

A Community Remembers

Interview: Paige Chargois 1 & 2

Laura Browder: Now, Paige, could we just start by you telling me your full name and today's date so I can keep everything organized?

Paige Chargois: I am Paige Ernelle Lanier Chargois (?). Um, and today's date is Monday, July the ninth, 2012.

LB: Thank you. Now, Paige, why don't we just start by you telling me something about your family and how you grew up, where you grew up.

PC: Ok. We came from South Hampton County. My father moved to Richmond when I was actually about four-and-a-half years old and I was gonna—it was somewhere in the spring, early summer, and I was five that, uh, July. And so I started school that fall... uh, at Elba, ah, Elementary School, which evidently they were gonna close down. We didn't know that at the time, but they were building a brand new school, which was Carver. So, I—I went there and from there, I actually transferred to Baker School, well Norrell, and then Baker School. And did my junior high school at, uh, Benjamin A. Graves (?) right at First and Leigh Street. And that's where I encountered, um, the training, the—the—that's when desegregation really kind of began—the *efforts* to desegregate the Richmond public schools began. And, um, several of us were—were hand-picked by whoever the leaders were at that time. My parents were very active in the PTA. And, um, so I remember, um... one of the teachers that, uh, chose me and probably some others in that same classroom, saying "would you come with me, we're gonna tell you what might be happening." And they told the whole school that we were getting made y—possibly to desegregate. But they hand-picked some of us to give us extra training as to what to do, how to handle ourselves as children. Cuz that would have made us about, um, eleven, twelve years old, roughly, at that time. Cuz we went there from the seventh through the ninth grades... at Benjamin Graves. And so, uh, I was amazed, uh, at how they—they told us the mean things that people might would do to us. But that we could not respond like that. That we had to—to—to stay... uh, quiet. Uh, not fuss... you know, back at that them. Uh, if they spit on us, if they spat on us, we were not to spit back at them. You know, all of those kind of basic things. Stupid things that children do anyway, you know, when they're playing or—or even when they're fighting, I should say. But, uh, we were told we could not return the same kind of behavior... and that we had to be very strong because nobody knew exactly what was gonna happen and what people might do. Uh, people even might would hit us and whatever, but once we got off the bus or the car or the whatever the transportation was, we had to walk straight into the school, keep our eyes focused on the school, and not worry about what people were hollering out at us or saying to us, you know—the big n-word, of course, was used profusely. But we could not return those kind of comments to the people who were hollering at us. So the—that was probably the main thing that I remembered. And they—they drilled that into us. I don't remember how many sessions we had exactly. Um, but I remember, uh,

that—they drilling that into us, making sure that we would be strong enough to—to carry almost the whole neighborhood because—and the whole community—cuz we were the only children selected at that point, you know, to desegregate the schools. And so I would imagine that I felt honored, you know, like other kids, you know, to have been chosen. But it just seemed like another task, another chore at that time that we had to do. And, um... so why they chose me, I don't know. The only connection I can make is with my parents, both of whom were very active in the PTA. So...

LB: Was it both you and your sister who were chosen? Or just you?

PC: No, my sister wasn't. And that was—that was the, uh—and she was a year ahead of me. So she would have been in the eighth grade and the ninth, you know, cuz I was coming on behind her. But she, course, graduated a year ahead of me. Um, so it was just a year—a school year apart, that we almost two years apart in—in—in age. When we moved from the country here, she had already started school down there. And they put her back a year and a half. They made up that half year but she was still a year behind by age, and so, uh, coming from South Hampton County – where the schools were actually better [laughs]. But that was their rule, you know, so at any rate, that's why she was those two years difference, we were one year difference in school.

LB: So, interesting, so it was really through the PTA and not necessarily the NAACP that all the efforts were coming...

PC: No, it—it—it—it was a, um...

LB: Or both together?

PC: ... a conglomeration of groups. Um, and—and—and leaders throughout—cuz even the churches were involved. You know, so there were some church leaders, some PTA leaders, there was the NAACP, etc. etc. So, uh, a mix—real mixture of—of individuals, uh, who were leaders and representing different organizations. I don't remember how many or whatever, but I know this for sure: the NAACP, the church, and the PTA, uh, were quite involved and—and working together on the effort, yeah.

LB: How many kids were in that group? How many children?

PC: I cannot remember it being a large group. I would say ten to twelve, I would guesstimate. And I was even trying to think back and look at some of the faces, trying to imagine some of the faces or remember some of the faces in that group and I can't. I can't remember any of it. Um, so I—I can't say exactly how many but I know it was not a large group. Um, so I—I know it wasn't over twenty. Now, let me say this: unless other teachers had other groups... but I thought we were all one group and together. So I would guesstimate, uh, ten, twelve, max maybe fifteen or so... um... is what I would think.

LB: And this would be around 1956 or so?

PC: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

LB: But then you continued on...

PC: [Whispers] yeah...

LB: And nothing happened.

PC: Nothing happened at all. So, the schools were not desegregated before I left Benjamin Graves. And—and they were focusing on what we call now middle school – um, we called junior high. So I graduated and went on into Maggie Walker High School, and, uh, but the—the whole effort to integrate was still going on, or really, more so to desegregate. I could not focus on the school then because I was beyond that. But I got involved in the—the um—eventually in the, uh, department stores, in the movies, you know. I wore shoes [laughs], walking around those stores and walking in front of the movies—movie house, cuz I think there were three movie houses, at least two movie houses right there on Broad Street, kind of across from Thalhimers.

LB: Now you know I've got a thousand questions for you about that experience.

PC: That's alright. Yeah.

LB: So, Paige, tell me, how did you initially get involved in the protests – what led you to it? What kinds of conversations do you remember having at that time? Just... tell me all about it: when it started, how you kept going – all of those things. Wherever you want to start.

PC: The im—the impetus really was, um, from my—my family. My—my—I would say primarily my father, but also my mom. And we—we had many conversations in the household. And, um, I—I think I had, uh, mentioned in some thing I had written to you, my mother actually, uh, my—my—my maternal grandfather... that house is right on the road where Nat Turner's, uh, the—the, uh, historic marker is, and so I—I worked for a pastor many years later and, um, he one day asked, he said, "Paige, where were you born?" and when I told him South Hampton County, he said, "Now I understand you." And because South Hampton County is really known for many blacks being firsts at this, that, or the other. Which to me suggests that we were not afraid of a fight, not afraid of a confrontation, not afraid to stand tall, not afraid to stand on what we truly believed—all of that is just—it came natural to us because that's where so much of the fighting during slavery – to try to free ourselves from slavery – emerged, uh, here in Virginia. And so, uh, as we came u—up to Richmond, my—my dad came up first and he got a job and all that and then he brought my mom up and then he brought us two. And what they told us is when you get a letter and there's a little house in the corner, you'll know we've found a house and we're

coming to get you cuz we were staying with my paternal grandfather then. And, uh, when we—sister and I would just run to that mailbox every day, every day, every day. Looking for that letter—when we got that letter, it was such joy, that we knew then that momma and daddy were coming back for us. And, um... [clears throat] there was always talk within the family because of where we came from, it was just a normal conversation about whites and black, uh, and segregation. And, um, uh, l—let me just throw this little historical piece in. My—my, uh, father's dad was one of the black men in Capron Virginia (?)... and they had a debate society... these were uneducated black men who met every Sunday at one of each other's house—homes to debate topics. I didn't know that until less than ten years ago. And that—that—I knew my father, though he only had, like, a sixth grade education, he was always wanting to read, wanting to learn, wanting to study, etc. And he can literally—you could tell him maybe the day that you were born... the date, and within minutes, he could tell you what—what—what day of the week that was, even if it was fifty years ago. Just a wonderful mind, and—and—he—he—he kept two—two, uh, books for his money in the bank and he even corrected the bank twice, I remember that. So that's the kind of mind that he had and he was nurtured in, and he brought that into our family and I think trained his girls that way. For some reason my sister seldom had any interest, but, um, for whatever my mom and dad said or did, I was always the one, I was ready to go. And—and so from that, the influence then in the high school, because the—the notices, the announcements were given... um, uhm, as far as meetings. And usually this was like an NAACP meeting or a community meeting of some oth—some kind, at a church or wherever. And then you—you went *there* to get instruction about walking or doing—or really connecting with the leaders who were planning the—the, um, march or whatever. And so we only got the announcement for the most part at the school, to go to a certain meeting. And, um, usually, even those meetings, I think, may have been in—in the black newspaper, at least, which was the Richmond Afro at that time. And, um, so that's how I would have connected. And we were members then at Sharon Baptist Church, and I don't remember Sharon being involved... directly. But there were plenty other churches right in the community. And so, um, -- at any rate, we were... uh, able to connect with the leadership and, uh, go to the marches when they were playing and walking around the department stores. Um, even, um, seeing some black people who still were determined to shop at Miller & Rhoads and Thalhimers, and, you know, how—how sad that was, and we would boo them, you know, sometimes as well. And they would kinda sneak in a certain door or what—thinking that they wouldn't be seen as much. But for the most part, people stopped—black people stopped going to uh, uh, Thalhimers or Miller & Rhoads. And really, it—it was a—a financial situation for them. They finally had to open up a little bit more. And, uh, so at any rate, um, once—once you connected with that group, then you knew what was planned, uh, whether it was to march around the department stores or the movies, they would say we need people here or there or wherever. So that's kinda how it went.

LB: How many students from Maggie Walker and from Armstrong participated in the marches?

PC: I would really just have to say lots... because I don't have a.. a.. any way to, uh, reach any quantity... uh, specific quantity at all. I just don't know. Uh, I know friends, you know, cuz some of us would catch the bus together to go down, or from our neighborhood, some others... And, um, uh... but to give you an ex—even close to a number, I have no idea. We—w—we graduated with a class of about four-hundred students and just thinking in general for that, um, I would say... probably less than 20% of—of—of a class, so that would have been a senior class in 1962. And I—I would think less than 20% would have been involved in the actual sit-in's and, uh, marches and whatever.

LB: But still, you know, to me, it's so interesting that in a city like Atlanta, right? People remember everything about the civil rights movement and everyone who was involved in it has been interviewed fifteen times—

PC: Wow...

LB: Well... I'm exaggerating, of course, but here in Richmond... people don't always talk about it much.

PC: [Whispers] right... right. And—and—and my—my—my dad's comment, uh, is right on point with that, because, um, he actually helped to get me a job at Reynolds Metal, uh, when I moved back to Richmond, Virginia. Uh, cuz when I got married, my husband was stationed out in Kansas, and, um, and so, uh, when I came back to Richmond, eh—uh, after that, um, I had had so much experience in the library that they hired me in their technical research library there at Reynolds, and Daddy—I was always amazed at how well Daddy got along with everybody. Always amazed at that. And—and so relative to race, Daddy made the comment and he advised me, he said, "Paige, the least... said... the better." In other words, try—try to meet the person on a different level than just race... and there's so much more that can be talked about, etc. And—and that—that was always his—his advice cuz I was—"Dad, how do you get along with all these folks who are out here," you know, and--and whatever. And so, um, at any rate, he said, just the least said, the better. Just be natural, be yourself. And—and I had a *wonderful* time. *Wonderful* time. And only had to leave because my husband got—it was during Vietnam at that point and he got sent overseas—that was, like, sixty....six... '65, '66 by then... he got sent over. But he got back sent to—to, uh—not *back*. He got sent to Germany... um, because people were being gradually pulled out to go to Vietnam. Um... so it was still kicking but I hadn't gone full-blown at that point cuz we did a second tour over there. We did six years in Germany all together because of Vietnam. He had what they call a ear profile. He couldn't be in a battle, so... because of—he would lose all of his hearing. So he could hear normally. But, uh, he—his ears were that delicate, so they—they wouldn't send him, so when they pull out other troops, he was one that they would use to replenish, so... um... so we—we were gone, um, about six years from... '65 through '71 with just a few months in between.

LB: And you left for Kansas...

PC: Um... I got married June of 1964. And, um, and so we left within day—June 13th, actually—1964. And we left within about four days after that... to [Herrington?] Kansas.

LB: Now when you came back to Richmond six years later, what kind of changes did you see?

PC: Well, I c—I could hardly be—believe, uh, some of the—the changes that we could go into some places where we'd never gone before, but one—one of the things, even in '64 when—when we got married, um, June of '64, we could stay at the, uh, Richmond Hotel... And that was one of the, uh, uh... earlier places where we—we could go as—as blacks. And, um, relative to the wh—whole hotel, uh, uh, uh business. And so I was kinda surprised that, you know, so many other doors had opened up when we came back, because we weren't sure when we went there for part of our little honeymoon, uh, in '64, whether we would be accepted or not, but they treated us ok, we got through the desk and got to our room and everything was fine. So, um, that was probably a bigger surprise to me, um, that this place that had been so closed to all of us for so long, you know, now had—had opened up with almost no, uh, problem at all. And I—I don't remember—I—I know there were problems, uh, in some of the establishments when blacks went to—to, uh, do business. But for the most part, Richmond has still today the reputation of being one of the easiest, quietest places to have desegregated. And there is... a certain strength-slash-pride, I think in Virginians. And particularly, I think, here in Richmond you'll find it as well. We—we don't like a lot of commotion. We don't like a lot of, uh, bad scenes, and—and—and negative, uh, um, um... behavior. And—and—and I think that's—that's just in all of us, it's—it's a part of that southern mystique as well. And it—and it's on both sides, white and black. Um... for—for another interview later on, I'll tell you more about how African women influenced, uh, white women in the South during slavery to become Southern Belles [laughs]. Uh, at least some part of that... so that—that—that's another interesting aside, but at any rate, um, we—we were pleased and surprised with what we found... because we started to—to search for a house. And, uh, we realized we could buy a house almost anywhere. And that—that was kind of surprising to us cuz, many other sections of town had been so closed to us before. So, I—I think in—in real estate and then in—in just being able to travel, uh, around the city, much easier to do business with different establishments – that was, uh, welcoming and—and somewhat surprising, but just knowing how hard we had fought and since [?] it was more just satisfaction than being surprised.

LB: So tell me more about that fight. Tell me how you talked about it at home, how you talked about it with your friends at school. Tell me about the protests, tell me about the moments that stand out in your mind.

PC: Um... coming home one day from, uh, uh having walked, uh, and, uh demonstrated, uh, I got on the Ginter Park bus, and... that—that came across... came

down First Street heading to Northside, on around Poe Street, and then it made that turn—right turn onto North Avenue. And I had sat right behind the driver all the way. And—and it wasn't until he made that turn that he realized I was sitting behind him. And so he declared then he was not gonna move the bus until I got up and moved to the back. And, um, and I was, uh, I sat there, I think, for a little while, and—to hold up the bus, and, um, and then, I said to him, "It doesn't matter. I can get off your bus. Cuz my house is right down there. Less than a block. So I've ridden on your bus all the way, just about all the way home, sitting right behind you." So I—and I was, what, only about um, twelve, maybe thirteen... thirteen, fourteen, somewhere in—in there. But knowing how... we—we had to be so determined, even when you got tired. I mean that wa—that was the main thing that you had to get over, when—when you're demonstrating, get over your own fatigue, your own, uh, loss of strength, just from hours and hours of walking around. Though we had people coming at different shifts, different times and all that. And—and nobody would—would—would keep you if you really wanted to leave or had to go somewhere. But—but that sense of determination to just stay in there, keep walking, keep marching, you know it's for a purpose. You gotta make it, you—you—you can do it, you can do this—all of that just - just churning within you, it—it—it just wears you out and—physically—and somewhat mentally. But, um, so when I got on that bus, I was already pretty plum tired, and—and just sat down where I saw an open seat, not even thinking about integrating the bus. And, uh, but we had come ninety to ninety-five percent of the way before he realized I was behind—and he refused to move the bus. And I—I have, you know, since laughed in his face ever since. And I—I actually got back on his bus a—a few times afterwards and knew who he was. So, um, you know, as—as things changed, uh, so that—that—that's... the main thing that I re—I remember and walking around, it gets a little monotonous. But you began to have conversations with people that you don't even know but they're there for the same reason that you are. And so, uh, having good friendly conversation and encouraging one another, the greater strength, I would say, for the movement comes from the people who are involved. From the people who are actually on the line. Because they're the ones who—who'll hold you up. They're the ones who will encourage you and just—just feed you their energy, if they—whoever's got another cup of energy, they'll just pour it into somebody else. And that's what really kept us going. And then walking up and down and in front of the theaters, um, um... to me, I—I liked the department stores better but when they said they needed somebody across the street, you—some of us would just go and whatever. And I—I'll—I'll never forget that, uh, one of the times when the policemen were coming across the street from, like, the Thalhimers side... across the street, and they had dogs. And we had already been warned that police were gonna bring dogs. And—uh—dogs were always *there*, but not in large numbers. And so, uh, this particular day, uh, there were gonna be larger number, uh—there was gonna be a larger number of dogs. And here we saw these policemen coming across the street... maybe having two dogs each or whatever. And the dogs were already growling, you know, and... and, uh, we... were just told, 'don't be scared. Hold you ground. Stay steady, stay strong, don't run.' And—and—and we actually, as—as young people, had to face and stare down dogs that could have eaten us alive. And that'll put some—some—some steel

in your spine. And so, you know, that's—that's one thing that I—I do remember. And, um... I couldn't picture anybody who was right with me. I said I wished my sister could have been there more, but she just didn't have an interest, um... She is one of those people, um—Allen West is a—a—I forget if he's a representative or senator now from Florida – African American man. And he just made the s—the statement, uh, he's not African American cuz he don' know nothin' about them Africans, and [??]... and my—and my sister was one who would say, "Well I never been to African, I don't know nothin' about it." And I want to say, "Stupid, you took it in school, you know the history of it, whatever." And so that was our—our conversation many times. Um... and so there were just really some—some African Americans who just couldn't buy into the plan. Um, and—and, you know, they wanted to reap the benefits, of course, but they just couldn't buy into the struggle. Um... we—we had, um, uh, several national Baptist conventions, uh, and—and the National Baptist Convention USA, Incorporated rejected Martin Luther King... and all of his efforts which included us... and, uh, it was m---King and he pulled several others, about twenty other leading pastors from across the country and that's when they started the Progressive National Baptist Convention. All because these leading pastors—and I mean, a few *thousand* of them would not support the movement. So there were always that cadre of people, um, from the National level, all the way down to the—to the community level, uh, who just could not support it. They saw it as rabble-rousers, they saw it as trouble-makers, and, "why don't you just wait. Just keep—keep quiet, things gon' change." And, uh, you know, sometimes you gotta *make* things change and not wait for change because other people don't have the same sense of urgency or don't, uh, benefit or—or don't suffer to the same degree. So, um, my sister was a—one of those, I think, on the quieter side, who just wanted—just wait and, yeahhh, things will be alright. But, um, not me. Not me. And... I think that came more from my father than—than from my mom. But, my mom was one of those—uh, she—she cut up her—her Thalhimers and Miller & Rhoads credit cards [laughs]. So she was supportive in various ways. But, uh, she was very stout, also – I'll show you a picture of her. And so she could not have walked around. She was sick on and off during our—our younger years. So at any rate, uh, I just think from the, uh, people on the line, marching around, and um... people facing down the police as well as the dogs... once or twice. Uh, that's where we got our strength from.

LB: So did the dogs just—did the police with the dogs just back off? At that moment?

PC: Yeah, I mean, the dogs never attacked us, no. But—but that—that picture virtually went around the world at that time... and particularly across the nation. And it—and in several cities there were dogs.

LB: Absolutely.

PC: Several cities. But, um, I—I—I remember, uh, this—that particular time happening. And—and the police never released the dogs... so they never actually charged us, but they came—they came close enough.

LB: I mean, I remember certainly seeing those pictures from Selma—

PC: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Mm hmm...

LB: ... but just never from Richmond.

PC: Mm hmm.

LB: Paige, how did you get involved in your first protest? Can you tell me about that moment? Cuz I would love to hear more about some of the big turning points for you as you were growing up.

PC: Well—well, I—I would say my—my first, uh... protest was in the preparation—
Hey, Papa.

Papa: Hi [??]...

PC: I'm just talking to a friend.

Papa: You what?

PC: I'm just talking to a friend. [To LB:] He's a little hard of hearing so I have to holler. I'm just talking to a friend. Do you want to come in or do you want to lay down?

Papa: [Indecipherable.]

PC: Laura, this is my father Earlin Lanier (?). This is Laura, Daddy. Her name is Laura.

Papa: La—

PC: Laura.

Papa: Ra—

PC: Her name.

Papa: Raleigh (?) who?

PC: Laura.

Papa: Oh yes.

PC: A lady.

LB: Yeah.

PC: That's her name.

Papa: Oh, oh... [indecipherable] Well I'm glad ya'll are here. Well, let's see. You all fixed up, ready to go? Just packed up some things.

PC: Uh, no. Uh, we're not going an—anywhere today. You can go back and lay down, Papa. I'll be right here.

Papa: You aren't going nowhere today?

PC: No, uh-uh. Not today.

Papa: Well, how you going tomorrow?

PC: I don't know. I don't know, Daddy, I have to have, um—

#2

LB: There we go. Uh...

PC: So we were...

LB: ... talking about how you first got started.

PC: I—I would say, um—

LB: So you were... twelve? Thirteen, fourteen?

PC: Uh, twelve, yeah, because, um, I started Benjamin Graves age, uh... a—at age twelve. The, um, seventh grade, so I was five when I began school, so that would have made me twelve, uh, there. So twelve, thirteen, fourteen... I don't remember which year they actually started us, started training us, but I—I know, um, most likely it was the latter part of that seventh grade, and then going into the eighth grade. Um, I would believe, um, that was the time, so, um... For me, that would have been, what, '56, '57. And, uh, cuz '59 I graduated on into Maggie Walker. So, to me that was the real beginning. Because all that we were told and we were—we were told what it was about and—and, you know, the... what difference it would make for our future. All of that, you know, we were given. So, uh, to me that was the starting point, you know, whether I got a chance to walk into a desegregated school or not, that was when I was turned on to the movement. And, um, you know, in due time here, Martin Luther King and Pro and Con (?) and, uh, other leaders, local leaders,

uh, in—in our community, a—through the NAACP and all of that. Um, it was just—I—I—I can't think of any other starting point because it—it's a continuum—

LB: Mm hmm.

PC: ... from that day until now. And I—I don't know of—of a time of... of, uh, that I wasn't involved in one way or in the other. As I've mentioned, I've spent about twenty years in racial reconciliation. So I know that was a part of even shaping my life, uh, in that, uh, direction, professionally. And, um, so at—at any rate, that's the best starting point I can tell you of.

LB: So tell me about your first march... [pause] if you can remember. [Pause] Would this be around Thalhimers or Miller & Rhoads, the department stores...?

PC: Yes. That—that was the first. That was the first. Because, um... they—they were quite strategic in—in their planning. And we knew if we could get them to open—of course, Woolworths... was right there on the corner with Miller & Rhoads. And to desegregate Woolworths and the two big department stores, the rest of the stores would follow. So we didn't have to cover all the stores at all. Uh, but—but, primarily those three stores, from what I recall, were the—they were the main focus. And, um, when—when we would get to the—the place, we would—they—they usually had a person responsible, I don't know what he or she would be called. But, um, who's the organizer, the coordinator of the—the marchers. And, uh, you just check in, say, yes, I'm here, or whatever, or just fall in line. And, um... you know, I guess if you wanted a placard, you'd have to go to a certain person to get your placard when you arrived. But otherwise, you just get in the march and—and keep walking. And, uh, sometimes we would sing and—and, um, uh—again, encourage one another as we were walking along... Ne—never in a sense of a rush but always a—a solid stride. Um, very methodical, you know, very deliberate. And—and just, [slowly] “we... shall... o...ver...come,” almost with that kind of a cadence, walking around, uh, the—the buildings, and so, uh... that's many of what I—what I remember. And—and I—I can't remember any specific names of anybody who walked with me, cuz I—I said my family, my—my dad participated some. Uh, but my sister and my mom didn't. So otherwise, I was in the midst of strangers all the time. And, uh, strangers in the sense of not being a part of my family, course there were some students from high school... and, um... and course as I went along even, into, uh, uh, uh—college. You know, other—other things that we had to do here in—in the—uh, during the time of desegregation. I don't know if that answers your question or not.

LB: Where did you go to college? Here in Richmond or--?

PC: I s—I started out, uh, at Virginia Union. So I went straight into Virginia Union when I graduated in '62. And, um, I did a year and a half there. I, um... they didn't have the kind of tests then to help a child know what he or she really is good at. And though we had been given some tests, um, uh... the counselor at Virginia Union just simply looked at all my scores and stuff, she said, “Well, you're—you're—you're

good at math and you like business, so maybe you should be an—an accountant.” And so I took that as my major... And—and, um, by the time I took one course in accounting, I just said, “*Absolutely not*. This is *not* me.” So, uh, I was actually queen of my freshman class. And, um, so after the third semester... uh, I quit—quit college and, um, I knew it wasn’t accounting, but I didn’t know what. So when I went back to school about fourteen years later, I was majoring in psychology, on my way into theology. So I knew very well then, and so—accounting and theology are at totally opposite ends of the spectrum in the sense... and, uh, so, at—at any rate, I was discouraged academically... cuz I didn’t know what I wanted to study, but I knew it wasn’t accounting. And, uh, so I got married in, um, ’64... Yeah, June of ’64. I quit school the end of ’63, so all of ’62 and then the s—fall semester ’63, I went to Virginia Union. When I went back into college after the divorce, I went to Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee. Uh, they had a very highly rated psychology department. I could not go back to Virginia Union cuz they had no psychology department. They didn’t even have a psychology minor. And they may have had one or two classes in psychology, but—so I knew that’s what I wanted to study but I couldn’t go back there cuz they didn’t have it. So I w—did some research and you know, s—a school that I could afford and all of that. So, uh, we had some, uh, friends, like family, who lived in the area of Clarksville, Tennessee. Said, “come on down, Paige.” And so I stayed with them, uh, that first semester and then stayed on—lived on campus the rest of the time. So with a, uh, uh, Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Journalism... and then went straight into Seminary, uh, less than a month later, after graduation. So, um, with a Master of Divinity.

LB: So you’ve had a lot of twists and turns along the way.

PC: Yeah. Yeah.

LB: Now... tell me more about... kind of how you talked with your friends during this period of growing up, how you talked about the civil rights movement, what you remember from watching things on TV, talking with your family—I—I would imagine, having two sisters myself, that there may have been some heated discussions between you and your sister during this time about the different paths... you were taking. Tell me about all of that.

PC: Well, I—I would be sure that my sister and I had some arguments. Uh, no doubt. Um, I can’t remember any specific one at this time. But again, because we were so very different... um, she never involved herself in any high school activity. And, so that—that shows how... uh... little concern she had, you know, for things going on in school or around school... uh, which connected her directly with community. She was always looking towards older people and socializing and so, uh, we were very different in that respect. And—and, uh—with—with fellow students, even, uh, some of them, they just had other interests. Um... or—or they didn’t have the parents to encourage them or to point them in any direction, uh, specifically. And—and I don’t remember any—any... verbal fights... but, um, certainly a lot of discussion. And, uh, even when—when we, uh, were in high school, I remember teachers just talking

about how well they wanted to prepare us. Um... and—and—my—my algebra teacher, or the geometry, whichever, she would work out problems on the board, just stand back, said, “Now—*isn't that beautiful?!*” ...And we said, “No...” We didn't realize she was totally transforming us from being afraid of math of any kind... to really admiring it. And, I mean, to me, that's a symbol of the quality of education that we had. And so teachers all along the way were encouraging us to be a part of the movement, be a part of the community, what the community needed at that point. And, um, but—but never demanding, never demanding. And so there—uh, there were, um, again... um... a fair number of students from—from junior high as well as high school who were involved but I just cannot quantify it. Uh, my—my memory doesn't allow me to. But I—I know there were some where just the... high school, uh, extracurricular activities, that's all they were interested in. And some of them had to work after school and others just were not interested, period. Um... and so th—I—I think... uh, some of us who were selected as leaders in our—through our school times, we were the ones who took the bull by the horns, I think, and—and—and ran with it to be as involved as we could be... as children, still. And so that—that's... what I remember. We—sometimes we would leave school... you know, after classes and—and—uh, take the bus on downtown to be—to be able to start marching. And so I know there were some that we'd leave school together and get on the bus and go on down, you know, to um, uh, Thalhimers and all. Uh, but... again, not many. Th—there were never many of us. Armstrong, I have totally no idea about... you know, though we come together for dances and stuff, you know, w—I—I really don't remember them being involved, or the amount of involvement, uh, from Ar—Armstrong side.

LB: Sounds like school was a pretty incredible place to be from junior high school where... you were studying three languages—

PC: Yes... We—to me, that's incredible. And when you look at—at the way that they, uh, planned... the—the, uh—the whole curriculum now, some schools, I think, don't even have *a* foreign language, much less three. We—we did three languages in a semester, so all they were trying to do was give you a taste of them. And, um, and so, we—we had a little bit of three different languages, learning some songs, you're learning a few statements and all that. And a little bit of the structure of each language... uh, certainly some vocabulary. Uh, but, a—it—it wasn't *intense*, uh, for any particular language, just to give you a sampling and a—a taste of each of them. Because going into high school, you had to *choose* a language. And you couldn't get out of high school without having studied a foreign language. And—and, uh, once I got into high school, they finally decided to offer German. And I—I said, “I think I wanna take German,” though I had—had French and Spanish and Latin in junior high. They wouldn't let me take German. So, um... I—they had, uh, other students in the class, I don't know what the requirement was, but they wanted me to... take one of the, uh, languages I had previously studied, so... that's what—I took French in high school. Two years of French. So, I mean, a—all of our students, I—I don't know of a student that could get out of high school without studying a foreign language at—at that time. And, I mean, to me, that's—that's what's so sad in this day in time,

you know, kids go all the way through twelve years of school, never having studied even one language in—in a world that’s so much smaller, uh, uh, linguistically than what ours was. So, um, to me, um... uh—I get on a soapbox when you start me talking about public education today. Um, I remember specifically a headline, uh, when I was, uh, eleven, twelve years old. And I brought—I would bring the paper in to dad, and I said, “Dad, looky here—“ and—talking about the schools, and—and things. “Teachers want more money. The school’s gonna close.” And so, um, uh, Daddy said, “Don’t worry about that. Schools are—are—are not gonna close.” And he read the—the article and the teachers were saying if you pay us more, we could do better. And I throw that up at every teacher I—I encounter. Said, because from—from—from that time, all almost fifty years... and we’ve paid you more and more and more and more and more, and you’ve given us a worse product almost every year. And—and—if—if—if—if—if you can’t do better with what you have, how can you even *ask* for any more... And—and if—if you don’t—you know, even the excuses that many teachers give, “Well, we get too many kids from poor neighborhoods, we gotta do this, that, and the other.” I said, no poorer than what we’ve always been! Teachers always had poor—poor kids in class. You know, I remember when—when—when—when, uh, teachers had to go and—and—and buy *clothes* for some students... So, b—but you the one have the college degree, you the one been trained in how to teach. You oughta know how to—how to—how to reach that student. So, I, uh, teach—I’m not a friend of teachers... in general. Uh—uh, not when it comes to the quality or lack thereof of education they’ve been giving our children for too—too long. Just too long.

LB: It sounds like in—in your day, you had some pretty remarkable teachers.

PC: *Fantastic* teachers. *Fantastic* teachers. Arthur Ashe was just a... just a year ahead of me. And, um... uh, Willie Lanier, we were, I think, the same class. Uh, he’s one of the football players, but a leader here in this area. Um, and—and I think all of us, we—we have our fiftieth, uh, school reunion in August coming up. And so, um, from the class of ’62. So I can’t wait to get there and—and—and see some of my—my old classmates. But, um... you know, but—but we had teachers not only who cared... but who knew how to get the point across. That’s all that it takes. You know, you—you—you just can’t give an assignment and I—I—I share this, too, this is a little aside, but... before we moved here, about three years... uh, two, three years, I did substitute teaching in Henrico, uh, public schools. And, uh, a lot of times, teachers would—would—would leave, like, not crossword puzzles, like find-the-word kind of puzzles for the kids to do. Now, even though it was an English class, I mean, that’s not necessarily a bad thing, but come on, now, you can do better than that. Um, so I—you know, I just—it just disgusted me even further when—when I was actually substituting and right there in the midst and I saw what—what teachers would leave for the substitute to do. Should’ve been, you know, the regular curriculum. And, cuz they—they don’t put a teach—or substitute in there who can’t carry on what the teacher has supposedly left. And I would—I would sometimes laugh and feel like crying when I’d look at what the teacher’d left for them to do. And, um, so, uh, at any rate, it’s—it’s—I—I don’t have a quarrel about it a student at all today (?).

But the quality of our teachers, I—I knew that quality and I know that quality does not exist today. In—in *most* teachers. Not all. But in most.

LB: I mean, it sounds like when you were growing up, you were surrounded by leaders. Can you give me some examples of good leadership you saw during that time? And examples of leadership during that time that was not so good?

PC: [Sighs.]

LB: On any level.

PC: Ok. Um... I remember this—this would be a—a negative and a positive one. Um, bu—the—the negative one... this teacher was fairly new, maybe first, second year out of college. And he was, I think, my fifth grade, uh, teacher. And, uh, at Carver. And for some reason he just wanted to call us names, you know... whatever a child failed to do something, or whatever, call him stupid or this, that, or the other. You know, just—a real negative kind of attitude. And—and I finally got tired of it. And—and I knew no other teacher had done that. And I stood up in class one day and just asked him, you know, “If—if your child was in school, would you want the teacher to call your child stupid and this and that and the other?” And he felt that I was being insolent and took me to the—the, uh, principal’s office. Now—to me, he should have... uh, if anything, maybe talked to my parents... say, I don’t like the way Paige addressed me in class... uh, if she’s got something negative to say, or whatever, like that, she needs to speak to me after class, or—you know, some kind of instruction... like that. But for him, all—all that he could do, he couldn’t address the matter. All that he could do was, uh, just—just kick me up to the—the next level, so to speak, of leadership. And... and I just thought it was really poor for him, uh, first of all, as an example to the—of a teacher to—to the class. But then in the way that he handled my response to him... uh, I thought was, uh, very poor. And, uh, in that same, uh, school... when I first got there, the, uh, we had a—an orchestra, and that was amazing, too. And, uh, I had, uh, asked for the—to be able to play the violin. And, uh, he told me, said “well, I don’t have a violin. Let me check and see what else I have.” So it was like, uh, about a week, few days in between, so he said, “You come back to me, such and such a date.” So I—I did. He said, “Well I don’t have a violin, but I do have a viola... if you would like to play the viola, I’ll teach you.” And so, um, I went home, I didn’t even really know what a viola was, and I had to... understand that, cuz I think the orchestra man, he thought that I was—I understood what a viola was. And then I realized, “Oh, a viola is slightly larger, has a deeper, richer tone than the violin.” Said, “Yes! I’ll play that.” And so they actually—they loaned you the instruments from the school. You didn’t have to buy them. You could if you wanted to, but you didn’t have to. And—and then when—when I went back to him, the quality of—of leadership that he demonstrated to be able to bring into the orchestra a variety of students, not students who already had private lessons, you know, o—or—or had a lot of access to other musical opportunities. But to take someone like me who had never played any kind of instrument, never even teetled (?) on a piano, um, whatever. But I knew I wanted to learn, I knew what I wanted to play. And, uh,

for him to... uh—uh—be able to do that for me, as well as, I'm sure, some other students... showed—showed the *quality* of leadership that he possessed and demonstrated for all of us there at Carver as—as—as our musical instructor. Um, that—that he cared enough to go beyond his normal duties... cuz he could've just said, "Sorry, I don't have violins." Over and done. You know. And, cuz he had enough students to take care of musically, but, uh, he—he—he—he took the extra step, he said, "Let me just see whatever else I might have... And—and then you come back to me." So, the—that—that sense of—of communication and—and, uh, uh, him doing some research to see what he could allow me to use, all of that... to me was—was a great example. And the—the teacher, uh, the geometry teacher that I mentioned earlier is another one, uh, that I think demonstrated, uh, seriously good leadership – that it's not a matter of just *learning* or just *teaching* a child... but you have to change the *perspective* of the child... for that child to be able to learn what you wanna teach them. And—and... the same is true for me as a minister today, and in teaching people in bible study or whatever – before they can learn the ABC's, uh, or—or—or—the 123's of what I wanna teach them, many of them, I gotta change their whole perspective about a particular subject. We just had a hot tup—hot—*hot topics*, uh, bible study that I led on homosexuality and gay marriage. And I told them, I said, you know, uh... forty years ago, I didn't want to be in the room with anybody that I *thought* was gay. And—and, we called them all kinda bad names *then*. But—but to look at where I've come... from that point to this point, in saying, you know, how can we in the church allow, uh, people who are homosexuals to—to lead us in music. You know, many of them are our organist, our pianist, our choir leaders, and then on Monday, we basically say you don't exist. I said, it—it's the hypocrisy of the church that needs to be dealt with. Not the—not the, uh orientation of the individual. And then you've gotta remember, you live in two different kingdoms... as a believer: the kingdom of our God and the kingdom of the world. And there are certain rights that you have in the kingdom of the world that every human being has... and the freedoms that we have in this country. But—but all we have in the kingdom of our God is privilege. So changing their perspective – I've gotta do that before I can teach them the ABC's of—of—of even the word of God. And so that—th—that—that, I—I've tried to model myself on the quality of teaching that I—I had for twelve years in Richmond public schools, that I would sing to the *hills* now about all of those teachers then. So they not only *cared* about us children as youths, but—but they knew how to transform our thinking. And to me, that's the key to education.

LB: And during those years when you were so involved in the movement... and spending your afternoons... marching and earlier, getting prepared to desegregate... when you look back, what do you think were your big turning points? What were the—the moments that kind of changed your life or changed your perspective?

PC: [Sighs... pauses] I know that bus ride was one. Um... I was trying to think of, uh... some others... Um... [pauses] A few circumstances that really changed me didn't happen in Richmond. I would take the bus, uh, down to Suffolk, Virginia, because we had relatives there, my great aunt—I would go spend a couple of weeks with her in the summer, whatever. And I remember getting on the, uh, Greyhound or Trailways

or whatever it was... a particular day. And a white young lady from Brooklyn, New York... uh, I was sitting beside her. And, um, so the buses had been integrated.

LB: What year was this, about?

PC: Um... I'd have to think back. It—it'll—it'll come to me. Um... and—and—and so, we stopped—I—I'm pretty sure it was Wakefield, Virginia—and it was—it was a normal rest stop for the bus. But they still had black and white, uh, counters. Or the—the blacks had to go, I think, around the side of the building. The whites took the—the front of course. Just to take out some food. People getting food, you know, get back on the bus and whatever. And, um, and she and I had been talking all along and when we got off the bus, you know, I had to tell her, no, you go that way. And she said, "No, Paige, I'm going with you." And it... still to this day, brings me to tears. That then we had a different conversation when we got back on the bus. And I could understand that there were some white people who really *knew* better... and who could live differently, relative to race. And, uh, we stayed in—in contact, uh, for a fair number of years, you know. Heard all about her wedding and whatever else and, um, actually, I think it was her daughter who eventually came here and worked for, um, in one of the city departments. And I—I got a hold of her name and so we—we chatted a couple of times. But, um... uh... I never made contact with her or connection with her afterward for a while. But that—that was a moment—it was like, "wow... there are some good white people." And I—I knew that in a very general way... because I knew all white people didn't want to shut down, uh, the public, um... uh, places from blacks. Or shut them up and prevent us from—from enjoying these freedoms and whatever. But, man—to many of them were just sitting on the sidelines. And but—but—but that encounter—and it had to be... I'm—I'm gonna still to pull up—up the year. But I—I know since the counters were still segregated, it had to be in—in the mid to late '50s. And so, um, because we—we could—we couldn't even go at that point to the—the same place... and, uh, to get our food. And the—the—the *stares* and even some of the words that were thrown at her... as she walked with me around to the back or to the side to get our food... ad then back to the bus... was amazing, just—and that she could bear that. I mean, it was like, "Huh! Who cares," you know. And—and, um... but—but she was from Brooklyn, New York, so we—we had—we had a—a different conversation when we got back on the bus. And, um.. and actually we never saw each other again. We were in touch by letter... ah, but never saw each other again. That—that was a—a major moment when I did not need to put all white people in the same category as hating blacks. And, um... so I know that was a—a—a transformative moment for me. And, um, the bus ride would be another. I'll—I'll try to pull up one or two more. Um... [pauses] The others—the other major moments came for me much later. Uh, during my racial reconciliation work. Uh, but I can't remember any other moments when, um... that—that were *that* transformative during the time of desegregation. I—I did get a—I was fortunate enough to meet and embrace the father of Martin Luther King. I never met Martin Luther King directly, but I was actually ne—in that particular year would have been, um... let's see... [pauses, indecipherable]... would've been 19, uh, 81, would've been, like, the s—the early summer, early... early summer, summer, going into the fall,

somewhere in there - of 1981. And, um, I... [pauses] think that was the year... anyway, this was Martin Luther King's father, his dad. And he was doing a revival in—at a church in Louisville, Kentucky where I was. And for some reason or another, he had picked me and one or two others out of the congregation and just said, you need to be a member of this church. And I didn't know how in the world he knew I wasn't a member. I don't think I had stood up when he said... if anybody said, all, everybody who's not a member, stand—I—I don't—I can't remember that. But, uh, just coming out of the blue he came right to me and pointed to me and said, "You need to be a member of this church." And—and I'd been attending... and so, um, I joined the church that night, and under the follow Martin Luther King. And—and—that sense of w—of *warmth* that he brought... um, it—it gave me new insight to Martin Luther King himself, you know, who of course by then was—was deceased. But, um, yeah, I w—I was just amazed that, um, I had that kind of encounter and could—could be that close to Martin himself is... to touching and embracing his very father... getting a deeper sense of how much it all meant to them... to really change the world. The—the other moments when I've been so changed... uh, was—they've—they've come during my work in recon—racial reconciliation. When we went to India, they were singing *We Shall Overcome* in Hindi. And when the—the East Germans finally broke through, uh, and the two Germanies were—were—were, um... but I'm losing my word... reunited. When the—when that wall came down, they were singing *We Shall Overcome* in German. And it was one of the songs that they li...--and to—to realize that no matter where—where I went, almost, people knew that song, knew—that was the signature song of the whole struggle to be free. That whether you could overcome in that moment or not was not important. But you knew that we *shall* - off in the future a little bit - we *shall* overcome. Anything that was a hindrance of any kind. And so, being able to dark around various places in the world and—and to hear the song that took me all the way back to childhood every time I heard it. You know, it was like, you were right, you did the right thing, stay on the journey. You know, it—it... it *galvanized* a whole movement in me all over again, every time I heard it. And, uh, many times I—I could not verbalize to anybody in that moment, um, but it's—tho—those were some amazing movements to me. So...

LB: Oh, it sounds like they really... I mean those moments when the past and the present and future are all connected—

PC: Connected. [Whispers] yeah. And right in a nanosecond virtually, it all comes together. Yeah. Yeah...

LB: Now, I've—I—I feel like I have two simultaneous follow-up questions.

PC: Ok.

LB: So you'll have to forgive the *dis-synchronicity*. I want to go back a little, and the forward a little in time. Uh, back a little and ask, you know, you had some personal

turning points, you know, during your growing up years. During those years, what do you think were turning points for the community?

PC: Mmm... [pauses] I would say w—when the schools were actually... w—when the law was passed, '64, desegregation, uh, came down... it showed the rest of the community that the fight, that the struggle had been worthwhile. And that those who had sat on th—on the sidelines had made the wrong choice, not the right choice. And I—and—and—and I—and I—and I think it—it showed how that a *few* folk, being determined, could change anything. So it—it was a—a new sense of empowerment... for our community. A—a new sense that—that we—we know we must always stand for what is right, no matter what it costs us. And—and then it just kinda shut the mouths of those that always wanted to say, “they’re just rabble-rousers making trouble.” Cuz not only in the white world, you know, was that being said about many of—of the uh—uh—uh—uh demonstrators, but al—also in the black community, there—there were those naysayers. And, um, “you just trouble-maker, you just making trouble for—for the rest of us,” you know. And—and so when—when—when that—when that law was passed, uh, to desegregate the schools, it—it—it was... uh, a real *blow* to those who had been the naysayers. But now could participate in the fruit of our walking, of our neighbors. And—and—and that—that they could—I don’t know how they felt individually, but—but now they could have all that we had... even though they did not stand with us, you know, during the—during the battle itself. So—so, you know, to—to me, that—that was... maybe a turning point. But it showed that—that our, uh, our—our—our labor had not been in vain and that we could use the same tactic... over and over and over again. And it could be effective and it has been. Um, that it wasn’t just trying to make trouble, but the—the—the—the—the secret, so to speak, of the—of the march were—were—were—it was twofold. It was—there was a financial dimension, and—and then there was what I would call a strength dimension, that you didn’t have to fight your enemy the way your enemy fought you. If you fought your enemy differently, you would change your enemy. And, course, that’s what Martin Luther King, uh, learned from Mahatma Gandhi’s work, and, uh, praise God, I—I had the—the chance - I was one of, uh, about twenty-two Americans invited to India to celebrate Martin Luther King and, uh, Gandhi’s birthdays. And, uh, so, at—at any—or not theirs. Their birthdays don’t come together cuz Gandhi’s birthday is in October. But to celebrate their lives on the birthday or during the birthday time of—of Gandhi. And, uh, and—and learning in preparation for that more and more of what that trip for Martin Luther King meant, way back when... that that was the moment that he knew he had to use those kinds of—of resources, or that kind of—of personal internal spiritual powerful resource to transform the United State of America. And to—to fair it a little deeper (?), uh, uh—what that—that visit meant for Martin Luther King was another transformative moment for me. And—and, um, here again, reaffirming for our community that it was well worthwhile and it was the most powerful way to—to change the world.

LB: Now, I'm trying to put a few things together in my mind, you know? One is what you've talked about, which I—you know, I've only been in Richmond since '94 and I know—

PC: Ok...

LB: ... it's a very different era... But I think we're all familiar with that kind of politeness, not wanting rock the boat, keep the—keep things... smooth on the surface, right? That—that *is* Richmond. And at the same time, I was interviewing a—a woman yesterday, Robin Mines, who was talking about, in this very same time, 1964, moving with her family to a white neighborhood and having the Klan burn crosses on her lawn—

PC: Mm hmm.

LB: ...and shoot up her house. How did those two sides of Richmond, if you will, come together during the time when you were growing up? How did you—do you know what I'm saying? Those two sides, what—what did you see when you were out marching. What did you see elsewhere during your daily life? Because... you know what I'm saying, right? There's what's on the surface and there's what's beneath the surface, and how did that all balance out?

PC: The—there is... so much that's abnormal in the midst of what's perceived as normalcy. Because on a day-to-day basis, life seemed just so normal. You know, for—for the—even for the average African American, uh, during that time. But—but... but there—there were pockets of—of that kind of, um, racial hatred... still being spewed at our community. And—and I don't really... remember too many folk individually that I knew... uh, who had dealings or suffered from, uh, like the Klan and their—their—their, uh... work. Um... but certainly the newspapers reflected some of that. And I—I don't have any—any strong thoughts one way or another except that I know those who knew the individuals who were suffering or who had been attacked in various ways, there w—there would always be a sense of—of comforting that person - calling, going there, helping in some way or another. And, um, to me, that was the *power* that we had... that the community for the most part was *very* united. Um, certainly there—there were factions that were—were broken off, but—but, uh, there was a stronger sense of unity that—that we would—no matter what you faced, you had the community behind you. And—and you didn't have to be afraid. Now, certainly these, uh, direct attacks on personal property were—were fearful, no—no—no doubt. But beyond the moment, uh, I think the individuals knew that—that they didn't have to stand alone. I don't recall, uh, some of the, um, uh, behaviors that—that—that—that developed or that came in—in—in view of—of—of the Klan's, uh, highness. Things that they did... But, I—I know that there was that sense of community, that... the—the—the people who suffered from attacks like that were—were embraced... and were helped in whatever ways were needed. Um... that—that you really didn't feel alone. That—that's the—the *main* thing that I think I—I—I... I—I'm drinking still... from that—that era. You—you just

were not alone. You were not left alone, you were not ignored, uh, uh... whatever it was you were encountering relative to race and all of this, there was—there was somebody who could stand with you and stand behind you. That—that's the best of what I remember, but it's all very general, but I—I'm very comfortable with—with that perception of that era, still.

LB: It sounds like there... you—you have a lot of very positive memories from growing up.

PC: Mmm. Indeed so, indeed. Um... the—remembering the park, you know... even though most people think of it as where Arthur Ashe played tennis, you know, that—that was the gathering place for—for the whole African American community, uh, over Northside. And—and the kids be—our—our dances, wh—ever—every night in the summer, that's w—you went to the park. And—and, during the day, they had crafts and stuff, you know, from the city. And, um... and so, when you—when you think of that—that group, and we could only go up to the Boulevard at that point... uh, across the boulevard was the white community. And so on the Boulevard, you—on—on at least this—on the... what's on this... east side... of the Boulevard... um, that was the black community. On the west side of the Boulevard... cuz the—think the Boulevard ran north and south, I believe it was. And, um, that was the white community. So you didn't really cross that unless you had business up there for whatever reason. And, um, the—there were few blacks living across the Boulevard but not—not—not too many at that point. And we would go up to, um... uh, that little ice cream shop on the Boulevard and dance after the park had closed, then you go to the other spot! So, uh, uh, we—we hung out till, like, 9, 10 o'clock at night, and... and, uh, just *wonderful* teenage kinds of things, and... and, uh, never any trouble, I don't remember any trouble no—might be a fight, you know, here and there, but—but somebody from Armstrong side or whatever come over and bother us, but, I mean, nothing major. You know, not like no guns or nothing like that – never. So, um... you know, life was quite normal, and—with kids right in our—our block and around the corner, you know, always playing together and... parents getting together... it—I could not imagine a better childhood, really. And—and more peaceful and loving, uh, childhood... uh, from the community as well as my own family. So, it, uh—there was no problem with crime. Uh... everything was just so safe... Uh, so I—I—I don't remember being intimidated by the likes of the Ku Klux Klan, or whatever. Uh, only those who cut acrossed over—only... African Americans who had crossed over into the white word were probably targeted by them. And... at that point, most of us still were in the black community.

LB: Now... how do you think all of the experiences that you had during that time shaped who you are today?

PC: [Chuckles] Um... [pauses] I think the steel in my spine, um... is in my DNA, uh, again from South Hampton County, being born of—of—from generations down there. But, e—bringing that on—in—into Richmond and all that I experienced, uh, with the civil rights movement. Um... th—the—there's a joyous sense of openness to

people... And, um, that though we may have been enemies and we fought on different sides, once the fight was over, we could create something different together. It's—it's that sense of, you know, we—we butted heads, you know, during—during the whole civil rights movement, but after that, we could make a world of peace and... make a better world for all of us. So there—there's that sense in—internally of—of looking at people differently than what I would have looked at them during that time. And—and realizing that this is a potential partner for something better... rather than just thinking or perceiving everybody as an enemy just because they're white. Um, so—so those—gradually the—that kind of... mind-set was changed and transformed through the work. And, um—and then, it—it made a better person out of—out of me. So, I, um... I've always... been told, um, since my first marriage – I was married for eleven-and-a-half years – but, um... almost no man would want me because I'm too strong. Too strong of a woman. And, um... uh... uh—this kind of culminated in a conversation when I was... going on a date. The guy wanted to take me bowling. And I think one of my auties or somebody said, "Now, Paige, now, remember, don't beat him bowling. Let him beat you bowling." And... I said, "Well, if we gonna go bowling, he's gonna have to bring his best, he's gonna have to do his best." Cuz I was always taught, do your best, do your best, do your best, do your best... and I said, "cuz I'm not gonna let him win... he's gonna have to win on his own." And sure enough, I beat him... [laughs] and we never had another date [laughs]. And so, you know, it—it's—it's those kinds of lessons that you learn, that regardless of what the outcome is, you cannot be satisfied with less than your best. You know, whether that's in church, or whether it's in the community, or whether it's in the bowling alley. Put your best out. And, um, so, I mean, that—that's how I grew up and even through the civil rights movement, it was always, bring your best. Be your best. Because even at—in prep—in the preparation, as I've mentioned, for the... desegregation of the schools, we couldn't just be anybody. We couldn't be what we would think of as our normal selves, that if you kick me, I kick you back. If you spit on me, I spit on you. We cou—we couldn't be that kind of a child at that point. We were not allowed. We were gonna—we were gonna change our schools. So we—we—we couldn't bring that same kind of behavior. So we—we had to—e—every child in his or her own way, have to really turn some knobs internally... to change his or her own behavior. And—and—and that's *powerful*... right on through the rest of life... when you know you've got the power to change anything that you don't want or you don't like or that you would like. To turn it on or to turn it off. And you can do that within your own power, in your own range, nobody has to try to do it for you. Um... yeah... I like being that kind of person.

LB: How did you get involved in the racial reconciliation work that you've been doing for so long?

PC: It was almost by default [chuckles]. Because I was, uh, my seminary training was as a campus minister... and, um, so... I served, um... I had served... five—no—really, I served seven universities before I went down to North Carolina Central in Durham, North Carolina. And, so many because I served five at one time... simultaneously. And down in the Norfolk area. And then I served two while I was in Seminary,

different times. So, I—I was the full-time campus pastor at North Carolina Central... and, um, it was a separate, uh... uh, uh... ecumenical group... that sponsored the—the campus ministry. And so I wasn't hired by the school, but my office and all was right on the campus of the school. And, uh, so... once that was over, I worked there for four years. You may or may not remember Jim and Tammy Faye Baker—

LB: Of course I do!

PC: Ok. Well. Their whole... mess... was right there in North Carolina. And you would be amazed at how... churches and everything had to just shut down their pocketbooks after that debacle. And we were depended on twelve different denominations supporting our ministry there. And it went all the way down so low financially because as individuals, that trust was broken. As individuals, people shut up their pocketbooks. They were—weren't even giving to their own churches. Uh, and—and particularly hit—hit the hardest was right there in North Carolina. And so, uh, when I left, uh, after about six months of—of more of not receiving any funds... uh, maybe even a little bit longer than that. Uh, but, I mean, the six months from—they owed me six months... uh, benefits. And three months of salary. And so I had worked, I said, just give me enough to keep my apartment paid for and gas and food and whatever. Let's keep going, let's keep going, let's keep going, and finally we realized we couldn't. And it took then, like, five years after that to bring another minister on campus... so—full-time. So, um, when I left there in—in June... of, uh... uh, 1990... I had already been in touch with a group called Moral Rearmament (?), MRA. And now called Hope in the Cities. And I knew a lady who—who was quite involved with them... and, uh, she had invited me to go on a trip with them, um.. and we actually went to Zimbabwe and we s—we sat in the home and talked to the president of Zimbabwe—was just amazing. And, um... uh, who became a lunatic lat—years later, but... you know, it was wonderful to—to be hosted by him. And so, um, I knew her and was aware of them and even while I was in North Carolina, had done a few things still with them, had kept in contact. So when I came back, uh, we had several conversations, uh, me and—and the guy who was the head of it here, Rob Corcoran (?). And finally, I—he said, "Paige, I think we would like for you to work with us full-time, if you would." And, uh, I gave it some thought and... the pay was... horrible [laughs]... but the perks were fantastic. And I literally spent sixteen summers in Europe. And, um, as a resul—cuz we would—we worked throughout the year in our own, uh, separate locations, dotted around the world. And then we bring teams to our permanent conference site in—in cold Switzerland... and, uh, for our different conferences and so, I spent sixteen summers there. Um, some parts was anywhere from two weeks to... six weeks. And... so but I came back to Richmond and I did not have a job. Um, and I was looking for something, uh, permanent. You know, when—when he... said that, um, I said, "Well, I'll give it a try." You know, I just thought maybe it would be something temporary for me - maybe a year or two. Didn't realize how long it would last, so... I think it was... uh, I think it was... about sixteen years full-time and then I'd already been involved about four years prior that. So... So that's how it happened al—almost be default, but then I turned that around and said, no, I—I wanna stay here [laughs]... enjoyed it (?).

Was—um, we... uh, as I mentioned, a part of that was me going to India and celebrating, uh, King and—and Gandhi together, and... and here's an amazing thing, too... Cuz—I was—at—at that point, I wasn't working with them – I was still in North Carolina. And, uh, we had some, um, East Indians, um, there. One of the professors, I said, "I'd like to talk with you cuz I'm going to your country." And, uh, so we had *wonderful*, honest, straight-forward conversations, and one of them that he mentioned, uh, particularly when I—I came back... no, no... it was before I went... whichever... But I—I'd said, "I'm amazed at *why* the Indians here... almost never affiliate with African Americans." And he said, "Paige, we're no fools. We know where the power is... And we know with whom to affiliate to be able to participate in that power." And that was like, "*Wow!*" Um... because when I went to India... you could not find warmer, more hospitable people anywhere on the globe... And I just said, "I—I just thought I brought my Southern hospitality with me that you all provided," you know, so. Uh, it was just wonderful there, but then to come here and realize part of the, uh—uh, in East India will—will barely speak to you. And, uh—as—as a black person. And to see that dichotomy was—was amazing, but I—I appreciated his honesty. And I see it even in—in, uh—Jindal now, how is the Governor of—of Louisiana. I see it in him as well, and some others. And so, um, at any rate, I... uh... that's kind of why I... work with Hope in the Cities and—by default, but, again, intentional... after that, to stay that long. I loved it – I loved the work.

LB: How do you think... that period of time that we're talking about, you know, '50s and '60s – how do you think that time changed your family?

PC: [Pauses] I wouldn't—I wouldn't use the word *changed* [pauses]. Maybe *strengthened*... would be a better word and—and—and—and—the way that I—that I—

LB: I should say *shaped*, really.

PC: Shaped? Mm hmm. Um... [pauses] I think it—it enabled us to hold our heads a little higher... We were already proud of our ancestry and... proud in a sense of who we were... as—as people of African descent. But I think we were even prouder after that – that we could make such a difference... in a whole nation. And that somehow or another, we had participated in a little bit of that. So I think a sense of—of—of—of pride grew... uh, or—or—or—or morphed into something greater within us... uh, as—as best I could perceive it. Because outwardly, life wasn't that different. We still went to the places we enjoyed. And in even though, uh, I could work at Thalhimers and Miller & Rhoads – I worked at both in due time, over the years – um, and—and could go to their restaurants internally (?), we still had our other favorite places that we wanted to go, so it—it didn't *change* life that much. And that—and I think only in maybe some spiritual senses were we shaped or reshaped or... uh... did—did we change or develop in some way, or become somebody better or different.

LB: Did your sister ever change her viewpoints?

PC: No. No, and I'll give you another example. Um, after we'd gone to Zimbabwe, um – after I'd gone with the group... I believe it was the very next year, so that would've been... um... n—I went to Zim....babwe in... '83. 19... wait, wait, no, where am I, where am I... Yeah. In—in 19—cuz I—I came back home in... '83. '84, 1984 I would have gone on—on that trip with, um... uh... MRA. To—to Zimbabwe. And so the—the year following that, which would have been 1985, um... a pastor that I'd met in Zimbabwe – his daughter and son-in-law were in school down in North Carolina, and, um... and so I invited them to come and spend Thanksgiving holiday with us, so I had to drive down there, get and bring them, and they spent the holiday. And of course at the—at the dinner table, uh, they were speaking in their native language. And one of the times my sister got up and stormed away from the table and, "They talking all that mess here." And—and—and, "I don't know what they sayin'. They could be talking about us!" You know, she just hated that. And I said, "Enid (?), it's their mother tongue. And they can converse better in their mother tongue, and—" you know. She couldn't care less—she had ever studied a language and she—she studied the least it—she was actually a better student, you know, grade-wise, than I was. But, um, she couldn't care less about this--the language that she studied or the languages of people around the world. But she just thought, well, they were in her presence and everybody should speak English, and—which was just so snobbish. And, um... and so that—that—that was—was, um—I forget your question now, but that was something that I really saw in her that—that never really changed. You know, she distanced herself from the movement and she rejected people of—of—of other differences, whether it was language or color or whatever. Um, though she did her nurses training in New York and had to work with everybody. She loved it up there, but somehow down here, she just... you know, shut herself off from others. Um... so that—when she said that I—it—it was really hurtful. Uh, and I—it just sharpened the differences between us. How could I be so open to the world, anybody... and how could she be so closed. Eh... um, and—and two children growing up in the same household. How could we be that different, I—

LB: It's like that Sly and the Family Stone song...

PC: Uh... um...

LB: You know, it's a family affair.

PC: Family affair—fair. Yes, yes, yes... yes... yes. Absolutely. So, um...

LB: Now... when you—when you reflect back, are there things that you would like the generation of kids growing up in Richmond today to know?

PC: *God, yes.*

LB: [Laughs.]

PC: You—you don't have enough time for me to go over that list. Um... clothing is one thing.... Um... I see few positive things about the clothing of this generation... or the past few generations. Um... for the—the—for the girls... as we were coming up, we were told, you know that you're a woman. Other people can look at you and tell that you're a woman. You don't have to show everything that a woman has to prove it. And when they got to wear pants that almost show their clitoris... uh, that they're so tight. And—and—and then so low on the hip—on the hips... that when you sit down, you literally see the crack in their behind. And—and then they gotta wear tops so tight, you know, you see the whole... uh, separation of their breast... and even the top part of their breast. You know, I wonder, how can they feel so positive about themselves... and present themselves so negatively to the world. Like, 'I got to show you what I got.' Well... something's wrong internally for that. Because if you don't know who you are and appreciate and value who you are, and not need to demonstrate that to other people, then you're in a safe place. Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically. And—and when I see girl—I—I've even, um, um, rubbed a few people wrong at our church... be—because, uh, we have Youth Sunday once a month, and, I said, Oh, these young girls are gonna come in there, they're gonna wear the right kind of clothing when they—when they sit in that pulpit. They're not gonna wear skirts that are so short, and they—and—and they're not gonna wear pants that are so tight. I said, because, you know, we are not focusing on them. We are—eh—those in the pulpit are *leading* us in worship. Not looking at them, we're here to worship God. And—and as you can tell, I get—I get—I get a litt—little... moved by that. And—and that people forget even in the church just *normal* appropriate attire. I even commented to one of our youth workers - I said, "I'm amazed at this one particular young girl... Every time she has to give our church announcements, she's always wearing a low-cut... uh, top. Or a skirt that's quite high on her thighs. Or both." And I said, "You need to talk with her, that it's not about her." And so I find that—that—that our generations now are so empty inside, they've gotta put on all this stuff or do all this stuff on the outside, just to make themselves feel like they're worth shit. And—and—and that—that—that bothers me deeply. And it goes right to the—to the guys with the pants that—you know, they can't even walk! Their pants—and—and—and—for—for—for parents and for teachers and it—school administrators to put up with that is just more than beyond the pale. Because, uh, I've—I've heard teachers say, "Well, now, we can't—we can't tell 'em to not do this, that, or th—cuz their parents gonna fuss and holler." And I said, "Doggone, well, I don't care! When, they're at school, they're on public property.... They can wear anything they—they darn well please when they're *off* of public property. But when they come to school, they—there should be a standard. And it—and if they don't learn it at home, daggone it you better teach 'em that at school." That's a part of the problem right there, is I was, uh—uh—substitute in—in—in the schools... uh, mentioning the girls with their pants so low... that, now, a guy sitting behind them, he gotta watch the crack on her behind. And he's supposed to concentrate on his math exam. I mean, there's a prob—the—the—tha—the—som—I mean, there's something wrong with that picture. And—and—and, yeah, we can tell guys, "Well you ain't gotta look at it." Well, no. I—I firmly believe that women don't have to take responsibility for male behavior. But women should also

know that I don't have to *prove* to you by what I look like that I'm female. Or by—by revealing that. You know, I... um, I—I'll never forget a conversation I had with a religious leader... and that he was talking about how women just, uh... um... whatcha-call-it, not inspire, but... uh... stir—

LB: Provoke?

PC: Provoke lust in—in men. I said, “You know, I don't give a darn if a woman wore a steel tank instead of a dress. Men would still be lusting after her.” So it's not just the clothing, but then also we—we—we don't go to the other end of that—of the extreme end of that continuum. It doesn't have to be clothing that does *entice*. And—and—and—and provoke, uh... whatever. Um... that—the kind of behavior that we know of today. So, there's—there—there—there's some irresponsibility on both sides, male and female. And again, I—I just look at the parents. I tell people all the time, I've never seen a bad child. I've just seen some horrendous parents... Because the child doesn't automatically know what's right and wrong.

LB: Well that really leads me to my—my next question, I mean, are there things that you feel that we as a community... particularly need to remember... about that era we've been talking about, that we may be in danger of forgetting.

PC: Oh, abso—I—I woul—I would say—say two—two things, and they really could kinda connect. Uh, a sense of decency. And—and—and—and that connects with—with knowing what belongs to you and what doesn't... Because you always had a sense as—as I was growing up, it didn't matter what was out there in front of you, if it didn't belong to you, you didn't touch it. And—and I'll never—never forget, um, I think it was a pencil... We had a store on the corner from our house, and there was—I had gone to the store for my mom to get something and I came back, and I had this pencil. Mama said, “Oh, where'd you get the pencil?” I said, “Mommy, it was just laying on the counter and I—I wanted a pencil...” “Take it back.” A pencil! A child with a pencil! But it didn't belong to me. Even though it was laying on the counter, you m... they may not have known who it belonged to, but... she knew and I knew it did not belong to me. So that sense of—of—y—you don't cross that line. Y—you've got a right to everything that belongs to you. But you don't bother what belongs to somebody else. No matter where it is. If they put it in your lap, you don't bother it. You might move it from your lap, but you don't bother what doesn't belong to you. And the sense of crossing the space of somebody else's property, or somebody else's body, or somebody else's belongings... I mean, that was just so strong in our—in our community. Y—you know, y—you couldn't be a decent person and—and think differently. And—and so for—for our kids today, it doesn't matter what belongs to anybody. If they want it, they just go for it. And, uh, in whatever way they've been trained and they want to. And—and here again, I mean, it's—it's—it's the parents who've taught them that or allowed that. So, um... the sense of decency w... presenting yourself in a *decent* way... um... because onl—only whores and prostitutes reveal their bodies... at that day and time. And—and you were a virtuous girl. Not all of us were virgins, necessarily, but you were a virtuous girl. If you did

your stuff, you did it in private, you know, you don't flaunt yourself out in public. And—and so there w—there was that real sense of decency that—that it's just—it's long gone now. It's long gone... with too many of our kids, yeah.

LB: Paige, is there anything that I have not asked you that you would like to add?

PC: You know, there were a couple of things that—that, um... came into my mind, and—and they'll—they'll come back. Um... [pauses] Well, I—I—I think I t—yeah, I told you about my dad, he's—relative to his understanding about race. The—the least said, that—the better. Um... [pauses] Oh. Let me throw this in. With my work on Hope in the Cities, we had a conference in D.C.... and, uh... I decided that we would have a demonstration on the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building. And, um... I got a group of dancers from my church—liturgical dancers... but on those steps, they were to pretend that they were, uh, washing the steps... and I'll tell you why in a minute. So they had to—it's—what, like, fifty, sixty or more steps that—long... tall... uh, map (?), I guess it... and, um, staircase. And, so they had to start from the top, and it was about twenty of them, and they had the—they had buckets and they had brushes. And they had to scrub the steps and come on down and... they were all in white garb. And they—they performed all of this as a dance, really. And then... one at a time, they just collapsed... you know, like they had worked and given their last... and—and—on the steps. And people from the crowd... had to walk up those steps, take their hand, and bring them back to life. And I still have my brush, I'll show you. And—and what—what that signified was... slave labor built that building. And a part of our conference was the declaration that never again... would that kind of behavior be allowed. And even the things that had been said about blacks and slaves or whatever on down the years, that never again would that kind of behavior, verbiage, etc. etc. be allowed from the capitol building of the United States of America. That never again would any ethnic group be disenfranchised and dishonored. We were washing it... clean. Because as a part of our preparation, we even saw some of the, um... um... pay slips... that paid the master of the slaves. The slaves never got a dime, of course. And, um, to realize that—that the—the building that's—that's signifies freedom... and democracy to the world... uh, was involved in that kind of heinous behavior. Which was legal at that time, we understand that. But we were declaring, 'never again.' And—and we did it, um... through, uh, the liturgical dance. I don't remember what music was being played, but there was some music. And, um, we scrubbed history clean. And, uh, the people from the, uh, audience then went up and grabbed their hands and said, "We can work together," and we—they came on down. And so that—to transform or whatever or to—to make America better. So that—that was really a moment... that you saw people could learn so much from each other. And—and... have it affirmed that together we really could make a—a better America. And a different world. Um, just—just by dancing it out. Just by miming it out and, um, uh—portraying the fact that we can—we can clean up history... by making the present different. So, um... the—that—that was... kind of a major moment for me. Um... so I... I was so glad that I had, um... somehow gotten the inspiration to offer that, and that they liked it—the... the planning group liked the idea, and... St. Paul's Baptist Church, I guess you've heard of it, but I was actually at

St. Paul's... and on staff with them. And they, um, they were the—the group that I—their dance—one of their dance groups... was the group that I took up there... to D.C., so...

LB: Yeah, the woman I was interviewing yesterday was a member of St. Paul's--

PC: Ahh!

LB: ... from when she was a child. So, we were talking about that, too.

PC: The name could you say?

LB: Robin Mines?

PC: Um, no I don't... Now, the Mines family, I know there's a Mines family. But I—I don't remember Robin... um... not directly.

LB: She was the oldest daughter, so...

PC: Ok, so... she'd be about my age, then?

LB: No. She was born in '58.

PC: Ok. Yeah. So... so I—I left in 200...2, December 2002. So, two years ago... so... she would have been in her forties then...

LB: I think you probably just missed her.

PC: Oh, ok.

LB: Because she was probably there when you were gone.

PC: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

LB: And then kind of...

PC: Yes. Ok. Uh, cuz I know—I kn—I know... I remember the... um, some Mines being there, part of that family... and, uh... but I just didn't remember that first name.

LB: Well, Paige, thank you so, so much. This has been... just a wonderful interview.

PC: Well, I'm—I'm delighted. I'm thrilled with your work, and... glad that I could be some small part of it. And—and I—I wanna—

LB: Huge part of it.

PC: I wanna share with you, look at that picture right over there. Um... cuz that connects with some of what we've been talking about. I was, um, on the Greek Island of Kos... And, um... I had left the, uh, place I was staying, the bed-and-breakfast where I was staying, and was walking towards town. You know how a lot of art shops, particularly [?]. they'll have pictures and prints and things out on the sidewalk. So, as I was walking towards town, uh, and getting ready to pass this art shop, um, that picture was facing me and just standing in the line of other pictures, just a print. And—and just as clearly, I—I—I... felt the—the thought, "Paige, that's you." And I looked at it... Because the f... the face... the facial expression... doesn't go with playing the viola. Cuz that's a little larger than a violin, it seems, and—of course, that's what I played, some of my would... Because how in the world could somebody be so melancholy, playing the viola. You know, it's the—the expression of delight and joy, you know, you may get serious in a moment, but—but that's not just being serious, that's a real melancholy, forlorn... kind of look. And then as I—I kept looking at that as I was walking towards it, said, "Now, how in the world can he have that kind of look on his face?" So, "Because he's playing somebody else's music." I—in other words, he hasn't internalized the music as his own... it's always a separation or distancing himself from what he's playing, that it's somebody else's music and not mine, [pretends to cry] I wanna play my music, mmmmm... You know he's doing it diligently, it's not something that he has... has, uh... really taken in fully, and—and I think it—it only cost me—I know it was less than twenty dollars, some were maybe twelve, fifteen dollars...was... little cheap thing. But I brought that thing back so proudly and I have... just loved it ever since, and... and, uh....

LB: It speaks to you.

PC: Yeah! Yeah. It truly—it truly did and it still does. That—that's... that--