't want to do that though, do you?

CE: Yeah, I would love to. Either I sell it, or my family is going to sell it. One or the other, but if I work till I die, then what do I get out of it? But then they would sell the building, and they sell

all of that, and there's nothing wrong with them doing that, but I'm the one who put the blood sweat and tears into it, so that makes a difference. I would think so, that's why I want to do it while I'm able to move around and do that now, instead of waiting until-

GR: You're older and can't enjoy it.

CE: Yeah, and I can't enjoy it, or either die working. Then I zero out with that. I live a pretty good life now.

GR: It could be better.

CE: It could be a lot better if I had that money.

GR: Any more questions you have? Didn't mean to put you on the spot, sorry.

CE: I have a bunch of antiques too. I have an antique hearse. It takes horses to pull it.

GR: Do you use it?

CE: Mmhm. I want to sell that too. A guy wanted to give me a hundred thousand dollars for it.

GR: Really?

CE: Yeah, yeah. It is an 1840, but it takes horses to pull it.

GR: And then you have to have 2 horses.

CE: I have a friend who has 38 horses, so I just rent a horse, but I use it- Have you ever heard of Jerry Falwell? I rented to a funeral home in Lynchburg that used it for Jerry Falwell.

GR: I have not heard of him.

CE: He is the founder of Liberty University and the Moral Majority.

GR: Oh wow.

CE: But he died about 6, 7, 8 years ago? But he founded the Moral Majority. He founded Liberty University. A group called the Moral Majority, it was a political group. It was used for funeral, and a lot of other people to. I can show it to you before you leave, if you want?

GR: Yeah, I'd love to see it.

CE: We started this business when I first started, and I started with 800 square feet, now it's about 8000 square feet.

GR: I don't want to say it was cheap, but did you ever take out a loan for it?

CE: Mmhm. I took out a loan. I took out a loan when I started the business.

GR: Yeah that's what I mean,

CE; I did, I did.

GR: Was it hard to get?

CE: It wasn't easy.

GR: Now I know you can go to a loan, and show them your credit score, and-

CE: No, you have to have some collateral for this stuff. That kind of money, you can have a perfect credit score, but they are going to want some collateral, because you can go beserk, and then everything can go downhill, but the real estate, they have it.

GR: Have you paid off the loan?

CE: I will be in about 4 years, 3 to 4 years.

GR: If you came into that-

CE: I did pay off one of them, then I added to it, and got another one, then I added to it again and got another one. But I'm probably- I guess I owe about 60 thousand, 50 thousand maybe. Someone is getting money, it's quite nice that I paid it off.

GR: When you were a child thinking about owning this business home, would you say it became successful? Not this business, I'm saying the vision of becoming a-

CE: My vision has been pretty much completed. Except for the mayor of Farmville, I'm interested in doing that, maybe. I'm still interested in doing that, I still have a desire for that.

GR: The one that got away?

CE: Yeah, about one hundred and something votes, about 125, 30 votes, but I'm still interested, I don't know and I may do it now or not, I probably have more time if I- but still I could do it, it's only a part time job anyway. You don't get paid nothing much for it. It's pretty much ceremonial, a couple meets a month, other than ribbon cutting.

GR: Is the mayor job a lot of work?

CE: No, we have a town manager form of government, so the manager runs the town, the mayor just presides the council meetings to cut ribbons and do proclamations, sort of like honorary and ceremonial for the most part, even though the mayor is the chief executive officer for the town, but still it's not- I don't know what they would pay you, it would probably be 600 dollars a month, 700 dollars a month. There's no money in it, It's just ceremonial for the most part. The manager makes the big money, he's about 125 thousand. He makes the big money, but he is day in and day out, and he reports to the mayor and the council.

GR: So if you were to become the mayor, you could still do the travelling that you wanted?

CE: Oh yeah, there is only one official meeting and that's a workshop that they have, a work session. There's only one official council meeting a month. It basically part time, I mean, it's strictly part time.

AM: I think we're ok.

CE: Alright, you're ok with everything? Let me go show you that hearse.

GR: I'd love to see that hearse.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6PRCBSLD00DWWtEajM1TldGUm8/view?usp=sharing>