

A Community Remembers

Interview: Reggie Gordon

Laura Browder: So about... that distance--

Reggie Gordon: Ok. Alright.

LB: ...is perfect. [Pauses.] And why don't we start off by having you tell me your name and where you went to school.

RG: Alright. My name is Reginald E. Gordon. I went to public schools here in Richmond. I went to Norrell Elementary School. And then I went to Binford Middle School, Albert Hill Middle School, Thomas Jefferson High School. That's my--

LB: Perfect.

RG: Richmond experience.

LB: Tell me something about how you grew up.

RG: Sure. I moved to Richmond--my family moved to Richmond in 1967. Prior to that, we were living in Blackstone Virginia, which is a town sixty miles southwest of here. And, just as a background... my father--is dec--he's deceased but he was a Baptist minister, my mother was a school teacher. So... when it was time for me to go to school, I could already read. And my father, because of that era, decided he wanted me to integrate the primary school in Blackstone. It made the paper, it was a big deal... and it--when I look back on those days, I didn't know how large that was for that community. But there were six of us who went to the school. Evidently there was some discussion with my parents after that, primarily with my father, that he didn't want to subject his children to that kind of experience. So that's why we moved to Richmond. My mother was upset because she thought we were moving from a manageable small town to a big scary city [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: So there was that--that was--so education was the reason we came to Richmond.

LB: That's interesting.

RG: Yeah. Mm hmm.

LB: So how old were you then?

RG: I was seven.

LB: Ok.

RG: So I started second grade in Richmond. We moved into...uh, Battery Park neighborhood, Overbrook Road--that's where I live now. And I walked to school. I walked to Norrell Elementary School, which was an all-black elementary school. Uh, so that's--that was how I started my education in this city.

LB: So tell me about your neighborhood. Tell me about what Battery Park was like back then.

RG: It was... fantastic. I mean, from my... you know, here I'm fifty-two years old, looking back on those days... it... when I watch television shows, I did not see any difference between the Brady Bunch's neighborhood and my neighborhood. Which... that's just--maybe it's because of how my family raised us? But we had, um, a really comfortable en--en--living environment. Uh, treelined streets, kids rode their bicycles, we had a park nearby with tennis courts and swimming pool. There were days when Arthur Ashe was at the park. So we would hear, "Arthur Ashe is down the park!" and so we'd all go run down and watch him hit tennis balls. We had, uh, you know, it was very family-oriented. There was a... big church down the street. So I really thought it was i--ideal kind of childhood. Um, all my neighbors had children who I went to school with, we walked to school together, which was about... uh, two or three blocks away from my house. So there--it--there was--it was very comfortable... um, I was always... um, I remember just being happy. There was no stress. Um, we traveled as a family, my neighbors traveled as a family, so it... as, you know--so we could talk to each other as kids about experiences that we'd had outside of our neighborhood. So it was really... great.

LB: What kind of trips did you take with your family?

RG: Uh, we'd--all over Virginia. We had relatives in... uh, Connecticut. Uh, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida. Every Christmas, we went to Florida for Christmas. Every--every year, we went to Florida for Christmas. Because my mother had a sister there. So I remember as a kid packing into the Chevrolet and we just would *drive*, this was before 95. So we did that my entire life until I was in my twenties. So it was a family--family, um, bonding experience. And, um, we... we probably didn't go too far west. But a lot of up and down the east coast. So I really didn't feel... deprived in any way growing up. Yeah.

LB: I can't imagine that you would.

RG: Right.

LB: What was Norrell like then?

RG: It was... a really good school! I--you know, I have memories of things like, um--well, I knew--I knew a lot of the kids because they were obviously from my neighborhood. We had teachers who were really invested in us. Very... um, proud administrators. You know, the principal and the assistant principals. My father was the president of the PTA... for a

while, because my mother was a school teachers so he--he was a minister, his job was on Sundays, so he had the time to be invested in... in parent-teacher conferences... We did, um... uh, like, carnivals and there--there were events like that in the evenings... um... so I--I... have a really good feeling about what happened at that school. I remember French--I don't know why that comes to mind a lot, but from second grade on, actually till my senior year in high school, there--it was an intent to make all the kids bilingual at--at Norrell. Yeah. And I--I think this was throughout the city. I'm not ex--I don't--I don't know all the details, but--so we always were, um, practicing French. Uh, in our, um--at Norrell. We had chorus. With lots of--we had sock hops. You know [laughing] it was--it was--

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: ...really a classic kinda nineteen... late sixties experience because the Jackson Five was big and, uh, I remember being in the--in the cafeteria just dancing around in our socks, listening to Michael Jackson. You know. So I--I felt a... it was really bright. It was bright, sunny, uplifting, I felt really cared for, loved... by the people there.

LB: I can see why. Where was your dad's church? Was it in the neighborhood, too?

RG: No. No, my dad's church was back in Blackstone. Uh, so he... sixty miles away. So every Sunday we would travel sixty miles to go to... his church or churches--he... had more than one. And since they were rural churches, every church didn't meet the same Sunday. So, um, they had first and third Sundays or second and fourth Sundays. So we were always on the road on Sundays. And then maybe sometimes during the week.

LB: That--

RG: So for us--it was cool because for us, uh, we got to be behind the scenes at weddings and funerals [laughs] because as he was doing the, you know, the--his ministering job, we were playing in the--in the back or... or listening. Um, from his, uh study.

LB: It sounds like a super close family.

RG: Very close. As we... traveled back on Sundays, I would listen to my parents debrief what had happened at church. And sometimes--it might have been irreverent because they were laughing at [laughing] some of the things that had happened or p--what people had said. So I--it was very loving. Uh, and my father actually, um, got sick. He had diabetes. So he lost his sight by the time I was in the fifth grade. So he was thirty--a thirty-something-year-old man... with a wife and two boys. And I'm the oldest son. And he--he could no longer be the--he had sort of a dominant personality--in a--in a positive way. He was... I think of him as, like, Martin Luther King. I guess because it was the sixties and he was always in a tie and he had a booming voice--voice. So as a--as a--as a kid, I... associated him as being just like Martin Luther King. My mother was Coretta Scott King [laughs]--

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: ... you know it was just the way they carried themselves. Just felt very similar to that. But after he lost his sight, my mother had to stop teaching... in order to make sure that sh--he could, um, keep moving forward. It was really hard for him because he'd been so active, so engaged, not only in his professional life, but in his civic... um, responsibility. That losing... that sense of sight was a--was a shock for him. He--he never really got over that.

LB: Did it come on suddenly?

RG: Overnight. I remember the night it happened. We had gone out to Blackstone... to, like, a choir rehearsal. And we got back and he was in, you know, that bedroom, and it was--he had a--a lamp. He did some insurance work on the side... um, Southern Aid Life Insurance Company. So he the papers that he was working on on the bed. We went to bed. C--my father was--he was just slumped over asleep in the bed. We, um, the next morning, I remember being--my mother crying. And--and rushing us out of the house to go--to walk to--to elementary school. When we got back that afternoon, we found out that he woke up in the middle of the night and he had--both of his eyes has hemorrhaged. So he lost his sight overnight. And that's how it started.

LB: That's a very tough road.

RG: Yeah. Mm hmm. Very.

LB: So your family really... changed--

RG: Changed, yeah.

LB: ...overnight--the whole family.

RG: Yes. Mm hmm. We had to... grow up quickly as the two boys. And I remember I--because Norrell was so close... I think our teachers were involved--because of the way the neighborhoods and every--everybody was woven together, you know, we were allowed to leave school during the day, walk home, fix lunch for our dad, and go back to school. And I just found out less than three years ago, that my younger brother used to sneak out of class to watch me go home to fix lunch for my dad. [Laughs.] It was--fascinating. Cuz I guess he was... anxious that all that got done, too. And he was afraid I would forget. So he, uh, was following out of sight, behind me to make sure I did that.

LB: How old were you, how old was he?

RG: So--let's see. So... I guess I was nine years old. When he went blind. Yeah. Around--yeah, I was still at Norrell. And we started when I was seven. So probably nine. That means he woulda--he would've been seven. Yeah.

LB: So what happened after that?

RG: Well... we--I--my family always believed in education, we were a tight family. And I think my mother tried to make sure that our lives didn't feel too disrupted. So we still traveled as a family. Um, my father was still involved with all the decisions. Uh... I... I... our--the--economics didn't change. I think because he had veterans benefits. My mother did stop working but I--I don't re--*feel* as though we had less money.

LB: And your dad was still working.

RG: He was still--*working*, right, exactly.

LB: Yeah.

RG: So he still had his churches. In fact, during that time, he led a--a... the construction of a new church... of--of one of his fac--you know, churches in Blackstone. So he--he still--we--we would use--we used to *read* to him... Primarily thing, uh, like passages from the bible as he was working on his sermons. And he would just begin to memorize them. And so we all became a part of his Sunday work. I remember--and then he also did the program, so there was a lot of typing in our house. And we had a mimeograph machine, so [laughs]--

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: So Saturday night it was always... you know, getting ready for church and--and, um... typing, and... getting things organized. Yeah. So it--it was a--it was a... I guess you can tell, I really have fond memories--I don't have *any*--and I realize how fortunate I--I am now. That I can't--I look back on my childhood and... I was loved, I was told I was smart, that I could do anything. We got exposed to various... people and places. So I know how lucky I was to have that.

LB: I'd imagine there'd be a lot of people in and out of the house--

RG: Yes. Right

LB: ...with your father in the position he was in.

RG: Yeah. So... few things, we were coached on... not only people come to our house, but we had to go to other parishioners' homes that invited us to dinner. So we were told no matter what that person wh--what was sat before us at a table, we had to eat it. Yeah and--

LB: I say the same thing to my kids [laughs].

RG: [Laughs] so we had to, uh, learn how to... be, uh... uh, respectful... If we walked in

someone's home and they didn't have much? No big deal. You know. I remember once we went to a house and the lady, uh--there was a rodent coming out of the stove. I mean, I remember my brother yelled [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: And--and my--cuz we were eating--it was some bread. And we were--we were *eating* bread and so it would--and so our--my mother said, "Sit down. Just be quiet. And we're gonna keep eating." So it was that kind of--and I remember those--that--those lessons. About, we will not embarrass this woman. She had left the room. She--they would--people would usually put us in the dining room, or in where we were to eat and then they would--they would leave. It was that deference toward the minister and his family. Um, but we were, you know, never... we weren't allowed to look--to be condescending, of course, and--and just love. My family was very generous with... supporting, um, people that we went to church with and others in the community. So I--it was a lot of, um... I--lot of those are great life skills. Uh, and I saw that when we were in front of people and the same thing at home. You know, it--there was no--it wasn't a facade. It was really how they felt about how we should interact with our fellow human beings. Which probably set me on the course to--do the kind of work I do now which is nonprofit. Yeah.

LB: Absolutely.

RG: Mm hmm.

LB: So you were continuing, you finished Norrel--

RG: Yes.

LB: ...and then what happened?

RG: And *then*... busing started for me. Now I know busing was taking place in Richmond prior to that. I don't remember the conversation, other than... you know, starting with middle school, you're going to Binford. So, it's my first time having to leave the neighborhood to go to school. And at that point, I felt like I was going to--*all* the way across town. It felt like it was so far from my house. But all my friends were doing it. So we were all at the bus stop. Getting on the bus in the morning, going to, um... Binford. And I think I recall--I used to think that--then the white kids in town must've been getting on the bus to come... to *our* side of town. That's--that's the way I sort of imagined this was working. But when I got to Binford, there was a mix of white kids and black kids. And it didn't feel--I didn't feel unprepared. I don't remember being afraid or anxious, it was just... the *bus* was what was different. It wasn't the--the environment. Maybe there were fewer... well, I had s--teachers who didn't look like me but that didn't scare me. Or cause me any concern either. My parents really... m...I think worked hard to not talk about race too much in our home. Uh, so I never even noticed much that there was a different between what was happening in my life and what I saw on TV.

LB: Because I would imagine growing up in Battery Park and going to Norrell, you must've been in a completely all black environment--

RG: All black. Everything was all black, and... and it--but it didn't seem... it--it felt... wonderful. [Laughs] you know, I--

LB: Yeah.

RG: ... we had stores on the, you know, we could walk to the general--the little store and buy candy if we needed to, um... uh... I knew people on my street, I knew people-- I'd see them at different functions around town, I--my parents were involved with some, like, social activities, so... everyone... seemed successful. And... and educated. And interesting. So I--I... it was great! I d--I don't remember... thinking that Battery Park was different from any other neighborhood in Richmond. Now what I've figured is I didn't *know* much about other neighborhoods in Richmond [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: The only thing I recall is... Oregon Hill was a scary place. You know [laughs], uh, which was funny because... I... it--it felt more like there were some poor people over there who might be mean to you. So don't go to Oregon Hill. But every--I--I didn't hear anything negative about any other neighborhoods in town.

LB: How as Binford when you were there?

RG: Binford was--was fine. The--there's one story that comes to mind.... Evidently... I had a white teacher... who was, uh, we--the--the subject, I guess, was social studies. And the topic was... um, something like, uh, E--Egypt or Ethiopia. It was--some country in--in Africa. And... she said, "You negro children should know this. You should know about peanuts." Be--so, I went home, and I think I said to my parents just--as we all--we all would sit down and have dinner together every night. And I think I said, "I don't know much about peanuts. And the teacher said that the negro children should know about peanuts." My [laughs]--my mother and father were livid. You know, I recall there was this big dust-up. The--they went to school with me the next day... that's all I remember, but I--I've since found out my mother and father talked to the teacher and the principal and they were, uh... wanted her reprimanded for saying that to the... in a mixed classroom, turn to the negro children and say you should... you should know peanuts. So that--that... I innocently went home to say, you didn't teach me about peanuts [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: And so ev--that--I guess that was, maybe a little fissure... that unbeknownst to me was a racial tension that was occurring. Middle school was just rough. So I don't remember much racial, um, racial problem. It's just growing up.

LB: Yeah, t--tell me about that. Tell me about the--the kind of middle school feeling.

RG: Right. It, uh... nothing--you... I los--you sorta lose, uh, confidence. You know, and I was--personally, I was a--I was... a--a skinny kid. I didn't wear glasses, but I was, uh, nerdy. You know, and--and for a boy being nerdy in middle school, just made it--that was bad [laughs]. So I--I remember those days just because I was different. But that wasn't like a... black boys, you know, picking on me, or white boys pick--it's just like, I was... getting picked on because [laughs]--

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: ...I was a bookworm or sorta... nerdy. So I remember that happening at Binford and Albert Hill, which was pretty bad, but I was resilient. Now I know why, is because I got so much positive reinforcement at home. I sort of brushed those things off, I thought, during the course of the schooldays. Or on the bus. But the bus became scary, though. Because that's when the transition started from the safety of my neighborhood in Battery Park to, even with some new kids... you know, getting the bus, you travel several minutes. You get sort of... studied and targeted on a bus. You know, I--that--that happened from time to time. Yeah.

LB: Yeah, that's a drag.

RG: It's a drag, yeah. And... so I had to learn... how to--where to sit on the bus and [laughs], how to keep yourself occupied on the bus, and... finding... likeminded friends. Who... might get picked up at a different bus stop. So. You know.

LB: But then you moved from Binford to Albert Hill, why that transition.

RG: I don't know. I think it had to do with... something about the--with the school system.

LB: So you were r--kind of rezoned from one to the other or--

RG: Probably.

LB: Yeah.

RG: Yeah. I--I really don't know why that happened. I spent maybe a year at Albert Hill and then a year at--I mean, a year at Binford and a year at Albert Hill. So, sixth, seventh... sixth, seventh, two years at one of them. I can't remember--probably two years at Albert Hill. That--they, uh... same ex--I thought it was--they were good schools. I didn't feel that there was... a big shift in... my education experience. Felt just as strong as Norrell. Um, and I don't have stories about... bad things happening. Other than... kids going through that period when they just... can be a little mean [laughs].

LB: Yeah!

RG: That's--that's all that--that's all I remember. About those days. Yeah.

LB: Now how were--there is so much going on...

RG: Yeah.

LB: ...in Richmond--

RG: Right. Mm hmm.

LB: ... at that time. Can you tell me what you saw of Richmond, what you remember of the city when you were a kid. And then what kind of changes you noticed.

RG: Right. Right.... I remember downtown... because that was exciting. Particularly since our roots were in a small town. YOU know, so going to... Richmond to Thalhimers, Miller & Rhoads, the classic Richmond experience, shopping downtown, the--all the people. Ladies in my neighborhood who rode the bus who wore gloves... You know, it was very, uh, provincial in a way that--there was a certain way you carry yourself with your handbag and your gloves when you went downtown. This is in the late sixties and--seventies, I think, it sort of laxed up... a little bit. And then the malls... you know, so I--I... I guess I probably had access to various places for--for--shopping. I do--I think I was a little bit older when we had one incident. My brother and I were doing some Christmas shopping in--in Richmond... downtown. I think Miller & Rhoads or Thalhimers. My brother had a wallet in his front pocket. And we passed by a rack of clothes, and my--and the I--and the sales lady, who was a white lady... said, I saw that and give that back. And we were like, you know, "what?" "You stole the knob--the finial--off of the clothes rack [laughs]. Give it back!" And he--we're like--and he said, I just have my wallet in my pocket. She said, "ok, ok." So she sort of shoo'ed us off. But I remember thinking, why would she think that we stole the [laughs]--

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: ... the finial off of the [laughs]--the clothes rack. Now, a--another--uh, here's something I just remembered. My father... loved my mother, he bought most of her clothes. We would all--so we were all involved with shopping for my mother. So this is prior to him losing his sight. After he lost his sight... my mother would drop us off downtown, and my fa--blind guy and his two boys would go into Miller & Rhoads or Montaldo's or all these stores, to buy clothes for my mother. Which I think must've been a sight. Because [laughs]--because we learned how to describe the dresses to my father. The sales woman would say, "Well, here is..." and we'd take over, "That's a A-line with a--it has a bow, and then it's turquoise with--" and he was like, "Nah, I don't--I don't think she likes A-line." You know, it was--

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: ... all this kinds of. So--people would, I remember lots of comments about, this is the most bizarre scene [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: A blind man and his two boys buying--but we would--so we shopped downtown with, uh... out--feeling a sense of barrier. Now we must--in retrospect, we must've had enough money that we didn't--he didn't--we didn't have a issue walking into... stores that might have... seen prohibitive. Now--now--I don't--I can't really tell you exactly what was going on, other than, we walked in any store. Now I know that probably hadn't--al--in retrospect, that has not always been the case in Richmond, but, it never was *my* experience to have anyone say... what are you doing here, or--or--or... or me feeling that my parents felt uncomfortable in any establishment. The only time I saw that happen maybe was at a--a... a gas station when we traveled. And my father would sometimes ask, can we use the restroom. If the answer was no, we'd keep driving. I have some memory of that. So growing up in Richmond. Um... I think s... what I do remember seeing change was the neighborhood, just a bit. Uh... when I got to... middle school... there were probably more white kids than black kids. But by the time I finished middle school and was going toward high school, I could tell there were fewer white kids in my classes. I remember that. I don't know what I thought about it, other than... I guess they were going to private school.

LB: Cuz that would've been early seventies, right?

RG: Early seventies, right. Um... so that was a change. But... the, I know we blacks on--I know we had black leadership on city council at that point. So it--I didn't feel that... people who looked like me were... uh... in--I saw them everywhere. You know, everywhere I went, I felt like we were a part of the community and--and--and important roles in the community. That's from the perspective of a kid.

LB: Were these changes discusses at home much, with your family, around the dinner table or while you were watching the news?

RG: Um.... Not much. I remember the discussions probably focused on the war. Yeah. It was--

LB: Did you talk about that a lot?

RG: Yeah. Mm hmm. I--just like many American families, we had that TV right there during dinner [laughs]. So we were watching the Vietnam War play out. As we were having our evening meal. Uh... so, I remember... you know, just how sad it was, or... unfortunate, and that we need to get out of this war. Um, that kind of--that kind of thing. Uh... yeah, uh--I--it... if my--if my parents had... discussions dealing with politics or discriminations or, uh, changes in the community that they felt were... really bad, they didn't bring it up win front of us.

LB: Or changes that were really good.

RG: --or good, right. Right, exactly. It wasn't... we s--we seemed pretty even in that we had a--a good existence. Now, you could've--my mother probably worked hard, particularly since my father had lost his sight and was sick, to try to keep things solid and... that we were doing ok, and--and... do--do your homework and you're smart boys and... you know, it--it was very much, um, always a pep rally. And--everybody's--no screaming at my household. It was really a good place to, uh, to--to develop... a--good sense of self, and how you... what you can accomplish. and I think--so inside the house and the neighborhood and the city, those were the kinds of things that kept getting reinforced... that I r--I now realizes. That the sky's the limit. Just work hard, study hard and you can--you can do it.

LB: I'm still fixated on the fact that your mother continued to have the guys in the family buy her clothes--

RG: [Laughs.]

LB: ... even after your father went blind.

RG: It was an amazing--uh, yeah! It--it--it--I don't--I--my father just had that in him. He was, uh... very... uh... very good husband to her. Loved her, obviously, and that's what he'd done before. And... I guess he decided he was not gonna let

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: ... losing his sight stop that, and we--he had two helpers [laughs]. I remember once, we walked. I guess it was a surprise gift for her, we walked from our house to Azalea Mall. Which is a good--that--yeah, that's... a few miles. You know. But, we went to [la bode?] store there and bought a dress for my mom. So it--it--that was just a part of how we were taught to respect our mother and--and women in general. So he was a good guy. Yeah.

LB: He sounds like it--

RG: [Laughs.]

LB: He sounds great.

RG: Yeah. Right. Yeah.

LB: So then you got to high school--

RG: High school, right. High school... took the bus. Um... so some of the... kids that I knew in high school, the white kids, had been kids that I'd met when I was in middle school. Here's the st--here's something that happened. I was very comfortable with all of

my... friends, whether they were white or black. I remember getting to high school, and... I would s--didn't know this, but I was sitting at the wrong table, in high school. I was sitting at the white table.

LB: In the cafeteria?

RG: In the cafeteria. Because I knew some of those kids from my classes when I was at middle school. And I'll never forget, one of my friends from the neighborhood... walked over to me at some point and went--they called me Reginald Gordon, cuz there were about two or three Reginalds, so I was always--my closest friends called me Reginald Gordon.

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: Like...[laughs], "Reginald Gordon, why are you sitting at this table?" I was like, "What do you mean?" He said, "Look at who else is at the table." And I think everybody heard the conversation. And he said, "They're white. You need to come over here and sit with us." I was like, "Really??" He's like, "Yeah!" So then I got up and went and sat with the black kids. And I--I... I don't know how my white friends felt about that, but I didn't... I just.. didn't realize that I was doing something wrong and it felt... a little weird that I was... being told by one of my friends from the neighborhood. I thought that's more like a neighborhood thing. As opposed to--

LB: Yeah.

RG: These are white kids, like--your'e neighborhood friends are sitting here and you need to sit with them. So I--that was my freshman year. And... I... remember that I had s--some best friends who lived near T.J. Lived in the West End. So I would go to their--he's a--a--one of my friend, Dean Catlin (?)--his name comes to mind. I'd go to his house after school, my parents might come and pick me up, we're just hanging out doing what little boys did--high school boys did back in that... period. We didn't have video games, obviously. But then he might come to my house some afternoons. So there was a lot of... with *my* circle of friends, um... white or black, we were visiting each other in our respective homes. Neighborhoods. And I--cuz I look back on that, it could've been because we were all in some of the same classes. And maybe I was taking advanced classes. I don't--maybe--I--in retrospect, that could've been what was happening. Because i thought it was just natural to have... a very integrated circle of friends. We were in key club together and other social groups. So we saw each other during the school week and on the weekends. We went--we even went on camping trips together. So that--I didn't even r--I don't remember any tension... *then -- but*, there were fewer and fewer white kids. Even some of my friends started disappearing.

LB: So when you started T.J., like, what... would you say the ratio was--

RG: Oh, it was--

LB: ...black to white or white to black.

RG: Uh... I would say it was... about fifty-fifty... when I started. When left, seventy-thirty. So there were--quite a significant drop in the white kids.

LB: Was there anyone there who was neither black nor white?

RG: That's a great question.

LB: I ask it to everyone and I have yet to hear the answer yes [laughs].

RG: That's a great... [pauses]. The only non-black or -white person--I remember--this goes back to my entire public school experience--

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: Well--before--well, I do--uh, two people. There was a girl at elementary school named J--uh... [pauses]. Well. She was Asian. I don't know... I don't know how she ended up at Norrell [laughs]. There was one girl who was Asian at Norrell. And then there was a girl in my high school class named Jeanie Huey (?). So she was Asian. And so they were--they were--talk about a--a--the ultimate minority. Yeah.

LB: That's... it's so amazing to me coming from New England--

RG: Right. Where--yeah. Mm hmm. I know. It was very much black-white.

LB: It's very monolithic here.

RG: Very monolithic. So... God knows what they must have felt like or gone through.

LB: I can't imagine!

RG: I know. [Laughs.] Yeah, no one--no--no Spanish-speaking... students. Um... the--uh--I remember there were--we had some folks who were friends of mine who had names like Siprios (?) or Constantine, so I knew -- Greek. Yeah, so that was a little bit of... I began to st--it's not just a white kid, this is a kid who's Greek. So that--that... became more, um... evident for me. About people who had different backgrounds or ethnicities. But, yeah, it was white-black.

LB: Now when you think back on that period, can you give me an example -- and this can be anywhere in your childhood--

RG: Right, yeah. Mm hmm.

LB: ...of--of leadership that you saw that was really good and leadership that was not so good.

RG: Well, good leadership, I would have to say the f--the men who ran the key club... at Thomas Jefferson. Because this was 1974 through '78. And the guys in the key club were like brothers. And I know Thomas--there's a book that's been written about Jefferson because the high school--something odd happened there. It was... always at standards of excellence. So regardless of the racial composition o the student body--at least the folks who were in--that / hung out with always strove to be like number one, and... the key club was for the--the boys int he school who really showed leadership qualities, etcetera. And the--the, um, sponsors who... wh--wh--white men... were very, um... um... encouraging and... giving a boost to all of us. And I remember, they wanted me to be the president of the key club. I--he was a guidance counselor, his name was Mr. Norman (?). Called me in his office and said, "We..." two--two older white men, "We've been watching you and we think that your'e the guy that should step up to lead the key club." You know. So! Never in my--I wouldn't even... have thought... that they had a racist in their body. Not that I thought in those terms anyway, but now that I look back on it, that was the great equalizer. It was like what the k--it's like character and skills. So we had this really wonderful combination of guys, obviously black, white [laughs]. No--no other color. But, um... we were just... all made to focus on... how to be the best young men we could be. So I--as--an answer to your question, I think that was a really important thing for us to hear in what to some might have appeared to be a potentially... uh, fractured or tense environment. None of that, um, for my circle, anyway. Now, I don't know, really, my friends who weren't in those classes--I've--we've had reunions since then and someone came up to me and said, "You had white friends at T.J. didn't you?" I was like, "Yeah!" And this is a black person, said, "I didn't." So I did--there might have been two worlds going on in--in T.J. that I was oblivious to that. Yeah.

LB: That's interesting.

RG: Yeah.

LB: Did you see leadership ever that wasn't so good? And you can take it on any

RG: Right. Um...

LB: ... level you want.

RG: [Pauses.] Hmm.

LB: I mean, I've had people talk about family members, and people talk about Barry Goldwater, so [laughs].

RG: [Laughs.] Uh, you know, I--I... I remember probably... was those--were those the Nixon years?

LB: Mm hmm.

RG: I think--yeah. I--I--I re--I recall at a... federal level, like a government level... there were some things that I would see or read or hear or just in conversations, said, wow, I don't--that's not good, that seems like those people are corrupt or... or doing something that's wrong. An--and... yeah. So I--I--I did go--I think I di... sitting here right now, that's the--that's where I probably have memories of bad leadership. Nothing comes to mind of something that I saw--

LB: Much more locally.

RG: Much more locally. Right. That I remember--that--that I remember right now. Yeah.

LB: Now, what were some of your personal turning points as you were growing up?

RG: ...Well, a turning point w--when my father got sick. That means--that I--had to be more of a little man than a boy. Uh... [pauses] I think getting through the... trauma of middle school was a turning point just... because I was different. Uh... and then... being really popular in high school. So I could tell that there were--you know, I think I realized, just keep pushing through and things will work out fine. Um... so when I was ready to go to college, you know, this sorta ties into that--I... uh, felt the sky was the limit. And applied for the school I wanted to go to. And I--my father at this point--we--we were gonna get veterans, um, education benefits for me. We had to go to this office, somewhere in Southside, I guess it was near the VA. And I was, you know, maybe a junior, senior in high school. He and my mother were talking to this gentleman who was in charge of deciding whether the veteran's child should get the benefits. And he said, where do you wanna go to school? And I said, Duke. And he said, "You can't go there." And he said, "You should--you should set your goals lower." [Chuckles] he said, "You should go to someplace like Virginia State." And so--my father, who was blind, got up and said, he just, he said, "We are leaving. My son will go to Duke if I have to pay for it myself." You know, "we don't want your benefits." I--you know, I was a ki--I remember this scene. That I didn't know that he had just said something that was completely insulting to both of my parents. And that's what they did. They didn't take the veterans benefits and they--they forfeited a couple of appliances around the house [laughs] and--and I got some scholarships but that's how I ended up going to school. And it meant a lot to me. I remember when I--he was dead by the end of my... he died after my fresh--first year at Duke. So when I graduated, I remember crying. Because that story is what sort of propelled me into Duke. You know, the fact that my father said, like--almost over his dead boy would I not--would I *not* go to Duke. And that meant a lot to me.

LB: That's a--I mean, I get chills--

RG: Yeah, it was--

LB: ...hearing you say it.

RG: Yeah. It was--that was life-changing. Because... you know, as I--as I've gotten

older, like, why would that trigger my father... to be so angry. So--that he--I have this--maybe I've enhanced the story but I have this thought of him taking his cane and, like, waving it [laughs] you know--

LB: [Laughs].

RG: A white cane with a little red tip on it, like--as if, waving it like a sword almost. You know, nope! We're leaving, my son's going to Duke, and I don't want your stinky money. You know. So, yeah, that--that... how much education meant to them... and my father's, um... dream or vision for his kids.

LB: And it sounds like he was not the kind of guy who typically got angry and made those big--

RG: No. Mm hmm.

LB: ... public--I didn't me--I don't wanna call it a scene, but--

RG: Right. Yeah--

LB: ... a gesture, you know?

RG: Right, yeah, yeah, I do--I... that's why I re--recall, because, you know, as a minister, he was more of a peacemaker, trying to--he had a strong personality... but he wasn't one to... you know, make a big... fuss. In public. And this was one of those times that he did.

LB: Had his health kind of continued to--

RG: Decline?

LB: ...decline?

RG: Yes. Mm hmm. Yeah. So by the time I was... in college, that first year--freshman year--his health, he was on--he was heading toward death. And so when I got--but I was told that he didn't want me to know. Cuz he wanted me to do well in my first year. So I would call home, he would never talk to me. He was in the hospital. I didn't know it. They would say, your father can't talk right now.... he says, you know, good job, keep on working hard. When I got home in May, they said, your f--yeah, he's in McGuire Hospital. So he--I got home in May, he died in July.

LB: Wow.

RG: Yeah. Mm hmm.

LB: So you hadn't been home--

RG: No.

LB: ... at all that first year.

RG: No. No. So I think my brother has a different--my brother had to even grow up *more* than I did. I was off having a good time. You know [laughs]--being away from home in college. My brother had to really step into a--a--a role to help my mother out. Uh... when--when I was off in college. So, I don't--he didn't have to get a *job*. But he just--I think felt he had to help my mother think through some decisions about running the house.

LB: Had you known that your father's health was getting worse after he was blind? I mean, was it visible or was it the kind of thing where... he could keep on... doing what he was doing and you--you didn't have to really grapple with it.

RG: I didn't have to really grapple with it. I think... there were things, like his kidneys... So I missed--I don't remember him--I think he was on kidney dialysis. But I wasn't--I didn't see that. I might have heard that he was doing it. But since I was away in school, I didn't realize his body was breaking down.

LB: But before that, when you were in high school--

RG: He was fine, he just--he was blind, but he was still active and... uh, he would, you know, we'd go shopping, he'd do some cooking. You know. So he was really... uh, he didn't seem, um... feeble. At all. And he was taking insulin. So... h--with medication, he seemed to be functioning ok. Even with the disease.

LB: But then...

RG: Then he took a turn... and I--to this day... I think the--he began to lose hope.... cuz he wanted his sight. He had faith that he would see again. But it became pretty clear, that no, he's not gonna see. And I think that chipped away at his psyche. And I--I really think that's... why he started giving up. In fact, he--he mentioned once, he was gonna write a book... about, why do--bad things happen to good people--I think that's a title of somebody else's book [laughs]. But--but something like that, so I knew that he was really turning over and just--[finding/fighting?] a lot of thought about, why is this happening to me. You know, and... and maybe it's mirac--like, I went blind overnight, like I'll see... miraculously the next day. And as the years went by, when he realized that wasn't h--going to occur, I think it really got to him. I have a--another great memory, he was my baccalaureate speaker. So, uh, he, um... my--you know, my friends knew he was a minister and they voted. And they--so--so there I was when I graduated from high school and he was the speaker. So that was cool.

LB: That was very cool.

RG: Yeah. Yeah.

LB: What was his talk about?

RG: Um... you know, th--I remember that he used a Linda Ronstadt song--

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: ...in his talk. Uh, don't know much about... isn't that her song? Biology, don't know much about the... It's about love. Yeah, and--and holding fast to your dreams. Which--makes sense. Because that's how he raised us. Uh, so you don't have to know everything about all the topics that are out there. But don't... feel that you have diminished ca-capability because you don't... ha--have a--you can't write papers on every... subject. You know, wherever you are, as long as you have that kind of--and--constitution of, uh... being a good--integrity and--that's gonna carry you far in life. So it was--I remember that. Yeah.

LB: Sounds like a good speech.

RG: Yeah, it was. It was. I don't know if I answered your question [laughs].

LB: You did, but now I'm gonna ask you another one. Um--

RG: Ok.

LB: ...what do you think the big turning points for the community were during those years that you were growing up?

RG: Now... it must have been... obviously, schools [chuckles], and integration must've been really scary. I didn't know that. But evi--obviously it was. The... the fact that we were on these buses and, we went--if we went to this school, then... go to that school, and... people started disappearing and the neighborhoods were all black or all white. You know, stuff like, 'Wow. Why did that happen?' I was involved with the Red Cross in High School and the Red Cross Club. And the CEO of the Red Cross--I happened to know him because I was... went to some meetings, and this--in the chapter when I was a kid--as I got older, he said to me, "Have you noticed Richmond neighborhoods..." and... he--he lived in Bellevue. He said, "Bellevue looks just like Battery Park. Have you noticed the houses are about the same? But one neighborhood is black, and one neighborhood is white.

LB: But hadn't that always been the case?

RG: I don't... I--probably.

LB: ... you know, that there was residential segregation.

RG: Yeah.

LB: ...and redlining.

RG: And redlining. I guess he was trying to say... the *houses* aren't different.

LB: Yeah.

RG: You know, [laughs] like, what is the barrier. If the--if the--that the streets and the--back in those days, you know, the white people kept their lawns... if--if you just were pop--if you just popped in the neighborhood and no one walked us out of their doors, these are--there are several neighborhoods in town, if no one walked outside, you would never know it was a white neighborhood, quote-unquote, or a black neighborhood. So w--what does it mean to have this redlining. You know places that--why doesn't anyone... why don't we mix neighborhoods. So that was an interesting thing that he pointed out to me. And I saw that to be true. The--cuz the neighborhoods I did know as I got older that--they used to be white... but... now they're all black. Uh... you know, the schools used to be... my school used to be black. [Laughs] but now it's integrated. But then by the time I was leaving it was turning all black again [laughs]. And you know, so what--it was--why are in this commun--why--why is Richmond a t--kind of town that seems to have a comfort level with us being segregated. Even our churches obviously are segregated. So... but there wasn't... violence or anger. It was just how things are. And I think that's the point he was trying to make to me and--and it is what I've seen... we... see it, but it doesn't cause us to try to change the dynamic, even to this day [laughs]. You know. It's just, ok, we just happen to live in separate neighborhoods, go to separate schools, and go to separate churches, but... we get along fine! [Laughs.]

LB: Yeah [laughs].

RG: Yeah, it's interesting, and, uh--

LB: No, it's true.

RG: Yeah.

LB: So that was one big turning point--

RG: Right.

LB: ...for the community.

RG: Right. Yeah.

LB: What would you say some of the others were?

RG: I, you know, I recall having a black mayor. And that probably--to me, it was great! You know, now I see leadership at all levels. And, I--woul--probably even... knew Marsh somehow. Because... my family's friends. You know, it wasn't as though it's some--guy that... seemed out of reach. It's like somebody that I knew. Uh... but I--I--I recall that was a--I ca--or recall there was always a news story about the splits--the--the--the racial split in the decisions at city hall--uh, with city council. It was always blacks voted this way and whites voted another way. Uh... I don't remember why, what those issues... are--were, but... I, um, thought that was just how things... were. You know. We see the world differently, or... black people were always in a posture of, 'we can run this, you know, it might've been done this way in the past, but here's how we're gonna do it now.' That kind of thing.

LB: What do you think the turning points for your school were, when you were there?

RG: ... I think there's a... tipping point... of where--like, T.J. We could say that it's a--a school that always has, uh... excellent standards. But at a certain point, somebody--teachers, parents--but the composition of the student body... made people scared [laughs], you know, that it would no longer be a good place to ensure that your child would leave with a strong education. Now. Looking back on that, I'm really insulted by that. Living through it, I just didn't believe it to be true, because I--we all did well, and... I mean, my people that I knew did well in school, and we seemed prepared in any setting. I recall once, because we'd all been taking French since the second grade, by the time we got to... senior year... most of us were extr--extremely fluent. I mean, I could--I could--I, in those days, could write poetry, all kinds of stuff in French. Our--our French class went to Paris, went to Geneva. You know, so here's--so I--I never--and we had--there was a statewide competition on French--or French and T.J. placed one through ten.

LB: [Whispers] wow.

RG: So, we beat out all the private schools in Richmond, etcetera. So I kn--I was--so that just confirmed with me, 'Well! That's not true.' I--I remember we had a bit of a--we were proud of the fact that we did so well, and, I guess at that point I didn't know that some parents were pulling their kids out and going, putting them in Saint Gertrude's or Saint Christopher's because they were scared of what was happening... at some level, I knew that. And so we really... were--really thumped our collective chest when--we're like, 'well, at least for French, that doesn't hold true.' [Laughs] you know. So it--it was--it was an interesting... time to see that people probably had misperceptions about intelligence. And, uh--maybe that, you know--uh, as I got older, I was mad about it but when I was going through it. It was like, well it's--I didn't think it was a logical argument, and it didn't--wasn't true, so why worry about it.

LB: Now, how do you think your experiences back then shaped who you are today.

RG: From a family perspective, it--it... m--uh, made me feel that, um, most doors could be opened for me, I just need to figure out how to, um... how to gain access to the door.

And then make sure I had this--was prepared in order to open the door and walk through it. I think I got that from my, um, family, and then my teachers... all the way through! You know, not just--yeah. Pro--all black teachers at Norrell, but then... white and black teachers at middle school and high school. Like I mentioned, key club sponsors, uh--growing up in Richmond... I felt that, uh, the system--least the school system and the neighborhoods... that I knew, and even seeing leadership that looked like me, all just empowered me to say, go for it. Do it. And that's probably why I went on to, you know, college and then law school, and at a certain point came back home to Richmond. Because I want to continue to help Richmond to find solutions and grow and evolve, because that's the experience that I had. And I know when I was away from home, and I'd read about the challenges, the murder rate... even my own neighborhood going into decline. It's like, I wanna go back home. Not that I could save it, but just because... that can't--I don't want--that can't be the reality for kids now. When that was totally not the reality for me when I was growing up here.

LB: How--how old were you when you moved back to Richmond.

RG: I was, uh, it was nineteen... ninety-seven, so I was, uh... thirty seven.

LB: So that was when things were really pretty crazy here.

RG: Crazy. Yes. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah. And I--I felt... a calling to come back home. And... yeah, because it just didn't make sense to me that, uh... Richmond was... struggling so much [laughs]. And--and I recall feeling I wanted to be a--a part of the change.

LB: What had drawn you to the Red Cross in high school?

RG: ... I think that I had a friend in hi--in high school that was part of the Red Cross. I think it was a girl that lived in my neighborhood. And she just dragged me to a meeting [laughs] once. And... I liked it. I--I recall that back then the Red Cross had... an international exchange, so there were... uh, Red Cross kids from other parts of the world that would visit here. My family hosted like a--a Red Cross boy from Haiti. So, you know, so I felt, wow this is a cool nonprofit where--we went to--I went to leadership camps with the Red Cross, uh wi--with University of Richmond, Randolph Macon... It was all... just, uh... how do you, um, run a meeting, how do you look at your community, how can you help people get prepared for, um, disasters. Even back then that was part of the work they were doing, n--at a local, national, and international level. And I--I--it worked for me, I liked it, I was pretty good at... understanding how the Red Cross--what the Red Cross's role in the world was. So that--so I became the president of the club. Then president of all the red cross clubs in Richmond. And ended up being on the *board* of Red Cross when I was in high school.

LB: Wow.

RG: Yeah. I was like the, uh, the kid on the bo--um, the Red Cross Youth

Representative. So that's what I remember, I'm really connected to this... to the Red Cross, because it was part of my maturation. And, um, a lot of pats on the back and... and, um, encouragement from the folks in the nonprofit community, as a kid.

LB: That's so interesting.

RG: Yeah, and i--and--and--and once *again*... across--there was no racial--um, my--my, um, director was a--I realized years later, she was white. I had no id--I didn't even think about it. So it--it--I guess the lesson I've learned in life is... if people love you and support you and that's coming through earnestly, all of the--the racial stuff just disappears, at least for me it did. I know that--as I got older, that was heresy and a really, uh, afrocentric dialogue, like, you know, what was wrong with you when you didn't see color. But I really, because of how I was, um... supported and encouraged, I didn't see that automatically.... when I grew up. I got--when I got older, it started happening. But not growing up. That was not my experience growing up in Richmond. Which I know seems--that's just...

LB: No, I mean, I--

RG: Yeah [laughs]...

LB: ...I think... one of the things I love about doing this project is people have such different experiences.

RG: Yeah. Yeah.

LB: And it's great.

RG: Yeah.

LB: You know, because it just really, to me, demonstrates that there's no one monolithic truth, right?

RG: Right, and I--and I--and I--maybe I was, um... saying all that because it--at times that has felt embarrassing [laughs]. Because as a black man in America, I felt--my story should be one of, I've always felt underprivileged or had to fight and... you know, this was, uh, it was hard. No! And I give my family credit for that. My--like I said, my family, my neighborhood, *all* of our teachers, my Red Cross... uh, um, the folks who worked for Red Cross and volunteered for Red Cross, there was never any kind of, you're different or you can't be number one. That--I didn't get that message. And so... when I was... I learned about it, or learned how I could be perceived, when I left Richmond and went to Duke. That's when the, uh... uh, I rem--I--I tell this story to people all the time. Um, I'm sitting in a class. I was the only black. A hundred kids, and it was a... uh, either a sociology or public policy... class, and the professor was discussing urban blight or urban poverty. And he said--he looked at the course list and figured out what my name was and said, "Reginald Gordon, what is it like to grow up in the ghetto?"

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: [Laughs] and so, I... stood up, I think, and I said, "I didn't grow up in the ghetto." And so I heard some chuckling. And he said, "No no no. It's ok. I mean, this is... we--we're--this is college. I mean, you can disclose... to help the--help your classmates exp--understand--this is not their experience, but it's your experience. So tell us how that was." And I said, "It was not my experience." So we had this, like, back and forth in front of everybody. And I remember sitting down, going... that--that was a jolt! I was like, wow. Just because of how I'm packaged, this learned professor... is trying to create an experience for others, you know, to sort of hear what black life was like. And so as I got--as I grew up, I realized my experience--maybe that's why I'm not angry. [laughs] I mean, that taught me to be *angrier*, but I had a really--I had--uh, a kind of experience that... our story doesn't always get told. Even to this day. In--in music or--or just... common discourse, I--you never hear, everything was good, you know, I had a loving family and great schools, and didn't really see much color. That--that is not politically correct. To hear.

LB: Although--I'll tell you there are gonna be so many of those stories in this exhibition.

RG: [Whispers] wow.

LB: It's really interesting--

RG: You know, I've also heard--remember--they said that Richmond... when Martin Luther King got shot -- have you heard this? That... you can maybe find out if it's true. Other cities blew up. Ignited. Richmond did not.

LB: Well, I don't think that is true because I've seen photographs of Broad Street trashed.

RG: Oh, really? Ok.

LB: ... in the aftermath--

RG: Ok. Alright.

LB: ...of the assassination.

RG: Ok.

LB: ...and I've--I've heard stories about just crazy stuff happening on Hull Street.

RG: Ok. Alright. Cuz I--maybe that was just--

LB: Yeah.

RG: ... some kinda urban myth about this community. Be--particularly growing up in Northside which, I guess middle class-ish. Uh... sorta genteel. Which I think--which I do think is part of the Richmond... um... psyche. White-black, whatever [laughs], you know, it's very--

LB: It's all genteel [laughs].

RG: It's all genteel. Right. [Laughs.] We might go home and say some things that aren't so politically correct, but... out in public, uh, when we--at work in the workplace, even in school, it's genteel and civil.

LB: It absolutely is.

RG: Yeah [laughs].

LB: [Laughs] especially now that I'm at University of Richmond [laughs].

RG: Oh my goodness, yeah. I know. [Laughs]

LB: Now, looking back, or--and thinking to now--are there things that you'd like the generation of kids growing up in Richmond today to know?

RG: I wish I could replicate whatever happened in the late sixties and seventies... for me, with... *all* the kids in our community. Now I realize there are prob--there are [laughs] obviously some kids who had a much better economic situation than I did. But I didn't even realize that! The folks--the kids that lived in the far West End, River Road, I didn't--I didn't know University of Richmond existed... to be quite honest, back then. But didn't really care. You know, because, ok, this is nice. But Union's great, too. So I don't know how that happened, where you don't see disparity. But I--I think... we--I don't know what--that's forever lost? Of kids looking at--whatever they have in their environment and realizing, you know what? This is... it's good! And--and not feeling defeated and angry and ready to... do whatever to get immediate gratification in order to have things... that--that they think makes--will make them happy, or make them feel successful. And--and I think that my family, whether they did it intentionally or not, just had this formula of exposure to different places, exposure to different people, telling your children they're smart, they're attractive, they can do--you know, all that just getting... in--just constantly hearing that and feeling that... is what I would hope that we have for all of our kids. And, the question is, if your--if the--if the child is not really getting that at home, because of an inability or whatever external reason the--their parent or parents can't do it, how do you... infuse them with that if you're not a parent. You know [laughs]. Are teachers, uh, today, as invested... in that, um... in their--in the--in their students the way they were when I was growing up here. Or has something changed. Because they have SOLs or because there are more numbers, and, 'this is what I have to get accomplished,' as opposed to, 'what will it take for this little girl, this little boy to realize that they are the--that they are gonna succeed?' Rather than just platitudes,

what is it--what's the--what is missing in their life and how can I help the parent or, even the neighborhood to be able to buttress them and keep them going in the right direction. That--that would be my wish--I guess it--I know we have lots of nonprofits and... boys and girls clubs, etcetera, that are trying. But we--it seems like we're falling short. And I don't know. Maybe it's too big of an issue.

LB: No, I think it's a great issue.

RG: Yeah.

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

RG: [Pauses]... [voice strained] Excuse me, I think be--uh, as the community now becomes more diverse, it's not just a white-black community anymore. Uh... we need to... work hard not to segregate ourselves. I know we're really comfortable with segregation, but things like... the Two Street Festival. The, uh, Asian American Festival. Uh, the--it's... the I--uh... Que Pasa... I think--my thought is... other parts of the country... there's, um... appreciation of ethnicities because it's always been a fabric of the community. Here, it's like, here's a special day, and all the Asian people go to the... uh, Asian festival, Indian Festival, whatever. Well, how can we... make it almost, um... an expectation that we experience--we have these great opportunities to experience each other's cultures. And I think if we could start that with kids. And adults making themselves go, too. We would maybe begin to have a ripple effect on our neighborhoods, our schools. It's... we would be comfortable... s--being around the other. Because we... we know the people. They're just like us. They might eat different foods or... I may look a little bit different on the outside, but on the inside, we're all *the same*! Have the same -- sounds like a political campaign [laughs] but all--

LB: [Laughs.]

RG: ... but all have the same hopes and dreams for our children, but I think that is so... clear. But we... Richmond could get there because we don't have... we're genteel. So at least the door is open for us to at least have the politeness of have a discourse. And then just keep digging deeper. Uh... when I went through LMR, that was why... I loved that... time because I thought I knew the community. But I had my own barriers. Because, great time growing up in Northside, came back home to help. But, *wow*, there's so many other good things going on in Richmond that I just didn't know about. So, it--ha--how we can create opportunities for all--for that to happen on a mass scale, would be my dream. And something that I hope could change somehow.

LB: It would be great. Now, I'm gonna ask you to just sit quietly for thirty seconds while I record room tone.

RG: Ok.

[Pause.]

LB: Ok, we're good.

RG: Ok.

LB: Thank you so much, Reggie.

RG: Sure. Sure, I...

LB: It's been so interesting working on this project because... the stories I hear... are really so different and it really... I mean, it--it came--