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Wayne East

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Interviewers: Mason Moorefield, Kila Gray, Brittany Baker, and Gretchen Gross

Interviewee: Wayne East

Gretchen Gross: This interview is being recorded for use by Longwood University any information given will be made public my name is Gretchen Gross, Kila Gray and Mason Moorefield. If you could just state your name real fast for us-

Wayne East: Wayne East.

GG: Could you spell it for us so we spell it correctly?

WE: W-A-Y-N-E E-A-S-T

GG: Easy enough. Okay so we will start of sort of with the easy questions. How many years have you worked for the fire department?

WE: Well actually I'm not a fire department member, I'm an auxiliary member. I help the auxiliary out before I became a member, and it was the ladies auxiliary. And, I wouldn't join so, you know, I said I would help you do anything but I'm not going to join you. So anyway, they changed the name after about three years. They changed the name to just the "fire department auxiliary". So, it's been about probably fifteen years or something like that. The auxiliary department has been around for about 17 years ago.

GG: Oh wow. What's the difference between the auxiliary and the fire department?

WE: We don't fight fire. Well I say we don't fight fire, we have to I have been in the house but basically our job is to raise money and support the fire department with anything they need. If they need physical help, we also do the harvest sale and I keep the auxiliary vehicle at my house at 2 in the morning if the fire alarm goes off if it's a structure fire or a field fire or something they're going to be at for any period of time they I take Gatorade, coffee or water depending on the temperature and if I need help I'll call other members. At present I'm the president which doesn't mean anything other than I'm just anybody messes up they call me. That's just what we do we're here to support the fire department and you actually can't be a member of the auxiliary and the fire department too it's kind of a conflict so it's with the bylaws.

GG: When was the auxiliary started again?

WE: It's been about 17 years now I don't know I'm not exactly sure but it's been about 17 years.

GG: You said it was all women at first?

WE: Yes it was the ladies auxiliary. It was mostly made up of the fire department members' wives and girlfriends and things like that. And then when they do we usually do auctions we follow people around and do all of the food for them while they're carrying the coolers and putting the tents up and all of that

became they needed help so that's how I and I worked with the president of the ladies auxiliary at the time and her husband was in the fire department and we just kind of hung out and that's how it became about I ended up here. So I don't have anyone who I'm related to here at the fire department and I lived at Hampden Sydney so I'm two miles from the college and I work at the college so it's not too far cutting through the back roads.

GG: Where do you work as in Hampden Sydney?

WE: I work in the building ground.

GG: Oh okay nice. See I've been to Hampden Sydney a couple of times but I can't exactly go there for classes.

WE: Well you could-

GG: Well I could but that might be a little awkward-

WE: A little-

GG: Alright so one of the questions and you can say this is too personal are you actually married?

WE: Yes.

GG: Do you have children?

WE: I do. I have a daughter

GG: How old is she?

WE: My daughter is thirty-four.

GG: Oh wow!

WE: I've been married for forty years

GG: Aww congratulations. Nowadays it's not as common as it should be. Have you always lived in this area?

WE: Yes

GG: So you grew up in-

WE: I was born in Farmville and after I got married we moved to Hampden Sydney when I was like 18 years old so I've been here all my life.

GG: So um you went to Prince Edward County Schools?

WE: I went to Prince Edward Academy which turned into Fuqua.

GG: Okay so were you there during- did you see some of the um- there was a book that recently came out um by a lady and it talked about Prince Edward County Schools and the shutdowns during the integration did you see any of that?

WE: I was um well see that was like 1959 and I started school in like 60, 61 so it did affect me because it was 99% well it was all white in the Prince Edward Academy and very few of the white children went to the Prince Edward Schools after that had happened it was just um so I didn't know anything about it I was too young to know I just went where they told me to go but it did effect everyone here and I worked with a man that was during that shut down he was in 8th 9th grade or whatever and he never went back to school. So that kind of ended if your weren't able to go to another place you know go and visit a relative and go to school wherever they are at then he said he couldn't have gone back after the time when they opened the schools back he would've been an eighteen year old in 8Th grade so it would've have it just he never went back.

GG: It's crazy how that all just one event just changed so much

GG: You said you had a daughter. Where did- Did she go to school here in Farmville or in Hampden Sydney

WE: Yeah she went to- Well she went to Prince Edward Academy and then it changed to Fuqua while she was in her junior year.

GG: Okay.

WE: So she's always been- and then she went to Longwood and graduated from Longwood.

GG: Did she really?

WE: She teaches in Cumberland County now. She teaches fourth grade in Cumberland.

GG: My mom's an eighth grade math and sciences teacher, so yeah.

WE: It's a challenge.

GG: Yeah.

WE: I would rather dig ditches. You know all day just with a shovel.

GG: I couldn't- I just get so frustrated. I'd too- no. Um, did you- what college did you- did you attend college?

WE: I did not. Well I went to Community College, like Southside Community College.

GG: Okay.

WE: Just for a few semesters, but nothing- I wasn't after any, anything other than to learn. I mean I took some like automotive and body style and things like that. I really had no desire to go to college when I got out of school. I never wanted to quit high school, but I never wanted to go any further.

GG: Yeah.

WE: I just wanted to work.

GG: There's a couple of my friends that, yeah-

WE: I just wanted to work. I've been working since I was fourteen, so, I just wanted to continue to work.

GG: Alright. What made you want to join the Auxiliary? I know you sort of touched on it earlier.

WE: Well, I guess the reason that I joined-I had been in the Rescue Squad. I joined the Rescue Squad when I was- the year I got married so I was like 19 years old and I joined the Rescue Squad and we lived in town and we were right down the st- like two blocks away. So I joined the Rescue Squad and stayed in there for four years, but after we moved to Hampden Sydney I had to spend the night there, so it was staying away from home at night and so the volunteer thing was always- you know, I enjoyed doing- I enjoyed the people, I mean the people up here now we're like a family. You know you can say you know the firemen are, but in- I don't think there's anyone in that Fire Department or Auxiliary I couldn't call at three in the morning and tell them that I was broke down I needed some help and they wouldn't hesitate. We all feel that way about each other so it's- you know I've always volunteered for something you know? Even when I was out of there...be church whatever so, I just don't know what I'd do with my time you know? It's a lot of hours, I mean between the training and going out at night and some nights you don't go to bed you know? There not that- round here it's a slow- it's rural and we don't do it that often, but you know some nights you go out all night and then you get up and go to work the next morning you know? It's just-

GG: Yeah.

WE: Be the one- It's like being a doctor or a nurse or anything I think, it's something you-you got to have a calling to do. You just don't- you can't make somebody do that.

GG: Yeah you can't.

WE: You know, people work in nursing homes and things it's got to be something that they- it's got to be there thing. I just believe that so and then some people you can't make volunteer for anything. They won't- they wouldn't move your car without you had to pay them to do it, you know? It's just- that's just the difference.

GG: Yeah.

WE: I don't know why I'm getting a little too in depth with this, but I just-

GG: Oh no, it's totally fine. No it's- no it's however deep you want to go.

WE: Okay.

GG: Alright. What is it like- you said you- you've been on a couple fire calls, but you've also- as a member of the Auxiliary what's it like sort of going to one of those calls?

WE: Well they're all different. Everyone is different if you-traffic accidents on 460. I mean you've got a lot of traffic to deal with depending on the time of the day. Directing traffic...Just watching- keep everybody keeping each other safe because people don't look out after- and for fire scenes everything- every fire scene is different. How close you get to it you know you're watching out for each other.

GG: Right.

WE: And I don't know. I don't know what else to you, I mean there's no said thing as we park here and you know- we carry drinks and water and everything because it doesn't matter if it's ten degrees and the wind is blowing, once they put that turnic gear on and they go in that house, they come out soaking wet. So they need to you know, hydrate back and they need water, Gatorade, whatever. But, so they're all different. It's just, but you just- for us it's kind of like being a part of- we can't fight fire or we don't, we choose not to so we, we do what we can do. We figure we're helping out you know, and they'll tell you sometime in the meetings and all they'll thank the Auxiliary you know for coming and they'll- they make comments you know- you may not think this is a good looking group over here and all, but at three in the morning when you come out of a burning house and you look at someone and they standing there handing you some water it's exactly- you're the most popular person on that- at the fire.

GG: Exact group you want to see. Is there a call that sort of stuck with you the most or made the most impact?

WE: Probably- probably an accident- we had a head on collision right up here at this intersection and two people burned up in the car and I guess that sticks out because it was just- you know that an hour before that they were leaving a dance and they were on their way back to Lynchburg and they were brother and sister and who would ever thought you know- and just- and then it took so long to clear- it was a drunk driver coming down the wrong side of the road and it's just so senseless and you sit there and you know if you sit there and look at something long enough it's hard to get it out of your mind and that's the way it was for me. You now we stayed there- we were there from about two o'clock in the morning till about ten o'clock the next morning by the time they cleared everything up. That kind of sticks out because it was just senseless and- but fires, all fires are, like I said they're all different so I really don't have anything. I've had some that I would sit there watching the fire burn and seeing your friends go in and worrying about whether they're coming out or not. You know the fire looks bad from out here, I mean they know what they're doing that's what they train for, but not knowing if- making sure they're going to come out you know that kind of- and then that end of the house falling down when there's people in this end then, yeah.

GG: Alright, we are going to a happy question now.

WE: Okay.

GG: We are going to go to something more "happy". I'm just curious because I'm just- I'm a romantic. How did you meet your wife?

WE: I went to school, we went to school together. First memory, fifth grade- got off the school bus, school bus slid right when we stopped. It's ice now. She gets off the bus, slides down, slides to the curb. I think it's the funniest thing I've ever seen in my life. I step down, fell down, stay right in behind her. So, I've known her since we were, you know. So we went-but we didn't start dating until like...10th grade or something maybe and we didn't really like each other like each other; you know she had boyfriends and again we ended up dating. In fact, my best friend asked her to marry him and she gave him the ring back and, and then you know I said what's the deal you know and she said well I'm not going to marry him I'm going to marry you... you know, I then I thought about it for a while, I said yeah that's probably you know-

GG: She knew what she wanted!

WE: More than I did I guess. Better than waiting for me to set a date, we still wouldn't be married, probably. So you know, I'm pretty good at doing what I'm told you know so she said you know be there this date you know so I-

GG: Wear this. Bring this.

WE: That's right. So yeah.

GG: My best friend just got married recently... That's basically what happened.

WE: My daughter just got married in May. Yeah I didn't never think she would get married. Yeah and I told her that her standards were too high.

WE: I was in 78' or something so we were up all night so we would just hang out with him and he's got some interesting stories he was on the rescue squad when I was on it and he's been in the fire department since before I knew and yeah there's a lot of responsibility on dispatch and the bad thing too with a town this size the way Farmville was 40 years ago you knew everyone and the rescue squad was the same way most of the time you were going to pick up either a friend or a family member of a friend you knew there was very few people you went to see and accidents and wrecks I missed some very bad accidents of people I was really close to just by a couple of hours of being on duty I would've had to go and pick them up so it's better if you don't know them.

GG: Yeah that job he comes home and it is, he's shaken sometimes. Um here's one with the constantly changing economy is it easier in the current situation or is it harder to function as the auxiliary?

WE: I don't see a whole lot of difference from what we do in the length of time that I've been doing it other than the auctions that we went to we used to like I said we used to it was an auctioneer and he

had auction sales for estates and whatever almost every Saturday or every other Saturday especially in the summertime so we-we worked them all and in the last few years that we did it um it just less and less people at each one I mean we used to have a good day we would easily clear 5-6 hundred dollars on a Saturday and the last few we maybe had only a couple of hundred dollars so I don't know if the people are not spending or they're not eating out when they do go to places like I don't know what but that trend has changed. But other than that our fundraisers I mean the people there we have dinners here almost once a month um in the wintertime especially and it gives the community just they come in at 5 o'clock and they might get a plate then and they won't leave until it's over at like 7 o'clock they're here for two hours and just won't get up because they're talking to everybody they don't see them as much it's just a community, but as far as the money we make on it we make about the same thing now as we did when we started on them.

GG: The community here is much like mine back home and so you know at church you have the big meetings and the big meals and everyone stays for hours.

WE: Yeah well we're Baptists we're going to eat every time we get together

GG: Me too! Yes, southern Baptist all the way. Was there any really hard times for the department do you know?

WE: Not since I've been there. I mean when they started out I mean you know we heard stories that there was you know they didn't have proper gear they didn't have boots they wore their own clothes when they got a call they had a truck that they all got together and purchased and that little part back there where the kitchen is now that was the firehouse. So they had one truck that they had back then and they used like long rain trench coats that was the only things they had when they started. So it was tough starting out here they went and cut trees write down the lower part there and the framing for the roof of this thing was cut off the place down here and they took it to the sawmill and cut it and these guys got together and weekends and put it up but you know all of those are dead now they moved on but some of their children and grandchildren are still in the fire department here. It was tough then I think but you say it's tough now but we now have pretty good trucks and everything is pretty much up to date. Yeah it's hard to raise funding and when you buy a truck it's 300 thousand dollars you know and we bought a little brush truck for something and it was 80 something thousand dollars. It's actually just a pickup with a pump on it and the auxiliary gave 40 thousand dollars for it someone that died their estate left 40 thousand so we were able to buy it. We have pretty good equipment so my thing of hard times is really the toughest is when you can't get enough money to operate, and we have enough money to operate. Until that doesn't happen I don't know sure everyone wants a new truck and they want new equipment and they want everything, but as far what you're here for being able to fight fire I don't think it's that tough. That's just me.

GG: No that makes sense it makes sense. Has there ever been a funny call that you've been on, I know there can be because there are some weird people in the world.

WE: Yeah well I mean it's there are things that are funny that we don't talk about you know especially when you're on the scene and you think about it then we all get together later and talk about it. I saw a

drunk driver one night turn the car over in the middle of the road and he stood up and he was going to get the sobriety test and see if they needed to take him in and they told him to touch his finger to his nose and when he did that he never stopped he went straight back in the road and laid flat out in the road. It was just like somebody laid him out. You know it's a lot of things that happen though. They lectured me on a house fire one night when they were pouring water on a roof. It was a tin roof and it was very hot. I pulled a meter out and when that hot water hit me from the roof I knew that I was electrocuted. I knew I was dead right then. It hit me the same time after I pulled that meter. So yeah things happen that you know is funny not at the time but it is later. I don't know of anything else that I could tell you that is funny. The other things I can't really tell you that is funny I guess.

GG: Yeah no that makes yeah. Would you ever think of leaving this area? You've been here your whole life.

WE: No probably not, not at my age. I'm almost sixty years old so I'll be sixty next month so no I have no desire to go anywhere else. The only thing I need is right here.

GG: Is right here yeah. All of your memories school is right nearby.

WE: I wouldn't leave the church right now you know? And that's another thing I came up here when I was going to church at Hampden Sydney and I was working there...and when I got involved in the fire department here I also got involved with the church that's right down the road, Glenn Memorial Church. So at that- you know everything just kind of fell into place I just felt home when I was there so I don't really want to go anywhere else.

GG: I don't blame you. It's hard to find a church where you walk in and you'll be like, this is right.

WE: Well the man- that man right there is Foster, his father, Mr. Foster was one of the trustees and everything in that church when I came up here to Easter breakfast, they have Easter Sunrise service here, every year. So when I walked in the door that morning I was about 30 minutes early and he walked up and shook my hand and invited me to church and told me I was in the right place and stuff and then when I went to church a few weeks later- cause I work with the same- the same guy that got me started here and his wife went to church there too, I just went in and I just felt at home. I mean it- when you walk in and people are shaking hands and they're talking and everything and of course they- everybody has their problems and they- their little groups and quirks and whatever, but yeah overall it's the same deal it's- they're just all family.

GG: I actually think that's it. Is there anything you want to tell us about the Auxiliary, the department, your life, anything?

WE: No, I pretty much told you everything. Anything else you want to know, I don't care- I just.

GG: Do you guys have any other questions?

GG: I want to thank you so much.

WE: Sure.

GG: I know you- you guys take calls when you go down to Longwood and

WE: Yeah.

GG: I want to thank you, there was a couple times last year that the alarms went off and 2 in the morning it was awesome.

WE: How about the fire drills? You enjoy them?

GG: I loath, I love standing out in the rain, it's awesome.

WE: My daughter used to gripe about that more than anything there. Fire alarms

GG: Oh my gosh

WE: Fire drills

GG: Man, popcorn. You don't need to be making popcorn at 2 in the morning and then one girl was curling her hair at 12 at night. What are you going to go do? It's a Wednesday.

WE: It's not that in the morning it's going to look like-

GG: It's Wednesday, you're going to bed, just relax. So, other than that I want to thank you.

WE: You're welcome

Mason Moorefield & Kila Gray: Thank you very much.

GG: Are you okay to take a picture still?

WE: Sure.

GG: Alright.