

## **GRTC**

### **Interview: Deborah Hopkins**

Laura Browder: So, Ms. Hopkins, can we start off by having you tell me something about... where you grew up, how you grew up, tell me about your childhood?

Deborah Hopkins: Well I grew up in Richmond, uh, I started in Church Hill in 1954. Uh, the--I went to John Mar--well... I went to... let me see, Bolder School (?), which it was in Church Hill, and then I later went to Stuart School, which is over Northside. Left Stuart, went into middle school at Chandler. And left Chandler and went into high school the John Marshall. And I attended VCU and graduated in 1979 from Special Education.

LB: So you have seen a lot of changes--we both live in Church Hill. Where in Church Hill did you grow up?

DH: Um, 23rd and M.

LB: Ok, sure.

DH: Right around the corner from Cedar Street, which I belong there.

LB: Oh, nice. Nice. So... you were growing up in Richmond at a time when it was changing a lot -- a lot--

DH: Yes.

LB: And you must've been among--I'm trying to do my arithmetic here... so... you must've been one of the early integrators at John Marshall.

DH: Uh... I think I was, like, the third set.

LB: Wow.

DH: Mm hmm.

LB: Tell me what that was like.

DH: It was good, uh, it was a change. Um... you know, it--it was very good. I--and--and you know I loved it. Uh, we got along very well. And it was something different. But I had already gone to Stuart so I had started there.

LB: Ok, so that was super early if you were born--

DH: Yes.

LB: ...in '54. So you--

DH: 1954. Yeah.

LB: So did you go to Stuart, like, 19...

DH: I went in '65.

LB: '65.

DH: Right.

LB: So then you really were among the first.

DH: Right. Right.

LB: What was that like?

DH: It was wonderful, um... very good experience. Um... it was different. Um, teachers were really good. We worked together. Uh, the kids were super, you know, ev--it was wonderful. It was a different experience, but it was a very good experience. And I think, uh... in the area and the school, uh, the learning was a little different, but it was much better.

LB: And so then you--you grew up, you went to VCU and how in the world did you get from special ed to being a bus operator -- that's the part of the story I wanna hear.

DH: Well... I wanted--um, well, I started out teaching. And I wanted to do something a little different. Um, and this was a challenge when I came here... I wasn't quite sure I was gonna get here, but when I got here, it was something--it was totally different. Uh... you know, it was one of those places where you could leave... the outside alone and just deal with... just people and, you know, in general. So it was really good. It was something different.

LB: What made you decide to join the GRTC?

DH: Well, it was... I wanted to deal with people in a different aspect. And, you know, instead of dealing with them in a classroom where it was closed, I wanted to deal with the open area. So, it was something really, really good.

LB: And you must've been among not... not the first woman at all, but there must not have been that many women when you started--

DH: No, it... maybe... let me see, it was about, maybe... I wanna say s... maybe some sixty-some women, I--so I was [part of?] the group--the first one here was Miss Robinson, so, I think among her later on in the--I think they started doing in in the late 70s. So I came in, like, 80.

LB: Wow.

DH: Mm hmm.

LB: Cuz I saw a picture of the first class in 1965 of trainees--

DH: Right.

LB: ... and there was one single woman in that class--

DH: That's Miss Robinson.

LB: ... was that Miss Robinson?

DH: Uh huh. That was Miss Robinson. Yeah.

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: Only woman here. And so after she came in the 60s, in the mid-70s and the late 70s, a lot of young women started coming in.

LB: But it took that long.

DH: It took that long.

LB: So she was the only one that whole time?

DH: [Gosh?], she the only one the whole--that held down the fort [laughs], yeah.

LB: That is amazing.

DH: Yes it is. Yeah. Yes it is.

LB: And then something happened in the mid-seventies where it started changing.

DH: Well, I think, uh, in the mid-70s, the women kind of stepped up. Their driving records were much better. Um, they weren't um... how can I say it, they, um... I wanted to say--they were more successful in keeping this--their--their record straight, than the men were during that time, you know. Um, they knew it was important. And men, they tend to be a little heavy--you know on the gas. And women are a little less, so I think that's the--you know, what made the change come about.

LB: So what was it like when you came in for training, what was your training like?

DH: It was... it was good. It was different, um... I trained under most[ly?] white drivers. So it was, uh, and most of these people had been here, like, maybe 15, 20, 25, 30 years, so... It was a little different. Um, the buses were older. Um, we had seven-hundreds and they, uh, weren't power-steering. And you had to pull up the brake and you had to *really* go around the corners

and you had to hold the wheel -- very tight. Because if you let it go, you're in trouble. But, um, it was totally different. Um... it was a lot of muscle work. A lotta muscle work. Uh, and a lotta, um, I think, like, the brakes were a little different cuz when you hit a hill, it was just like driving a five-speed. You had to hold your foot on the hi--on your brake and on the, uh, accelerator to keep from going backwards.

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: So... it's changed a lot.

LB: That sounds extremely challenging with the bus that size especially.

DH: It was. It was.

LB: And you didn't have... air conditioning, right? In a lot of the buses then--

DH: Umm... when I came, we did. Uh, we did. Uh... I think right before the transition changed over before I came, they didn't. But when I came, we did. We had air on the buses.

LB: Cuz... I--I, uh, interviewed David Edmonds, he was the first person I interviewed, and he told me that when he started, they--

DH: It was--they did not.

LB: ...and they didn't have any kind of communication system. No radios, nothing.

DH: Never.

LB: So if something happened, he had to find a pay phone.

DH: See, when I came, that's when the transition changed and we did start having, you know, regular radios on the bus. So it wasn't... mine was a little different. He came in a little--little--

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: ... a while back before I did. Yeah.

LB: So what were your... what do you remember from when you started working -- you know, once you'd gone through the training and you got you route--and which route did you start out on?

DH: Um, I started out on the 62-63--well, it was combined with the Highland Park. Um, they've changed it now but it was like the 34 going over to the 62.

LB: So...

DH: So I started from Highland Park, going into Southside.

LB: Ok.

DH: It was one... run.

LB: Wow.

DH: It was a complete run. Now they've split 'em. But, um, I did the whole route from 34, all the way to Chippenham Mall which is out by Hanes (?). Um, Kmart, or Cloverleaf, you know, cuz that combined with it. And I did, um, the 62, which went to Broad Rock.

LB: So, tell me about it--those first days, what do you remember from when you started?

DH: Well, the first day I started--when I was out of training on my first day, I had an accident. I hit a pole--

LB: [Laughs] oh no!

DH: I had to go to the restroom and I was a little nervous and didn't know which way to go.... You know, was unc--certain--I should've called on the radio, but I had to go so bad I didn't know what to do. And right there at Highland Park and Meadowbridge, uh, Road, in Highland Park, I had an accident right at the pole.

LB: That's pretty memorable.

DH: Yes it is. And, um, it was a fixed object cuz I broke a mirror. So... you know, when they--when I went into the office, and, uh, I was confronted, how could I have prevented it? And, um, Mr. Saunders and Mr Carter was here--then they were the head. And I told him -- and he laughed -- I said, 'if I could've stayed at home, I would've prevent'--he said, 'no, don't do--' and he laughed. But it was--it was cute because I said, you know, that's the only way I could have prevented it because I had to go to the bathroom. He said, yeah, well... that's a good question-- [laughs]--

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: ... that's a good answer, yeah. But, um, it was a little terrifying. But I felt good about it after it happened because I spoke to Mr. Winn (?), which was one of our supervisors. He's deceased now. And he said, "Sweetie... a lot of things are gonna happen." But he said don't worry about it because everybody has a incident in the beginning. So it made me feel real good--I was kinda hurt in the beginning. And I cried but after he spoke up, it made me feel better, you know. I mean, because nobody's perfect [chuckles].

LB: Far from it. So that was your first day, and then you settled into your route. Tell me about that.

DH: Once I settled into my route, it was wonderful. Um, you know, I got to know people. And they were like family. You know, I knew when they were getting off, where they getting off. You know, and it was pleasant, cuz everyday, they were like, 'Oh, Miss Deborah, you just...' You know, I was always bubbly, I've always been a person like that, so... when they got on, it-- you know, they were older, whatever, I would help them with their bags. You know, have them seated. Children, strollers and everything. But it was a challenge. It was very, very good. I enjoy people anyway, so it was a very good thing for me. Yeah.

LB: It sounds like you must've built up some relationships with your riders over the years.

DH: Oh, yes. Um... over the years, my riders have become almost like family. Because it's nothing that I don't need, or something that I want. Or if I can't get off the bus, I need lunch -- anything. They're always there. Miss Deborah, whatever you need, we're here for you. You know, because--

LB: Wow.

DH: ... that's a relationship that I have developed. And, um... I think it's been about two weeks, I had a lot of recommendations, a lady came on my bus, and she says, 'sweetheart, you are so sweet.' She said, 'you're just good to everybody,' and it's... not often you find operators like that. So she sent in a real nice letter. You know. And, uh--

LB: That must've made you feel good.

DH: Made me feel real good. And she--you know, it was so ironic cuz she said, 'I'm gonna do this, but i want you to know about it, just in case'---I said, 'well they always let us know.' She said, but I want you to know, from firsthand, that she said, you're great. She said, there's never a day that people get on the bus and you don't have a pleasant smile, or have something good to say to everybody. She said, and that makes a great difference in the working field. She said, because soemtimes people have problems, you know, things happen, and they need a word of encouragement. She said, and you know how to do that. You know how to make people feel comfortable, and feel wanted. And I--you know, that made me feel very good, yeah.

LB: It's so true, though.

DH: Yeah, I think (?), yeah...

LB: It does make a difference.

DH: It does. It does. It makes a big difference.

LB: So what--what are the best and the worst parts of your job for you, just generally speaking?

DH: Well, the job itself is wonderful. But sometimes you have... people have different attitudes. And you come across sometimes different things and different people. Um, might not be in the best mood. Might not want to be bothered. Never say hello or goodbye. But I've learned to deal

with that because even your worst enemy can become your best friend. I've had a lot of people that have come on, they didn't know me and I didn't know them. But the attitudes were really, really bad. And, you know, I always say, you know, just... do what you have to do, do your job. And sometime people will open up and become your friends. And some of those people that have been really, really ugly, have become very, very nice. You know, I guess they... were challenging me to see how I really was. And see if I was the person I... seemed to be. You know, and they found out I am, so... you know, it's--it's good. They've opened up and they're pleasant. And the worse thing that ever happened on the bus was--um, I think in the beginning, when I was driving, um, the 34, I had an incident where a young black man was trying to help a young girl. And something was going on on the outside, I had no clue what was going on.

LB: Outside the bus, you mean?

DH: Outside the bus, before they got on. And when they got on, it was like, four other guys that jumped this man. And almost put his eye out. Um, I couldn't get radio. So I had a young man who was like my brother. And I sent him to headquarters. You know, so he--we were right at, uh, 8th and Broad, on the side. And he ran down to headquarters and brought the police back. By this time, I almost started to [I? guy?] was gonna be killed because it was... it was really scary, but, um, he's doing fine. I see him often. But he almost had his eye put out. And they did catch the four guys. And I cried because it was--you know, nobody would help. Nobody.

LB: Hmm. hmm.

DH: YOU know, and it was really scary. You know, and um, you know, I was surprised cuz I was stunned. I mean, people don't like to get involved with other people's incident. But that was an incident where I thought--it could've been avoided. Somebody could've helped him. You know, and, uh, I--you know, was nothing I could do, cuz the guys was gonna jump me, too. But, um... you know, I thank God that he was--they apprehended the guys and he was able to, you know, get him some--they had to take him to the hospital. And his eye would never be the same, but, he's doing well.

LB: So scary.

DH: Very scary. And he's never ever forgotten it. I see him from day to day. And he always gets on my bus and he gives me a hug, and he said, 'Deborah, if it wasn't for you, I probably wouldn't be living today.' And the--I mean, uh, I don't know what happened. Probably never would've got into it, but I guess every--I mean, those guys were just... feeling like they needed to hurt somebody, you know.

LB: Did they follow him from outside onto the bus?

DH: They followed him from outside onto the bus. Yes.

LB: And was that in your early days, like 80s?

DH: That was in the 80s. Mm hmm.

LB: Wow.... That sounds super, super intense.

DH: It was. It was. It really was. I mean, um, I, you know, was really discombobulated cuz I just didn't know what to do, you know, um....

LB: Well it just sounds like it came outta nowhere.

DH: It did. It did. And--and it was another incident that really freaked me out. I was driving over in Highland Park, leaving heading, um, northbound. And, um, I seen a couple of people in a car that I knew. And I seen a guy on the--I had never seen it, so I was stunned, I stopped the bus. But he had a, uh, revolver, and he was shooting there in the street. And it was like something on TV, I had never seen anything like that. And everybody--it was like maybe ten passengers on the bus and they were saying, "Deborah, go ahead, go ahead!" And I said, "I can't really go, I mean" "We might get shot" because it stunned me, I didn't, you know, I had never seen anything like that. I said, only on TV, but to see it in live person? It was really--it was--oh my goodness. I just couldn't believe it. It was unreal.

LB: That's crazy, when was that?

DH: That was in the early 80s. Mm hmm.

LB: So it sounds like the early 80s, there was a lot going on.

DH: There was a lot going on. Believe me when I tell you. It was a lot going on.

LB: What was Richmond going--what was Richmond like at that time, I mean, I moved here in the mid-90s so I don't--

DH: It wasn't really that--I guess... in that area, it was a little rough.

LB: Yeah.

DH: But it really wasn't that... I really didn't experience a lot of bad things, except for, I guess over in that area. And those people might not even have been from over in Highland Park. It was just--maybe something with drugs gone bad. Yeah.

LB: And... you just stopped because you saw the people who you knew in the car?

DH: Yeah.

LB: And then just--

DH: I couldn't believe it. I--I mean [in/and?]

LB: And then sort of coincidentally--



DH: Yeah, and then when I seen him, he was jumping off a wall with this gun. I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it.

LB: So tell me about some more of the memorable moments, good and bad.

DH: Ohh, good moments. Um, I was in a movie, um... I was really supposed to be in--a bus driver? But the producer of the movie... he enjoyed me and he said, 'you're so sweet,' he said, 'we have enough drivers, but I would like for you to be in the movie.' And I was--oh man, he--I was so excited because, you know, that had happened. So when I came back to work and I spoke to Mr. Carter and Mr. Saunders, they said, 'We're giving you a week off. You're a very good operator.' Um, I had just recently--earlier gotten to be, uh, employee of the month. And I've on--I had only been here for a year. And that happened in--in '81. So my--my record was wonderful because my grandmother had passed when I came out of training. And really, you weren't supposed to have any time off. So I told them, I said, 'I only wanna be off, just for the funeral.' Which I did. I was off. And I brought my note back. Cuz they told me I had to do that. And I guess from then, from that time, knowing that I was a business woman, you know, and I didn't mean any foolishness, they knew, this girl is gonna be alright. You know, she--she's--she means w--well. So, um, at the time, before I was telling you about when, um, I came here and I was in a movie, it was supposed to be a movie that was done in 1965. And it was Mary Tyler Moore, and um, Robert Preston. He--uh, he's passed, but, it was a really good movie. Uh, I played an extra. I got paid from the company and from doing the scene. And the scene actually made... the, uh, commercials. Every time it came on, it showed me and friend of mine that was in the movie, um, and we were just extras but, I guess that particular scene was really good. You know, and it was really exuberating (?) cuz everybody got on the bus, 'Ohhh, Lord, that's Deborah! She played in a movie!' [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: They said, 'How was it?' I said, 'it was exciting.' And I really enjoyed it, you know, um--

LB: What was it called?

DH: It was Finnegan Begin Again. And, uh, I think we, uh, rehearsed... for like a week, from six in the morning to almost nine or ten at night. So it was still like being at work. But the producer, he was so sweet. He said, 'I just--' he said, 'we have enough operators, but your smile is so glow (?)--' and he said, 'we just need you to be in it.' And--I got permission, you know, from the company and it--it went well. It went very well.... Yeah.

LB: Well that sounds very memorable.

DH: It was. Um... Employee of the Month was memorable. I had a parking space for a month. Uh, I have a picture--I should've brought it in. Cuz it's amazing. That was like, uh, thirty...two years ago. And I was real tiny. I was only a hundred-and-a wenty. If I come back in, I'm gonna bring that picture cuz it is--

LB: Please do.

DH: ...oh, everybody's like, 'wow!' Uh, I been here for thirty-three. And I've gained... I came from a hundred-and-twenty, and I'm now at--I've gained, I guess, I'm at one-sixty-five or one-seventy. I've gained quite a much weight--and most people do. When they come here, they're tiny. Some people still remain the same. But most people that have been really small? Psh. They have really gained weight. Now my worst time, was I had an accident... uh... I wanna say... in the mid-90s. Uh, I was off-route. It made the newspaper. Um, it was when they were doing constructional work [or 'construction on \_\_\_\_?']. But they were do--also doing construction on--on... I wanna say... on Midlothian. But that's when we was having the real bad flooding. And, uh, I had to go off-route and--because I couldn't down Midlothian. So I had to go to Old Wor--uh, I think Work Road. And, um... for some reason, um... it was, uh, the weather was very inclined that day. It was really, really damp and muddy. Because they were working on the side road. And my bus went off of the, um, pavement... onto a ditch. And I almost, um... hit a--a transformer. But I ended up hitting a, um... pole--just an electric pole? And it did right much damage to the bus. And, you know, because of the damage, I had to go to the hospital to make sure that I wasn't on drugs or anything. And, um, you know, it turned out well. It was really--it knocked out all the power. In Southside. And some of the drivers lived over there, they called me and wanted to make sure I was ok before they said anything. They said, 'Deborah. Did you knock out the power on Southside? We heard.' And--they--and then they'd say, 'Are you alright?' And I say, 'I'm find.' And they said, 'Girl, we haven't had power for five hours.' But, you know, it was really scary. It was an intense moment. Nobody got a ticket. Cuz it was another car that was involved, too. Um, the police officer just said it was a blessing that everybody made it. But that was one of my worst pro--times, and then I think, um... also I was pregnant... I think, uh... I wanna say, in '91. And I had a miscarriage on the bus.

LB: Ohhh. That's terrible.

DH: So that was a little sad, but you know, um... I was supposed to stay home from work for a while. And I worked. I came back to work, uh, a little soon, cuz I--was a little depressed at home and I didn't wanna stay. And that Saturday was one of the most unusual Saturdays I have ever had in my life. I really should've stayed off because I was off Sunday, Monday, anyway. But I wanted to come back to work. And people were, like, um... I'm sorry. I'm--I'm so--and I said, you know what? God has it and if it's meant for me to have another baby, I will. So I didn't want anybody to worry about it. But that Saturday that I came back to work, I was still... a little dazed and sedated. And I didn't realize it. And I had to go--I was driving the 34 then. And I and to go to 7-11. Matter of fact, um, Robin is here now, um, one of the drivers that was working at 7-11. And I had to get a large... Big Gulp cup... of slurpee. [Laughing] So it would bring me down because I was still sedated and didn't realize it. And I said, Lord... how am I gonna make it, I don't wanna hurt anybody. And I was still a little drugged up. And, you know what? That slurpee brought me right on down. It mellowed me right on out. And that night I said, thank you. Thank you, Lord, cuz I--you know, it was no way, you know they--told me to call in. But I said no, no, no, no, no. I'm gonna make it. I'm gonna make it. And I made it. And I was thankful because it could've been another way, you know. But, um... it, you know... all in all? It's been great. Uh, I've seen a lot of changes. Um, as far as computers. Uh, these new buses are computerized now. Um, we have, uh, better equipment. It's been really upgraded. Um, the buses talk now. You can

call in, they can track you. Uh, you know, it's, uh... you know, they could tell if you're off-route. If you need to let them know that there's something going on, you can call radio. If they're not... you know, aware of it, you can let them know, and then they can make everybody else aware of it. But we've changed as a family. Um, we used to have a lot of closeness, which some people are still close here. But not like it was in the beginning.

LB: What was it like then?

DH: Oh, it was so family-oriented. You know, um... if, uh, your car broke down? Someone would help you. If you were having trouble with your route, drivers would come in to try to show you what to do, or take you on a run, or if you needed to get downtown -- which it works that way with some now, but not like it did then -- they would make sure you got to your destination, or to your bus. Uh, if you was worried or if you were running late, and they knew it, sometimes they would park your car -- the old company, cuz it was small. And they said, go ahead on in, go ahead on in. Because you... can't be... a half a second late here. You have to be on pointe. If you are anywhere a second... a half a second, you miss out. That means your run goes to someone else. So you have to make sure you're on pointe. And i was telling my family, I said, you know this is the first job that I've ever really had that you--time is really crucial. Because you have to get people from point A to point B. And if your'e late, they're late.

LB: I know, there was someone telling me last week -- I can't think now who it was -- that if you were picking up someone else's route, you had to wait there ten minutes early, ahead of time.

DH: Right. You have to--you have to be there ten minutes before time. And for sign-up time, you need to be in... a little earlier. You know--really you should get here sev--uh, least a hour and forty-five minutes. That way, if anything is to concur, you can still make it on time. But if you're push (?), and you gotta rush, it's a lot of problems. Um, I've noticed that a lot of operators now have high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney problems. Um, high potential for just--you know, still basically (would have?) blood pressure because your'e always rushing. You never have a chance to really mellow yourself out. You know, you--you--you need that time. And if you rush all the time, what can you do, you're going to have high blood pressure, you know? You know, um, diabetes, and I think a lot of kidney problems and things come from not being able to really go to the restroom like you want to, you know. But, um... all in all, it's--it's a good job. But you just have to kinda train yourself. Uh, I drank... really large, uh, I guess, a--a large container of water. And it's a really large container. But I think over the years, I've trained my... my self and my body that people be saying, 'Great day, that's a lotta water,' but I only go the bathroom like three times. And I'm out there ten and a half hours a day. So, you know, I guess you have to... kinda levy yourself and wait and see, you know, how you can go and--what you--on each run, you--you have to kinda... be able to be comfortable enough to know what you can do and what you can't do. When you can go and when you can't go.

LB: Ten and a half hours, that's a really--

DH: Yes, a long day.

LB: ...long, long shift.

DH: Yes. But it's a good shift.

LB: Cuz I thought... I must've misunderstood but I thought that they did split shifts because of...

DH: Usu--you get--well, you get, uh... at least an hour. An hour and a half. But that's still a lotta time.

LB: It is a long time.

DH: But, it's--it's good. You get a hour. Some people get a hour, some people get a hour and seventeen minutes. I get a hour and seventeen minutes, so--it gives you time to kinda breath and... you know, kinda... wind down and I walk a lot and I read, and you know I try to get a little exercise in, so it--it's really good. But you do, you get a little time. So, you know, it gives you time to kinda wind down and relax. You know.

LB: That... has gotta help a lot. Can you tell me... about some good leadership that you've experienced, or different kinds of leadership you've experienced? And it can be--you can take that anywhere you want: other operators, people within the GRTC, people outside of the GRTC...

DH: Well, the leadership is wonderful. Um... as far as I'm concerned. I try to be a leader. Um, I try to carry myself in a productive way. Um, I'm always smiling. I'm--even if I have problems, you never know. Um, in this--uh, working environment, here... sometimes you need somebody that's gonna be open... enjoy themselves, never negatives, I'm always positive. Um, you know, and I feel like a good leadership is being able to... come down on everybody's level. You know. So, um... you know, I mean... I feel like, um... no matter who you are... you should be able to talk to anyone. Homeless... anybody, you know. And... the homeless people, everybody I treat the same way. I don't treat anybody any different. You know, uh, all people that I meet, I speak to them, I hug them. I ask them how their day was, what's going on. and they say, 'Miss Deborah, you're *always... everybody!*' And I--I don't leave people out. You know, if I'm having a conversation, your'e in my conversation, I put somebody else in there--I don't wanna make people feel like they're not wanted. Or they feel left out. So I think good leader--leadership is being able to be... do... different things being--multitasked. Being able to talk and, you know, go here and go there. I tell my husband all the time, I say, 'I can listen to music, look at TV, do something--' and he say, 'oh my goodness.' And I'm just that kinda person. You know.

LB: How did you meet your husband?

DH: Well, we met in high school. Uh, we were high school sweethearts, he is, uh... we met when we were like seventeen or eighteen.

LB: Oh, that's nice.

DH: Yes, and we've been together for thirty-two--we've been married for thirty-two. We have our anniversary coming up in June. And we have been together for forty years.

LB: Wow.

DH: And my son--I had him when I was thirty-seven, so I was kind of a late bloomer, but he's a good boy. My husband is a chef. And, uh, he's a good man. Very good man. He's had open-heart surgery, about two years ago.

LB: Mm.

DH: And they were real good here. I was able to get off. Um, be with him, and... you know, everybody tells me, even some of the old, uh, supervisors here, they said, 'Girl, you just so--ooh, if I could be like you. You never let anything really bother you and get you down.' And I say, 'you know, sometimes I have things going on, too. But you have to leave those things behind.' I've learned that. You know, you can't be--bring your problems to work with you. They have to stay on the other side of the... door. You don't bring them on the inside of the door. So I've learned to really be able to cope and handle myself... very well.

LB: So... tell me... what have been your biggest moments of change in your job?

DH: The transaction of moving from a smaller... place into a larger place. Coming here was totally different--in the smaller building, you could run in, park your car on the side, and go in and sign in. This building was designed for exercise.

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: When you come in here, you have to go on the elevator, and you have to go through some doors, go down a hall, around the area (?)--and by the time you get to the window, if you're running late, you'll know it (?). Cuz you're out of breath. And it ha--it--it's really good. I like the way this building is designed because the other building was very, very old. I think they said that building... had been there ever since... I guess 1929 or--a little later. But it was old. And it was beginning to--it had mildew and everything. It was beginning to fall apart. So this building here is wonderful. We have showers. Something different, um... the rec room is very nice. Um, the cubicles where they have their offices are beautiful. And, I mean, it's just--it's totally different. It's... it's a new environment. We have computers, radio, I mean, supervisors have their own little cubicles and... then they have, like, 10 to 15 or 20 monitors where they can see what's going on on the outside with the buses. So... it's wonderful. It's--it's totally different. They're not in a little room where they feel like they have claustrophobia--

LB: Yeah.

DH: Cuz the--the office they were in was very small. So... this is nice. And plus, now we have combined, we have C-Van along with the bus drivers. So it's good. We were all--were in--in different places, so now we are all as a family. We're all as one. And it's good.

LB: That's nice.

DH: Yeah, it's very nice.

LB: Now it sounds like you've got some really close relationships with your riders. How do you think that Richmonders who don't take the bus... look at the GRTC?

DH: Well, now, they look at it totally different. Uh, I think it amazes them, um... to hear--you can hear the computers on the outside. Telling you about, walk in, and... you know, uh... watch out and the light is gonna change, different things. But you have a lot of people that don't ride, that come up to the bus and they're--they're so amazed, they say, 'I just want you to open up the door and I would like to get up on here.' And those--some of those people that have looked at the buses and come up on them, are now having ridership on buses when they have lunchtime. So it's really good, you know.

LB: Mm hmm.

DH: Uh, the ridership has changed tremendously. Because you have, um... Ride-Finders (?), you got, uh, different transportations and--lotta people they park their cars to get on the bus and ride from one destination to another to get to work. So it's worked out well.

LB: When you think about who was taking the bus back when you started off in 1980 and who's taking the bus now... how--how do you see the ridership changing over those years? Is it a different kind of person, or all the same kind of person--you know what I'm saying?

DH: No... different kinda people, uh, you got, um... working people, blue collar, some of your politicians, I mean--it's different people taking the buses now. Um, it was... back when... my time, when I first start--it was a lot of domestic workers, um... Some people, uh--most of them domestic. They, you know, worked out in Windsor Farm and places like that. But now it's a wide variety. It's a lot of different type of people. And you got doctors, lawyers, uh... you know, different people that work in hospitals... uh, downtown. Um, Capitol building. I mean, a lot of different people now. So the ridership has changed greatly.

LB: That's interesting. Um... do you think that... the public perceptions of riding the bus have changed since you got to GRTC?

DH: Yes, it has. It has, um, greatly, um... Like I said, it's--it's expanded. Uh, we go out to different routes now. We go all the way out to Laburnum. Um, they used to go to Fredericksburg. They go to, um... um... Kings Dominion now. And they--I mean, it's... we go all the way out to Pemberton. Um, it's different places. Petersburg, so... it's expanded, and--and--and the routes are moving out in different areas. And a lot of counties. We do go out to Chesterfield. They have an express one, so--it's totally different, we didn't have any of that. And we did have--at the old building, we had a smaller bus... that used to go out in Chesterfield. But now the smaller buses... expanded into a larger one. And it only goes the express route.

LB: What kind of changes have you seen inside the GRTC since you've been here?

DH: Um... well, the changes have been, um... supervisors--we have more women now. We

didn't have--we had a lot of men. But it's kind of equaling out now. We have a lot. We have, like... I think maybe... five or six--let me see, let me count... We have maybe... I wanna say five ladies. One time we only had all males, and we had two females. So it's changing as far as the supervision department, it's changing. Then with our CEO, we have Mr. Coles (?) now, which... he used to be a supervisor, and a scheduling supervisor. Now he's CEO, so it has changed tremendously. And he's a fine man.

LB: I just interviewed him. He was great. He was really great.

DH: Yeah, he's very good. Very good.

LB: So it sounds like things for women have changed a lot here.

DH: It has. It has, it really has. I mean, you know, [laughing] when I first came, it was so funny because... if it was a woman being trained, they said, 'mm-mm, mm-mm, mm... this train, uh-uh, no, no. I'm going on another bus. I don't wanna be on a bus with a woman.' You know, and now you have women being trained--nobody has any problem.

LB: You mean the other drivers would say that?

DH: No, I'm talking about the passengers.

LB: No, the passengers.

DH: Yeah, they would--oh my goodness. And some of the drivers, I think it was kind hard for them because they had to train women, but you know, all in all it worked out well.

LB: Mm.

DH: Worked out well.

LB: I can't imagine anyone saying that now.

DH: No, they don't. Mm, I mean, you know, they've gotten used to it. But right back--that's back... in the late 70s, early 80s, you know. You used to seeing men, you don't see a woman driving a bus, you know.

LB: [Laughs.] Well I guess that's true, you know, people used to always make those jokes about, ooh, a woman driver. And you never hear that anymore.

DH: Mm hmm. No, not anymore. Mm-mm.

LB: That's funny. Um... tell me, how do you like to spend your time when you're not working?

DH: Well, I am a person, I... love going to church. And I love swimming. I love, uh, you know, relaxing in [the/my?] hot tub. And I like movie time and--I spend a lot of time with my family,

we have family time, and... bowling... skating... you know, just having fun. You know, just relaxing. A lotta time with my mom, she's 83 so I spend time with her, too.

LB: And is your son still at home?

DH: My son has--has a scholarship, he's at [?] University.

LB: Oh, wonderful.

DH: So he's only home... for the summer. He's in computer engineering. So we spend time now--matter of fact, before I came [laughing], I had just dropped him off. And I told him I would pick him back up when I leave here. He's in the barbershop.

LB: Is he home for the summer?

DH: He's home for the summer.

LB: Oh, that's terrific. And he's staying with you all summer?

DH: He's staying with us all summer. Mm hmm. Yes.

LB: That sounds great.

DH: He's a good boy. He's twenty, and, you know, and I asked him, did he have a problem with his parents being--he said, 'Mom. I don't have a problem with your age cuz' he said, 'all my friends think ya'll are young, anyway' [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: Cuz most of his friends, their parents are like, in their mid-forties... late thirties. And, you know we're in our fifties, and, uh, he said, 'Mom. Everybody think ya'll are young, so I don't--' you know, because... sometimes you need to ask your children, you know, things, and we're very close. Um, matter of fact, we're both Sagittarius, so you know... you know, but he's a good boy. Very good.

LB: And what changes have you seen in Richmond, since...

DH: Well... a lotta changes. Downtown--it's no longer downtown. When I first started, um, we had Thalhimers, Miller & Rhoades, um, Tom McCan (?) bakers, different stores downtown. Now downtown is more like a--a working force. You have maybe... only three stores. You have, uh... downtown, you have, uh... I think it's um... Footlocker... Rainbow... and I think it's, uh... New Ridge (?). Those are only three stores. When downtown first started we had over... I know thirty-five, forty store downtown. So it's totally different, it's more of a... a business, industrial now. You have a lotta new buildings, apartments, parking lots, um... you have, uh, different restaurants, I mean, things have totally changed. If you wanna go to a real nice, uh, shopping cen--you have to go out.... So it's changed tremendously. It's no longer downtown... it's... still



downtown, but it's no stores. And most people come in for tours or conventions.... Where are the stores? You have to go so far out. So I really think that Richmond needs to maybe be a little--we had Sixth Street Marketplace, and it was a combination of a lot of stores. And they closed that down. So I think they really need to kinda bring back something... exciting. Some type of store downtown in a area where people can kinda shop. And they don't have to go so far out.

LB: Now... how do you think your job--having the job you've got, has changed the way you look at the city?

DH: Oh, my job has changed me a lot. Um, uh... in--as far as... it's changed me on how people drive. The things they do. The things they don't pay attention to. People walk out into the area when a bus is coming and they have their headphones on or... they're texting. You have to blow the horn, uh, I look down sometimes and somebody might be in my lane. They might be doing their lashes, working with the radio--

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: ... drinking coffee, so... you know, it's made me more alert. Uh, uh, I--I'm more defensive now. I watch everything around me. Um, you know, I pay attention, because in a split second, anything could happen. If you just close your eyes for one second, a accident can occur. So, I--you know, it's changed a lot. Cuz people don't pay attention. And sometime you have, uh, road ragers (?). They in a hurry and they might fly--you're on the--their on the left and they'll fly right on to get on the right side. So you have to keep you foot on the brake and you have to be alert at all times. And I do that, I keep my foot on the brake. All the time. Because I never know... when somebody gonna try something foolish. And people say, 'Oh, Miss Deborah! Oh my goodness!' I say, 'Yes, that's why I keep my foot on the brake, cuz I already know.' You know, so, um, I don't have to say anything. Because the drive--the passengers [laughing] [will tell?] for you, you know... especially when they see road ragers. You know... so it has changed tremendously. I mean, the traffic is heavier. Uh, we have a lot of, uh... potholes, construction... a lot of things going on now that didn't occur during that time. Then, um, they fix potholes, but sometimes they still... instead of patching them, they need to redo--redo a lot of roads. Yeah.

LB: They sure do. What do you think the hardest thing about your job is?

DH: Well... let me see, what can I say is the hardest.... I don't really think it's any--I don't have a... um... I can't say I have... anything that's really hard about my job because I try not to make it that way. Uh, I don't... I--like I say, I carry myself in a fashion where I know.... that if you are negatives, it's gonna be negative. So I don't carry myself negative. So I always have a good day. Sometimes it's a little rough if you have somebody that try to ruffle your feathers. But most of the time I count to ten and breath and try to relieve myself. Because I don't like to be ugly. So I try to have a smooth day each day. And I have a prayer that I use each day. And it's for the working force, so... when I read my prayer before I come to work, that usually eases me down and when I come, I'm calm.

LB: What's your prayer?

DH: It's, uh--it's--I--I would have to bring--it's--it's a work prayer. It's really, really nice. And it--it--it says, um, at the end of the--the prayer, it--cuz I would have to recite the whole thing and I'm not gonna do all that, but at the end it says, Lord, please help me to maintain with who and for whatever the circumstances may be, help me to be able to handle whatever comes my way... each day. And that's a real good prayer. But it's for the working force, and you know... um, it's very, very good. So I try to read that each morning, and each day. So that I can kinda... ease myself. You know, and it--I don't--I'm not a... you know, like I said, if you bring your problems to work, then you're gonna have bad times. But if you come to work and you ease yourself and you think positive, your day is gonna be fine. Regardless of what goes on, you have to maintain yourself on the inside.

LB: So what's the best part of your job then?

DH: Well, I love people. And I love... you know, I like for people to come out and if you're having a problem, we can kinda talk. I can't really aim myself to look over, but a lot of times people get on my bus and they have a lot going on. And they just need somebody to open up to. And once they get off my bus, they're like totally different people. You know, they like, 'Oh Miss Deborah, I'm so happy I talked to you. You make me feel so, so good.' you know. And I mean, I have had them cry. I've had them--I mean, you're like a doctor, lawyer, psychiatrist, minister. You know, you do all these things because people need someone to talk to and when they open up, I had a young lady on my bus, and she was going through, uh, quite a bit. And she had cancer. And she really didn't know how to handle it. Um, she has passed on now. But, um, we were on the bus and I knew her very well. I knew her since we were very young. And, um, when I finished talking to her, the only thing that she really--she lived for her grandchildren. And I told her, I said, 'look... don't worry about... the future. Just live for today. Because we all know, we're not gonna live forever.' And she was crying. And by the time she got off the bus, she said, 'You know what, Deborah? I wanna thank you. Because it's not as bad as I think it is.' She had brain cancer.

LB: Mmm.

DH: And I told her, I said, 'You're gonna be alright.' And she had been crying. And we were kinda alone on the bus. We didn't have anybody on there at the time. And by the time she got off the bus, she said, 'I feel so good.' She had a smile like sunshine on her face. She said, 'You just... just uplift, and make people feel like, you know, they are all... about... being themselves.' and I said, 'You just do what you gotta do. And God will handle the rest.' And when she got off, man, she had the biggest smile. Her kids got back on the bus and they said, 'Miss Deborah, Mom loved you. Cuz you never l--made her feel down.' I said, 'No. You can't do that. Because like I told her, we're all gonna go. We're not gonna be here forever.' But they said she lived her life out to the fullest.

LB: And that's the best anyone can do, right?

DH: That's the best--yes. It is, it is, it is. Yeah.

LB: Now, I noticed... that... one thing you talked about in the notes you brought in... was losing

an operator during the big flood.

DH: Yes.

LB: Was that Gaston?

DH: That was Gaston, which that was Mr. Underdo (?).

LB: What happened?

DH: He, um... we had a real bad flood. That--one of the times--

LB: I remember that flood, I--

DH: Yeah, that's one of the times that we closed down early. And he was in... he had... retired from the buses. But he was working with the C-Van which I was telling you about. And he got caught down in, I think, a reservoir.

LB: Mm.

DH: And couldn't get out.

LB: Mm.

DH: And the other incident was, um, Mildred. Mildred, um, was an operator that worked with me. And... um, she came out of training a month before I did. And she... delivered papers. Um, that was her second job. And what happened was... uh, I'm not really sure of the incident, but they say she burned up in the car. And that was very devastating, I mean, we really, really took that--it shook everybody in the company. Um, because she was such a sweet person. And she worked a late, and then after she worked--cuz we all worked late once during that time. After she got off of work at one or two o'clock in the morning, then she would deliver papers.

LB: Mm. Mm.

DH: So it was really devastating. Um, that incident, and, uh, supervisor, Mr. Winn (?) -- very good man. Um, we went through a, uh... period together when we had to--we had to take uh... um... we had to get our commercial license, we had to take a test. And I noticed in that July when we took that test... it was like in 1989, I do believe... he was so nervous. And... he was taking high blood pressure medicine and everything and... it was like... he couldn't calm down. And I think like, uh... maybe a week later, he had a massive heart attack and passed. So, I've seen... I wanna say twelve supervisors, mmm... let me retract. Let's say about eight. Or ten. That have passed.

LB: Mm.

DH: Um, one... came outta training before I did. The others were a little older than I was. And I

seen... I guess close to a hundred or a hundred-and-twenty operators pass away. Since I've been here. So, um, you know, a lot of things have changed. And I've seen several that have retired. And only last for a year. And some less than that. And I have one operator, he went out on vacation, and was gonna retire when he came back. And he passed away while he was on vacation. So I've seen a lot. And it's--it's... you know, in all... it's a very good job, but it... it... sometimes things happen. And I've seen a lot happen since I been here, in the last thirty-three years.

LB: What would you... give as advice to someone who was gonna start off a career as a bus operator, what would you tell that person?

DH: Well, it's... I would tell them, it's a very good career... if you are people-oriented. Uh, if you have the type of attitude where you can deal with certain situations. Because you--this its he type of job that you either an make it or you can break it. And if you're not a person that have... a good attitude... and you can handle certain situations, and you're one of those people where, um... you, um... your attitude is just... psh. One of those attitudes where you just feel like--it's just not for me. And you don't have the patience of Job, you're not gonna make it. So you have to have... a good attitude. And attitude bring multitude, so you have to combine the two. And if you're the type of person where you can let things just ride over your head? You can make it.

LB: Well, thank you so much. Is there--

DH: You're quite welcome.

LB: Is there something else that you would like to talk about that I haven't asked you? Is there anything else?

DH: No... um... as far as the job is concerned, I love the job. It's a--it's a wonderful career. And I just think that if you're the right person, you'll fit in. It's a--a very good career. But you're--it's time-consuming. So you have to realize that. And it's one of those jobs where you got to *love* to get up to come to. And see, I'm the type of person, when I get up the morning--I love my job, so, when I get up, I'm ready. I know what I'm up against. And I'm ready to roll. And that's what it's all about.

LB: Well thank you so, so much. This has been such pleasure.

DH: You're quite welcome. Yeah, it has and I enjoyed both you all. Yeah.

LB: And please, um, next time your'e here, I would love to see that photograph--

DH: I'm gonna bring the photo. I know you said that you have, um, an operation coming up. And I'm praying that everything will go well with you. And when you come home, and things are back, please call me and let me know and I'm gonna bring that picture in. And the prayer.

LB: I will. Because I'm gonna be here--we're both gonna be here Thursday, and then I'm gonna be out of town until mid-July.

DH: Oh, ok. Ok. Alright. Let's see. I'm working Thursday. Um, that's why Tuesdays is my best day to come.

LB: Right.

DH: So, um, I will see you... probably when you come back.

LB: Good. Cuz I'm gonna be doing another whole round of interviews. And if you think of someone who I should interview... please let me know.

DH: I will. I will.

LB: Because... we are looking for... we're--we're interviewing Bruce Korusek later today.

DH: Yes, Bruce Korusek is a wonderful--I'm glad you said something about him because I do have something else to say.

LB: Oh, good!

DH: Bruce Korusek, I had just started here. And he is a fine supervisor. Uh, I worked two jobs for like twenty-some years.

LB: Wow.

DH: And Bruce brought me in over to Overland (?). So I worked at Overland for, like, uh... twenty... two? And I was working here for, like, twenty-four. So I held down two jobs even with--

LB: Wow.

DH: ...having a child. Before I had a baby. I worked two jobs up until two weeks before I had my son. So if it can be done, you can do it. Bruce is wonderful. He didn't know me very well during that time but he knew I was a fine operator, and he brought me in. We have become very, very close now. But I feel so good about him, he's a very good man. Very good.

LB: I am so looking forward to meeting him. And we're interviewing Carl Brown? Later on today.

DH: Ok. Mm hmm.

LB: And on Thursday, we've got Jennie Bullock--

DH: Yes. Miss Bullock, her son is here.

LB: Oh!

DH: Yes, he works here, too.

LB: Oh, good. And, um...

Benjamin: Marsha...

LB: Marsha Schmigelo (?).

DH: Oh, yes. Marsha is a sweet lady. Yes, she's very sweet. Very nice lady, yeah. Mm--Marsha is our secretary for the union.

LB: Oh! Good!

DH: Mm hmm. Yes.

LB: Good, good.

DH: She's a good lady, yeah. So, you've got some fine people.

LB: Aw, I bet we do. And, you know, again, if you can think of anyone else--any of your friends--

DH: Well I have asked some of the operators, but they really don't wanna...

LB: Yeah, I understand.

DH: Yeah, they like, nooo, mm-mm.

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: I'm like, ok, you know. They say, 'I'm not trying to do no interview or anything,' so--you know, some people are just shy--

LB: I understand that.

DH: Some people just don't really like to do them, so, it's understandable, you know, um... um, when we got th electors and, um... they sent them out, I had asked a lot of operators and they're like, 'noooo, you go ahead on, I'm...' I mean, it--that's why I say, it has changed because, um... back during the day, it was exciting. A lot of people would have loved to have done it. But... now they... people are... I don't know... operators are different. They're not like... some of the operators we had back in the day. And you know, um, I lot of people don't like to really put their self out. But I mean it's a good thing and I try to explain to them, I said, 'It's good!' 'No... no interviews. Mm-mm.'

LB: Well I'm hoping Celestine Christian (?) is gonna come in.

DH: Ok!

LB: Cuz she--she said yes, but then we haven't been able to really schedule...

DH: Yeah, um... for one thing with Celestine, she works the extra-board and I guess the way she works, you know, that's a lot of hours--

LB: Yeah.

DH: ... I, you know.... So I guess she might come in and I'm quite sure she will, but... I guess she has to find the time in her schedule to come in it.

LB: And Roy Adams and Ramone. I think it would be so nice to get a father and a son.

DH: Yes. Ramone is a sweet boy, I calls him Little Roy.

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: He's very good. Him and his dad. Now his dad, he was here before I came. Celestine, um, was here. Uh, I think she came... in like seventy... seven or seventy-eight. And also, well, Aquanette (?) is no longer here.

LB: That's ok.

DH: She--she rides for VCU now. Um... you might wanna ask her, uh--uh--Aquanetta Jackson, I don't know, you know, how her schedule is cuz she works over at, um... VCU now.

LB: How do you spell her first name?

DH: Uh, just like you spell, um, the water. It's--I think it's, um... oh, let me see, I think it's A-Q-A-R...N-I-TA. I think that's right, I'm not sure now. Aquanetta. You spell it like you do the water.

LB: And last name?

DH: And last name I think is--oh. I'm sorry. Her last name is Herbert. Mm hmm. I was thinking about her--her other married name. But she is, uh, now working with VCU, the new transportation.

LB: Right, right.

DH: Uh, and Deedee Banks... Deedee used to work here, but Deedee works over at, um, VCU, too. So... um... I don't know, you might be able to get a hold of those two. But Aquanetta and, uh, Cici, I think they came out of training about the same time.

LB: I'd like to get as many women as I could.

DH: Mm hmm.... Yeah, I asked a couple of women and... uh, I'm still working on one, so, I'm gonna see if--

LB: Good!

DH: [Laughs] I'll see if she's still come in here... (?) She hasn't been here very long, but--

LB: That's ok.

DH: ...she has received a letter and I told her, I said, it's a good thing, you know. So, um...

LB: And plus, you know, I'd love to get some people who are more recent.

DH: Right.

LB: Because I've interviewed a lot of people who came in during the 60s--

DH: Right.

LB: ... or the 70s. I think you're the--well, no, except for, um... Frank Tundstall. You're the only person--

DH: Yeah, Frank, um...

LB: ...from the 80s that I've interviewed.

DH: He is the president... of the union.

LB: Yeah. Yeah, we had a nice interview.

DH: And, uh, he's a very nice man. Um...

Benjamin: Julio, too.

DH: Uh, Julio.

LB: Yep.

DH: Yeah, Julio. He's from, uh, Puerto Rico. He's sweet, yeah. Matter of fact, we worked together at Overland.

LB: Oh!

DH: He worked with me over there. That's where he started from I think.



LB: Ok.

DH: So a lot of operators that are here now--some of them started... five and--I trained them-- cuz I trained two at Overland.

LB: Oh that's interesting.

DH: And they came here, and then I trained here. I'm a trainer. So it... you know, it's, um... their taking now, they're mixing and I think it's good. They have newer people training, too. That's maybe been here like five to ten years. So that's a good thing because usually, you don't train if you haven't been here less than twenty.

LB: But I bet with the--all the equipment changing so much--

DH: Yeah, you know. And it's--it's really good. It's--it's--it's... it's a... totally different atmosphere. But it's a good atmosphere.

LB: Well, thank you so, so much Miss Hopkins. Uh, we're gonna have Michael Lease, the photographer, get in touch with you--

DH: Ok.

LB: ... to sit for your portrait.

DH: Ok.

LB: And we will just keep in touch and...

DH: And like I said, I get that picture, I meant to bring it today, but I was taking my son to the barbershop. Because everybody looks at that picture, it's... when--when I became the employee of the month, it was really nice because they put your photo right there on the fare box. And I forgot to tell you about the fare box change. You know we really change... we used to have... old transfers, I got a lot of those, I said I was gonna bring those in, too -- where the transfers were paper. And you would rip them for the time. And the transfer box was an old box where people would dump the money and you would flip it down. The new change is, you put your badge number in now. You put your, uh, run number in. You put, uh, the... each time that you go from north, east, or south, or west, you put in each number, the times that you went, and then--they're computerized. And we also have clever devices where you check in and you put everything in and they have a monitor where they could tell if you don't come in to work, they could tell when you key in on your radio. So it's--it's--it's... things have really changed. Yeah. Uh, lotta people relieved now the street. And a lot come in in here and they go out... in the, you know, out in the back. Um, the old garage, it was... lotta fumes--

LB: Yeah.

DH: ...and everything, so... you know, this is a clean atmosphere, and if you smoke, you have to go away from the building. So, I like that smoke-free, you know, cuz I don't smoke, um... I don't knock anybody that do smoke, cuz I used to smoke. Years ago, but, um... I'm glad it's a smoke-free environment.

LB: Yeah.

DH: And I know that they're doing that everywhere now. Even, um, on our computer, um... when you come up to MCV, it says a smoke-free area on 12th Street. So if you get caught smoking, you get fined.

LB: Things have so changed since I moved to Richmond and used to be to smoke in the super market, remember that?

DH: Yes, but you can't do it anymore.

LB: Uh-uh.

DH: Mm-mm.

LB: Mm-mm.

DH: A lotta--and even in restaurants, you know, now, they have certain areas where you can sit. But I noticed, I went into a couple of restaurants and I don't think you can smoke in there anymore.

LB: A lot of that's changed, too.

DH: Mm hmm.

LB: Yeah.

DH: Yeah.

LB: Not what it used to be.

Benjamin: Most bars you can't smoke in.

DH: Yeah, yeah. You have to go on the outside, so everything has changed.

Benjamin: It's much better.

DH: And it's cleaner.

LB: Yeah.

DH: Well I have enjoyed you two.

LB: We've enjoyed you. Thank you so much.

DH: And I'm a talker--I guess you can see that.

[Laughter.]

DH: But I love to talk, and I love people, so...you know, um... that makes my job very easy for me. You know...

Benjamin: I have one question. Laura was doing interviews with... um, some people... from the early seventies and they were talking about... was it the Pagans?

LB: Ah. Crazy, and--and it sounds like it would be before you started driving, but... I was--I was interviewing some people about grown up during Civil Rights Richmond--

DH: Right.

LB: ...you know, and... a couple of people were telling me that when they first started busing, and you know, they didn't have the school buses--

DH: Right.

LB: ... you'd have to take GRTC or... buses, public buses. They said that going along Hull Street, the Pagans, the motorcycle gang, would shoot at the buses that were carrying the kids. Have you heard anything like that?

DH: No... uh-uh. Well, I guess it was a little before my time. No, I...

LB: I'm gonna asked Bruce about it.

DH: Ask Bruce, he probably would know. Now, I have a little something I wanna say about one of the drivers, he's no longer here. But he was driving one of the older buses, before they had air and they just had a little fan. And this is, uh, really sweet, um, he trained me. And he was--he remind me of--and I'm--maybe might be able to convince Vaughn (?) to come in. He is on the board for, uh... the trustee board here. And he was telling me about, uh, the early 60s when he was driving. And, um, this is a funny little incident. And he said he... somebody got on the bus and they had a great big bucket. And he said he never paid it any attention, and that's when he had to take the buses and pull the windows down with the two little levers and open it up--

LB: Yeah, I remember those.

DH: ... and, um... he said he was driving along, he was at Broad Street, he was out there by Willow Lawn and he said he heard everybody screaming and hollering and jumping up and out of their seats. And all the sudden, he looked back and somebody had a, uh... a bucket full of

crabs.

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: [Laughing] And they had got loose--oh! Man, if I didn't laugh, he--he had me in training, I laughed so hard, I cried. It was so cute, you know. He said--he said, everybody was up in the seat, he said, 'Believe me. I was up in the seat, too.'

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: ...in the front, he said, 'I couldn't believe it.' He said the crabs was all over the place. He said 'And I couldn't--you know, I didn't know what was going on, but I heard everybody moving and holler--' He said, 'And I looked back and,' he said, 'I jumped up in the seat, too--' he reminds you of Richard Pryor, he looks like him. He is so funny and I--that was one of the most funniest little incidents that had ever happened. I was [sitting there?], and that was cute. Yeah.

LB: What was his name?

DH: Uh, his name is Mr. Vaughn (?). What is Mr. Vaughn's first name? Um... you know what, I'm not really sure, Mr. Vaughn's first--I can't think of his first name. But they--they would know. Um... Bruce probably knows cuz they were... driving together. Yeah, Mr. Vaughn was a lot of fun.

LB: I'll ask him.

DH: Ask him cuz he is--he was a lot of fun. Oh man, if he didn't keep me laughing about that. He said all you could hear was click, click, click, click, click, click.

LB: [Laughs.]

DH: Yeah, but um... If you're finished, you all have a wonderful day.

LB: You too and thank you so much.

DH: And it was a pleasure meeting both of you all.

LB: I really enjoyed it.

DH: I'm a hugger, so, you know... [Laughs] Um... I told, uh, Tim, that's our new, um, supervisor, head supervisor. And when I met him and he called me in for the comment (?). I told him, I said, 'excuse me, if you don't mind. I'm a hugger.' Even with my passengers, they come in and we hug, they... you know, I guess it's just that closeness we have. They say, 'Miss Deborah, everybody loves you, they hug you. They, you know, ask you if you're having a good day, if you need anything.' And that's the way it should be. You know, I say I have a family relationship with my passengers. And it's a good thing. You know. But you all have a wonderful day. And for God's sake, don't let nobody steal your joy. Nobody.

LB: Never.

DH: And see my motto is... when anybody gets on my bus, and gets off... you always make people feel pleasant. And I'm a eye contact person, I guess you all can see that. So I always tell them, God loves you, and I love you, too. And that makes their day. They all--and look, it was so cute, one of the guys got on the bus, he said, 'Miss Deborah. So-and-so know you--' and I couldn't figure out who he was talking about. He said 'and I know they know you, know why? Because this your saying: God loves you, and I love you, too.' I said [laughing], 'Well that's somebody I know.'

[Laughter.]

DH: And he said, 'You know what? I told her. He said, and I thought about it. You never can say anything ugly about a person cuz you don't know who knows who.' He said, 'when she spoke of you... it was all good things. And I told her, I said, 'I know Miss Deborah, too. She is just genuine. And you can't find a--a #1 girl (?) like her.'" You know, that makes you feel really good, you know. Alright, well you all--and I won't forget this.

Benjamin: Oh yeah--

LB: Mm-mm.

DH: You all have a wonderful day.

Benjamin: You too.

LB: You too.

DH: I have enjoyed myself.

Benjamin/LB: [?]

DH: And I have another copy.

LB: Great. Great, great.

Benjamin: We have these, too, for like snacks and stuff--

DH: Oh, thank you!

Benjamin: ... our thank you for you guys coming...

DH: Thank you, sweetie. Ya'll have a--do you have another interview?

LB: Two more today, so.

Benjamin: Two more today.

DH: Well, have a good lunch

LB: We will.

DH: ... cuz it is almost lunchtime.

LB: It definitely is.

DH: Ok. Thank you, sweetie. Take care, now.

LB: Buh-bye.