

**GRTC**

**Interview: Marshall Avent**

Laura Browder: Probably not since we don't have a video camera in here, but that's just a kind of--

Marshall Avent: Ok.

LB: ...catch-all release form that we use.

MA: Ok. Alright. [Long pause.] You gon--uh, email me this first, so I can look at it?

LB: Hmm?

MA: You--are you gonna email me this first so I can look at it?

LB: If you'd like, I'd be happy to, yeah.

MA: Ok.

LB: Um. Basically, for the exhibition, what I'm gonna do is... I'll get this interview transcribed--

MA: Mm hmm.

LB: ... and then I'm gonna edit it down to three- to five-hundred words because that's about as much as people will read while they're looking at a portrait.

MA: Ok.

LB: And I'd be very happy to send that to you.... Before we put it up there.

MA: Ok.... This is the 23rd?

LB: Yeah. [Pause.] Thank you very much.

MA: You're welcome.

LB: And now... can we start off with you telling me something about... where you grew up, how you grew up...

MA: Ok.

LB: ... tell me about your childhood.

MA: I grew up on the farm in Pleasant Hill, North Carolina. And, um... we... were poor. But we

didn't realize that we were poor because we had to work for everything we got. Our father made sure that we, uh... had some pretty good standards. He taught us right from wrong. Made us go to church--took us to church. Made us go with him, and, uh... and that was, you know, kinda the gist of childhood, you know, we--I had, uh... four sisters... and one brother. And, um... you know, it's six of us. All total. And, um... like I said, we had--we had--we had pretty good life. You know, it was, you know...

LB: What--where were you in the family -- oldest, youngest, in between?

MA: In the middle.

LB: In the middle.

MA: Mm hmm.

LB: And what kind of a farm was it, what'd you--what'd you grow or farm?

MA: Uh... cotton, corn, peanuts. We raised, um, livestock, hogs, uh, we had a couple of cows and, you know, stuff like that.

LB: So it was pretty much everything.

MA: Uh, yeah. But it was a small farm. And, you know... um, it finally got the point that a small farm... small farmers couldn't make it, uh... you know, because of just the, you know, you had to kind of do it in a big way. So my father took on a public job. And the last year--my senior year in high school, I pretty much did the farming, and... after that, we went out of business. I guess I put him out of business. Or--or I finished putting him out of business. [Laughs.]

LB: So what happened after that?

MA: Uh... well, I was supposed to, uh... I had two sisters in college. And I was the... well, actually--actually I was the fourth child. I had one that graduated college and two already in college and... I was supposed to've been going to college, but... um... I didn't really wanna go to college at that point. And, uh, financially, we couldn't afford it anyway, so I just... uh, I got a job.

LB: And what year was this?

MA: This was in 1969.

LB: Ok. So you got a job there in Pleasant Hill or--?

MA: In--well, yeah. Uh, I worked... well, the summer I got out of high school, I... worked in Emporia, Virginia in a bakery. And then, um... that fall, got laid off from the bakery, but I had found a job--another job... uh, in Conway, North Carolina at a particle board factory. Worked--my father worked there, actually. And so that was Georgia Pacific. And I worked there... uh...

for about a year. Then... I went... I got a job at Albemarle Paper Company in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, and I worked there for... probably about--maybe six months. Um... we were on a shift... that was on call? And we were kinda like... you know, we--they would work--ask you to work [?] as you need it--as they need you? So... I would work maybe... two or three weeks and get laid off for two or three weeks and... that wasn't... very productive for me, so [laughs].... But luckily I was living at home, so, you know, it... you know, I could make it. Uh... then I... w--uh, got a job in Jarrett, Virginia (?), uh, in Johns Manfold (?). That was another, uh, factory. And I worked there for couple of years. And, um... by then I had, uh--the sisters that were in college had graduated, and so I had a sister that was living here in Richmond. She got married and, you know, moved to Richmond. And they, uh... told me that I needed to come up here and apply for a job with transit. So... got a vacation. And I came up and I applied for the job with transit and I applied for another job. And so when I came to Richmond in 19...73, I actually had two jobs. And I took the job with transit. Cuz, you know, both--I had, like, two jobs that came through. And so, I took the one that paid the most.

LB: That makes sense.

MA: Yeah. So...

LB: So, tell me about your training when you got here and... tell me about what it was like when you first started working.

MA: [Laughs.] Well, that was... early 70s, uh... the training was three weeks. Uh, nonstop for 21 days. Um... we had to... we had a couple days of classroom. And then we had to go out and ride buses and we had to... drive buses with operators and then when we finished, we had, uh the day... we had to ride more buses. Uh... you know, expose ourselves to the routes. And, um... it was kinda grueling. You know, but... you know, we... we made it through. Um... that's... pretty much it. When I--when I... when I came here to apply and--and I applied for the job... they told me to, uh, go to DMV and get, uh... a chauffeur's learners permit so that I could, you know--cuz you had to be eligible to get a chauffeur's license. Well... when I went to DMV, they told me--uh, they asked me if I had ever driven... a bus. Well, I--you know, in North Carolina at that time, they would let you drive a--uh, school bus if, you know, if you were in high school, if you had a license. So I drove a school bus. So... they said, 'well, did--did you drive 500 hours or more?' And... I didn't know but I said yeah.

[Laughter.]

MA: So anyway, I took the test and I got my chauffeur's license. Yeah, and so, uh... at that point I had no Virginia address so I put North Carolina address on it. And they told me to change it when I came back. So I did.

LB: Yeah, I was talking to David Edmonds earlier, um, this week and he said that... on his 16th birthday he got his drivers license and the next day he started driving the school bus for his school!

MA: Yeah.

LB: And so that--it sounds like that was kinda common.

MA: Exactly. Exactly, yeah, I--you know, I got my driver's license when I was 16 years old. And, you know, growing up on the farm, we had--operated farm equipment, so I could drive--

LB: Yeah.

MA: ... you know, I been driving since I was about five years old. And, uh... we had to operate--

LB: Did you say five years old?

MA: Yeah, I used to sit in my father's lap and drive. See, we always had a tractor? You know... when I was nine years old, I was in the field with the tractor plowing. So, you know, I mean... driving was common. You know.

LB: Yeah.

MA: For country--country--country--country people. You know, so... Uh, and then you know, there's no public transportation so if you don't learn how to drive, you... you in--you in trouble. So...

[Laughter.]

LB: I mean, cuz I've got a son who just turned 10 and the idea of him driving... is... frightening to me [laughs].

MA: You need to go on and start teaching--teaching the boy how to drive!

LB: I know it!

MA: Yeah.

LB: Now that I've talked to you, I... I feel like I've gotta change my attitude.

MA: Yeah. Just--just, you know, just... let him drive a little bit. Take him to the park or... any place that, you know, he won't get... um... sited... for--for driving without a license [laughs].

LB: I'm gonna tell him I talked to you and he's gonna find your story very inspiring.

MA: Yeah. Cuz I, uh... cuz I taught my brother how to drive. My father taught me and I taught my brother--my brother and, you know, we just--it was a hand-me-down... thing. You know.

LB: So... what were your first days like when you started operating the bus? Here, I mean. For the GRTC.

MA: Well... I was from the country. Uh... had never been to a city, and it was scary. You know. Uh, I had never ridden a transit but until I drove one.

LB: Wow.

MA: And so, you know, um... it was--it--it was scary, and, uh... and then coming to a... a city... where... you know, I had never been before. Everything kinda looked the same. So, you know, I got--I got lost a lot. But I didn't get lost in the same place. More than one time. [Laughs.]

LB: Where did you live when you first came here?

MA: Uh, I lived with my sister. They had, uh... a house over on [Vager?] Lane in east Henrico County.

LB: OK.

MA: And so I--I moved in with her. I stayed with her... uh for a while and then I had another sister that lived here. And her husband went into the military so I moved in with her. That was out in West End. And, uh, then he was transferred and so she... moved with him so by then I was ready to get my own apartment, so I got an apartment. And, uh... I've been on my own ever since.

LB: Now... tell me something about what your favorite parts and least favorite parts of the job are.

MA: Uh... I used to love dealing with the, uh... the people. Um... you know, my... my brother-in-law was a bus driver for a little while. And, uh... he used to always tell me, the people are [a?] party. And, you know, I found out that they were. You know, lotta really nice people... uh, here. You know, you run into a few... buttheads, excuse the expression. But, you know, for the most part, everybody treats you really nice. And, uh, if you treat them nice, they really look out for you. So, the people were really my favorite part of the job. Uh... having grown up on a farm and--and driving--I like to drive. And so... that was good, too. Course after I drove for a long time, it started to get a little bit tiring. Um... you know, but... I still did it for... thirty-one years, actually.

LB: Wow.

MA: Yeah.

LB: And how did you come to be union president?

MA: Well... uh... I served as brice--as vice president. I went into the union hall as vice president... in the year 1996. And, um... I stayed in there, working with the, uh, president. Until he retired in 2004. And so, he retired early, he appointed me president. And then when it came around for reelection, you know, I was reelected. So, uh... then I served for another three years.

And then I was voted out. [Laughs.]

LB: So that was, like, 2007?

MA: That was two-thousand, uh.... yeah, seven? 2008. 2008. Yeah.

LB: And then--

MA: Cuz I went in in 2004 and I was voted out in 2008.

LB: And then you had that period from 2009 to 2011 with no contract, which must've been...

MA: Well--

LB: ... I imagine frustrating.

MA: ...at that point, I was, uh.... Ok, I negotiated a contract in nineteen--in--in 2006. And... my successor, um... I don't know what happened. They... you know, my contract expired in 2009. And, um... they didn't get a contract. Until Frank was elected president. Um... I don't know why. You know, cuz at that point, I got--I, uh... I decided... I, you know, when I was voted out the union hall, I came back and I drove for maybe... three weeks. And I started to remember all of the... negative parts of driving that I had... learned over the--my thirty years. And I was like, I don't wanna do this again. So, uh, a supervisor position came open and I applied for it and I got it. And so... uh, then I was out of the union. Cuz that--you're a management employee. And management employee could not belong to the union.

LB: Ah... ok.

MA: So I lost track of... things that were going on with them. So I don't know why they didn't get a contract. You know, but... they didn't.

LB: So then you moved into the supervisor of safety, right?

MA: Uh, yeah, well I moved into, uh... I--when I--when I first came into supervision, I was... I worked the streets and, um... I was radio operator. Did everything that supervisors do.

LB: Mm hmm.

MA: And then a position came open, uh, for lead supervisor. And so, [clears throat], I applied for that... and I worked that position for a year. And then transportation safety came open and I was appointed to that position. And so I've been there... ever since.

LB: How do you like it?

MA: I like it. I like it. Yeah.

LB: Tell me about that job. What's interesting about it. What--what do you like?

MA: I like the--the--the... the variation of it?

LB: Yeah.

MA: Because you... you do a little bit of everything. Uh, you know, I'm... uh responsible for security. Uh... I advise--I go out and I ride with operators and I assist... what they do. And, you know, put the safety aspect to it. And advise them. Um... cuz I'm driven--driven for thirty years, I mean, you know, I... yeah, I could do that. Plus, I been driving all my life. And, uh... so I--I do that. I, uh... I look at the... safety aspects of, uh... of routes. And... you know, I try to advise on those. Um... I create... uh, presentations. For training. And, you know, and whatnot, cuz... during the course of my... union experience. Um... when I went in, we did--we--we--the union hall was not automated. We nev--we had no computers. And whatnot, so... uh... we got a computer. And... we had a secretary who... was... was--who had worked as a--uh, in a clerical job, and she came to drive a bus because she wanted more money. So, anyway, she was--she was good at what she was--uh, she was--she did in there. And so I learned a little bit from her, but... whenever she wasn't there, I'd try to do a little something on the computer and it seemed like the lines would jump... here, there, and everywhere and I couldn't get them back. So I said, well... probably need to go take... computer course. So I enrolled in J. Sergeant Reynolds and I took a computer course and... then I got interested in going back to school. So... um... I... kept going to J. Sergeant Reynolds and... I acquired my associates degree and then... I enrolled in VCU cuz I wanted to do little bit more. Well... back up a little bit. I--I [?] J. Sergeant Reynolds and I got my associate degree, but during the course of that, my wife and I decided to adopt a child. Because we had no children. And, uh, then we adopted, you know, our little girl. Who's 17 now.

LB: Wow.

MA: And I decided that I wanted to... leave more a legacy for her, so... uh... I decided to keep on going to school. Between the union and my little girl, I decided to keep on going to school. And a f--you know, various other reasons. I made a promise to my father that I was gonna go to college, but I didn't. So, I said, well... you know... hadn't planned to keep that promise, but you know, you... you gotta be careful what you promise. So anyway... uh... I... graduated from Reynolds. And then I went--I enrolled in VCU. Um... And I went to VCU for about a year but my shift started rotating. Cuz I was in supervision and I couldn't attend the classes. So... uh... I withdrew from VCU but I wanted to continue my education so I enrolled in University of Phoenix online. And I was able to do online courses in, you know, any time. You know. So, I finished with my, uh... bachelors degree there. And then I decided to keep on going so I went back and I got my MBA. Uh... and, you know, so I just kinda moved on from there.

LB: That's great.

MA: Yeah. So...

LB: It must've been challenging juggling everything like that.

MA: It was--still is, but you know...

LB: Yeah, I know.

MA: You do what you gotta do.

LB: I used to work at VCU. I was there a long time. And my students were always juggling...

MA: Yeah.

LB: Jobs, kids, everything.

MA: Yeah.

LB: And they kept on going which is... always so impressive, I thought.

MA: Well, you know, you, um... you get... Ok. Before I started... to go back to school, you know, I drove my bus, and... I rode around the streets of Richmond and I was... kind of the man. And I thought I was the man. Then when I got the job and when I was appointed to the job in the union hall and... I realize... you know, some of the things that I was gonna be doing and I decided to go back to school, I learned that... being the man... was not... it. At all. You know. Uh... we used to have this saying, I was as dumb as a brick? And so I--[laughs] I realize, you know, how far I was behind with technology and... just, you know, things in general, so I decided that I wanted to get myself back up to speed. So I kept on going to school. So...

LB: So... can you tell me... some of the biggest moments of change that you had in your job during the time you were a bus operator?

MA: ... The biggest moments of change probably... was going from... oh, well I guess watching the changes in equipment over the years. Um...we started out with old buses.... Some had air conditioning, some didn't. Uh, we went to, uh... completely new equipment. All of it has, you know, power-steering. Uh... computer technology. We even had some electric buses at one time. Uh, you know, cuz, you know, we have been experimenting with alternative, uh, fuels and--and whatnot, you know. And, uh... I... drove... the electric buses during the--during, uh, demonstrations. Um... I even took one to DC one time. Uh, and demonstrated, you know, well, [actually?], you know, they trucked it up there and I drove up there and I got the bus and, you know, drove it around a little bit in ch--gave some demonstrations. Um... so watching the equipment changes and... um... going from... I guess a predominantly white company to a predominantly African American company--well, I won't--well, yeah, yeah, I guess--I guess, we have... a lot of different ethnicity--that--ethnicities here now. Well, not a lotta different, but we have--do have different eth--ethnicities. Ethnicities.

LB: I just interviewed Julio Vidal and he said there were two Spanish-speaking drivers.

MA: Well, when I say--we don't have a lot, but we do have different ethnicity here.



LB: Yeah.

MA: Now, but at--but when I came here, it was predominately white and that was... kinda the way of the world (?). You know.

LB: Yeah, you know... uh, Bruce Korusek?

MA: Mm hmm.

LB: Just sent me a photograph of his training class in 1965--

MA: Yeah.

LB: And... it was.. almost all white men, there was one white woman, and two African American men.

MA: Yeah. Yeah.

LB: And... it's a lotta change! Since then.

MA: Lotta change. Lotta change. Now, I wasn't here at the time, but I'm told... that... when, uh, African American started--first started driving the buses that, uh, white folks used to call the police... on them. Said they stole the bus.

[Laughter.]

LB: Well, Richmond, I could--[laughs].

MA: Well, I mean, you know, this is... the heart of Dixie and the Civil War--

LB: [Laughing] It definitely is--

MA: ...was fought here and, you know, so... I'm not surprised. So, y--you know.

LB: I'm not either. But... it's different now.

MA: We've... yeah. We've done a lotta changing. A lotta changing.

LB: So did a lot of that change start happening in the... you came in '73?

MA: I came in '73.

LB: So... you must've been starting to see that change, then, cuz... cuz Frank West was...

MA: Harry West.

LB: Sorry--Harry West was telling me earlier today, that he started in 1970 right after he got home from Vietnam.

MA: Exactly.

LB: And he said that back then, he--he came back and he applied to, you know, the post office, police department, fire department and GRTC, cuz... all of those jobs were starting to open up--

MA: Yeah.

LB: ...for blacks then.

MA: Exactly. Um... and, you know... it was pretty much... it was pretty much assured that if you were military or if you... you know, had a pretty good record that... you could get employed in one of those jobs because... you know, that was the time of--of--of affirmative action and... uh... lotta legislation was going forth where you had to hire black... people and whatnot, you know, so... uh, you know, if you were, you know, m--uh, coming out of the military and you and a good record or if you just had a generally good record, you could get a job. At that [point?].

LB: But still it was--was it, like, three-quarters white at that time when you came in?

MA: When I came in, yeah, it was probably about three-quarters white. Yeah.

LB: And now it's...

MA: Probably...

LB: ...mainly a--yeah, three-quarters black, right?

MA: Mainly African American--yeah. And two Latinos.

[Laughter.]

LB: I thought that was so funny.

[Laughter.]

LB: So that's a--that's a huge change over time. Can you tell me about other changes that you've seen, thought about... etc. over your time... here at the GRTC, cuz it seems like it's an organization that's... that's been in a lot of flux. You must've been here for the 1975 strike?

MA: Yeah. I was in the strike.

LB: Was that the only strike you've had here.

MA: Yes.

LB: Ok.

MA: Well, that I know of. I--

LB: Yeah.

MA: I can't think of one before that. Yeah.

LB: And noth--nothing since then.

MA: No. Mm-mm. There have been threats, but no. Nothing. No strikes since then.

LB: So just a single 45-day strike.

MA: Yeah. Well, see, a lot of, you know--well, it's starting to change a little bit now but for the longest time, uh... a lot of people that were involved in the strikes, they did (?) for a long time after that, so, we all remember it... when it was, like--you know, when we... went on strike... uh, you know we were all gung-ho, we were gonna get this, we were gonna get that. But... when you go out on the street and you realize the realness of what's happening, you know, you don't have the money coming in, you know, and... uh, you know... at that time, I was single and... had my own apartment, but, um... you know, had a little bit of money saved, had paid things up [kinda head?] so... it didn't hit me too hard and I was able to go out and get a job. You know, uh... so that helped too but for a person with a family and really, *real* obligations, it was a real trying time. You know. Um... and so, you know, like I said, most--most of the people now... that went through that, are retiring--

LB: Yeah.

MA: ... a lot of them have come back to work part-time so they still remember. A lot of the young people didn't go through that. The majority of the young people that are here now... haven't been through that, but we, you know, we haven't forgot. You know. So... um... now that the whole work force is almost ready to change, it may happen again, but for the longest time, you know, we were all here and we knew about it and we didn't wanna do it again.

LB: Yeah, I could see that.

MA: Yeah.

LB: Although now, you know... I talk to teenagers and people in their twenties. They don't know what unions are, even.

MA: Well, yeah, the whole--the whole face of unions have, uh... have changed. Uh, a lot of people don't feel that unions are necessary now. Because... you know... of the amount of legislation and things that have changed, but... um.... as you live... you realize that, though a lot of things have changed, a lot of things still, uh, still the same. So... you know, um... even

though management--I still see the necessity of unions, you know, sometimes. Um... I can see... going from being a union employee, a union president, to where I am now. I can also see how sometimes, uh, union people take advantage of situations. You know, uh, I guess having worked in both areas, you know, gives me... that little insight.

LB: It's an unusual perspective.

MA: [Laughs.]

LB: ...I would think. You know, going from being a union president to being on the management side.

MA: [Laughs.] Yeah, it, uh... it's... definitely different. Yeah.

LB: Um... how do you--how do you feel that public perceptions of riding the bus have changed over your years at the GRTC? And--and how do you think that people who don't ride the bus see the GRTC or--or see buses in Richmond.

MA: Well, I think uh... public perception of the buses here... maybe... there's a lack of respect for... the... organization for the bus operators--and for people who ride the buses. I think... years ago, uh, people appreciate--people in the city of Richmond appreciated it more. Uh... but now... there've been surveys that have gone forth and I've also kinda seen it myself where, um... perceptions of bus--of--of--of people who ride buses in Richmond now is predominantly single... African American females. Uh, with children. And so they--it's looked as kind of like... a social service... thing. A welfare thing. You know. Um... I think... with the... increase in prices of fuel. And, um... pollution. I think it's--I think that the bus transit industry is starting to gain some more notoriety. But I find change to come slowly in Richmond. So, you know. It's getting better, but. Still slow.

LB: That's funny cuz you know, I grew up in Providence and I lived in Boston a long time, and I've lived in other cities and there everyone takes public transit. Right?

MA: Yeah, cuz see--

LB: Here it's different!

MA: See... here... um... there's more of an independence as far as having your own, you know, like, having your own car and... you know, here you're--you're in the country but not really. You--people--the people in the country but... most people don't think they are. Most people from Richmond don't think they're in the country.

LB: That's true.

MA: Uh, they--they--they think of themselves as a metropolitan area and... uh, they're... you know, about... things. Uh... they don't realize that... well, most people that are--that are from Richmond have lived here all their life and they... haven't ventured out so they just don't... they

don't get out much.

[Laughter.]

MA: [Laughing] So when you--when you don't get out much, you think things are, you know... fantastic.

[Laughter.]

MA: And, so, uh... places like Boston where you're from, New York, New Jersey... uh... you know, those places are more crowded and... the streets are more congest and... parking is kinda crazy. I find that when I got to New York, uh, a car is really a hassle, so you find a place to park and you leave it and you use public transportation. So that's the--that's what I do.

LB: But--

MA: But here... you know, it's--it's not like that.

LB: But, you know, Providence, where I grew up, it's... it's just like Richmond, right? There's no traffic, there's no congestion. But people are still taking the bus. Right? And it's not a big thing--

MA: Well... well, because--because, you know, that's the kind of the way things are... there. It's been--

LB: Yeah.

MA:... like handed down, but here... um, most people drive. If you go... you used to--you can go right outside of Richmond, out in any part of Chesterfield County where... you know, a bus doesn't run. Henrico county where a bus doesn't run. So people will still... you know, used to have having their cars and they're dependent on that. And so they get used to that and they don't want--they don't wanna ride the bus.

LB: Do you think they're afraid of the buses?

MA: I think... it's not as convenient as they would want it to be.

LB: Yeah.

MA: And some of them are afraid of it because... you know, they're--they're just used to--to doing their own thing, the way they wanna do it.

LB: And it's different if you're on the bus and you're--

MA: Yeah.

LB: ...you're on someone else's route.

MA: Yeah, I mean, you know, some just don't know.

LB: [Laughs.]

MA: Cuz they don't get out much.

[Laughter.]

LB: So Mr. Avent, how do you like to spend your time when you're not working?

MA: Uh... I just kinda like to relax at home with my family. Um...

LB: Is your daughter still in high school?

MA: Yeah. Yeah, she's in 11th grade. And, uh... she just got a drivers license and, you know, she knows everything. You know. [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.] I've got a thirteen-year old and she knows everything.

MA: Yeah. So. Yeah. Uh...

LB: Where--where does she got to high school?

MA: She goes to Highland Springs High School.

LB: Oh, ok.

MA: Down in, uh... eastern Henrico...

LB: Oh...

MA: Yeah, on mil--Nine Mile and Airport Drive.

LB: Ok.

MA: And, uh... you know, I--I kin--I kinda like just--just being with the family. Um... I have a sister who lives here. And we'll get together with them. Uh, we go to church and... stuff like that. You know. It's just... you know, just... just family time.

LB: Yeah, that's nice. Um... what changes have you seen in Richmond over your time here since 1973?

MA: I've seen the downtown go from a booming metropolis to... [chuckles] nothing. And... now it's starting to come back a little bit. Uh, I've seen the areas of, uh... western Henrico, Grove, I've seen Short Pump move from... uh... a little... a little [fizit? fidget?] of a town to a... almost a

bloom--a blooming metropolis now. The way they're doing. I'm evening seen--uh, you know... it's a long-time coming, but I'm starting to see east end... the east--east Henrico, eastern Henrico, um... pick up a little bit. You know, as far as, uh... building and... shopping areas and... you know, business and stuff like that, so... uh, when I came here, everything was centered in Richmond. Few things have started to move out of Richmond, but... not compared to what they are now. Uh, Chester--I could rem--I--I can remember when Chesterfield Town Center was... just a shopping center. Uh, Cloverleaf Mall now, which is... torn down and gone now. Um... was the blooming big thing when I came to Richmond. Uh... now they've torn it down and they're starting to rebuild, they got this big, uh, Kroger store over there, which sells, you know a lot of...everything, and... some other stores are starting to grow up over there, but... it's been quite a change.

LB: Yeah.

MA: Quite a change.

LB: Yeah. I--I, I mean... I know it's changed a lot since I came here in '94.

MA: Yeah.

LB: And... I'd imagine the twenty years before then--

MA: Oh, yeah.

LB: Must've been huge.

MA: Yeah.

LB: Um... How do you think your job as an operator has changed the way you look at Richmond? You know... physically, politically, emotionally, however you wanna take it.

MA: Well... I guess the good and bad part of that is that... when I came to Richmond, I was a bus operator, I... had no prior life here. I didn't know anything about Richmond. So... uh... my job as an operator, as far as changing my perspective here? You know, when I came here--

LB: Yeah. That was it.

MA: You know, I just--that--that was it. I--that--that's what I knew. Uh... my job as an operator... compared to where I came from in the country--how did it change my life? Uh... I think it made me more outgoing. Um... it made me... deal with... people. Uh... in a way that I had to make adjustments for the way that... for that good and bad things that people do. Um... because I was an operator and I wanted to keep my job. We used to say, [??driver?] is your meal ticket, so you gotta guard it with your life, so I knew that. And so I dealt with people that way. You know, I... let a lotta stuff roll off. You know, so... that... that helped me and--and--and... uh, it even helped me when I back home because I had a better perspective as far as dealing with, uh... my people. You know, from the country. There.

LB: That's what everyone has been talking about is how much dealing with the public all day changes you as a person.

MA: Yeah. Yeah.

LB: And everyone said it was a positive thing.

MA: It's positive. Definitely is, you know, because... um... well, it's--it's one of those things, it--it'll make you or break you, and it--it has broken a lotta people. A lotta people who started out here, are not here. You know, I've seen a lotta people... come and go.

LB: How long do they usually last if they're not cut out for it?

MA: ...Within the first five years... you know, if you make it past five years, you--you're probably gonna do--

LB: You're a lifer.

MA: ...pretty--pretty good.

LB: Yeah.

MA: But, you know, three to five years. You know, that's generally the--generally the life--if you are cut out of this work.

LB: Yeah.

MA: Is that what everybody says?

LB: Well... no one's... I haven't asked anyone that question before, of you know--

MA: [Laughs.]

LB: ...how long it takes to find out. But--but everyone has said that, you know, you kinda wash out. After a while. If you don't enjoy dealing with the public.

MA: You do. You do. And, uh... you know, you--it's--you--you--you--you have to like people.

LB: Yeah.

MA: And, um... you know, I guess the way that I grew up, you know, I--I really... like people. And this job taught me to like people even more. I had to--you know, if I hadn't, I would've washed out, too.

LB: Mr. Avent, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to talk about?



MA: Mmm... no, not really.

LB: Well, then, thank you so, so much.

MA: You're welcome.

LB: This has been a real pleasure. And... Michael Lease, the photographer, is gonna be contacting you soon, um, for a portrait sitting.

MA: Ok.

LB: And... then I'll have this interview transcribed. And when I get it down into a text panel size--

MA: Ok.

LB: ...I'll email that to you so you can... see what I'm gonna put in there. And if there's anything that you'd rather not have in there, we can work around that.

MA: Sounds good.

LB: Good!

MA: Alright.

LB: OK.

MA: Thanks a lot.

LB: Thank you so much.

Benjamin: Thank you so much. You have a good night.

MA: You all take care.

LB: You too.

MA: Enjoy.

LB: Buh-bye.

Benjamin: Oh, is this...?

LB: Oop! Is that... [Leaves room] Mr. Avent?

