

A Community Remembers
Interview: Mark Person, 1 and 2

LB: Alright, we're on.

MP: Ok, my name is Mark Person and I graduated George Wythe High School in Richmond, Virginia – there's another one in Wytheville, Virginia – in class of 1974.

LB: Alright, but now I'm gonna have you say that again without the other stuff, just cuz we know it's Richmond.

MP: Ok. Ok. So you want me to do it again?

LB: Mm hmm.

MP: Alright, tell me when.

LB: When.

MP: My name is Mark Person and I'm a graduate of George Wythe High School class of 1974.

LB: Thank you, that's perfect. Mark, tell me something about how you grew up.

MP: I grew up in the Westover Hills neighborhood and as a just young kid I had been very active in sports. Anything that bounced we managed to play, all the neighborhood friends. So, I attended Westover Elementary School and then was fortunate, went to George Wythe High School and then played sports and was recruited by a school up in Ashland, Randolph Macon College, and attended on an academic athletic scholarship, so... George Wythe opened up a lot of doors. I played two sports, I was a tennis and baseball player, and delivered papers, newspaper route in the morning, get up at 4:30, go to school, and I tried to stay on the honor roll throughout the time at school, so just work ethic, both parents worked, so...

LB: Tell me more about your family.

MP: My father was self-employed. And my mother worked, she was in the insurance industry, but, just had a brother, still do, Jim, who's a principal up Northern Virginia. He was four years ahead of me. And we, we just worked hard. Typical morning, the phone would ring and it would be my mother getting us up. You could dial a code and it was an alarm clock. So, we would get up early. Wasn't any 'hey, you're not going to school.' We had to go, so that was the way it was.

LB: What was Richmond like when you were growing up?

MP: Uh, pretty conservative. Westover School was a lot of siblings that attended there. And we all would kind of follow in our brothers and sisters footsteps. Most of the families were some single moms, but most were the two parents. And if your parents weren't looking out for you, the neighbor was, and everybody kinda looked out for one another. But our haven, we played sports, we were at the, after school, whatever bounced, we were there. Basketball, football, baseball were kind of the big three sports.

LB: So, when and how did you begin noticing changes taking place in Richmond.

MP: Uh, probably... I remember going to Westover School, we were scheduled to go to Washington DC. We were coming age of about 14, a buddy and I used to go to all the concerts. We would—there was a place, The Arena, which is now the Sports Backers stadium complex. And we would go to all the concerts. Just kinda, two young guys, we'd ride our bicycles over there and hear all the great rock groups of the time. Coming out of the Vietnam conflict, so you started to see a little bit of the—we were I guess trying to interpret it all at that age, but—

LB: And what year would this have been?

MP: This would have been, like 60... late 60s. '67, '68. They had a little concern up New York, Woodstock. So, we couldn't quite convince our parents to let us go. We said we were going on a camping trip. She said, "where?" and I said "Place called, uh, Woodstock, NY." Matt, I think Yasger (?) was his name, but, didn't quite convince the parents that we needed—that we could get there, so, but I—there was someone from George Wythe that attended and whose picture was on the cover of Time magazine, Kermit Skinner. But all the bands from that Woodstock era would come play at The Arena. Santana, Sly and the Family Stone. So it was a great era for music, but there was a lot of, uh... if you listen to the words, a lot of conflict in these songs. You know, the... so you kept paying attention, I remember getting a bus trip, 7th grade, cancelled because they were flipping buses in Washington, DC with Civil Rights protest. And they said they didn't think we'd be best—our best interest to make that trip. So, that's when we started noticing all the changes going on. And as a kid growing up, you know, you... you just go to school, play sports was our big thing. But then it was an eye-opener. You started seeing a lot of these Civil Rights, a lot of the anxiousness, the tension in the air.

LB: Were people discussing Civil Rights around you?

MP: Somewhat, but, uh—and I saw it maybe because in the city of Richmond, we played, you know, we played different communities. And, uh, it was never a black/white thing with us. We had friends from... that we knew from playing from seven, eight years old. As you get older, you know, then other, some of the friends moved out. And I said "why are they moving out of the city?" and they said "they don't wanna go to public schools" and so that, that kinda bothered me. You know, I got—my father had his own business which is on Hull Street, and we just had a lot

of, we always had black friends. It wasn't a white/black thing, we just had friends. And Christmastime, it'd be an open house. Everybody'd come, white, black, didn't matter. You know, so that's just the way I was brought up.

LB: It sounds unusual for that time.

MP: Uh, really was. And I can remember going to George Wythe and—and a lot of my friends can relate to it, too, but... my—it was kind of comical, we had a—I'd ride the bicycle, a lot of warnings, and when busing hit, all of a sudden I kind of looked at it as an opportunity. I said, hey, we got another option to get to school, we can ride the yellow school bus. And I had a paper route, I'd get up at 4:30 in the morning and we had to be self-sufficient. My mother worked as a secretary for an insurance company and dad was gone a lot. He travel—had a business in Virginia and Carolinas where he did specialty work, but, so it was kind of like, uh, hey, you did your part, you helped contribute, and buy some groceries, it's no free ride.

And my brother, you know, the same way, and as the younger brother it's always that, uh, tr—he was a smart guy, went to William and Mary and you know, you're trying to keep up and keep the family tradition going. A lot of the teachers, he had the same teachers I did so it was like, "hey, your brother wouldn't have done that." And it was teasing, but you know, you, you wanted to pull your weight, and try to be honorable and do the right things. But the, I noticed it, like the transition when I was at Westover, we had our first African American student come, and he was a good friend, we all got along well. But you know, you put your—looking back it was probably quite a transition for him. And then he ended up going to George Wythe with us and, you know, finished, after five years, again with the eighth grade. So then we started, you know, that we were the white kids, we saw it coming in and then we became the minority, so... but it was, it was a good time, you know. I didn't—no regrets.

LB: How did you and your family decide where you went to school?

MP: This actual zone was... basically George Wythe was the original area -- when annexation took place a lot of kids were bused from the counties that would have gone elsewhere and they went to George Wythe. So, it was still -- it remained the same area, the George Wythe, you know, kept this area and so we, the transition, we still got to go to George Wythe.

LB: So, can you remember what your first day was like at Wythe? Cuz, you know, going from being the majority to being the minority?

MP: Well, the—when I was in the eighth grade, it was probably -- and I'm just ballpark: maybe 95% white. And the teachers, you know, it was kind of a, there I was with big brother and all of his buddies, a lot that grew up in the neighborhood, and you know, you, maybe the kid tagging along with everyone, you thought you were big but you really weren't. And so then the eighth grade when busing took place when uh... that was quite a transition. All the kids from -- a lot from this area --

all the sudden they're going to the very good private schools – no knock on the private schools – and each family was different, you know it was an expense factor there. But I never really was an—I never thought about it, I just said I'm going to George Wythe, so what, you're going to ninth grade. So that part wasn't any different, but, you know all the sudden you're in, uh, without kids you grew up in the neighborhood, so it was just a matter of adjusting and getting to meet new friends, so, lot of different... but the time, you know there was a lot of turmoil going on in the country, you know, at that time, too, so we made the most of it.

LB: What was your first day at Wythe like, what do you remember?

MP: I think the transition, I think the first thing I remember somehow I got elected as yet a class president—or classroom president of that whatever class—the room you're in. I said, "How'd I get elected in this?" and that basically made you kept, helped the teacher keep role of who was in class that day. But, uh, the big part, you know the school was so big, it was, you know, two floors, and you, like, trying to, and I speak to everybody, 'hey, how's it going' so I wanted to know everybody first day, but. Pretty exciting, it was a lot of transition. Kids like, 'well I don't want to be here.' And you know, they were supposed to have gone to another school. They had been bused in. And I think, looking back, a lot of people hate being told that, hey, I've gotta go here where you're losing that, quote, freedom of choice. So that was, little, saw a lot of tension there, and little territory, you know, people, hey, this is my school and what are you doing here, kind of thing. So, started seeing that where you're naïve to it coming out of elementary school, so... So, little different sports programs, got more competitive, who should play, and now you're competing for, you know, different positions. So it stepped up a notch.

LB: So, what do you remember most about your education during this period?

MP: Very interesting, the, uh, I had very good teachers. Some were, some classes were not great, but in looking back, a lot of the teachers that had been there previously stayed, and uh, it—it wasn't a color thing. They wanted you to do your work and if you didn't, they'd flunk you, you know. And I don't mean it that they were old, but they were old school teachers. They were, hey, this is it, and, you know, we're academic, you're here to learn. I played in the band, too, and the fun part, I got from a—in the eighth grade, we had a, we were playing John Philip Sousa and the next year, we're playing the Temptations and you know, some good rythm and blues, I had a ball, I loved the music. So you just adapt. But the teachers were, I can remember the, probably my freshman year, taking algebra, and it was white, black kids, pretty good mix in there. And I'd say some smart people, you know, you gotta study or you get left behind. And that competition was good, you know, and if you, you know, someone stronger in one subject, you say, how do you—you know, we would help each other. The history classes, and I can remember the African American profess—one of the teachers I had, the uh, it was a geometry class, he said, "hey—" first time I'd really been into a black church. He said, "ya'll, we're, my church is having a function, if you all want to come, you're welcome," and it was a like a

Christmas service, and we went and it was well attended from our class—it was very nice experience. Just—I said, it’s just the way it should be, you know. Just nice people, everybody has the same objectives. And it shouldn’t be a white/black thing. And sometimes that got distorted, you know, other people don’t always see it that way and it shouldn’t be a color thing, but I said, we just have good friends, and we mix, you know. The sports was probably my haven. I... sports and music, and I just wanted to participate. I was in every club you get in, the Key Club... If not, we were trying to make some club. But we tried to get back to the school, we did fundraisers and that type events, too.

LB: What was your instrument?

MP: I played the trumpet.... was my main instrument. The fun part... the, uh... the—we had a marching band and concert band and the trumpet was, uh, they had a Richmond You—Youth Wind Orchestra or Ensemble and somehow I made that so it would drive my coaches nuts when I was playing two sports – tennis, baseball – and I’d say, I hate to—every Thursday I’d have to leave early so I could go practice with them. And it didn’t always sit well with the coaches, I says it’s kinda nice, I don’t have to slide all day, and I’d go work at, you know, sit with some very accomplished musicians, and the instructors were with the Richmond Symphony, so... quite an honor and I—I look back, it was, you know, a great time. You know, just exposed to classical music and just every genre of music – jazz, everything. Probably wouldn’t have had that experience at some other schools.

LB: What are some of your musical highpoints from this period?

MP: I can remember the, uh, we played—I used to play the Star Spangled Banner. There was a group of five of us, and we were chosen to, um, before every football game, we played that before the opening kickoff, and we played the Star Spangled Banner. A couple other events, uh, I got called one time to play Taps for the Virginia War Memorial, Veteran’s Day, and it was a good experience, you know, plus yeah, just you, with music you remained focused, and just, uh, you kind of hear it from a different perspective with different people in the class and backgrounds. And it all—I still to this day I love that old music and I’ll pull out the horn and start playing it. And I played in church a lot, too. I played with the organist and the choir in the churches. So, just, uh, lot of my favorite musicians like Louis Armstrong were black musicians and, you know, so I just kinda grew up with, you know, white, black, just it’s what it is. So I enjoyed it.

LB: Now, did you experience any changes in your circle of friends during this period?

MP: Uh... probably so. A few, had a few that – again, no knock on the private schools, but they basically left. And at the time I didn’t realize—I said, they’re just going to private schools. But it was, you know, the media was always talking about the public schools and a lot, for whatever reasons, they went elsewhere. One, uh – we were real

close friends, still are – told me he went to private school and he played sports and we're still very good friends to this day, but, interesting thing, he said another guy that was behind him, I think the knock was that the Richmond Public Schools, you don't get a good education and I disagree with that. We had kids that were off the charts. You know, I can list a name, you know, one out in California that you've heard about stands out who's had his own software company... but he said one student from George Wythe transferred to his school and he said the comment when he got there, he said George Wythe was harder than this school. And that was, but there were advanced classes, and the teachers were there to make sure you got an education, and looking back, the, uh, maybe we had some obstacles that not everybody does, but adversity sometimes raises you to another level. And it wasn't a perfect world, but we made the most of it.

LB: And I know you had a lot of things happen to you, I mean, Elizabeth Salim told me about you and her brother David—

MP: Right.

LB: Getting...

MP: Yeah, got ambushed. Last, and the—and looking back, I, it was the, this was their freshman year – after the eighth grade it was the first year as entering freshman – last day of school and... you know, I still replay it back in my mind, but we were just pretty naïve maybe to some things. So, we're just leaving George Wythe that last day, cleaned out our lockers, and two of us, and there was a group of guys on the sidewalk and they were flipping coins, was the thing where you—the closest coin to the fence wins the prize. So, we didn't think anything of it. But David's parents lived about maybe a quarter to a half a mile away and back then, our transportation was our feet, you know, if we wanted to get anywhere—maybe a bicycle, and I don't think we were driving, we were maybe 14 or 15. So we both had our hands full and we cut up through a place called Northrup's property and this is a shortcut and we'd do it all the time. And next thing, I—or as we're walking, the—hear little rustle in the bush and we were surrounded by several guys. And it kinda, it happened so quickly, he's—I look and he's... basically getting assaulted on the ground and I turned and I, it was a, happened so quick probably within a minute, and in that experience you don't know if someone's got a gun or whatever and you—you're at their—you do what they tell you, you're not trying to be a hero, and I—but I motioned to 'em and the guy said, "Give me all your money" so I probably had three dollars on me so, time—last of the high rollers (?), so I reach into my pocket, and as I'm reaching down and look up, I get hit right up here – it's a little scar there, I don't know if you can see it. So that during the, uh... probably about 1, 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Again, the last day of school. And so, I... so these guys took off and my friend David, I look and I said, you don't look too sporty and said, what? And he was out of it, he had a concussion. And it's the first time I'd seen that experience, you know, I'd been around little turmoil, you know, the typical playground kids fighting or something like that, but, uh... where you're the actual

victim, and... So we got up and he said, "Hey, you're bleeding, man" and I'm like... "Oh, I sure am." So I got a little cut here, and I, you know, put something on it and we walked back home to his parents' house. And they said, "What happened?" and I said—I won't say it on the tape, but I said we basically got our butts kicked and... I said, but we're here and I, we're ok. And David wasn't, uh, some of the questions we were—you know, they said, well—we went—I remember going to the uh, I guess the doctor that afternoon and they ran some tests. He's fine now, done real well, lives a happy lifestyle. But, uh, looking back, we—that day after it happened, the—it was the first time and as a 14, 15-year-old kid, the police come interview you and that was a little intimidating. You know, there, and we knew one of the assailants, he had—uh, we recognized him, I did, he'd been in a class, but, um, I don't know how much he attended. So we had to identify one of the victims, and um this was over the summer, probably that June, next thing, we're in court. And it's a little different experience, you know, and it's in the newspapers, the Richmond Press hit it, and it—front page, and, you know, you little uh... quite an experience of people calling the house and—go ahead.

LB: Why did it hit the front page of the Richmond Newspapers.

MP: I think cuz uh—and I think maybe the incident itself with that time, there was a lot of... uh...uh... watching the school system, see if this—quote—busing is working, and, but it got—I think because it was—we took it to court, maybe and it was a situation where they—we pressed charges and I, I think that was our parents said, you know, you have the option of, do you want to leave Wythe, and I, we said, no, we're not gonna leave, we just—hey and the way I looked at it, uh, I remember my father coming home, he said... he said, you'll be alright, just put a bandaid on it. And he was all tough World War II vet, and I, but we stuck it out. We did press charges and the first, uh, time when the trial came to be the, uh, defendant was still a minor, he was under the age of 18, and he got a few months, but he, uh, they appealed the case and then it went to the main court and then he ends up serving a suspended service of a couple years. And I, looking back, I, we both got some threats. I had people phys—you know, just come up in the classroom, and I said, you know, I'm the victim of this, and I, it's not a racial thing, but I said, I've got my rights, too. I have as much right to be sitting in the classroom as someone else and because I'm a victim, I got attacked, I said, I'm holding my ground, too. And I said the public schools, you know they give you the opportunity, and... So I just looked at it as hey, put it behind you, you had a bad day, and keep on going. I never missed a day of high school.

LB: Well, it sounds like it was kind of a big deal for you to press those charges.

MP: It was and I think a lot of people thought that, hey, he'll be packing his bags and just, going to another school, move out of town, or go... elsewhere. And I had a lot of friends who was just friends, white, black, and I had some guys that said, if you have any problems, you know, a lot of those coaches—it's a pretty tight network and it was an isolated incident and I stood my ground. I had a few death threats and you

know, you like, kind of after you—I think you can communicate and discuss anything, but I had a fella come in the classroom, he sat down beside me and he made a few comments and I just let him know, I said, don't ever threaten me again, I really don't appreciate that. And we had a little fifteen-minute talk about it and never had a problem after that. So, sometimes you just stand up, you know, you—everybody's got their equal rights.

LB: Were you hurt badly as well?

MP: Uh, no, I got, uh, I think that night—uh, just basically got a—I had a scar, little... I got hit. But nothing major other than just a... maybe a little pride factor, but that night, uh, and again I was playing the trumpet, so that evening there was, I guess, the graduation ceremonies for the 12th grade, and there were a few cute girls in that class. I had to make sure they walked across the stage. So we—we finished and I played the trumpet with a nice, good-sized Band-Aid on my eye that night. And they said, "what happened to you?" I said, "hey, just... had a little—had a bad day." So, uh... and we shook it off and I think looking back, and it probably, you know, was a serious thing, but, uh, I had a lot of people, you know, they said that shouldn't have happened. And you know, we agreed, but it shows it can happen.

LB: David was hurt pretty badly.

MP: David had a concussion and he was banged up. Uh, yeah, he got... I remember seeing him on the ground and it was like, you know—I motion over there and then I get hit and it was like, it happened so quickly and... and looking even like, in today's time, if you relate it, and uh, and I saw, like, in my experience at George Wythe, I broke up a fight one day and there was a gun falls out of the guy's pockets and just, randomly noise in the hall and I went and broke it up. Probably crazy, and I could have gotten shot. But it was instinctual, I broke it up, turned out they weren't even students at George Wythe. But the times were different. I think the Richmond public schools—it's one thing to say, hey, we're busing, but, uh, another thing that always interested me, too, I said a lot of the, uh, decision makers, they're sending their kids not to public schools, they're going to some of the—and again no knock on the private—I said, but, you're making these decisions, let's walk the walk a little bit. But, you know, and that, you know it's one thing, hey, you guys do this, but... so we were right in the middle of it, and no regrets. It was the best education of my life.

LB: It sounds like, you know, one thing I'm really struck by doing these interviews is a lot of people I've talked to have had really positive experiences...

MP: Yeah.

LB: And everyone kind of mentions the violence at the same time.

MP: It was quite a bit. Yeah.

LB: Tell me more about that.

MP: We were, uh... I noticed it in the sports, was a, kind of safe for us. It was uh—and the white g—I played the baseball team. The fella I had the pleasure of playing baseball for, it was Paul Sussey (?). And my tennis coach, I played all four years of tennis and... was Oscar Cuen (?) and looking back, and at the time, you later you respect what they were about more than anything, but, Coach Sussey was a... All American at Auburn University. And he had a brother that played for the Boston Red Sox, he was a pitcher, and his dad was a major league coach. And as a student, and these were old—Coach Sussey was real hard-nosed. Uh, no... not in bed by ten o'clock or at home, you weren't on the team and we respected that. He was the... Bobby Knight, who was the Indiana legendary basketball coach - I —and I mean this in a positive—he was our Bobby Knight of baseball. No nonsense, you play the game, and he got the most of his talent of any coach that I've ever played for. And I, uh, few times I was injured and my dad was, like, hey, you don't miss a game. I'd tape up my back and you'd—we learned to suck it up for the guys, they're your teammates and you might not ever feel like playing but you do. So... that was a good experience. We would have major league players coming and working out with us, and the tennis coach, Arthur Ashe, was local from Richmond. And Arthur Ashe was a hero. I—my aunt worked for the City of Richmond for 42 years with the Department of Public Recreation and Parks. And she'd talk about this—she worked with Arthur Ashe's father, and she would tell the story of this little, young man walking in with a tennis racket, it was Arthur Ashe. I said, [Grace?], see if you can get me some Wimbledon tickets. But, you know, that—we played at Battery Park and Byrd Park, and I—I think about Arthur Ashe playing, you know, I said this is kind of special, you know, playing on these playgrounds that he was on. So the baseball, the white, black, it was about 50/50 on our baseball teams. And we would play in some neighborhoods and the white guys look out for the black guys and [...] they said, I know these guys should be safe. And as a player, you know, it was like the -it was good rivalries, but... we were highly competitive, the baseball teams were good, and uh, depending on where we were, the other guys had each other's backs so to speak. And we just gelled as a team and, and we had fun, you know, it was like—we would go out and Coach Sussey had, he had contact list. He just—he was legendary in this area. He would intimidate the umpires, he just knew the game and but, before the games, it was some big happenings. He had piped in music, playing on George Wythe's ball field to the Moody Blues, and the hills would be, there'd be couple hundred people out on sunny afternoon, getting ready for the ballgame. All these sports were that way. The basketball teams, football... the teams were very competitive in the district, couple guys ended up making it to professional sports. And it was a, you know, I look back, and it was a special time, you know, we just—and I can remember in the summer—I, lot of times in the summer teams, I'd be the token white guy out there playing. And I never thought about it, but we'd play some of these teams that were...from, you know, they, uh, were pretty white teams, for lack of a better word. Nice guys and after the game, they'd say, "you're the only white guy out there playing," and I said, "well, yeah," and I said, "well, [...] so?" and usually we'd win the game, so, uh, but I noticed and this is where it bothered me, I—and years later, I've,

you know, that--from that era, you know, I just—I've had a lot of black friends, and they ask me to play on their teams. I'd say, this, "we have an all-black tournament, you're allowed to have two white guys on the team, you want to play with us." I'd say, "yeah" and I took it as an honor first, you know, they think you can play a little bit and you know, want—so I had more fun, and—and it was never, you know, just—but I can remember a few times going to—and again with my black friends, we a couple times went into gyms and locker rooms and they'd say, "well, we—we're full now." And I'd say, "Well, what do you mean you're full, you called me" and it was cuz, you know, the black kids, they didn't want to come. And I said, well, I won't tell you what I told them, but, I didn't go back to some of those gyms, but I said it—you know, it does exist. And it bothered me and it—you know, just, uh—and I think it's come a whole, a long way. But I—and I've been on both sides of it, you know, where, uh—but you know, it shouldn't be the color of your skin. So you live and learn, but, you know, so it's uh, so I made the most of the opportunity and, uh, so that was pretty much my experience with that. A lot of the coaches from George Wythe, here it is 40 years later and we still stay in touch. You know, they'll call me and we'll talk an hour or two. And it's—so that's kind of special, and that time, I think, helped with a whole lot of that. We went through a transitional time in American History.

LB: You really did. Were there any interactions that you had with your fellow students or teachers or administrators that stick out in your mind?

MP: I can remember the, uh, there was a Spanish teacher that I had, uh, Mrs. Washington, that I liked quite a bit. And I can still hear her saying, uh, we'd ask her fifty-million questions a day, she'd say, "Rest your nerves, child." But, somehow she—asked—excuse me—she asked me, she said, "We'd like you to be on a white-black committee for race relations," and I said--

LB: Was she white or black?

MP: She was black. And the, uh, a lot of the black teachers were—I don't—uh, they looked out for me. They'd have some event and they said you oughta look into this or look into that, and it was uh—and some of those teachers I'm still—you know, they're still around and I stay in touch with, but the majority were... had a lot of black teachers that kinda took me under their wing and uh... the other incident I remember, too, was the Jeroy Green (?) who became [Sy Ellamine??] that was a walk-out and I was sitting in the middle of the, uh, event that day—that was probably my freshman or sophomore year.

LB: Tell me about that.

MP: Uh, the—and again, this is, uh, this was Black History week. We would—and I'd say that's nice that they have, and it it—I think it was in February. And this bright attorney Jeroy Green came to the school and... First time I experienced where there was walk-out, and it kinda had some overtones, if you will, and uh...

LB: Why did people walk out?

MP: Uh...I—it was uh—

LB: What was Jeroy Green saying?

MP: Uh, his comments, uh, I remember a couple. Like, uh... comments about the...I think, being—just the word “honky” stands out. And it got a little—uh... you can just kinda tell the tension. And I said, well I... sat there and, might as well hear what the guy has to say, and I... and, and looking back it doesn't make - and who am I to judge, but I listened through it and I said, it's a different perspective of what people feel, and it—again it's the heart of the—it's a whole lot of tension going on in the country. And, uh... but anyway, I think the first time I've—you know, at that young age, you kinda being called some names, and I said, you know, I guess.... It's what it is. I sat in there and there were people that walked out that day...

LB: White kids or black kids or both?

MP: Mostly white kids. But the black friends, you know, said, you know, and they said this—a lot of them said this isn't right and they said—comment was “stay around me, we'll make sure everything, you get outta here ok.” So, uh.. and that was, uh, quite a day that we all—you know, I remember that pretty good. But I just sat there and listened to it and went back to class. And I think maybe I was naïve to a lot of things, but my mother never drove a car. And I can think of her getting up six in the morning. And again, that dag-on phone ringing to get us out of bed. And so we just showed up, you know. It wasn't like, don't make an excuse, you still go there and that's—you have the opportunity to get an education. And it's not gonna be perfect, but uh—so that was just a little—I looked at it as a little blip on the radar. And I went back to class, next thing, I said, well everybody's talking about this a whole lot. And I looked at it, said, well, hey, it got us out of class for the day. So... you know, I just—in that time, I just, uh—you just kept going and you had one incident that happened and you just—I just shake it off and keep going, you know, you keep plugging.

LB: I'll tell you something hilarious. When we did the play, not a single student in our class knew what the word “honky” meant.

MP: Yeah. Oh, they didn't?

LB: They didn't, they'd never heard it before.

MP: Yeah. Right. And I've been called, on the sports field, I've been called that word, and I just shook it off. You act like you don't hear it. And I—it's, you know, I'm sure it's... on, uh, whether you're black or white, we've all heard terms, but, you know, I just... that's the worst thing I've ever been called, so be it. And I said, “ok, alright.”

And then you—it's a way to diffuse it—and I said, "anything else?" They said, "no, man." So it was pretty, you know, you just shake it off and some—you know, just—but the—that was an experience that stood out. Uh, the other incidents I remember was like on the, playing the music, again I remember being in a parade, and I think we came in third place. There were only three bands in it, but... and I remember people throwing stuff at us—all of us, the whole band—and I said, I remember that incident. And playing the Star Spangled Banner one time, and the—before the game and we pulled up in our proud yellow school bus and it was a party when we went to those, when we got on that bus, it wasn't just sitting there. We were playing the music of the times, and it was it, it was a tremendous amount of fun. I mean, some of that music I can still remember and a lot of these groups were coming out of Woodstock like Sly and the Family Stone. Jimmie Hendricks was arguably the greatest guitarist of the times, you know, the rock guitarist. But that music was uh, we would play it on the buses and I had—there were, I think three white people in the band and I felt honored, they'd say, "hey, come on, blue-eyed soul" and we'd be playing Isaac Hayes, that music, the Temptations. And we were—I think they were calling us the Bulldog Horns. And it was just more fun. It was just a good time. And we would play it on the bus to the ball field but I remember one time they said, someone tipped us off and this is telling my age, but there were no cell phones, facebook, so word-of-mouth, if you told someone you were gonna be there, you were there, otherwise they're not gonna deal with you anymore and we just showed up. So I can remember a couple of the parents—some of the, uh, ladies on the—in the band, their parents would ride on the school buses, their parents were concerned about the safety issue. And so if you picture our—we had the drummer and French horn player, I was the trumpet player, trombone player, maybe a sax, or, maybe 5, 6, 7 of us. So we're playing the Star Spangled Banner and I can remember the, uh, teacher who's our conductor, he said, he's looking around and he's telling us to speed up and I think it was the quickest Star Spangled Banner that's ever been played. He said, "Let's get the... hell outta here"—excuse me—but he said, next thing, we see these guys coming after us with chains. And I said, uh, that day, I said, well, "Thank God I'm playing the trumpet and not the tuba" and they said, what'd you do, and we ran like heck, got on the bus and took off and—

LB: Where were you?

MP: The old city stadium, where University of Richmond played their football games for years. And that was just the times. So they said, "What'd you do?" Said, "Got on the bus, went back, next day just did it all over again." But that was kind of the excitement—

LB: And was it a white mob or a black mob?

MP: Nah, I think it was another school, it was...

LB: Oh, another school.

MP: Yeah, it was another—it was a rivalry. It wasn't a racial thing, it was just a rival school that, they didn't want us playing, you know, whatever football team. And that was kinda... And I said, looking back, I said, well, we got back on the bus and did it again. It wasn't—but that was the times and we, and we didn't—just laughed about it, said, hey, we'll play, we'll be closer to the 20-yard line next time. But that was kind of the events of that era and it wasn't... you know, it's just, you just do your thing, go back to school the next day.

LB: It is what it is.

MP: Yeah.

LB: Can you think of an example of really good leadership you experienced at this point and leadership that wasn't so good?

MP: Uh... I can probably... had a few classes that, uh... some of the teachers just, lack of a better word, were apathetic. And looking back, they—I think their interest was maybe to get out of the school and, you know, as soon as they could have the opportunity, they're gone. And probably didn't care if they, uh... what happened to the students, maybe, and I saw that in cases, you know, and... and it's sad but I—that might happen in any school, but there were some apathetic teachers that—that didn't care. And as a result, you know, you just kind of, uh... you know, the teacher's still the one running the classroom, so to speak, so you just kind of rise above it.

LB: How about in the greater Richmond community. Do you think of good leadership and bad leadership at this point?

MP: Where we are today?

LB: No, at that point in history.

MP: Um. I think the, uh, you still had a transitional time where the, uh... maybe the — and when George Wythe was bused, there were, you know, there were still the— George Wythe being on the Southside, there were not a whole lot of city Southside schools. Huguenot was originally in the county and that was part of the annexation. You had Thompson which had the middle school, and then Huguenot. So, a lot of the other schools were on the other side of town, uh... John Marshall was a very similar, uh, building, even, similar. That—that was another city school. But you had Maggie Walker and Armstrong, which, uh, lot of loyalty with those schools. They were, uh, African American Schools that a lot of the kids that came to George Wythe would have gone there, and... and they still talk about the Armstrong Walker classic (?) city stadium would be packed at football games, and it was big happenings. That was a big part, and uh, that kind of changed the dynamics of Richmond when the busing took place. That era was maybe, uh, not what it was, you know. They brought that game back, but it was a bit event. So some of those dynamics changed at the time, but Thomas Jefferson was a, uh, another school that it—back, way way back it was

uh, the cadet corp was real big. George Wythe had a cadet corp, too, and, uh my friend Philip Brunson (?) w—could tell you a few stories on that, but that was real big in that era. George Wythe still has a, like an ROTC program, if I'm not mistaken, but... So you had a few things that were, uh, changing. The sports scene—I—I can—I talked to a... a person that's at George Wythe—she's—she went through the George Wythe experience. She was black in the class of like the late '60s. And she came in and I talked to her one day, probably for a half-an-hour or so and she gave me good perspective, too, talking about that time, and a lot of the white schools didn't play the black schools in sports and then she told me that they announced that the, uh... George Wythe would start playing some of the other schools that they had in the past and some of the coaches opposed it. And she said, I thought it was great. She told me the story of taking a history class and she was very bright and, uh, I think she got the highest grade in the class. And the teacher would put the star pupil of the week up and got to sit in a certain class, and, she said she got the atten—she said everybody was real good to her, but, you know, there were still a lot of kids—you know, the racism factor. And she said the guidance counselor wasn't very encouraging for her to go to college and she had—uh, she went, and she had some scholarship offers, but, uh, those were the times. So that's poor leadership, to answer your question, you know. Whatever counselor told her that, uh, should have been encouraging her. So it was a big transition, I think in that time, too, just in talking to the people of the '60s and '70s and now kids even '80s and '90s that went to George Wythe.

LB: Did people in your—did your family talk about the kinds of changes that were going on in Richmond at this point.

MP: Uh, I think, uh—

LB: You know, when you're sitting around the dinner table, or...

MP: Well, kind of, uh, and I guess my father was, uh... maybe a little different in the sense, he—he had a business, right after World War II. We have an old family church that dates back to 1838, I was telling you about. And it's in the old country church, and my mother—uh, that's in South Hampton County, Virginia, and my mother lived on the North Carolina side, North Hampton County, and, so, long story short, they met and got married. She was a, uh, a guess a war brat, World War II. And growing up in the country, they—they had friends, it was neighborhood kids and our church. And I looked through some of the old... 1877, there were—we had African American members of the church. And—and it's a Methodist church, and it's uh... and I—looking back in my background, we—we've always had black friends, and it—I never thought about it, and—but my father, uh, his business was on Hull Street, which is a pretty—it's called the, uh, Old Manchester District, it's very—uh, back in the early 1900s, very thriving business area. But his office was the—an old bank building across from the police precinct on, uh, Hull Street.

LB: What was his business?

MP: It was, uh, he did tank-lining. He said I do everything that no sane person would do. But he—he and I laugh about it, but he loved sports, and uh, but he played country ball and he was just a real good old fella and any hobo or anyone down on their luck, he'd say, hey—and I still do it, too, if someone's short on money, he'd hand them a dollar, five dollars. And he had guys that worked for him, that, you know, some w—they literally had places of guys standing around a fire and looking for work and he'd give them a chance. And he had a good soul, and uh... But he would let those guys if they couldn't, didn't have a place to sleep, he'd say "here's a key to the shop." And it didn't matter if it was white guys, black guys, just—you know, he just had a good heart about him. And, uh... Christmas time, the doors—and, I had a little band, we would go and play and this, it was a predominantly African American community. And I can remember—eleven o'clock at night, we thought we were gonna be the next Rolling Stones – didn't happen. But we would sit out there and just, uh... we'd play music, and open the doors up and it was, uh, just a good time, and it, uh—so the white, black—he had some property that he had and it was in an African American community, and, you know, we just got along with everybody and that was how I was brought up. And so, sitting around the uh... dinner table, I can remember my mother's biggest thing was "Have you all got ballgames this week"—we were *busy* all the time, so... it wasn't, uh—there was a show *Leave it to Beaver*, and I—I said, they got to sit down to dinner, and we would do it when we could, but everybody was—my brother and I were playing sports, so we had to be on that ball field at six or seven. [phone rings] That's alright—at six or seven, so we stayed busy and it was, uh—the event of the day—the biggest topic was, uh, "did you pass your test?" And that was good, so you're not flunking. And, uh, "Did the team win?" So they were the big highlights, you know, that was—that was what we did.

LB: So that was the focus.

MP: Focus and it never was like, uh, brought it—I—I—really, looking back, that's a very good question. It wasn't like, uh... your white friends or black friends, and like, his question would be "Can the guy pitch?" or, you know, "He can help the team?" and "Who's playing leftfield" and like, "Hey, I like that guy, he can hit." And he would come to the games. My dad would yell so much, my mother would sit at the other end of the bench with my aunt. But we had fun, you know. It was just, like—everybody was busy. Four-thirty, I'm delivering papers. Six o'clock, hopefully you're back home. Seven, you gotta be at school. Two o'clock, uh, I'm on the ball field. Five, and then, you'd get home, I'd study until eleven and do it again. And looking back, uh, from freshman year through senior year, I didn't miss a day of high school. I wanted to be there, and—with my friends, you know, we just—and I wish, uh, and there wasn't but so many hours in a day, and... Friday nights we'd go out and socialize. I think *Shoney's* was the place we'd go after a football game. And it was black kids, white kids, and, you know, we just had—had fun, you know. There were people that, uh, you didn't see a whole lot, you probably wish you would have seen

them more. But, yeah, so it was a good experience. When I went to college, Randolph Macon, uh, a lot of the friends—and we stay in touch, it was a different, uh, time, it was a small liberal arts school and I played, fortunately, I was able to play baseball for four years. And, uh, a couple of the guys, I'll tell them about playing for George Wythe. And—and they're like talking about Coach Sussey, they said "I wish I could have pa—played for him. He was... a legendary coach." So I had a—to this day, here I am at the age of 56, I still play softball, I'm the old man on the team. And I—little trick-plays that he taught us that these guys are shaking their head and I said "Coach Sussey taught me that." So, you know, you learn to think. So, you know, it was a good time.

LB: Definitely. Um, what were some of your personal turning points during the Civil Rights Era in Richmond.

MP: Uh... probably the, uh... I think when...and I remember—and I've met, like, Governor Wilder, for example, and I'd followed his career, and I spent years in the boat business and I had the pleasure of meeting him a couple times and I actually still see him and stay in touch, but uh... that was good, he was the first elected, uh, African American Governor, and that—that was—you know, you could see that coming to be, that was pretty exciting here in Richmond. He attended Virginia Union Univeristy and uh... so I always respected that, the Arthur Ashe, I can remember—and again, you've got the...as a... sports fan in Richmond, uh, the Richmond Coliseum used to have a team called the Virginia Squires. There was a—the best player was Dr. J (?), Julius Irving, who when the American Basketball Association... uh... fail—you know, that—went a—went aside, he went to the MBA. So, seeing those guys, uh, just compete and go to another level and starting to get, you know, the recognition. I can remember, uh, and this, again to the sports, Jackie Robinson who broke the color barrier, uh, I—I can remember that Hank Aaron when I was in high school, I wore the number forty-four and that was Hank Aaron's number. And uh... there were three—my—and this, back in that time, my favorite players growing up were Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, and Mickey Mantle. And, you know, just—they could hit the long ball, and so you patterned yourself after this, who I want to play like, and those guys were in a league of their own, but, so, but I can remember when Hank Aaron broke the homerun record, here the guy's hitting 715 homeruns and people were booing him, I said, something wrong with that. And he put up a lot of stuff, so I said, good for him, and, you know—so you look back and it's been a struggle for a long time, so I think we've come a long way, but, you know, so you see, uh, what other people have gone through in—to getting where they are. And I think the, like, Martin, Dr. King, uh, the movement in Washington, he did it peacefully, you know. So it's come a long way, you know, it's a...

LB: How about in your own personal life, were there any moments where you could look back and say, well it was different before, than it was after that moment – you know what I'm saying?

MP: Yeah, uh... I think the, uh... like the classrooms, uh... kids getting the opportunity, uh... you know, the scholarships I think are greatly improved now. Uh, the—all—a lot of the colleges, you know, they're more, uh - it's more of a mix, you know, diversity.

LB: But how about you personally during that time when you were growing up. Did you have an experience that you look back and say, that single experience really changed me? Or changed the way I looked at things.

MP: Uh, yeah, I think one time going to, uh... I can remember this is, uh—you mean when I was at George Wythe?

LB: Yeah. Or you know, any time that you were a kid.

MP: Uh, I think, uh... probably when I was, uh, playing ball, you know, going to another playground and we were like, uh... the area that we were in was pretty rough and couple of, uh... comments, you know, just like, hey you guys win, you won't get out of here, and... and that was like, I said, what're they talkin— we're real naïve and a couple of guys on my team were, uh, they played football, you know, both sports and... so it's like, you know this... sometime—and it wasn't—uh, sometimes it was, uh, other groups, too. Could have been a Hispanic group or something. I said, this racism needs to stop, you know. Everybody should be on the same page. But I can remember going to a few gyms and uh, where, you know, we had friends with us, and all of a sudden they said "Well, ya'll can't play" and it was because we had an African American friend with us, and that bothered me a whole lot, I said... and I let it be known, too, and I said, you know, "you all are prejudice." And I—that, that bothered me and I—years later and this is probably 15, 20 years back—I was playing with a group of my friends. We'd go up to a softball tournament and—out of state—and I'm playing shortstop and we're—we have a—this team, some of the best talent I've ever seen. And we're playing a team and I—and we have come back from the later innings to basically win. Next thing, they're protesting, and saying... and I got called a few names afterwards and I s—and I—these guys all didn't—they didn't like them calling—but it was because of the—it was some tension there, and I—that was... put it back in perspective, I said, this shouldn't be happening, but it was a...uh, team that was from Richmond and I'd played with a couple of the guys. And I think the fact that we were beating them pretty bad, they—we just had a good team. And so it's a few, uh, racial comments, uh, that—I said, you guys, I said, this is not, I said, this is modern times. Ya'll might need to grow up a little bit and, so I like, a sports field teaches you a lot. So that was, uh—but I thought back in the earlier days, I said, this shouldn't still be happening. And so, um, anyway, we had good teams and I said, hey, we just like to play. But, uh, I saw it on the ball fields a lot.

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

MP: Uh, I—I have a... a very open perspective, you know... I don't discriminate. It's helped me get in a lot of doors. Someone said—I had a football coach tell me—I showed up at a Hall of Fame banquet down in Portsmouth, and as I walked in, I knew a couple of the guys that had played professional ball. Said "you know everybody, don't you? And I said, "No, not really. I—one or two," but... he's [?]-he's just sitting there and he's the uh... head coach of a sports program, and he said, "that's good," but I've, uh... just—my brother, I think, I embarrass is a—he's a principal of a high school, and he went up—my dad was like that, too, he would speak to everybody. It hurts my f—I... maybe it's a local thing, but, if I see someone, "hey how's it going." Not everybody speaks, if they don't it kind of hurts my feelings a little bit. My father was like that, but... my brother, we're at a football game—his high school team was playing for the state football championship. And I said, "I'll see you guys in a minute." And next thing, I'm over at the... uh, another team that's getting ready to play after him. He said—my dad's nickname was C-Daddy (?) because he played—he was in the navy. He said, "You're just like C-Daddy. You never met a stranger, have you?" And next thing, they—the guy that I was looking for showed up, so...I said, "Well he's on my church softball league." But, uh... but I think to answer your question, it's uh... I just open doors to everyone, you know. Just, give them a chance. Not ev—not everybody—you might not become friends with, but... give them a chance, you know. At least, uh... doesn't hurt to say hello.

LB: So... when you... when you think back, are there things that you'd like the generation of kids growing up in Richmond today to know?

MP: Uh, yeah, I think so. I think the, uh—I think this part of the Richmond Public Schools or anyone that lives in Richmond should know the history. Uh, the Civil Rights movement, it's come a long way, and whether it's a—whoever's telling the story, that, uh—it happened, you know. It's, uh, been a long time coming and it's—yeah, it doesn't make everything right that's ever happened, but we've evolved. And I think, uh, if you keep your eyes open, you can make things happen. You can open up a lot of doors, uh... Don't shut people out because of their color.

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

MP: Uh, I—I think the, uh... like, this neighborhood... you know, a lot of the, uh—there was a—I had a knock on the door the other night and it was a fella, he said, "This... gentleman, uh, said that he painted your house, do you recommend him." And he said, "Yeah, I think he'd do a good job for you." And... and he started looking around and... and he—next thing he said—he had gone to a private school, and at first—he said "Where'd you go?" and I said "George Wythe." He said, "Oh, really?" He said—and, the school—and I won't name it—he said, "I went there because of all the mess ya'll went through" and I... and I kind of get a little defensive, maybe. I said, well... and I let him talk, and... and I—you know, I said, "well what do you mean" and he said "Well, because it's rough" or something. I said, "Well..." I said "well I was up there a month ago" and I said "I... sat in the classroom with a couple kids and... did

alright.” And I said the—and a couple of the faculty up there I went to school with. And I said, “but that’s the perception,” I said, “the uh—the—it’s good kids in that school,” and I said, “we’ve got an alumni group that have gotten back in it.” And Robin Mines (?) that you know, bless her heart, she’s a heart of gold. And I said, “We’re... we’ve had fish fries trying to help the kids, we’ve given them scholarships, they’re going to very good schools, they just need some encouragement.” And I said... and he said, “Oh...” He said, “Well, that—that’s good.” And I’ve had a few, uh, uh... ministers contact me recently that are—I told them the story—I said we’re—I said, they’re good kids. I’m, uh, trying to put together, uh, basically an alumni softball tournament, and we’ll, and... I think we—and we’re still a bunch of old guys like me—uh, what we want to do is get some of the students involved, too... and have an alumni tournament and give the money back to the athletic department. And—and I’ll go up there to, uh, some good talent up there, it’s just uh, all things being equal, giving the kids the right opportunity, having some financial support, and... and they’ll do alright, you know, it’s, uh... it—it’s... they’ve got some challenges up there, but, uh... you know, the economy the way it is, too, they—they’re, like with the alumni group, uh... they know when you’re in the stands pulling for them, too. I’ll tell you one that kind of made me feel good. I had a George Wythe sweatshirt on, and I went down to the James Center and there’s a Wendy’s down there, I’ll sometimes walk down there from, uh, where I work, uh, to grab a sandwich. And I walked in, these... folks were all in line and they said, “George Wythe - you come here?” It’s like a little special treat and she said, “That’s where I go to school.” And I was talk—she said, “well I’ll look for you at a sports event.” So about two months later, I’m sitting in the stands, basketball game, and she came over and spoke. She said, “I’m on that girls’ basketball team.” So... so, and it—and they know the history of the school, the students that are up there now, and that’s where, I think if you show what—you know, where we were, it’s a little, a common bond there, like say, you went to whatever college, and uh... it’s a proud school. A lot of tradition in that school, and I think if you can teach it, they appreciate it that much more.

LB: Cuz that’s a school that’s really been through so many changes, being white, being integrated for a short period of time, and now it’s basically all African American, am I right?

MP: Yeah, pretty—yeah, you’re correct on that. It’s uh... pretty... um, I’d say statistically, uh... yeah, that’s an accurate statement. And... and so the, uh, the time that we were there, it was the—you know through the integration, the busing, and all - it was a transitional period, and... and it’s, yeah, I think you’re correct, it’s predominantly black now. And—and I’ve been up there, I—you know, try to go a couple times a year, and, uh, the—sat in on the... with the band class one day, and the teacher, uh—real nice—he said, “Tell your story.” And I said, “Hey, I sat in this room for five years.” I said, “You guys sound pretty good.” I said, “I might have to practice a little bit and I’ll come play with you.” And, interesting, I asked one of the students, “Who’s your, uh, favorite musician?” And he was a trumpet player, he said, “Jimmie Hendrix.” I said, “Jimmie Hendrix?” I said, “He’s back in my day.” He said, “Yeah, but he could play that guitar.” So, a lot of that influence—and I said, “Well he,”

I said, "We'll have to talk sometime," but, the... just—great kids, and they were coming up, high-fiving me and, uh, made me feel good, and the uh... So I walked around the school, and, uh, some of those trophies are still in there. And—and as an alumni, there are some other ideas I have that I hope—Rob and I are talking about that might help out, too. But I'm prou—I—I've been sitting at football games, college games, and somehow the conversation comes up, where'd you go to school, and it—next thing, the whole—everybody's looking and you're telling them the story. I—I said, "Yeah... we're George Wythe Bulldogs, proud of it." So, uh—we—and this neighborhood, uh...'bout—about a month ago, right after we, the night that you had that great presentation for University of Richmond. And everybody wants to know when you can put that on Youtube, they're still talking about it. But, uh, Janice Rossi (?), the—who was the cheerleader—uh, she said, "We'd like to—maybe we can get together one night to eat or something." And O'Toole's is a favorite spot up here. So I just, uh, told a few people. Next thing, we had 25 people show up, and we—there—we had the banq—little banquet room, it was probably more than that. And it wasn't enough, we're running out of tables. And people from the class of early 60s, on up through the 70s and early 80s came to it. I think, three hours later, we'd finally eaten and had a great time. We talked about the Civil Rights Era and what University of Richmond's been doing, too. So, you have a lot of kudos. Everybody's real, uh, pleased with it.

LB: Well... we couldn't have done it without you. You know that.

MP: Well, I appreciate it.

LB: It's really true. You were—I mean you were absolutely the lynchpin.

MP: So, I—I'm honored to do that. It's uh, I—I just, uh, glad I was able to participate in it. It's, uh--University of Richmond, there are a lot of George Wythe alums that have been fortunate enough to go to Richmond, so, uh...

LB: Well, I am just really excited to be doing all of these interviews with Wythe alums, because I think when you get them all together and you can see the portraits on the wall and everyone's stories next to them – you know, everyone's quotations...

MP: With the archives, it's uh, fantastic.

LB: Well, I'll tell you—here, I can turn this off now.

#2

LB: Say it all...

MP: Ok... So the other link the Civil Rights Movement maybe is we have a church down in South Hampton County Virginia. Back in 1831, it was the largest slave

insurrection. Uh, Nat Turner, uh, led the rebellion and my link to the story is my—we have a church person, United Methodist Church, which I’m—try to stay active with, go down two or three times a month, this little old country church... And, uh, and behind the church there was an old millpond. My great-great-grandfather—it was called Person’s millpond. Well, Mr. Turner, uh, this goes back to 1827—I’ve read a lot of history about it, but, uh, they used to have baptisms on the millpond. And that was done—a lot of the Baptist, Methodist, uh, that was quite the event back in that day. They’d lay someone’s head down and, uh, in the water, and we—maybe you’ve seen the views of it, but that was how it was done, and now, this day in time, a lot of times the, uh, pool is in the church, but that was—that was the way it was traditionally done. And my, uh, great-great-grandfather, John Person said, “Hey, ya’ll help yourself, everybody’s welcome. Use my millpond anytime.” So, in—in my studies, that day they said it was a standing-room-only event. There were white people, black people. And Nat Turner and Mr. Brantley were both baptized on the millpond. And according to legend, uh, this I’ve heard several of the elders say, that a white dove appeared from the skies and landed on Nat Turner’s head. Uh, but the week before, later 1831, there was an insurrection—a rebellion, if you will—and, uh... the... story goes—and this— this is all, uh, there was a book Thomas Gray wrote on the confessions of Nat Turner. And Nat Turner was actually the, uh, led the rebellion—his story—he was a very bright man, he was a slave. And, uh, he’s a talented carpenter, also. And he—he—they called him the prophet, was his other name. And the week before the insurrection, there were a lot of, uh, its just history so it’s what it is. There were a lot of people tragically killed. And the, uh, week before the insurrection, he preached the book of Revelations to a church. And Nat Turner had a bible—little, small—about the size of the palm of your hand that he carried around in his back pocket. And when the insurrection took place, uh, he had preached that story of Revelations before, and it was about the serpent coming loose, and uh, so that—that bible—uh, the story goes, Nat Turner—there were a lot of people that were tragically killed, and, uh, and I had a great-great-grandmother that was actually hidden in a closet and a slave saved her life. So, uh, that day, if that hadn’t happened, I wouldn’t be telling this story, so I have a lot of, uh, thanks there, but... And I’m not uh... to condemn anyone, that’s history, so, uh, as a—my background, you... you know, you forgive and forget. But it was tragic part of American History. But around 1910, there’s a, uh, Nat Turner was eventually hanged and the bible stayed in the jail in Jerusalem, which is now Courtland, that’s the court house. And a, uh, basically the 1910, my cousin, Morris Person, his father, Walter, uh, was given the bible of Nat Turner. And here it is 100-plus years later, uh, the family, Morris, made the decision that bible was going to the Smithsonian, to the new African American museum that will be opening in three years. And president Obama was there for the groundbreaking ceremony.

LB: How did the bible end up in your family?

MP: Uh, the story was my... my great grandfather, Junius Person, married Anne Eliza Francis. Her mother was Lavinia Francis (?), and when the insurrection took place, Levenia (?) was actually hidden in a cubbyhole, and, uh, Red Nelson (?) was his

name, saved her life, he hid her during that night, and so the, uh, officials at the prison knew the link to the Person and Francis family and, uh, so they—they knew the story. So my ancestors were, uh, he knew the connection. And we're from South Hampton, he knew the story with the baptismal on the church grounds at the old millpond, and thought that was a logical choice to give to the bible with the history of it. And for years, the bible stayed in a safe deposit box, but tragically, the book of Revelations—my, uh—is missing. That—and—uh, story goes, and, uh, my cousin would bring the bible to the family reunions, we'd see it on occasion, but someone stole the book of Revelations. And it's missing. And we think possibly, hopefully we'll get it back one day. But, uh, the... uh, other... thing... we think Nat Turner would want it where it's gone, too, so, um—a lot of people generations from now will know the story and see it, too. So, it's, uh, in good shape for 180-some-year-old bible, but, uh, but he kept it in his pocket for years, and he—he preached and very well-educated, self-taught man, so uh... part of our American history that's been talked about and the stories, uh—the Washington Post did the story on the bible, so that's, uh... maybe 40 years from now, you know, someone will at least know the link there.