

A Community Remembers
Interview: Mark Merhige

Mark Merhige: So--and it was--

Laura Browder: Even better.

MM: I needed a girl... first. I learned a lot of parenting skills -- with my daughter. Well--

LB: Yeah.

MM: ...perceived (?) skills.

LB: Girls are great... Here we go. Mark, I want you to hold this like it's a lollipop. So, don't go too far away.

MM: Oh my God, this is *real* pressure -- a microphone.

LB: That's tough, isn't it?

MM: It is.

LB: But, you know what, you'll do fine. Just--

MM: Ok.

LB: Start off by telling me something about how you grew up and tell me about your family.

MM: Jesus, could you be a little broader than that?

LB: No, these are very broad questions.

MM: Um... I grew up as an only child in Richmond, Virginia with... incredibly nurturing and wonderful parents. Um... and I think I've had... you know, kind of a fairy tale childhood, to be honest with you. I, uh... you know, we traveled a lot. Uh, I was with my parents and with adults probably as much or more than I was with children my own age. Uh, just as a result probably of being an only child. Um... you know the history of my--my--my father's history.

LB: Well... people who are gonna be listening to this don't know it. So why don't you tell us--

MM: Ok. My dad kind of--I always envisioned it as almost kind of a--his childhood was almost kind of Hardy Boys, uh, big family, big Irish Catholic family. Um, Long Island, New York. He was the ol--the oldest. Uh, the oldest boy. Um, who took care of, looked after his little brothers, uh, and his sister. And he moved down south on a basketball scholarship... uh, in the mid thirties... uh, to High Point College in High Point, North Carolina. Uh, it's not High Point University and a beautiful place, but he went down there and played basketball and football. Uh,

and moved from there to Richmond, uh, actually to take a job coaching football at St. Christopher's School... which ended up being my oldest son's alma mater. Um, he came up, uh, at the request of a fella he had played basketball against, Petey Jacobs, who was at the time the Athletic Director... um, and moved to Richmond because he thought it would be a great fit to continue his education at law school at William & Mary... in Williamsburg. And his story, and he stuck to it so I gotta feel like it was accurate, was that he came up and went to St. Christopher's to fill out some papers for his employment and asked the lady at the front desk, "How do I get to Williamsburg from here?" and she gave him directions which I guess at the time was down route 5, and, you know, probably took an hour and a half, or... hour and--and three-quarters. And he said, "God, well that's--uh, I can't... have this job and... drive to Williamsburg to law school everyday, and this job is more important to me, uh, actually than law school. Is there a closer law school?" And there was one at the University of Richmond. Um, and I think that was also back in the day that you showed up and you registered and I'm not sure there was a huge application process. Uh, and that's what brought him to Richmond. And he stayed.

LB: How did he meet your mom?

MM: Met my mom in Washington. Um, and I think he was up there trying a case. It was--that would've been the late fifties. Um, and I just gave you the late thirties, early forties, and... there was, a--fairly big war in betwixt and between, that he participated in. So... that took a big chunk out of that, and... a lawyer and a B-17, I've never really... quite, you know, understood... that or gotten that visual other than a completely different generation and a brave bunch of guys. Uh, with a real cause. And they rallied to it. And I think that is... you know, that is a part of my father's life, obviously, that molded him. Uh, to a great extent. Um... and while he didn't talk about that experience... very much... ehh, I th--it was... it always hovered about, I think, as we went through some of the things that you're probably really here to talk about.

LB: Well, you know I'm here to talk about lots of stuff because you don't know until you start talking--

MM: Gotchya.

LB: ...what's there. Right? So, he meets your mom in the late fifties in Washington -- what was she doing?

MM: She was actually working as a photographer's assistant... at the time, is--is the story... uh, that I got. I think they were introduced by mutual friends. Um... you know, polar opposites would probably be too extreme, but, you know, he was a very fun guy but pretty serious and cerebral, uh, when he needed to be. And my mom was a beautiful, fun... kinda party girl. Said with, you know, love in my heart and all the best things of a party girl, not the--worse things of a party girl. Um... ehh... I don't have a lot of stories from their courtship...

LB: Mm hmm.

MM: ...Other than some of th--the friends that, uh, they had at that time always... had some--a couple of funny here or there about, again, how different perhaps they were, but so similar at the same time. Um... what I know is as a child is just seeing true affection... for one another. And learning a lot watching their relationship about how important it is... to have your partner as your friend. And they were friends and it was so obvious that they were enjoying each other. In--in a... you know, and also in a quick, back and forth, kind of very entertaining, cutting way. You knew that there was just truly--true affection and that if nobody else was there... the con--the conversation would be very similar. And they'd be enjoying each other and having fun with it. And you take away a lot as a kid from that. Just understanding what relationships are about. Or ideal relationships, anyway. And I don't mean to paint a picture that... it was... ideal for forty-five years and the most perfect thing in the world, cuz no relationships are like that. But I did understand or learn that friendship is the basis of it all. Um... and I think I probably learned during some of those stages as well... you know, during maybe what were some of the uncomfortable years. Um, that friendship is what helped everybody survive some of those ugly times as well.

LB: It makes sense. So you were born...

MM: 1960.

LB: And you grew up in Richmond.

MM: I did.

LB: And what was that like? What was Richmond like when you were a kid?

MM: Uhh...

LB: What was your neighborhood like?

MM: That's--and, uh--it's... and I'm trying to choose words and I'm trying to be... somewhat informative... but realistic at the same time. You're a kid when you're a kid. And I'm not sure you're getting a complete grasp... all the time of what's going on around you. Um, grew up, first eight years of my life, in a neighborhood in the--kinda the farther West End of Richmond. And we moved right before Dad took his appointment to the bench, to the near West End which is a house that... my parents stayed in till... they were both dece--deceased, and they left that house to Laura and I and we lived there for seven years, just recently sold the house. But we were basically on that property for... forty-five years. Um, which is--you know, kind of interesting and odd at the same time.

LB: So near West End, near University of Richmond -- that area?

MM: Correct. Correct. Kind of Three Chopt and Cary.

LB: Mm hmm. So... what do you remember about your neighborhood growing up?

MM: ... They--that it was... probably... full of people that weren't totally and completely in lockstep with what was going on at the time... in my father's career and--and life. Uh... around his time on the bench. Um, it was an affluent neighborhood... of sorts, and it was a very fitting neighborhood for a lawyer. Probably not so fitting a neighborhood for a--a guy who had taken his, as he used to refer to it, his vow of poverty... and taken appointment to the federal bench. But, at that same time, we're talking late '60s, early '70s... and--people were making decisions based on bigger and better causes, I think, than... necessarily a pocketbook kind of decision, I mean... The '60s, it was... you know, Martin Luther King and the Kennedys and... Linden Johnson. Uh, there were bigger causes... than--than one's own self worth, so to speak. Um... and I--picked up on that even as a kid... I think. That there was something bigger going on around me, uh, whether I fully understood the consequences of certain actions or... the--I certainly didn't understand what historically it may eventually mean. You knew the times were turbulent and it was kind of fascinating.

LB: How did that filter into your house... and your family and your lives?

MM: ... and *filter's* the right word. Because it--it did filter. Um... from a standpoint, too, we're back to... I'm--we'll take the early '70s. So, you know, I'm eleven, I'm twelve years old. I'm not reading the Richmond Newspaper. Which I think I'm very, very thankful for. It was probably not a pleasant read... for my father, when--when he still read it. And he stopped reading it as well. But it would filter through on a national level. I watched national news... regularly.

LB: With your parents?

MM: With my parents. Um--

LB: What all did you talk about when the news was on, or--or did you?

MM: No, it was never--Dad was never one that it was all a big lesson where we'd be watching something and he'd say, "See, there, that's what I told you" or "See how that reflects..." Um... I could tell when a story was important or important to him cuz the newspaper would go down and he'd stare at the TV a little... more intently. Um... it was left there for you to figure out. And the realities were as well, during those turbulent times, that those people I was watching on TV were actually showing up at my house... now and again. You know, the Today Show, or the--r--the CBS Morning show... would come to interview my mother. Uh, in doing a segment on my dad. So the realities of that... were at that kind of a national level.

LB: So, she's--

MM: All of this, I'm taking you in a circle to say... the intense negativity... I think was far more local than it was nationally... to the twelve year old. Um... it was cars in parking lots and I remember it is one of the things that is *engrained* in me, and I wish I could tell you I'm terribly scarred... for this whole thing cuz it would--probably make for a more fascinating interview. I'm not. But one of the things I do remember is there were these little red school house stickers... which were a sign of protest against integration or, at least against busing. Um... and I remember vividly how many of those I would see out and about. Whether it was at the mall or on the way

to school... um... You know, or just in traffic in general. And *that* I would find disturbing. Just cuz you felt outnumbered. Uh, but on so many other levels, you would feel at the same time that you were on the right team, so to speak.

LB: When did you first become aware of your father's work as such, and... the... the ripple effect from that work in Richmond? How old were you? And--and what events can you think of?

MM: Yeah, that's... you know, again, we're talking--he was appointed to the bench in the late '60s, '68, I think -- '67, '68, I would have been eight years old. I mean I remember that ev--event. Um... and probably the next... true realization of what it was that he was doing... would have been when the FBI and federal marshals showed up at the house... and started making preparations. Um, or at least that was when I realized the trickle-down, so to speak--

LB: Mm hmm.

MM: ... of what he was doing. Um, not scary... for me, and i'm often asked that. You know, 'kind of fascinating,' you know. And that would have been a bit later, probably the early '70s, but for an adolescent boy, you know, guys with guns and walkie talkies and cars with lights and... uh, they had to bring in large lights to illuminate the grounds around the house that I think they went to City Stadium and got--it was all kinda neat. To be quite frank. Um, you know, my friends weren't running away because of this, if anything, you know, they thought it was kinda neat, too, so... If you had a choice after school, let's go to Marks' and play basketball--he also had, you know, a better pickup game cuz there were two or three marshals that were willing to play some hoops as well. It was, uh... I never found it distressing.

LB: So what do you remember, I mean, you have these marshals there, right, ready and willing to play basketball with you at the drop of a hat. You were aware that there was stuff in the newspapers, although you might not have been reading the newspapers, you were seeing those little red schoolhouse stickers... What else do you remember about Richmond during those years? What do you remember of the changes taking place in Richmond?

MM: Well, I remember that we had a nucleus of friends who were so important to Mom and Dad and who were also, I think, many of them out there fighting these same battles. And I don't want to posture it that my father was fighting a battle. He would have been the first to tell you, he was following the constitution, thought he was doing what the Supreme Court asked to be done. It was not a personal battle... uh, by any means. But many of the close friends were political people that happened to be circles he had traveled in through his law career, was the Sargey (?) Reynold's, Linwood Holton's, Fergie Reid's... of the world that I interacted with as a child... who were incredible people and incredibly supportive... when many others perhaps were not. Um, and these were people that... to--to me are great heroes. Linwood Holton -- that's a guy that basically... was a politician whose career hinged on his feelings during those turbulent times. And he did what he thought was morally right and it probably cost him his political career. Um... you also learn as you watch that and absorb some of it... ya know, there was--you talked about did you--did we talk about the news with Dad, no, but it was a kind of a constant civics lesson in that I did learn there was a reason we're structured the way we're structured. There was a reason a federal judge is appointed for life. Because he never had to make a decision worried

about his job. He made a decision based on the constitution of the United States. It was, to him, that simple. And to me in adolescence, I quickly realized that there were others out there who were far more vulnerable... and at far greater risk... for some of those supporting decisions such as that. Or getting out in front and leading -- they were truly at risk. Their--their careers were at risk. And it did not slow the brave people down.

LB: So you must have talked about this with Anne and Woody some.

MM: Sure, well, you know, Annie ended up as one of Dad's law clerks, as well... later on. Um... yeah, we--we've talked about it, as adults. We didn't talk about it as kids.

LB: Hmm.

MM: Perhaps, although, I would see them at Christmas and...

LB: Yeah.

MM: Uh, etcetera. That... I think we were all busy being kids and teenagers.

LB: So tell me about that. Tell me about where you went to school, tell me how you and your parents made that decision.

MM: ... Believe it or not, they didn't include a six-year-old in that decision.

LB: [Laughs.]

MM: Um, we lived out by Collegiate School, a private school, co-ed private school in the West End. The same fellow that brought my dad to Richmond to coach football... was then at Collegiate. Also with a headmaster named MacPitt (?) who had--my dad had played basketball against, they were friends. And they chose--Mom and Dad chose to send me to what they thought was the best available school at the time, fairly close to... to, uh, to where we living. And I went to Collegiate. And I was there for thirteen years. Um... and I mean, I understand the angle we're taking here is there were many people who found that to be a hypocritical... thing. For my father to be sending me to a private school while kids in public school were going through some horrific experience. Um... I think his answer, or at least the way I understood it, was quite simply, 'I chose this school long before this decision. Uh, I still feel it's the best education for my son, I'm lucky enough to be able to--to send him there. I'm not gonna change that.' Um, and we didn't.

LB: Actually, you know, I ask the exact same questions of everyone, whether they went to a segregated black school or Collegiate or anyone.

MM: Did any of them get to make the decision on where they went to school when they were six?

LB: You know? Uh, they made decisions at different points in their school career.

MM: Right.

LB: Right? So, these are open-ended questions so you can tackle them... any way you like.

MM: I just--you and I having the conversation about kids and stuff and I think that we, you know, generationally, I have probably different conversations with my kids than my parents would have had. I think we include our kids a lot more--

LB: Much more.

MM: ... in some of this stuff than... maybe forty years ago.

LB: But you know, a lot of people I've talked to when they got to high school made the decision, yes I want to go to this school--

MM: Right.

LB: I want to try to go to to this school.

MM: Right.

LB: And of course, it often didn't work out the way they thought it would... because of zoning and--

MM: Sure.

LB: ...and other issues. But these are--these are my template questions, but I--I understand your family probably did get a lot of flack because of that decision... at the time.

MM: Correct. And again, it was probably more in newspapers that I wasn't reading. I mean, would I hear it in passing? Occasionally, even at, you know, my insulated school in the West End? Yeah.

LB: Now, at your insulated school in the West End, do you remember interactions that you had with fellow students, teachers, administrators... that stick out in your mind during this time?

MM: That... no, nothing dramatic--

LB: I mean...

MM: ...if we're hon--honestly looking for that.

LB: Yeah.

MM: Um... you know, were there some kids in school that I knew, you know, had some strong opinions on what was going on around them, and would occasionally verbalize it? Sure. But that's--I mean that's teenage stuff. Uh, you know, and it was also very hard for--for them, in my opinion, to be... but so anxious about it while they were there in their insulated school as well.

LB: Do you mean... strong opinions in favor of civil rights or in favor of segregated schools or--or--which--which way?

MM: The latter.

LB: Yeah.

MM: ...uh, for the most part, would be the ones I would remember, again, because that's maybe what sticks out. Um... you know, but was--was--was there anything every physical? No, but you know, you don't mess with a kid that's got marshals following him to class either, so... Um... administrators... no, other than, you know, a teacher here or there that maybe would pull you aside and--and say something, generally very nice... about... ehh--it would never have been about me it would have been about having respect for my father. Or understanding, uh, what he must be going through. This... I got off easy, I was a kid. Uh... it's Mom and Dad that I feel... you know... ss...he never... ever showed -- to me, he may have showed to Mom and we never had that conversation -- any reticence whatsoever about decisions he made ever. Um... or--or the result socially for--for him personally. The impact it was having. It was not of consequence. And I know, you've--you've read it, you've done your research. You know, people spit on him in restaurants. It was--it was ugly but it... that came with the territory... for him. Um... he nev--he was never scared visibly, to me -- when maybe he should have been. Um, he never seemed to truly fear for his personal safety. He feared for his family's safety. Which is why a couple of summers he asked that Mom and I actually leave the country. Just because he felt like he could go b--about his day-to-day business.. with a little more ease--I think also summers, again, as a teenager, you're floating around a little bit more. We can't quite keep track of Mark the way we might... during the school year, so it was just--it made him feel better to know I wasn't anywhere around. Um... but he wasn't scared, so I wasn't scared. And he would--tell you, you know, "Hitler's army couldn't kill me, these guys ain't gonna get me." And you believed it as a kid.

LB: How long did that--the twenty-four-hour police protection and all that go on?

MM: I don't--I honestly can't tell you, it felt... maybe a couple of years? But maybe it was sporadic, maybe it was an intense six months and... then some time off. I mean, it was--you know, those school cases were not the only cases that brought the marshals to d--

LB: Right.

MM: ... to Dad's house. You know, so... some of it can be a little blurred. Whether it was--was--was that this case or was that... Rap Brown (?) or was that... something else.

LB: Now when you think back on those years, can you point to an example of really good leadership that you remember, and leadership that was not so good? And, you know, again,

people answer that on a level where you can--anywhere from the family to the school to the nation, so you take it--

MM: Right.

LB: ... wherever you want to take it.

MM: Right. Um... the problem is I'm afraid it ends up a little political.

LB: Well, that's good (?).

MM: Um... that's--yeah, kind of aforementioned, the Sarge Reynolds, Linwood Holtons of the world, they--that was leadership... to me. Linwood Holton taking his children, walking them into school -- that's leadership. Sarge Reynolds -- that... ended up being towards the end of his life. Uh, you know, made a speech at the shad planking that was, you know -- historic. And... in saying, we, you know... you follow the rules. You follow the federal government. Uh... those were cour--that was courageous. You know, and I felt like I was having some firsthand... you know, I--I had a front row seat... to that.

LB: How about leadership that was not so good?

MM: You know, again, probably, and I'm not avoiding your questions, uh... and I could call names... but it would not be firsthand experience, it would be now from what I have read historically. And perhaps being disappointed. But it's selfish disappointment. It was a different time and people especially in political posi--positions do what they think their constituency wants them to do. But, you know, and you don't--you don't argue with that. You may disagree with it. Uh... you may hope to change it. But I understand it. Uh, and I don't think that... you know, I am happy that we are past it. I think we have a much better country for going through some of what we went through. The turbulence of the '60s -- it's the way you grow. Um... And I sure think I came out a lot... I came out unscathed and there were people that were hurt in some of those battles. And there were people that, you know, were killed... uh, fighting a good cause. You know. I got to--hang out with some federal marshals.

LB: Ah, you know, it's--it's interesting cuz... my father grew up in a political family as well and it was very much in the spotlight and I think... being the child of someone who is very prominent and very controversial could change you in unexpected ways. I mean, it's not always what people think it's gonna be.

MM: Mm hmm. Um. Yeah, and I am sure that... there are... parts of me that are far different from--for that experience. I can't tell you what they are.

LB: Mm hmm.

MM: Um... you know, you're made by the environment... uh, to a great extent, all of us... are. Um... so there were things that formed a... that formed in and around me. Uh, I'm sure. But I'm not... I wouldn't pretend to be able to articulate them.

LB: Right.

MM: Um... you know, or I could--I *could* pretend to articulate them and then I'd sound egomaniacal. That's the last thing I want...

LB: No, you can -- feel free.

MM: Um. Nope! I'm not. I'm gonna avoid them--gonna avoid that one.

LB: [Laughs.] Cuz you know, I'll edit anyways.

MM: [Laughs.] Uh--you don't know, other than, you know, there were always... w... and it sounds... you know.... We had African American friends and it wasn't one of those, 'I had an African American friend.' There were, you know, African Americans... around us socially all the time. Was that different from some of my classmates? Probably. Um, at the time it was very d--I mean, I never thought of it as unusual... whatsoever. Did that--you know, does that have some bearing on who I am as adult? Yeah, I'm certain... that it probably does. But... uh, it wa... it... wasn't a premeditated... kind of thing and it wasn't... something that was talked about... uh, at the time. It just was what it was.

LB: What were some of your personal turning points during these years growing up in Richmond?

MM: [Pauses.] Personal turning points...

LB: And, again, you can take that--

MM: No, I'm with ya, I'm with ya, I'm with ya [pauses]... Probably... graduating from high school... didn't go very far--you know, I only got as far as Ashland, Virginia, but being then exposed to other students from... you know, other walks of life rath--rather than just the insulated West End of Richmond, you know --other schools, oth--other parts of the state. And realizing that they actually recognized that last name and had been impacted as well. Um, is that a turning point? I don't know if it was a turning point, but it was a realization.

LB: Yeah. What was Randolph Macon like then?

MM: Uh, it's--ya--what do I have to compare it to. You know--is my problem. It was a small little private school, co-educational. Um... it was a--an experience. I w--I'm not--was not a very academic... uh, guy. Uh, I did not--my career at Randolph Macon did not last terribly long.

LB: What happened--

MM: But we can keep that a secret. Uh... what happened next was I was asked... I was--I was not given an invitation to return. Um, this is actually kind of a funny but terrible story. And you know we've now moved from the '60s into the late '70s. Um, and I remember it vividly, because I

was so--I was--I was so anxious. The summer was progressing and I had failed... to tell my parents that I would not be returning to Randolph Macon in the fall. And again, it's back to our kinda thing--the--sort of a different time, now. YOU know, you and I can go online and see exactly what our children were doing... etcetera, etcetera. Days were different. And Mom and Dad were actually going abroad to a wedding. A friend from Richmond whose daughter was... being married... uh, in Italy. And they were leaving with the understanding that when they got back, I'd have already packed myself and... moved up to... or back to Ashland. Um, and it lasted about three days, they were away and... the guilt was getting to me and, I picked up the phone and called and said, "I'd like to come to Italy and talk to you." So I actually went to Italy to break the news that I wouldn't be returning to college the next semester to my parents--this was a really--very well-planned on my part. And once I was there, I figured that they would have to say, well, you're already here, why don't you hang out for a week or so. That's exactly what we did, we ended up taking a cruise, uh, for a couple of weeks as a twenty- or twenty-one year old, twenty-year old at the time... uh, which was great fun and I thought, "Wow, this is all gonna work out and I shouldn't have been anxious, Dad understands it... wasn't my best year and this'll all work out." Uh, and the cruise was lovely! When we got home, not so much. Uh, you know, that's when... that's when, uh, I was told that I would have a job within seventy-two hours, etcetera, etcetera. No big--just, you know, kinda what I had expected out of the box, but it was a nice little vacation and I do appreciate it, and I--I thanked them. You know. Regularly. For not beating me up... uh, in that first two weeks. But... it was, uh... it was reality when we got home, and I did... I--I went and got a job.

LB: And then what happened?

MM: ...Then I went back to school -- a bit... here or there... on or off... three to five more years, working all the while. Um... and started making a little bit of money. And... went and got a real estate license and made a little bit more money and figured that maybe I was... quasi competent at it. Um... and have sort of been doing that ever since, since the... mid '80s, I guess.

LB: So it sounds like that was a... a huge fork in the road for you, right? Course, going to Randolph Macon and then not going to Randolph Macon...

MM: Yes. Of course it was a fork in the road. I'm a college drop-out. I'm not proud of it. You know, it's a fork in the road that I would not suggest others take. Um... I--again, I've knocked wood, you've seen me already do it a couple of times, I'm pretty superstitious. I am very, very lucky... to have seen any success whatsoever... given the angle I attacked the success from. And I know it. Um... you know, and God bless my children, they will stay in school... and... uh, they will be successful. I will not recommend the path I chose... and... it's fun to be called entrepreneurial, but that also means that you've got very little as far as a safety net is--is concerned. And, you know...

LB: So how about when you were a kid before you hit college, do you remember any turning points before that?

MM: [Pauses] Honestly, not particularly. I think it was a very... other than the marshals and the lights, a very kinda adolescence. Um, and I was lucky enough to have a lot of good friends and...

many of whom it's--to some extent, maybe it's a Richmond thing, too, cuz it surprises many of my friends that are not from Richmond -- that I still regularly see people that I have now known for, you know, fifty-two years. Um, that's very natural and normal to me. Um... no, I can't think of anything I would consider a turning point. Um... did I kind of the summers... that we talked about earlier where Dad would ask that Mom and I would leave town, so to speak -- is that a turning point? I don't know, did that--it separated me... from some of my contemporaries... who maybe were going to camp Virginia. And... I was... gonna go live in Portugal for the summer. Is that different, didn't--certainly didn't make me any better. I certainly missed everybody and felt like I was missing things... back home. Um, but it gives you a different--perhaps a different perspective. You know, a--as a--as a teenager. You see different cultures, other lives, um... but I always kind of loved that anyway and that was through Mom and Dad who loved to travel and... in fact, Dad... who was a... a couple of years... um... before he was offered the position on the bench, took a sabbatical from his law practice. And it was pre--eh, maybe kindergarten time-ish for me. But we moved to Spain. And lived in Spain for six or eight months. Um... you know, is that a turning point, I don't know, you know. How does a six year old reach a turning point.

LB: Well, you--

MM: It was fascinating, I remember it--yeah.

LB: I mean you know, they *do* have turning points--

MM: Yeah.

LB: ...right? They have... major events that may not look major to an adult always--

MM: Right.

LB: but events that really change--

MM: Oh, no, I'm with you, I'm with you, and -- I try as a parent to be very sensitive--

LB: Yeha.

MM: To some of that, too. I mean, I hear exactly what you're saying and you know it with--with your children as you look and you go, "Oh, how could you feel pressure," or "How could you, you know, talk about stress." It's all relative, isn't it? You know? The playground is a stressful place... if the playground's your place.

LB: Yeah! What did you see as turning points for the community during those years that you were growing up? And again, you can define community--

MM: Mm hmm.

LB: ... any which way you want.

MM: I'm not sure... I can honestly tell you I saw at turning points -- maybe the election of Doug Wilder. Is that a turning point? Yeah, I think that's probably a turning point. I'm not sure I w--I could put my finger on--on any turning points between... those late '60s, early '70s... and Doug Wilder. I don't think there--there was particularly anything huge that *I* would point to as a turning point. To me, the election of Doug Wilder... w--was something nationally, internationally... uh, that I would call a turning point. You know, the state... you know, Virginia... had elected an African American man as Governor -- that's *huge*. That's huge -- was huge.

LB: How about turning points for your school... while you were there at Collegiate.

MM: Well, I'm pretty certain -- and we'd need to look this up -- I'm pretty certain it wasn't a terribly diverse place... uh, until I was probably in high school. And then--then I saw some diversity. Um--

LB: Were there African American students there when you were in high school?

MM: Mhm! ... Not many. Doug Wilder's son was one... believe it or not. Um... yeah, and I--I mean, I'm... I have not been... a perfect alum and stayed in touch, uh, with Collegiate, just cuz my children ended up going to the rival school, St. Catherine's and St. Christopher's. Um, but I think all the private schools are far more diverse... than they were, but our community is more diverse, it's... you know, and then again I don't want to go backwards on it, but that's was part of... the obvious issues of the sixty was the... the global inequalities, you know. The social, economic... there were not many African American families who could probably afford to send their child... to a Collegiate or a St. Christopher's. Or live in a neighborhood... that allowed them... uh, access... to better education. It was, uh... the world has changed, thank goodness.

LB: How do you think all those experiences shaped who you are today?

MM: You know, again, it's, uh--it's--it's hard form to articulate... that. I think... that the real answer is just, they *did* shape me. Um, as your experiences... shaped you as an adolescent--as an adolescent. Um, you know, and back the stresses of children, etc. We're having this talk because what I perhaps was peripherally involved in is somewhat historic.I'll admit it: historic. But it's all relative, that doesn't mean that that stuff formed me in a bigger way than... another experience would form another adolescent.

LB: It doesn't have to. You know, I mean, you're--you're right. Everyone's experiences shape who they are today.

MM: Mm hmm.

LB: And... I'm not suggesting that your experiences shaped you more--

MM: Mmkay.

LB: ...than...someone else who was living a block away--

MM: Right.

LB: ...right? Because the events that we experience as kids have a huge impact on who become as adults. So I guess what I'm trying to get at -- and, again, I ask this question to every single person I interview and they have radically different answers. You know? Not how special are you, but what experiences from that time do you think--do you point to when you think about your life now and say, wow, I--I can see the path from *this* to *this*.

MM: [Pauses] Values... is that an okay answer?

LB: Yeah!

MM: ...Without putting on an experience it was the global experience of being privileged enough to be around people... who had great values. Who had commitments... to certain things and they stuck by them, no matter how uncomfortable it may have become. Did I take that away, do I remember that, do I try and transfer that to my children? Absolutely. But I can't point to the specific issue. It was being lucky enough to be surrounded by committed people... who... understood that to change things that needed changing, you can become exposed. You can perhaps be at risk, you can perhaps be ostracized. But if you're committed to something and it's that important, it's all worth it. Was that an answer?

LB: It's a great answer.

MM: Ok. [Chuckles.] I'm trying.

LB: You're doing great!

MM: Alright.

LB: I mean, I--I know you've been interviewed a million times. I'm sure you get asked the same questions over and over and over again. And I think that--

MM: I'm liking yours, though, more, cuz they're kind of fun and a little bit more open-ended.

LB: Well... that's what--

MM: You're pretty good at this.

LB: It's what I love to do. It's--it's really my favorite thing to do. Because people take these questions on such different paths.

MM: That I think would--it would be fun, is to hear the parallel kind of answers as to how people... heard your question, what path they took... in answering it. That's gonna be the beauty in some of this -- is lining it up.

LB: Oh its -- it's fascinating. Because sometimes people will--I'll ask them what experiences were turning points for the community -- I had one woman say it was when Barry Goldwater and Linden Johnson... were, you know, running against each other for president. And that changed Richmond and then we moved into a white neighborhood and had a cross burned on our lawn.

MM: Right.

LB: You know, so it can be that, people talk a lot about city council, people talk about... you know, musical things that happened, I mean, there are so many answers to these questions. And I'm--I'm not looking for, 'how did you as the son of a very controversial public figure... who implemented huge changes in richmond -- how did you experience that' because I know you've been asked that--

MM: Right.

LB: ... so many different times. But it's more... how did it feel, how did it smell, how did it look... what are some of the things that when you--when you wake up at three in the morning and all this different stuff is going through your head, I don't know if that happens to you, it certainly happens to me, you know--how--what are the images and memories from that time that surface for you.

MM: Right. Right. You know, and again, sometimes you don't... especially as--as an adolescent, if it's all you know...

LB: Yes!

MM: ...there's nothing else to compare it to. So it doesn't--certain things that people say, "That's *so different*." Well, it wasn't different to me. It's what I knew. If you wanna think of... smells and visuals... other than the little red schoolhouse one that has stuck with me, there was... and--and--and part of this may also be because it's a photograph that seems to surface that seems to surface and resurface -- which was a picture of me that the Times Dispatch, I think, used--you know, it's like every anniversary of--

LB: Right.

MM: ..of something, it seems to show up... Walking across my parents driveway and there's a line of police cars and... and some other things and for a period of time... the--every Sunday, up and down the road in front of my parents' house, would be a motorcade. Uh... the American Nazi party, the Ku Klux Klan... um... and they would ride up and down, screaming and signs and it was something--very much out of a sixties kind of newsreel. But I do remember one day in particular it seemed to be a little more frantic... uh, than previous. And I had been allowed to walk down the driveway and... go... see what was going on. And I ended up in the backseat of a radio broadcaster's car and he was doing a live--or perhaps it wasn't live, but he was recording... uh, his report... for the radio. And I still have that visual, and I still remember... listening to him describe the scene in front of me. Um... and that is kind of engrained. Um, and perhaps... his description of it was more aggressive than I would've... taken it... as--as--as--as the kid. I was

seeing people who... even as an adolescent, I could tell you, if those were the bad guys? I was okay with the team I was on. Um... and they were not scaring me, it was almost caricatureish... was cartoonish, almost. Yet, the broadcaster was panning this vivid aggressive scary kind of picture... that I was not seeing the same thing. I was just part, again, you don't know what you don't know, or you know what you know. Uh... It was just part of what I had seen every Sunday... you know, for a month. It was more of the same. They never came into the driveway, I never truly worried that they were gonna circle back around... It was--it was--not... dissimilar to things that I was seeing on the national news happening elsewhere. Just happened to be a little closer.

LB: But how strange to see, or to hear, your life -- your family's life being narrated--

MM: And that--

LB: ... by a broadcaster while you're experiencing something and--and saying, well, it--it feels different to me.

MM: Yeah. Yeah.... and again, Laura, that's... you... from that side... of this tape recorder, that's what was happening. To me, then, that's just what was happening every day. It was not--it did not seem unusual because... basically as much as I could remember, that was sort of always happening around my house. And I don't mean the protest, but I mean a narration of... uh, in some form or fashion. It was not unusual. I did not feel... special or... less than special. It's just the way I grew up -- that's what happened around my house. Never thought that that was different from what was happening across the street... eh, although it... so obviously was. It didn't--it was all I knew.

LB: I know, you're just living your life.

MM: Exactly.

LB: I mean that's what... all of us are doing.

MM: Right.

LB: So... you've answered this in some ways already but how do you think... everything that happened... during that time, you know, the--the annexation... the busing... everything else that happened -- how do you think that changed Richmond? How do you think that changed the community?

MM: [Pauses.] You know, I'm not--I'm not--I'm a--actually not at all sure. I... I would feel safe in saying... it might have been... a two steps forward, three steps back kind of thing for the community... in the long run. I think that there were great damages done due to that animosity. Um... but, again, it's... we're talking about my community, our community, so it is what it is. But this was not unusual, this wasn't just happening in Richmond.

LB: Right.

MM: It was, you know, a state of, uh... of the world. Um... and we were just one little piece of that puzzle as it--as it moved forward. There were plenty of other communities that were going through these same struggles and the same turmoil. How did it--in the long run, we're a better place now. Are--are we not? I mean you *must* go, that's... that's what this country is about, this is our form of government you *go through*... these things... to become what you eventually become and it's always changing. I mean, we could certainly... easily talk about other things going on in the Richmond community right now that somebody will be interviewing somebody... thirty years from now and asking very similar questions.

LB: What do you think those things will be?

MM: [Pauses.] I think--the first thing I would think of when we talk about our community now that will be of interest thirty y--is the changing demographic. It's--I mean, I think all you have to do is look at the diversity of--I means, we could... look at the diversity of the state of Virginia, look at the diversity of our country. Uh, it's a very different place than it was even just... thirty years ago. Demographically. So our attitudes change... through that... uh, as they should. I don't know, what--do--are you thinking that there's anything going on right now that will be of particular interest in... thirty or forty years?

LB: Well, one thing--I mean, I absolutely agree with you and it's--it's funny, um... one of the questions I often ask people who were in public high schools when we're at the end of the interview is, "Was there anyone who was in school with you who was not either white or black -- who didn't identify with either of those groups?" And it's--it's been impossible so far to come up with an affirmative answer, which is so... funny for me because I grew up in Providence Rhode Island, which is very, very multiethnic. But..I mean, I do think you're--you're right, we've moved from a--a world in Richmond which is black and white... to... a very, very... different kind of world.

MM: Absolutely. Um... and at least around school, no. You're--you're exactly right. From--from my experience, it was black or white, there--there was not a lot of brown or yellow. Um... although, again, as a child, and perhaps my exposure was different... there... Mom and Dad had a very close East Indian friend, who... we've just lost, actually, in the past month. A wonderful guy named Ranjit Sen who ended up... becoming... my next-door neighbor. Um... so, I was in tune a little bit with the Indian... community. So that portion of diversity and it's a very--it's become a--incredibly strong... uh... community... here around town. But that's--you're right, there were not a lot of Hispanics around, there were not many Asians.

LB: Although I will tell you one thing that sort of cracks me up coming from the north -- sometimes people will say, "Yes... there were some white people people there, and also some Jews."

MM: [Laughs.] Never thought of it that way.

LB: But many people here do think of it that way.

MM: That's--well, you know, that's another, that's--the--the Jewish community in Richmond has always been a very, very solid foundation and I'm not sure even in my most insulated moments... did I sense antisemitic kind of... feelings. There were a lot of Jewish kids... at Collegiate school in the '60s and '70s, and... their families were of great affluence. Without a doubt. Eh, don't see that...

LB: But, you know, I--I mean I think that wasn't true in many neighborhoods.

MM: Oh, no, no no, I'm not--I'm not disagreeing with it as a global--

LB: Yeah.

MM: ...or national sentiment. I'm just saying that's--that's a particular... place in Richmond--

LB: That... which is fascinating.

MM: That was different. Yes it is. It is.

LB: I find those... pockets really interesting. I interviewed a guy a couple of weeks ago who was talking about his neighborhood, growing up in, you know, Carver and Jackson Ward and... he was talking about the corner store. He said, "Oh yeah, the Jew store, it was run by Jew Mary." And, you know... my jaw may have... hit the floor--

MM: Right.

LB: ...but I... tried to prop it back up, and... he was not at all conscious of saying anything antisemitic or offensive, it was just--

MM: That's what it was--

LB: ... in his mind.

MM: To him. Right.

LB: Absolutely. So I think that's one thing... that... we will look at thirty years from now, this big demographic shift.

MM: Mm hmm.

LB: But the other thing that I really wonder about, you know... now, we're in a city where public schools have largely desegregated. I took my University of Richmond theater class to do a performance at Henderson Middle school, you know, on the Northside. And... we were performing a play about the history of civil rights and education in Richmond--

MM: Did you say the University of Richmond?

LB: Mm hmm.

MM: Ok. Keep going.

LB: And... the audience -- every single kid at that school is African American. There are six white kids and 694 African American kids. So, we're talking about history and one of my students said, "So..." you know, "what do you know about segregation?" And one of the students raised her hand and said, "Well, segregation is a bad thing that happened in the past." [Laughing] And, you know--

MM: All he had to do was look around.

LB: All the thad to do was look around.

MM: Right.

LB: But I--I mean, I--I wonder if we're gonna look back and if sometimes... you know, you look around, I mean, growing up in this very progressive civil rights community that you're describing and saying... 'what's happened to public schools now,' you know that--that your father... really tried to desegregate and now... when you look around in the city of Richmond... seven percent of white percent of white parents send their kids to public schools. Right? It's--it's... very, very segregated now. And I--I wonder how we're gonna look back at that thirty years from now.

MM: Well... I wonder how we're gonna fix it. Um... that's what I wonder. And--and I wonder what is the quality of the education... that those kids are getting... relative to perhaps what--what the same kids were getting thirty years ago. I don't know those answers. I wish--I *sure* wish I knew the answer on how to fix it. And I, you know, would never say annexation cuz it's a word I just don't use. Um... but I hear ya. And I think that's--

LB: Yeah.

MM: ...that's fascinating. I hope both of us are around thirty years from now to look back on it and say, "Ohhh, wouldn't have guessed that, but it did--o--ok."

LB: I know! Don't you think?

MM: Yeah.

LB: So... you've already answered this but I'll ask it in a different way: how do you think all of your experiences shaped how you interact now with people from different backgrounds.

MM: I hope it's made me--it made me more comfortable.

LB: Yeah.

MM: ...with people of different backgrounds. But that--that could be as much from... having been lucky enough to travel and--and feel comfortable in other cultures or see other cultures, as much as it was any kind of incredible liberal, you know, catharsis, I don't know.

LB: [Laughs]

MM: Um...

LB: Well I'm not suggesting it was an incredible liberal catharsis, I mean, things just happen--

MM: Right.

LB: ... the way they unfold, right?

MM: Right. Um... you know, I hope that I am a well-rounded person. And that's, I think, all any of us... want... for our children. And I think that you could -- and you probably have -- interviewed plenty of people that are very confined. Uh... who feel the same way. Although you would look at them and go, but you're not--that's not what's going on. Uh, but that's what you want. That's just a matter of how you really got there and what well-rounded really means. I hope I understand people I empathize, and I hope people understand me. Cuz I can confuse the hell out of some of them.

LB: Are there things that you'd like the generation of kids growing up in Richmond today to know?

MM: That's your best question yet. That's a good one -- have you asked everybody that one -- those are the answe--those--that would be fascinating to line up those answers. Um... and mine is gonna be one that I've probably already said to you. I--I would want... a generation of kids to know that you can make a difference. And if something is important to you, and you feel strongly about a cause, you fight for it. You fight within the system. You understand the system. And the system doesn't always work... to your benefit. But it's still the best system--it's the best system in the world. And you work through it. And you keep your ideals... and you stay strong to your convictions. And then you can live with yourself at the end of the day. It's not--it isn't rocket science, and it's, again, what I think all parents try to teach their children. Um... but I think we saw it more vividly just because of the turbulence... then. It was easier to segmen--segment or separate.... Um... I'm proud of this community. I think Richmond has come... a long, long, long way. The country has come a long, long, long way.

LB: Are there things that you feel that we as a community particularly need to remember that we may be in danger of forgetting?

MM: [Pauses.] You know, I'm not sure we're in danger of forgetting it, thanks to people like you. Um... we were for whatever reason at the forefront of some of this, visually. Um... and I think it's been incredibly well document. I don't think it will be forgotten. Um... and I think we seem to revisit it... every decade or so... which is healthy. Um... no, I don't--I think we are making our way. ... and part of it you want to believe that, as well. Uh, and you want to believe it for

your children. But I--but I honestly... do. We're... a better community now than we were and we'll be better tomorrow than we are today.

LB: Well, thank you, Mark. Is there anything I didn't ask you that you want to say?

MM: I don't think so other than thank you... for the opportunity, and I wish you *great* luck... with the project. Uh, it's--it's fascinating. And, uh, this has been fun. It's been--now, again, God, you're gonna make me *reflective* now. I'm gonna, like, spend the--

LB: [Laughs.]

MM: ...rest of the day thinking about stuff that I don't normally think about. Which is healthy, too!

LB: Well if you think of anything else, I could always come back. I just live right up in Church Hill and I'm always happy to come back and record... another segment.

MM: Ok. Next time we'll have a cocktail.

LB: Sounds good [chuckles].

MM: Ok.