

GRTC

Interview: David Edmonds

David Edmonds: ... I went home and lay down, was taking a nap and, uh... girl from human resources called, 'Can you meet with me at twelve-thirty?' and that was the end of my sleep.

Laura Browder: Aww.

DE: [Laughs] So I got up and my nephew had pulled the chain off of my fan. So I got up and took it apart and put a new chain and all on it and put it back together.

LB: Wow.

DE: [Laughs.]

LB: Good?

Benjamin: Sorry about that.

LB: Alright. Mr. Edmonds, I want you to start off by introducing yourself, saying what your name is just so we can keep everything straight. And then telling me something about how you grew up and -- please, tell me some great details [laughs] from the farm.

DE: Yeah, my name is, uh, David Edmonds. I was born back in 1939. I was born on a farm, raised up on a farm till I was twenty-three years old. Used to work in tobacco and work at all--everything on the farm. At age, uh, twenty-three, I moved here to Richmond. Came in to GRTC to apply for a job. And, uh, before I could finish the application, they wanted to know when I could start [laughs]. But, uh... farm life was--it was a good life. People thought it was hard, but... it was a good life. If you were poor, you didn't know it. Because you raised everything right there on the farm. We'd take our wheat to the mill and grind it for flour. Our corn for cornmeals, uh... the only thing we bought was sugar and mustard and mayonnaise and stuff like that. That we couldn't produce ourselves. I really enjoyed it myself. I was baptized in the church at the age of ten. And I been working in church ever since.

LB: What's your church?

DE: Presently my church is Webber Memorial Baptist, in Chesterfield County.

LB: So, you had--it sounds like it must've been a very, very different life on the farm. What caused you to move to Richmond?

DE: Well, when I graduated from high school, there wasn't a lot of work. My father, he owned two sawmills. And I know I didn't want to work in a sawmill. So I--I worked at a--a retail drugstore for eighteen months. And then I worked in, uh, Carolina Sportswear Company for another eighteen months. But work started getting slow and they were cutting our hours. So, uh... I had a sister living here in Richmond and I came up to visit her. And she brought me to the

transit company and... I applied and... got the job right away.

LB: So what kind of training did you get when you came to the GRTC?

DE: ... At first, they made sure that we could handle the buses. Had a little class train and then we--we trained on the buses. But, uh, before that, I had driven a school bus. Where I went to school. I was sixteen years old and driving a school bus. [Laughs.] So, uh, I ha--had--knew... how to handle the buses. So after, I think... I had two weeks of training. And they put me out by myself.

LB: How did you come to be driving a school bus as a sixteen year old?

DE: Well, in North Carolina they--they got... the... students to drive the buses. So I was just one of many. As we'd drive to school, park the bus, go to class, and after class, we'd take the bus and drive it back.

LB: Wow.

DE: [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.] And so, you must've started around--I'm trying to do all my arithmetic--around 1961, '62? Around that time?

DE: With the transit company?

LB: Yeah.

DE: '63.

LB: '63.

DE: August the fifth of 1963.

LB: Wow. Tell me about what it was like when you first started working for the transit company. Cuz Richmond must've been such a different place then, too.

DE: It was much different. Actually, uh, it was a whole lot better than it is now. Because, uh--of course we had, as usual, people trying to rob the bus drivers cuz we carried change. But I was fortunate enough not to ever get robbed. But, uh, I really enjoyed my work cuz I--I love to drive. So it was--it was right down my alley... to get the job, and, uh... then after I was there a few weeks, I started working overtime. And when I started out, I was making two dollars an hour. [Laughs.] And then overtime made it three dollars an hour so I was trying to get all the overtime I could, but... it was really good money back then. Cuz you were paying into a pension plan. Your paying your, uh--part of your insurance, uh... When it all come down, uh, it was real nice.

LB: What was your route when you started out?

DE: I started out working what we call a midday. I'd go to work at eleven in the morning and work till seven in the afternoon on the Riverview-Jefferson line.

LB: So for people who don't know what that is, because--I'll tell you what we're gonna be doing. We're gonna be recording this interview and then we'll work with a transcript and make a--a kind of text panel out of it to go beside your portrait. And a lot of people who will be reading this will not have taken the bus--

DE: Mm hmm.

LB: ...and won't know what all the routes are, so could you take me through that route a little bit and explain kind of where it goes?

DE: Uh, the Riverview in, uh--goes down in the West End, uh... 'round, uh... Randolph Street. Go back, it's the old cemetery back there [and/in?]-Riverview Cemetery. And it was back in that way on the W--in the West End, and then in the East End... it was, uh... forgot what the court it is now, but it's just off of Nine Mile Road. In--in the East End.

LB: So two very, very different neighborhoods [I'd imagine?].

DE: Oh yeah. Yeah, one was houses in the West End, and the East End it was the projects.

LB: Those projects must've been pretty new back then.

DE: I don't remember exactly when they were built, but, uh--they were nice, then.

LB: Yeah, early days.

DE: Yeah.

LB: So... tell me something about the best and worst parts of your job... as a bus operator.

DE: Well, the--the worst thing was... having to... put up with actually arrogant people. That wanted you to do things for them, which the rules says you couldn't do. I had one man that wanted to get on the bus outside the bus stop and I wouldn't let him on. So I was headed for the West End when I--I went back and when I came back on the next trip, he was standing out there. And threw a bucket of soapy water up on the bus on me.... And that didn't hurt me, but... I had to call the company and get them to relieve me so I could go get dry clothes.

LB: So your window was open.

DE: But then he did it through the door. When I opened the door, he was standing in the bus stop. And a whole--whole bucket of water right up through the door on me.

LB: That's pretty crazy.

DE: Yeah. And I've had a few that... claimed they were gonna smack me and things like that and I told them I couldn't advise. Because I could recourse on something like that. I can't touch them until after they touch me. [Laughs.]

LB: But after that...

DE: Yeah. Then I've gotta defend myself.

LB: So, sounds like sometimes you get passengers... with an attitude [one way or the other?].

DE: Yeah. And they wanna smoke on the bus and things like that. And, uh... the rule is that you can't so you have to try to stop them. I think I've called the company on... the whole time, about three occasions that... people wouldn't stop smoking when you asked them to. Had one that... he wouldn't stop and then his buddy lit up a cigarette so... at the time we didn't have radios on the buses. We had to get out and call by phone.

LB: When was that, when did the radios come on--come in?

DE: Mmm... radios came in... I guess it was in the... eighties. And, uh, I got off and called the company. When I got back on the bus, both of them started up to the front. And I had a passenger on the bus with me. And he stood up between them and me. And, uh, he says, "You're not gonna touch him, he did what he was supposed to do." And they said, "who gonna stop?" And he said, "me and what's in my pocket." So they went out the back door. When I got to the end of the line, I said, "Rev, what you got in your pocket," he said, "My hand." [Laughs.] But he--he bluffed 'em. [Laughs.]

LB: That sounds like a pretty tense moment.

DE: Mm hmm. I just... was sure I was gonna get beat up that time, but he stopped them. And that's about as close as I ever come to... you know, really being... anybody jumping me.

LB: How do you notice the passengers changing over the years -- cuz you were an operator for, it sounds like over forty years, right?

DE: It was... thirty-six years.

LB: Thirty-six years.

DE: Thirty-six years, yes. Actually, uh... before I retired, it had gotten to the point, that the younger people--we get more trouble with the younger people than... unbelievably, the girls... would give you more trouble than the boys. Cuz they knew you couldn't touch them. [Laughs.] So, uh... it--it went from the older people to the younger people.

LB: I'm surprised it used to be the older people.

DE: Yeah, it was at--at one time. Well, lotta times... you know, people get on the bus and they been drinking and... that--that usually causes a conflict.

LB: So what are some of the... what were some of the best moments of your job, just generally speaking. If the worst ones were... kind of--

DE: [Chuckles.]

LB: ...these passengers with an attitude, what--what were some of the best moments?

DE: Well, you--you had people that, uh... if you worked a route regular... you had people that were really good to you. They would bring food to you. And all this--they know when your birthday come and they would--they would bring you presents. And then, uh, after I retired, I had one of--the ladies that rode my bus to send me word that she was retiring and wanted me to come to her retirement party. So, it was--it was some real nice ones that then that--that made it good.

LB: Sounds like you really built up some relationships over the years.

DE: Yeah. Yeah, you do. Especially, like I say, when you... when you work the same route every day.

LB: Now... what would you say have been your most challenging moments in your job the whole time you were there?

DE: The most challenging? Mm, that's hard to say. Uh... when it--when it comes to... accidents and things like that. It--it--it gets to you. Some people might say it doesn't, but it does. And when it's your fault... and really--really makes it tense on you.

LB: I would imagine it would be-- [knocking]. Excuse me.

Woman in background: Thought I'd check and see if anybody was actually in there. We, unfortunately had to come back, but--

LB: Ok.

DE: [Chuckles.]

LB: Um... I'd imagine being out on the road so much, it would be almost a foregone conclusion that you'd have accidents at one time--

DE: Yeah.

LB: Or another.

DE: It is. It is. And... some of them you can't--you--there's no way you can prevent them. [Cuz I?]-I had an accident over in Church Hill one day and, uh... lady in a van. Run a stop sign. And

I didn't see her until she was already out there and I hit her. She spun around and went back up into a parking lot. It caved my front door in and at that time we had bar in the middle of the windshield. That bar come around and cut the top of my ear off and I had to have it sewn back on. So it... some accidents -- not much damage to you or it could've been if you weren't ready for it, but, uh... I had a--a nurse lived three doors from where the accident happened, she came out... and brought me some bandages to hold on my ear until I could get to the hospital. So, like I say, you've got people like that that will look out of you. If you treat them nice.

LB: Did you keep the same routes for long periods of time so you could really get to know people?

DE: No, I didn't. I was... one of the drivers that, uh... that's what they called 'extra board.' I would take people's place that were on vacation, out sick, and things like that. I'd--I'd work their runs while they were out. That way I could get more overtime cuz the extra-board man come first for overtime. So I could--I could get the overtime by working the extra-board. But my last years, I worked the same route for the last six or seven years I was with them.

LB: Which one was that?

DE: Going from St. Mary's hospital to Church Hill. And it was... it was an easy route. I'd go to work at 4:30 in the morning, get off at 12:15 in the afternoon.

LB: What was your favorite route all those years?

DE: I guess that was my best route.

LB: Pretty drive, I would think.

DE: Mm hmm. Going up Monument--I made one trip... to Regency Square early in the morning then the rest of my trip was St. Mary's hospital.

LB: So, you talked about some of the most challenging parts of your job. What are some of the most memorable things that have happened over the years... of being a bus operator?

DE: The most memorable for me... is--I met my second wife on the bus [laughs].

LB: Now, I've gotta hear that story [laughs].

DE: [Laughs.] Yeah, I--I had, uh... I had met her on the bus and--her and her son. She used to ride my bus and take him to daycare and then, uh... she would go to work. And, uh... her son wanted to sit up there and talk to me so she sat up there with him -- on the front. And we talked a lot and we got to know each other well, but we never... thought of anything cuz she was married at the time and I was married, so we were just... talking. But, uh... in 1995, my wife passed away. Well, her husband... left her for... I guess what he called a rich woman. [Laughed.] So... and in 1998... we got together and... I been married to her now for fifteen years. I was... thirty-seven years with my first wife before she passed away and I been with her fifteen... now. And

people can say what they want, but, uh... black and white will work. Because she's black... and, uh... I love her.⁵

LB: Who asked who out first? How did you--how did you go from being friends on the bus to making that connection after all those years of knowing each other.

DE: Well, uh, I got to know three, four members of the family. And one of the sisters had a birthday party. And I was invited to the party. So after that party, uh... I ask her if she would go out with me and she said 'let me think on it.' So I wanted a couple of weeks and she hadn't told me anything. So I ask her again and she says, 'On one condition,' and I says, 'What is that?' 'No strings attached.' I said, 'That's fine with me.' But, uh... in about a matter of a month, we were going together. [Laughs.]

LB: Cuz that must've been kind of shortly after her husband... left.

DE: No, it was sometime back.

LB: It was sometime--?

DE: Yeah, cuz, uh... her sis--her youngest son wasn't but four or five years old when he walked out on her. So, uh... right after she started riding with me, wasn't too long after that that he walked out. And her and her sister lived together to make ends meet. The two of them working, and, uh... but they made it. And... right now, I let her handle the money cuz I said if she could handle money, no more than she was making, and got by on it, I could trust her with my money. [Laughs.] Had no problem with it.

LB: Well, that's a wonderful story. I could imagine that would be far and away the most memorable thing that's--

DE: Yeah.

LB: ... ever happened to you...

DE: That's right. [Laughs.] It is that.

LB: Um... Mr. Edmonds, can you tell me an example of good leadership that you've encountered during your years as an operator -- and you can take that any direction you want to, whether it's at the GRTC or in Richmond or passengers on your bus. You know--any which way.

DE: Well, uh... leadership.... We had supervisors... that would, uh... be a little lenient on you but they give you a good talk. And it would encourage you not to do the same thing again and you had some that... were harsh on you. And it made them look like a bad person. But it was all included in leadership, they--they were trying to teach you a lesson, so.... They, uh... they--they... kept us in line, so, them--they--they were good leaders. And then, uh... my father always tried to teach me: You do what's right. The Lord will take care of the rest.

LB: And it sounds like it's worked out.

DE: Yeah. Yeah, it did... He was superintendent in--in our little church in the country. As long as I could remember--almost up until his death. He was superintendent of Sunday School.

LB: And I would imagine in a town that size -- you say, fifteen hundred people when you were coming up -- that you would... not just get to know everyone in the town, but within the church...

DE: Oh, yeah, we--

LB: ... it must've been so close.

DE: Yeah. Yeah. Everybody knew everybody in the church. But, uh... we b--that was back when... we had oil heaters to heat the church up, so... my father would take myself and my brothers to church and we would clean up the church and--and light the oil heaters so when the people started coming in, the church would be warm. So he--he brought us up working in the church and, uh... you knew everybody that went to your church. Everybody. From the young to the old. And you didn't dare do anything wrong in front of the older ones cuz... they would grab you just like you mother or father would [laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

DE: They would that, they'd keep you straight.

LB: I could only imagine [laughs]. So tell me, what have been the biggest moments of change in your job for you? And again, it could be you personally or the GRTC or the city or anywhere you wanna take it.

DE: Well, when, uh... I think one of the biggest changes I can remember is when... they started putting wheelchair lifts on the buses. And, uh... they talked to us about it, so... after the meeting I went to them, I says... 'That's a hydraulic lift on the bus. Why not put power steering and air-ride (?) seats on the bus?' So they said, 'Well, *you*... take a survey. And let us know... how it comes out,' so... I went around to all the drivers and, uh... everybody signed the petition. So that's... along with the lifts, we got air-ride driver seats and power steering.

LB: I cannot imagine what it would be like to drive one of those huge, huge buses without power steering.

DE: It was a whole lotta muscle. You had to do some hard pulling. The id--the thing of it was, you couldn't go real slow. You had to moving to get that steering--the wheels to turn, you couldn't do it real slow. You had to have just a little bit of speed... to get those wheels to turn for you. If you didn't, you'd pull yourself to death--driving slow. But... I--I been through all of it. Been through the double-engine buses.

LB: Tell me about those.

DE: That bus had two four-cylinder engine and--one on each side. And if one of them stopped running, the other one wouldn't pull the bus. [Laughs.]

LB: How many cylinders does the engine have now?

DE: They have a turbo-charge V6 on them now.

LB: Ok.

DE: But it's turbo-charged. [Laughs.]

LB: It would have to be really turbo-charged.

DE: Yeah, and uh... they've got more open windows now, you--you can... see better around you. So that--that makes it better, too.

LB: So what would happen if one of your twin engines gave out, and there you are.

DE: You--you'd have to get them to come and tow the bus in.

LB: And that's gotta be... quite a procedure, I would think

DE: Yeah. Mm hmm. Had to send a rack (?) out there and pick it up and... pull it in.

LB: So when did you get the power steering?

DE: Mm... it was the late eighties, I think, the power steering came in.

LB: So that was deep, deep into your career then.

DE: Mm hmm. Yeah, I've been... through a lotta different buses, we had the clutch-less max (?), that didn't have a clutch in it. You'd run the engine up as high as it would go and... push it into the next gear. That's the way you change gears, you had a gear shift. But we didn't have too many of those. But I learned to drive them [laughs].

LB: That sounds very challenging [laughs].

DE: But I--I really--I really enjoyed my job, uh....

LB: Tell me some of the things you love about your job.

DE: One of the big things is... developing friendship with the other operators. And also... developing a friendship with the people on the street. I guess that was one reason I never got robbed because I tried never to mistreat anybody. I never snapped at them or anything like that. I try to be nice to everybody and, uh... it pays off in the long run.

LB: I'm sure you got to know just a huge cross-section of people all over Richmond.

DE: Oh yeah. I know one... one year we had a bad storm. And, uh... my bus got stuck in the snow. I had people in the neighborhood coming and bringing me soup and sandwiches and coffee. I didn't worry about being hungry because... they'd look out for you.

LB: Well, it sounds like they must've really thought a lot of you to be doing--

DE: Well, I wanna think they did. [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

DE: Yeah, I do that, I wanna think they did. I f--I feel like they did.

LB: It's interesting, it--it does seem like--I mean, I've only been here... a couple of times so far but the impression that I get is that the GRTC is a pretty tight community.

DE: Mm hmm. Pretty much so. Pretty much so. A lot of the office employees have been here for a long time and... you get to know them and... when you get to know them you can work with them pretty good.

LB: And the other operators as you say.

DE: Yeah. Mm hmm.

LB: Now... how do you think--I mean, you talked about this a little bit, but how do you think the bus ridership has changed over time?

DE: Ridership has dropped down. Because when, uh--like I said, when I first started driving the buses... you'd have a full load every trip. Now sometimes you don't have but three and four people on the bus. Cuz I don't know, since '99--I retired in '99. And then when I came back I came back as a supervisor, so... I don't [?] but... a lot of the buses.... I know we got one route -- bus only runs one trip, picks up eight people. And that's it.

LB: That seems very challenging for people who need to take the bus, if the--if all the routes are getting cut back because of--

DE: Yeah. It makes it hard. Especially on the people that don't have transportation. It really makes it hard on them.

LB: Have you noticed a change in the--the kinds of people who take the bus?

DE: Other than your express buses... it's--it's, eh... well, I don't wanna say 'lower-class,' but they--they're people that, uh... have to get to work and don't have transportation.

LB: Is that the way it's always been or is that a newer thing?

DE: At one time it wasn't. We had a lot of people that rode the bus just because they wanted to ride it. They had vehicles but they wanted to ride the bus, now--the express buses, there are people that park at the park-and-ride... and come down, but the basic inner-city buses are mostly people that don't have transportation. And that's the only--only way of getting around.

LB: It's interesting there's been such a shift that way.

DE: Mm hmm. And so many people have moved out of the city, too... that's another thing.

LB: So, I guess that would've been like 1970s or so? Late 60s, 70s, that--that... people started moving out of town.

DE: I'd say in the 70s they started slowly moving out. And you'd noticed where--as they moved out, the shopping centers would move out. And eventually the inner-city shopping centers were closing down. So that--that hurt the--poor people, too. Cuz they really--they can't get to a shopping center.

LB: That's hard.

DE: It is. It really is.

LB: Now, how do you think that Richmonders who don't ride the bus see the GRTC?

DE: The ones that don't ride? A nuisance. To them. Because I had one man to tell me... 'I think *all* the GRTC bus drivers are rude. Because they pull out in front of you.' And I said, 'Well, they're in a bus stop. They have to get out. And we think the ones in the cars are rude because they won't give us any leeway.' I didn't have any more trouble outta him. [Laughs.] But it--that--that is the case where they just... they don't want that bus to get in front of them. If they just stop and think, that bus is only going a couple [of] blocks and it's cutting back in to the next bus stop. And they can go on about their business. But they don't look at it that way, that bus cut them off.

LB: So they don't really see the need... for the transit system or anything, they just see... it sounds like their own personal [opinions?]-yeah.

DE: Something that's in their way, yeah. [Laughs.] That--that's my opinion of it.

LB: Now... can you tell me something about the changes you've seen in the GRTC, from when you started to now?

DE: Well... when I started here. I was number three-hundred-and-fifty-three in seniority. Now they only have two-hundred and some. So you can see how it's cut down. Every--every year, it looks... seems like it's a little bit of difference in it. And, uh... It's sad to see it drop down like that, but, uh... I guess, like I say, it comes with the times.

LB: Although sometimes I wonder if it's ever gonna change back around, like... I was visiting a friend out in Colorado. And there, you know, Denver, Boulder? Everyone takes the bus. No one drives. I mean, you see people with their briefcases and whatnot.

DE: Mm hmm.

LB: And their suits. They're riding the bus, same as the people who can't afford to drive...

DE: Yeah, well, we--we... we try to advertise that with the price of gas... that riding the bus would be profitable. Because, the inner-city buses are a dollar-and-a-half. And gas is over three-dollars-and-a-half a gallon. So... to--to us, it's... it would be profitable to ride the bus, but... I guess it's a fact that they don't wanna give their vehicles up. They really don't, uh... We have a few... that would rather ride the bus. I know that. But the majority of them... they don't want to give the car up. But you have to go downtown. And you--rent a parking space. Plus on top of the gas, so... to me, they're losing. But somehow they don't see it.

LB: They're just not getting it.

DE: Mm-mm. When they could ride the bus, probably... get off right in front of where they work, when they go back home, they walk back out, get on it and ride back up. But, uh... they just don't wanna give up the vehicles.

LB: What do you think is gonna turn peoples' attitudes around about that? Do you think there's anything that could?

DE: Not really. Because we've seen gas prices go up and, uh... when it first started going up, we had a--a little higher ridership but then it went right back, so... I don't think anything is gonna stop it. It's not--it's not good-looking, but... I--I just don't think it's gonna be anything that's gonna turn it around.

LB: Well, how do you think perceptions of riding the bus have changed since you first began at the GRTC?

DE: The... average person, uh... I don't know how to put it, but they just... they don't have any problem with it, because... it's getting them where they want to go, but, uh... and you--you've got some, 'I just can't wait to get me a car and--and stop riding this bus.' But like I say, what they're gaining, I don't know. But, uh... I guess that's because--that's the reason for ridership being down. That people think they have to drive a vehicle. And stay off the bus, which reverse, they would have more money. *More* money [laughs].

LB: That's so funny how in America, we're so fixated on our cars.

DE: Mm hmm. That's the truth.

LB: Now, how do you like to spend your time when you're not working.

DE: With family. I love my family. I don't get to see my son too much, he lives in Florida with my granddaughter. But, uh... I'm--I've got... couple of sisters that live here in Richmond, and... my wife has family here in Richmond, but, uh... I really enjoy getting together with family. We used to have a Memorial Day cookout at my house every year, but... It just got so expensive we couldn't afford it anymore. So we had to give it up, but... we've had as high as 175 people in my yard at one time. [Laughs.]

LB: You must have a big yard [laughs].

DE: Oh, yeah, it's--it's a pretty good backyard. I even built a screened shed back--[had to?] put the food in. So it wouldn't be outside [laughs]. So we... I--my... three of our grandkids are coming down Friday and they'll stay with us a weekend. We've got one that lives here in Richmond. We only have five and the other one... I won't see her until August, when I go down and visit her in August.

LB: It's nice you've got so many family members close by.

DE: Ah, well, it was... eleven children in my family and fifteen in my wife's family. [Laughs.] Plus my first wife had a--brother and a sister and, uh... we still visit each other.

LB: So now I'm suddenly not surprised that you'd have a hundred-and-seventy-five people in your backyard and they're probably all first cousins with that size family.

DE: [Laughs] Pretty close, we had a few friends there, but it was mostly family. Mostly family.

LB: So what changes have you seen during your time living in Richmond--what changes in the city have you seen?

DE: Well... more buildings, more roads, and more cars. That's some of the biggest changes. The buildings are getting taller. You know, City Hall made an ordinance that nothing could be taller than City Hall. So the ones--go down on Main Street, they can go up more stories, and have more--taller building, but it's not going higher than the City Hall so [laughing] that's the way they did that. But, uh... the city itself... has grown and it's... spreading out. So... it's--it's--it's changed in that way. Cuz I know... you go out Midlothian Turnpike now--anytime of day, and it's loaded with traffic. So the [cars are here?].

LB: And I imagine in the early 60s it looked very different.

DE: Yeah. Yeah, it was. It was.... I remember when I... before I moved to Richmond, we'd come here and... we didn't have the interstate, we had to ride number 1 highway all the way to Richmond. Didn't have all these highways and all that stuff like they do now.

LB: That must've taken a long time.

DE: Yeah, because you go through small towns at thirty-five miles an hour or something like that. You didn't have any choice but to slow down for them [laughs].

LB: Now, how do you think your job has changed the way you look at the city?

DE: Well, actually... when I was driving... with less passengers, your job was easier. You didn't have to... worry so much about the schedule. You'd have to worry about being ahead of schedule. Because you had less passengers to deal with, but, uh... I think that's one of the biggest things.

LB: And how about--how about the way you looked at the city itself and what was going on in the city, how do you think your job... changed your view of that?

DE: Well, it's [I'd see?] the way the buildings went up and everything, uh... you would've thought it--it would make the job better. But, uh, I couldn't see that much changed in it, it's just... the traffic got more.... So you had to be more careful driving, because of the heavier traffic.

LB: I know I can't imagine--when I got down Broad Street now--you know, cuz I live up in Church Hill. I can't imagine what it would be like to be a GRTC operator, navigating that craziness--

DE: Yeah.

LB: 7:30 in the morning.

DE: Sometimes it's... it's hard to get out, but... you'll find that one person that will let you out [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.] Now, I'm gonna ask you a twinset of questions. What's the hardest--what was the hardest thing about your job, and what was the best thing about your job?

DE: Well... the hardest part about my job was wintertime, having to deal with snow and ice and all this. It made it hard for you then. But, uh... to me, the best thing about my job was... getting to know the people and making friends. To me, that was the best.

LB: And you said you loved driving, too.

DE: Mm. Yeah. I drive from here to Florida.

LB: What--what do you love about driving? And I ask you as someone who only learned to drive when I was 25 years old--

DE: [Laughing.]

LB: ... [Laughing] so I was not driving a school bus at 16.

DE: I don't know, it just--it just comes natural to me.

LB: Yeah.

DE: Like I say... on my sixteenth birthday, I got my drivers license. The next drive I was driving the school bus home.

LB: [Laughs.]

DE: [Laughs.] I drive the bus home, park it, and then the next morning, get up... go around and pick up the kids, back to school.

LB: How did they choose you out of all your classmates to be the bus driver?

DE: Because they knew my father had a sawmill and they knew I would drive his... lumber trucks around the farm. They knew I knew how to drive.

LB: So you were... a fifteen-year-old and probably even a fourteen-year-old driving those lumber trucks.

DE: Oh yeah.

LB: When did you start driving?

DE: I reckon about fourteen, uh... driving around the farm, uh... we'd--as we called it, we [shocked/shucked/shopped?] the corn up in stacks. Then as we needed, we go in the field, get it and put it on the truck. Bring it into the stable or... when we... cut the hay, we didn't have a bailer so we had to take pitchforks and load it on the truck. And then throw it upstairs (?) in the stable. So, uh, all of us boys learn by... driving the trucks around, doing work on the farm. I started out with the tractor. My first driving was a tractor and then... I went to the trucks.

LB: So you were comfortable with those gigantic vehicles from very, very early on.

DE: Mm hmm. Yeah. Sure was. I loved it. [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.] Now, what would you tell someone who was about to start a career as a bus operator in Richmond? If you were sitting down with someone who just came in and you were gonna give them some advice, what would it be?

DE: My advice to them was to... be kind to your passengers. Treat them with respect. And just try to do what's right for them and the company, and, uh... you won't have any trouble. Because once you earn the passengers' respect, and you're doing right for the company, then... as far as I [say/see it?], you're in there. You really are, because... if--if you can't respect your passengers, then you--you don't respect yourself. I've seen them that don't. And they don't make it.

LB: They get out of the business.

DE: Mm hmm. They can't handle it.

LB: I would imagine you would really have to love being with people to have a career as a GRTC operator.

DE: Yes. That's how I--I have no problem working with anyone. You're gonna find one or two. But the majority of them, they're gonna be alright. So like I say, respect them and you'll get respect back.

LB: Now, Mr. Edmonds, is there anything that I have not asked you that you would like to touch on?

DE: Well, not really. Like I say, I drove for thirty-six years. I was retired eleven years, and then I've been back three years. As a supervisor. By--part-time. But, uh...

LB: What are you gonna do... now, that you're finishing up that job?

DE: My wife and I will travel. I'll still be driving. [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

DE: We will travel.

LB: Nice. Where you gonna go?

DE: Well, uh... I go see the kids in Raliegh, North Carolina and... I'll be going down to Florida to visit my son and granddaughter down there, and... we like the mountains. Sometimes we go to the beach, but... we try to move around. Somebody in the family don't get to go somewhere much, we'll... take them and take them somewhere so they can enjoy a little time away from home.

LB: That's nice. Is your wife retired, too?

DE: Yes. She, uh... she retired, uh... 'bout a year-and-a-half ago. She opened up... her own business as--for an alteration shop. She kept that for six years and, uh... we found out it just wasn't profitable, so we closed that down, so... she's at home all the time now.

LB: So I imagine she likes getting out on the road, too.

DE: Oh yeah. Mm hmm. And we don't miss church. Wednesday night and... Sunday and she goes to bible study every Thursday, it's a women's bible study. So, she does not like to miss her bible study, so... we're moving around right much.

LB: It sounds like a nice life.

DE: Oh -- it is. I enjoy myself. I really do.

LB: Well thank you so much for sitting down with me and... sharing your memories, I really appreciate it.

DE: Glad to do it. Glad to do it, I hope I... gave you some stuff to work with [laughs].

LB: You gave me a ton of stuff to work with. Uh, the next thing that'll happen is, um, the photographer Michael Lease is gonna call you up and arrange for a portrait. And... I don't know where he's planning to do it. I know he's gonna do some of the portraits at the old GRTC building.

DE: Mm hmm.

LB: And... then we'll just be back in touch with an invitation to the exhibition--it opens on September 11th.

DE: The 11th.

LB: ...at the old GRTC building, and it's gonna be up until the fifteenth. And then we're also gonna be doing some panels with portraits and... you know, text, stories... inside the buses.

DE: Mm hmm.

LB: So the passengers can get a chance to--

DE: Sounds nice.

LB: ...learn more about their operators.

DE: That does sound nice. Cuz when they--they sent me a letter and asked me if I would do it, I took two or three days to think about it. And I called them back and told them, yes, I'd do it. I didn't mind.

LB: Well, I know that story about you meeting your wife--

DE: [Laughing.]

LB: ... [laughing] is gonna end up there.

DE: Yep. It was nice.... We--we really enjoy each other. Really do.

LB: It's nice to have a second act that way (?).

DE: Yeah. When I came in and met downstairs and they told me about terminating my job, I called her and she said, 'We're not gonna worry about it. We'll get by somehow.' [Laughs.] So, uh... that's just it, I'm not gonna worry about it. Go right on living like I was before I started back to work.

LB: That's right.

DE: I get--I get pensions, social security... and she gets social security. Plus I got rental property that I got money coming in from.

LB: That helps, too.

DE: It does that. It does that--I'd like to get a couple of more, but... I guess it'll come in time.

LB: Well, sounds just--like you're so handy with fixing things.

DE: Well my father brought me up that way. The house we lived in down in North Carolina... he... my uncle and us boys built that house.

LB: And it must have been a substantial house if there were eleven kids.

DE: Yeah. We, uh, even... dug the basement. With a horse a scoop. We dug the basement like that.

LB: [Coughs.] Wow. You don't see that anymore.

DE: [Laughs.] No, you don't.

LB: That's for sure.

DE: When they--when they dug the well, they hooked a horse up... to a auger, and it went round and round and round? And that's how we dug our well. Cuz the well wasn't but sixty feet deep. We got fifty feet of water. We hit the main--main vein for a spring that was down below the house.

LB: Oh, that's fantastic.

DE: And it was always good cold water. Always.

LB: So you start off with... digging a well with horses--

DE: Mm hmm.

LB: And ended up... as a bus operator [laughs].

DE: [Laughs.]

LB: That's quite a journey in a way.

DE: Yeah, it is. It is. I want to... go down to my in-laws--my father-in-law passed away but I

wanted to go down there and, uh... the man told us that he needed the small well, the drill well. Because they could go much deeper, and sometimes there's water run short on it (?). But they said if you dug the deeper well, you would never run short of water, so... I'm hoping one day I'll be able to go down there and dig that well for him.

LB: It'd be great.

DE: Yeah, it would. But my mother-in-law is 93. And, uh... well... she--most the time, she don't know what's going on. She's got Alzheimer's and--and she's in bed all the time.

LB: That's very tough.

DE: Yeah. It is. [Has] sisters to look after her. And my father-in-law was 92 when he passed away. So they live long life, I told them I hope mine was long, too. [Laughs.]

LB: Well it sounds like you keep yourself busy.

DE: Yeah, I do. I do. Try to... my wife won't let me get up and clean gutters no more so I have to get somebody else to do that. Anything going up a ladder, she won't let me do it. But I work in the yard a lot.

LB: That's fun.

DE: It is. It really is. She won't let me change the oil in my car anymore because I've got a bad back [laughs]. I've had hip replacement, but... if I lay down on the ground, when I get up, I can feel it. So she won't let me do that anymore. So Firestone get that job now.

LB: [Laughs.]

DE: [Laughs.] I take it down there and let them change my oil. So there's things I used to do that I can't do. I can--I can do electrical work, I can do carpentry work. I don't know too much about working on vehicles. Small things I can do. Cuz I put the lights and all on my trailer and everything and hooked it up. But other than that... the mechanical things I mostly stay away from.

LB: But knowing electrical, that's great.

DE: Oh, I've run all kinds of wires for my house. Cuz the house was built in '46. And, uh, it just didn't have enough... electrical outlets. And half the house was on one--one line so if you put too much on it, it'll throw the breaker. So I had to run lines [laughs] to put in there, so it wouldn't throw the breaker. So... I've even... run, uh, electrical wiring out--I made a--something like a goldfish pond although I don't have goldfish in it. But I made a pond out there and I run my electrical wiring to that. And then, uh... like, we were entertaining in the backyard so... I run the lights out there and run, uh... speaker wires... in with it. Electrical wiring. And I've got speakers all over my backyard. [Laughs.]

LB: It sounds so fun [laughs].

DE: Yeah. We've had a lot of fun out there. [They?]. . . talking about coming in Sunday and . . . just the close family and . . . doing a little seafood fest.

LB: Nice.

DE: But we--we can't handle the big crowd anymore. It's just too much.

LB: Well, very few people can handle a hundred-and-seventy-five [laughs.]

DE: [Laughs.] Yeah. But it--we had had cut it down . . . cuz we--we had people coming as far as from Michigan.

LB: Wow.

DE: To come to our cookout.

LB: [Laughs.]

DE: Couple lived way up in Michigan, and they--every year, they want to know when was our cookout. They'd come down to it. One couple come from Florida. It, uh . . . son of her uncle. He'd come all the way from Florida. My son, he just so busy, he can't make it. He works for USA Visa. So he stays so busy.

LB: I could imagine that would be a pretty demanding job.

DE: Yeah, it is. Being a financial officer, you know. He stays real busy, he has to fly out to California. Sometimes twice a month. He tries to limit it to once a month. That's where the head office is. But he's got his own office in his own . . . But he still has to travel . . . to banks and all. Keeping--keeping them straight. I told him, well, I brought you up good. He's now . . . making around three-hundred-thousand a year.

LB: That's crazy [laughs]!

DE: [Laughs.] Yeah, he has a nice home down there on--on, uh, golf course. In St. John's, Florida. Has his own boat. Has a condo at Daytona Beach. So we go stay at--two, three days with him and then go stay in the condo the rest of the time. [Laughs.]

LB: A good way to do a vacation.

DE: Yeah. It is, and low-cost. Last year, he even sent me money to . . . pay my gas. That was my Christmas present, he gave--gave me money for gas to come, go down on. So he's--he's good. If I call him, tell him I need him, he's always there for me, so . . .

LB: That's great.

DE: Yeah.

LB: He's your only child?

DE: He's *my* only child, and my wife's got two boys. One of them live with us. He hasn't--hadn't been able to get a job in seven years. So he's in the house with us. The other one lives in Raleigh. And he's doing real good, he's got three children. They're the ones that are coming in Friday.

LB: Well I hope you enjoy your seafood fest.

DE: Oh, I will. I will. Probably enjoy my grandkids more. [Laughs.] Will that.

LB: Well, thank you so much.

DE: You're very welcome.

LB: I really appreciate your coming in.

DE: Mm hmm. Glad to do it. Glad to do it. Thank you for being nice to me [laughs]--