A Community Remembers
Interview: Woody Holton

Laura Browder: …and Woody, I would love it if you would start by just saying what your name is where you went to school.

Woody Holton: I'm Woody Holton and I went to Crystal Springs Elementary in Roanoke, Virginia, and then we moved to Richmond when I was ten and I went to Mary Munford… Elementary. And then after busing began… began, I went to Mosby Middle School. And tried one semester since my sister was doing so well at Open High, my parents put me in Bellevue Middle School, which was a… experimental school and the experiment didn't really work on me--I… watched TV all semester -- that was an option. And then, uh, Kennedy High School, and then finished at Kennedy after my parents--finished high school after my… family moved to Northern Virginia, but, um, Langley High School.

LB: Alright. So, tell me something about how you grew up.

WH: Something about how I grew up…

LB: And tell me about your family.

WH: Ok. Well, um, my father decided at the age of twelve that he wanted to be governor of Virginia. And that, uh, became a real mission of his for the rest of his life. Not just to get himself elected, but to give Virginians choice. He likes to point out that when a guy named Bill Teck--*Tuck* was elected governor of Virginia -- and I think it was '46, somewhere around there, '47 -- only about ten-percent in the--of the entire state voted because they had disfranchised African Americans, and there wasn't much of a republican part cuz that was the party of Lincoln and whites didn't think too highly of Lincoln… all through most of the twenty--first half of the twentieth century. And, um--and so hardly anybody, black or white, voted and he wanted to give people a choice. And so he was a great fan of Abraham Lincoln's and wanted to give Lincoln's… party -- the republican party -- enough strength in Virginia to give people an actual choice at the polls. So… he has -- I think it'd be fair to say -- been obsessed with politics all his life, and all of us picked that up. And he ran for governor of Virginia in 1965 when I was six, and lost. But that was just a prelude to running and winning… in 1969, and it was the first time since reconstruction that anybody other than a southern democrat had been elected governor of Virginia, so he--he'd done what he'd--wanted to do…. which was, give people choices. And to get ahead of the story, he's now made his own choice, he pretty much--as far as I can tell, he… it's a secret ballot, but my impression is Dad generally votes democratic himself cuz the parties have flipped… um, now, s--the--the, uh… the… democratic party on gay rights and womens' rights and things that Dad has come to really care about along with… civil rights for African Americans… the democratic party is sort of more the party of Lincoln than the republican party these days, so he's made his own choice. But! He got got elected governor of Virginia in '69. And we moved… to Richmond in January of 1970. So that's the middle of the school year. And I was in fifth grade. And… really sort of socially at the top of my game. I had a bunch of good friends. We called each other the Banana Splits… uh, beca--if you--there was a TV show of that name, and I was… maybe I was Fleegle? Anyway, my buddy Bob Yates (?) was Snork, and all the

rest…. And so, for any ten-year-old it's tough to move to another town. And Roanoke was a lot further from Richmond then than it is now. Uh, the interstates weren't even finished… at that point, so it was--it was a long way… back to Roanoke, and… one of the perks of being in the Governor's Mansion that was enjoyed the most was the WATS line: Wide Area Telecommunication Services--it allowed us to call back home. And we were all--*all*…uh, three of us oldest kid--of--of the older kids were really homesick. My brother was only five. Um, and so it wasn't so bad for him, but it was rough… on my sisters and me. And… Mary Munford is a great school. And right now, we spend a lot of time there--there my own kids and my wife and I… spend a lot of time there because it's got an amazing playground. But I have to be honest and say that Mary Munford was pretty rough for me. There were some wonderful kids there. But… um, my father had just been elected governor. And a lot of those kids' parents were sort of social climbers and they were very excited to have a governor's--*two* governor's children -- my sister Anne and me, at… Mary Munford. And so, Anne and I immediately acquired a whole lot of what Anne called Buggy friends. And those were friends who bugged us to, uh, have a playdate but *at our house*, that is the Governor's Mansion. Cuz the parents were angling to be friends of the governor and be invited to dinner at the Governor's Mansion… so they could brag to their friends about that. And it was just about as bad a social situation, short of being physically bullied which we certainly weren't… it was as bad as a--of a--a social situation as you could go from having real sincere friends back in Roanoke to… being ten and having all these people who just were interested in you to get towards… uh, your dad. That--that was--that was the--the larger group--I, course I had a--a few--started to get some great friends by the end of that… of that, um, of that one semester we spent at Mary Munford. But *then*, that summer, um, Judge Merhige, Robert Merhige, um, for whom my sister, by the way, later clerked, uh, after law school. But he… imple--basically implementing the Brown Versus the Board of Education decision in Virginia. That decision, Brown had been made back in 1954 with this wonderful phrase: All deliberate speed. Um, and all deliberate speed, as Richard Kluger points out, means: speed, but deliberate speed. As in, hurry up and wait. And of course the Virginia legislature and the governors of Virginia up until that… had focused on the waiting part and so it had been sixteen years since Brown Versus Board of Education… and there had been only token, um, integration. There was one black kid in my class. Um… her real name was Barbara. Everyone in the class called her Bubba. And I called her Bubba, too, I thought that was a nickname that she had gone along with. And I remember one day it was her turn, Bubba's and my turn to stay back… and wash the chalkboard. [Chuckling] It may be that we were being held after school, but I think it was just our turn. And so I said, you know, "Bubba, will you pa--"you--it's fun to wash the chalkboard cuz you're not just erasing, you know, you're using water. So I said, "Bubba, will you had me the sponge?" And she said, "I wish you wouldn't call me that." And I said, "But I thought that was your nickname." She said, "That's the name they call me." They called her Bubba cuz there was a football player for… the Baltimore Colt's. I can't re--uh, Bubba Greer or something. Um, who was a big black… football player. And so that's why they called her Bubba and it wasn't a… friendly… nickname at all. And that was really striking to me. That I had participated in that, unknowingly. Um… so, we go into the summer of 1970, we've been in Richmond six months, had this not-very-happy experience at Mary Munford. And Judge Merhige… ordered… that, um, we had to accomplish integration as an actual fact, not just as a th--theoretical token thing as they'd done… for about ten years. And that meant, um, busing… with, um… you know, a lot of people had been riding buses to school for--eh--ever. And, specifically, African American kids have been riding buses past… often two or three white schools to get to the one black school in

town. But in this case, busing meant that they were gonna even it out. From having 99% white schools on one side of town, and 99% white--um, black on the other side of town. They, uh, decided to make it--not exactly 50-50, but close, throughout, uh, the town. Now… um… many people urged Dad to… defy the court decision as previous governors of Virginia, um, had done. And he spent most of the summer deciding what he was gonna do. It was clear that he wasn't gonna do a racis--a racial segregationist kind of defiance. But whether he was gonna… quietly, passively agree or passively not agree or what, wasn't clear. Um, he'd made a very pro-integration, um, statement in his inaugural address that January of 1970. But, busing was so unpopular among white Virignians. And people were really pressuring Dad. And so he--um… he was--he wasn't sure, I think, what he was gonna do that summer. Um, and many whites were furious at him for being reluctant, for not immediately taking the lead against busing. I remember there was a big caravan… led by this group that opposed busing. They called themselves SOS, Save Our Schools. And they had a lot of little symbols of the little red schoolhouse and that's what they were saving, they said. And I remember playing on the capitol grounds of the Governor's Mansion, is right there across the st--uh, little street from the Capitol. And that was our front yard was the capitol grounds. Uh, and it was a great fun place to play, we had a go-cart and all that. And I noticed this, uh, cloud of TV cameras. And, uh, reporters and others on the opposite end, over in front of, uh, St. Paul's Church. Um, at the--at *that* end of the Go--of the, um, capitol ground. And I went over there to see what was going on. I was very interested in TV cameras, which were, of course, huge in those days, and big deal. And, um, what they were doing is they had a caravan of cars and then a giant mailbox that they'd made. They were all dropping off letters to my dad. Um, and… I was fascinated by all that. I didn't quite get the whole busing thing, but saving schools sounded like a pretty good idea to me. Um, and… the organizers who were accepting of these letters saw the value of having the Governor's own son as part of their shot. So they didn't have any big ethical about involving a ten-year-old in their photo opportunity. And, of course, these--this is the day before you had to get a signed statement before you interviewed somebody, so… I became part of their shot. Um, uh--acc--helping them accept these letters. One of the cars… uh, was being driven by somebody who was really mad at Dad for not yet coming out… uh, they hoped Dad would, but they were pressuring him to come out against busing. And it had a sign on the side of the car saying "Impeach Governor Holton." So I was ten. And I asked the organizer who was receiving these letters, "What is *impeach*?" And as I recall it, without missing a beat, he said to me, "Oh, that means pray for Governor Holton." [Laughing] and, of course, *impeach*, *preach*, they do sound kinda the same, so I said, "Oh, good, they're praying for Dad." So, they finished--they got this huge cardboard box of letters and they said, "Would you like to deliver them to your Dad?" Again, they're using me in their--in their photo op. Oh, and I'm into mail, so sure! So, the--I--I dragged all these letters back and said, "Dad, they wanna impeach you!" [Laughs.] And he explained to me how I'd gotten taken. So I have a very distinct memory, having turned ten that summer, of being--feeling *burned*… um, by these guys, having been lied to. So that made--gave me a predisposition… in favor of busing, which of course was reinforced when Dad did come to his dec--decision that he was gonna do the opposite of what his predecessors as Governor had done, which was… not only s--sup--uh, support busing, but he was gonna make sure that his own family complied with the rule. He didn't have to do that. Cuz technically, the Governor's Mansion is not in Richmond, it's--it's in some--it--it's in Virginia but not in anywhere in particular Virginia. So the Governor can send… um, the Governor's… family can go--those kids can go anywhere they want in Virginia. So we could've kept going to Mary Munford which was still gonna be mostly white, at least for the first

few years, whatever, nobody knew. But he said, no, you know, let's look at where the lines are and… if this… if this rule about Capitol Square didn't exist, where would my kids go, and the answer was Mosby Middle School. Which had been pretty much 100% black. He said, "Well, that's where they're going." So Anne and I went to Mosby Middle School. My older sister, Tayloe went to John F. Kennedy, uh, High School, which had been all-black as well. And… um, I'd like to--give you a… utopian view that, oh, it all worked out fine. And… I--I can't. Cuz the first day there was pretty tough… too. It was tougher than Mosby. I mean, tougher than… Mary Munford had been. Because, once again, the TV cameras were there. And, uh, these kids, like me, were fascinated with TV cameras. And so it was kind of a mob scene, uh, in front of the school as people were waiting for us and when we came, they crowded around us. And even, um, inside the school… um… I had a--wonderful teacher and good classmates and all that, but every time I left the classroom, we'd go to lunch, or off to the gym or whatever, there'd be this *crowd* of students that--those first couple of days. Say, "Hey boy, are you the Governor's son? Hey boy, are you Governor's son?" Now these guys are--are--like me, nine, ten, eleven… they barely know what a governor is, but they knew it was something big. And it was… um--I was never physically threatened but it--but--just to be a *celebrity* all the sudden like that… was *extremely* intimidating and unpleasant. And so, I k--uh, I remember that first day, uh, coming out at sch--when school ended at two or three, whatever, and Mom was there to pick Anne and me up, and again the cameras were there and the crowds were there. And, um… and--and *dar*--I had to *dart*… uh, over to the car and jumped in the car and it was just *miserable*. And I told Dad that night… um, we had all known this was a new thing, kind of an experiment. And he said, "Just try it and see how it goes." And I said, "I tried it and it didn't go well and I'm not going back there." And I'm not sure where I was planning to go cuz as y--as I said, I didn't… think that much of Mary Munford either. But he said… um… "Well, what was the problem?" I said, "Well, they're all crowding around me and they wanna hear all the stuff about Governor-this and Governor-that." And he said, "Well, what you ought do is… um, just reach your hand out and shake their hand and say, 'Yes I am.'" Uh, and, that's what Dad would do with his great spirit of--of congeniality. Um… that wasn't exactly *me*, though. And so, what I did figure out, though --they're all interested in this whole Governor thing, and I asked Dad -- he remembers this a little bit differently… But, um, I said--I brought him a bunch of slips of paper… and said, "Will you sign these?" And he said, "Yes, but why?" And I said, "Well, these guys are so interested in you… being Governor, I think I can sell your autograph."

LB: [Laughs]

WH: His memory is that I was planning to sell my own autograph, I don't know if I actually thought… that would be worth anything, but, uh… uh, I think I got a couple of… couple of those and… turned out, that once I started trying to sell autographs, uh, that didn't have quite the market value I was hoping it would… at school. And the big thing is that… uh, that was a first-couple-of-days thing. But you know how ten-year-olds are. They immediately settle into things and things that had become shocking--that were schooling initially… become kind of old-hat. And so, um… settled into normal life at--at Mosby. And, um… ten, eleven, twelve… uh, lots of things happen in junior high school… that you like. You know, girls that--that like you and others th--that--that you don't like--that don't like you or whatever and… there's--there was a guy named, um, Gerincher (?) who--who I used to kinda to get into little fights with but he happened to be a white guy. Um, it turned out to be a pretty normal jun--uh… um, middle school… um,

experience. Um, but there were some interesting little gems. I remember National Scholastic… I think that's--or--it was called, but--this little magazine that we got… um, used to publish little plays, and the ki--and the class could act out the plays. And, um, this was the early seventies so people in those kinds of roles were--were pushing integration and understanding. I remember there were TV ads run by the Dep--then Department of Health, Education, and Welfare… where these two friends, one black, one white, are standing out in the rain saying, "Now let's go to your house," "Let's go to your house." Cuz they both know their own parents are too racist to accept a kid from the other race at their house. So that was kind of being pushed, so anyway, National Scholastic had this fascinating little story that I've always wanted go back and try to find… whe--about… um… blacks in uh--in the--on earth, I guess, but certainly in the United States, got sick of--of being mistreated and so, in this story, they'd all gotten on rocket ships and gone to Mars. Um, and set up their own black planet… um, in--on Mars. But then something happened to earth. I don't know whether it was pollution or an asteroid was coming to the earth--are we ok?

LB: Yeah, we're fine.

WH: Something--something was gonna destroy the earth and so all the whites on earth… got in rocket ships and flew to mars. And… um, there's this amazing speech, which the leader of the white guys… makes, once their rocket ship has landed and as the one of only two white kids in the class, or three or four, maybe there were, but one of the white boys in the class… I got chosen to play this role of being the white guy who makes this speech. And the speech is, you know, we mistreated you… when you lived on earth, we made you ride in the back of the bus and… drink from the separate, inferior water fountains, and bad bathrooms and all that stuff…. We'll now do that to you. I mean--you can now do that to us, but we're desperate, so, we're gonna… be the--the bottom rail now, and you guys can--can rule over us. But please take us in and--and you can just mistreat us the way we mistreated you. And then the leader of the black kids, also a guy, says, no, you are welcome here and we're gonna treat you like you should've treated us. So it's a great… little story. But that--that was one of the few times I can sort of remember being aware of race. Cuz they needed a white kid to play, uh, the white kid. But we did lots of, um… like, school plays and stuff where… w--um, probably all the characters were written to be white or black but we just mixed, you know, so I'd have a black brother and, um… um, and so forth. Um, so it was a wonderful, fun, um, experience. What else can I tell you.

LB: You can tell me what Richmond was like when you were growing up.

WH: Uh huh.

LB: And what your neighborhood was like.

WH: Well, uh, I didn't have a neighborhood in Richmond, um… because we lived on the Capitol grounds. Um, so, maybe I better ask--answer that about Roanoke. Um… we lived in the… city --this was really before subru--suburbs had taken off. Um… uh, we lived in the city and sometimes walked to our school--our school was maybe twelve blocks away, so it wasn't a short walk. But sometimes walked to or from school, but the school was *entirely* white. There literally was not one black child… um, at Crystal Springs. Um… and… I wouldn't describe, um… our group as openly racist just because it wasn't a topic that came up. African Americans came to our

community as maids… and we had a--a black babysitter, particularly when Dad was running for Governor, named Norma Jean… um… who we didn't like but only because she sat on us to punish us, um...

LB: [Laughs.]

WH: [Laughing] had nothing to do with race. Um, and--and we also had other, um, black babysitters and white babysitters, um… but, uh, but all--all of the people doing the really… tough jobs like--like, uh, maids and so forth were African American. Um… and I--I think there was suf--there was a… unspoken racism that assumed, you know, white people will do this and black people will do that, just as there was… an uns--un…unconsidered sexism that assumed that women are gonna do this and men are gonna do that. Um… but it just wasn't something we thought about--I do remember--I remember antisemitism more than I remember… racism. I remember one friend of mine who sort of prided himself--again, we're eight and nine years old--he prided himself on being a--on being a rebel. And… he… was s--screaming at some other kid when we were… in front of this other kid's house… um, about being a Jew. Um, and I had no idea, Jew, Catholic, I mean, you know, we were Presbyterians and we assumed everybody else was Presbyterians, so I don--I knew that was bad that--what he was doing, just by the tone of his voice, but… and I'm not sure he knew what--and I'm not sure the kid that he was accusing of being a Jew was a Jew. But I--but… my point is--I certainly… That's an interesting question. I don't think I ever heard the N-word. Growing up. Um, just cuz it--it--it--um… people were so separate and when African Americans came into our world, it was in such a menial role, that no one ever thought of feeling hostility. I guess--uh, there--there were probably racist jokes. I mean, I heard a lot of racist jokes at Mosby from my… um, from my black classmates. Um… um, yeah, that's interesting to--you--you know, cuz people--today if you turn on Fox News or whatever, you hear about, "Oh, there's these racist black leaders, the new Black Panther." But there were bl--racist blacks in my… group… who were racist against black people. That is, they would tell jokes for--there's a joke about… uh, a black guy, a white guy, and I don't know what the other was--Chinese or whatever, but… you know, there's a bear… there's a bear cave and the white guy goes in, "Oh, I can't stand it, it's too smelly." Chinese guy, "Can't stand it, too smelly." Black guy goes in, the bear comes out. "It's too smelly." And I remember a--a black friend of mine telling me that and thinking that was… um, hilarious--and I remember being appalled, even as a nine-year-old--maybe I'm… not--maybe I'm misremembering that. But, um… but… I feel like there were a--several examples like that. That's the only one I can remember… of things that--that black kids… were saying that--that, you could say, ok… you know, Amos and Andy was very popular among blacks, so maybe this is just sort of laughing at racism or whatever, but I think some of these kids really had… picked up sort of an inferiority complex that--that came through in some of the jokes that I learned as a kid.

LB: So tell me about Richmond as a city when you were… growing up here.

WH: Um. It's very tough… oh, that's right, your thing is about Richmond, I'm sorry, and I'm not--see, this is where I'm not much help because we lived in the--we… lived in… on Capitol Square, all our buddies were Capitol policemen. And… um… and we didn't live in a neighborhood. So… uh, the neighborhoods that I saw… I…I had--I did have both black and white friends at Mosby… and it's just completely different worlds. Um, when I'd go visit my--uh,

a friend of mine…. uh, Kirk… Jones, I think it was. Uh, we'd be--or Willy Bullock (?), I can't remember. Very--very poor family. Um… and… we'd do things like throw water balloons, um, at each other and I remember his father being--you know, once I got smashed with a water balloon, thinking, oh God, you know, the state police are gonna come get me, cuz I just splashed the Governor's son with water--but all--all in fun. But I also remember, actually, a, um… um… I remember a school bus load of white… kids, so I guess this was during busing and these were… the kids whose family had not escaped to the suburbs, either because they couldn't afford to… um, go to private schools or move to the suburbs. Or for whatever reason, anyway. So a bunch of white kids going by in a school bus from a different school, not mine. And seeing me out there playing with all these black friends and saying, and yelling, "White cracker!!" And it's so funny cuz I always thought "cracker" meant somebody who cracked the racial barrier. Um, because I, you know, because they were mad at me for playing with black kids. Uh… and, you know, *many* years later that I figured out that "cracker" meant sort of the opposite of that, you know, it's sort of a word for a redneck. Um… but… I'm not much help on--on--on the neighborhoods in Richmond cuz I really didn't live in one.

LB: But you were out and about in Richmond.

WH: Yeah, s--

LB: And what do you just remember of… the city, of growing up in the city--I know you were in a very, very particular situation, but--

WH: Right.

LB: … you went downtown, you went to school, you went… here and there.

WH: Right. Uh, ok. Let's see. Um…. Well, one of the perks of being Governor is, uh… um… w--al--we all got to go to the Country Club of Virginia, which is right here, next to the University of Richmond campus. And, um… and that… somewhat fills the stereotype of people living in absolute, uh, luxury. Being tended on--tended to, and sort of… feeling untitled to be tended to… by an Af--a servile… uh, African American class. Um… and so it was very strange to go, you know, to do that on the weekends, to go… uh, lounge on the pool--at the pool… on the weekends, and then go back to going to school with kids wearing--really… um… I remember, um… you know, people… people today really try to dress their kids well even though they don't have a lot of money, but they didn't in those days. So a lot of my friends literally had *tattered* clothing, and it was just--looked like a Dickens novel. Uh, the--so in a sense my life was like a Dickens novel on the--on the positive side of it in that I got to experience the two… worlds, one on the weekend and the other during the week. I remember going to, um… up to Broad Street where there were a bunch of theaters and… uh, a friend of mine, Kevin, and I went to, uh, *Godzilla Versus the Smog Monster*. Um… and it was l--um, it was literally--it was almost that the two sides of Broad Street--that was on the black side of Broad Street. Um, and on the other side, I would go with, um… um, maybe the--there was a housekeeper, a white house--sort of head of the household staff at… and my aunt and so forth, who would take me to, um… to, uh, Miller & Rhoads Tea Room and Thalhimers Tea Room. Um, you know, you're supposed to lift your pinky finger while you drink your tea. Um… so there were these two worlds that--that were

separate except that, um… people from the African American world were there making the white world possible by bringing out the tea and--and cleaning the pool at the Country Club and so forth, and… but they tended to disappear in that context. Um, and so the people that were invisible for me… on the weekends became visible… during the week. Uh, I had a paper route, um… first in the Fan… um… M--Meadow… Allen and Meadow was my drop--I don't know--between Allen and Meadow was--was my route. And then I got moved to, uh, um… um… a much better route of high-rise apartments. The Berkshires, Lexington Towers. Very near the Jefferson Hotel--actually the Jefferson Hotel was on my route. Um, and that was *great*. Because you, uh, I could ride the elevator to the top, and then basically toss the newspaper from the elevator. Uh, and so I had a hundred and thirty subscribers, which was a lot, but I could do it in an hour. Um, I did get robbed on my paper route once by a group of black kids. Um… who were about my age. Um, who kind of punched me a couple times but nothing very serious. Um, and… Dad said, "Well, we need to do something about this." And I said, "Yeah, you know… I can handle it." And he g--and, but--I think I remember--I remember being convinced that, well, you know, there are older people in that neighborhood that were among my subscribers who could be beaten up by these kids and really hurt. So… they actually set up a sting with state, uh, policemen. Um, and a couple days… later, um, some of the same kids, uh, came after me again. Um, it was a p--pretty lame as a--I mean, no weapon involved. And they--basically the kid saying, "Can I have a dollar?" I m--actually, b--I bet if you went back and looked at it now… you'd come close to entrapment, because he basically asked me for a dollar… without threatening me in any way, so I'm not sure that was a good conviction but… they, um--these poor fourteen-year-ol--no… eh, maybe even younger than fourteen--twelve and thirteen year olds are suddenly beset by all these state troopers. Um… but Dad, um, had hired a man who had been, I think, a school principal named Bill Robinson -- an African American guy, from Roanoke, as a… um… civil rights… assist--aide and as--specifically to--to be conscious about civil rights, and--and… first person in that role, first black guy in--other than in a servile role--in the Governor's Mansion. And he participated in that sting and also started investigating the situation of those kids. Um… and this all led to… um, us creating… I say "us," I was the figurehead, but--but… *he* created--Bill Robinson created a program called Project Self-Help… that, uh, raised a bunch of money from big businesses in Richmond and… um… created summer jobs for kids like the ones that had robbed me… so they could get some pocket money… uh, without having to do that. Um… so… ugh. I'm--I--I'm--I'm drawing a blank on Richmond neighborhoods. The--on--on growing up in Richmond.

LB: No, you're doing great! Tell me more about school as you moved through it. Were you involved in any extracurricular activities?

WH: Uh, [laughs], my sister was. And I--I--just had a very outgoing sister who was… a, um… um… cheerleader at Kennedy. Um, what did I do. Oh, I did, um… Um, this wasn't exactly an extracurricular--although it became one. Uh, the Junior ROTC, um… which frankly, I did to get out of gym class. Um… um… and the idea of wearing a uniform and going out and shooting and all that stuff… uh, uh, you know--p--pl--playing war in the woods… was a… tremendous amount of fun for me. And… I did, um… I was only at Kennedy that one semester before we--Dad's term ended and we moved away, but, uh, moved back to Roanoke, initially. But, um… but, here's where the--being Governor's son was a perk because, um, Colonel Vessels (?), who was in charge of the… Junior ROTC--the teacher, basically… for us, um, saw the value in putting this

white kid -- I was one of the few white kids in the… unit -- and the Governor's son up in front. So even though I wasn't an officer, you know, a leader of the group, I got to be the guy that carried the flag. Um… and… we marched in the Tobacco Festival. Um, and, uh, and things like that, yeah, it's… things that--things that are hard to imagine now. Me, wearing a--a uniform--a military uniform. And, uh, carrying the flag in the Tobacco Festival. Um, that marched up to Parker Field, which is now the baseball diamond. Um… but, um… what I think extraordinary about… our… life… at, uh, Mosby and at Kennedy was how unextraordinary it was. Um, that is--just this--this--we--these were our friends. And--and… um… and some were black and some where white and… um… they had--in general the white kids and the black kids had lived such different experiences that they were different. Um, and my sister that was in the, um… uh, was one of the cheerleaders for Kennedy, uh, used to teach us these funny cheers. You know, we were used to 'Rah Rah Grah!' Some classic white cheerleader, uh, girl things. And there were some hilarious things that the bl--that the, uh, cheerleading squad at, uh, at Kennedy would do. I remember one that was just, "Sardines--Mm! And pork and beans. Sardines--Mm! And pork and beans." And I'm not sure whether you do that when you're winning or losing or… just kinda entertaining the crowd. Um, and there were various, uh, "I can tell by your nightie that your momma was a whitey, I d--" so… so, some of them…you know, a little edgy. Um. So we were definitely conscious that, um… you know, I would now say, as a… looking back that there were multiple cultures but we were conscious that there were two cultures, at least. And that was the great advantage for us. Y--you know, the point of Brown Versus Board of Education and--and the subsequent court cases that finally implemented it… sixteen years later in Virginia… was the ensure equality of opportunity. That is… to--to--to not have great schools for whites and bad schools for blacks. On the theory that if you put everybody together, then everybody's gonna get the same opportunity. But we--we didn't see it that way. Cuz that--it--at--course, hadn't been a problem for us. We hadn't… had any lack of opportunity… for my sisters and me. Um… and then later my brother when--even when he went to John B. Cary School… for us, it was an opportunity to be exposed to… a different culture. Um, that, uh, there was a really a rich culture, um… uh… oh--ok, here's my poem. Um… very unpolitical correct. Let's see. "The clock struck noon in the middle of the night. Two dead boys got up to fight. Back to back they faced each other. Drew their swords and shot each other." Something about, "if you think--that's my story, you don't think it's true. Ask the blind man, he saw it, too." So--who knows! Maybe I learned that from my dad, but I feel like that's one of those little… uh, pieces of culture I picked up, uh… from my black friends. And you know, Shaft was big at that time, and--and, um… and--and--you know… I was… probably the only kid at the Country Club of Virginia who knew all the words to Life Every Voice and Sing. Um, and--and so forth and so, for us, it was--was equivalent to if Dad had gotten a diplomatic posting in Japan. You know, here's this other culture, it's kind of exotic, and… and then not exotic because it turns out, once--once you're a bunch of ten-year-olds in a room, you just play. But--but, um…

LB: So your dad's decision was… controversial to say the least. What do you remember about that -- how much were you aware of that, a--after you delivered the, uh, impeachment letters.

WH: Right, right. We were very aware. There were bomb threats and all sorts of death threats. Uh, and I remember, actually after one of the bomb threats… um…. The bomb--the bomb threats came in the middle of the night. They called Dad… uh, at two o'clock in the morning. The st--Capitol police did, said--and--said, "Governor, we need to evacuate the Governor's Mansion right

away, we've had a bomb threat." And Dad said, in his classic southwest Virginia accent, "There will be no evacuation. You may search as much as you want. I am going back to bed." [Laughs.] And I found out about that the next morning. And I--I said, "How about next time, wake me up and [laughing] let me make my own decision about whether to evacuate." Um… so it was controv--and--he--that--it ended my father's political career. Um, all he'd really ever wanted to be was Governor of Virginia, but in 1978, there was not a moderate republican running for… the--there was a--an open senate seat, and… the, um, the only republican who's gonna run for it was a very conservative guy who was a friend of Dad's and later killed in a plane crash while campaigning. He was a friend of Dad's but *very* far-out conservative and Dad didn't approve of that and so… Dad got convinced that he should run for… uh, for the senate. But, um… when he lost that convention, people made it clear that… his, um… stand on busing--his what--had what--had cost him, uh, that. And of course, nobody ever said it racially. They only said, oh, it's--it's not blacks we're against, it's busing… they were against. And I wish I could have said, g--I'd like to go back in time now as a twelve-year-old, "Well you never minded the buses when you were riding them past the black school… to get to a segregated white school," but, uh, suddenly everybody was against busing when it was being used to integrate. Um… so it--it ended his career, but, um… but he never had any regret, uh, about that. Um, and it was wonderful for me, um, in th--in the context where you see so many politicians kids are being embarrassed… by their dad--you know, imagine being Chelsea Clinton the day her father had to admit… to his affair, or any of these other politicians' kids who've--who… who ha--who are just embarrassed, uh, at the things that their parents do, or *have* to do to or--in order to get votes or whatever. Um… there's not a lot of politicians' kids who can feel real pride, um, in what they did, and we do have that great privilege of--of--of having a father who… had a chance to make… to--to end his political career by doing the right thing, or sustain his political career by doing the wrong thing and he chose to do the right thing. That's something to be very proud of.

LB: So you were really in Richmond from when you were…

WH: Age ten to fourteen.

LB: Ten to fourteen. So what were some of your personal turning points during this period.

WH: Hmm. Um… Personal turning point--well, I think busing--if I had to say--say the single most… important moment in all that, it was busing. Um… um… it got me into a school that I ended up lik--liking a lot better than the school I'd liked before and had better and more sincere friends than I'd had before. And, it gave us children a sense of importance. I mean, my sister Tayloe, as the oldest kid was--Dad had walked her and had--uh, not walked her, but driven her and then walked in with her to John F. Kennedy High School. She was on the front page of the New York Times. Um, and my sister and I were very envious of that and my sister points out, "That's my dress she was wearing!"

LB: [Chuckles.]

WH: Um, but--but it did--it made us feel, um… um… it made us feel important. It made us feel good… um… i--if I were critiquing it as a historian, now I'd say, "Well, there's a certain sort of noblesse oblige, uh, attitude that we had, but--but from the in--but… but it was a very good

feeling it--made us feel significant. We had lots of fun trips, you know. I met Re--I actually got into an argument with Ronald Reagan… uh, about busing cuz he… came… and spoke at what was then called the Mosque, um, the Carpenter Center. Um… and drew great, *huge* applause -- this is before… he was president, I think he'd just finished his governor of Virgi--uh, governor of California. And was on the chicken dinner circuit and making speeches for tons of money and he… was asked about busing and--and, um, gave a very antibusing response and this all-white crowd had come to see Govenror Reagan applauded that. And I handed him a note. Um, at a--at a, um, at the party after that speech… uh, that I'd written during his speech, defending busing and saying why it was important… um, and so forth. And I--um, I thought it was very nice--I'm not sure he would have done this for just anybody but he did take the trouble of, uh, when he got back to California, writing me a long note, responding to my note and appreciating my concern for it and then defending his position--a--against busing. Um, but I think, yeah, that little exchange that I had with--with Ronald Reagan… was an example of--of what busing did for us, that it --that it gave us a sense that… we were involved in something much larger than ourselves. Um… let's see. Oh, what I was gonna say is, we--you know, we met Nixon, who I swear I told my father in 1970, when we met Nixon, that guy looks like a gangster. So I just want you to know I called it two years ahead. Um, and we met, had a *long* conversation with Golda Meir, which, by the way, was a civil rights conversation, too… because, um… United Jewish Appeal… sent a group of Virginians over there, basically as--uh, as they all understood it, to milk them. These are wealthy Jewish Virginians, one of them was Norman Sisisky, who later became a… congressman. And a lot of the names you see out at the, uh, JCC, be--who donated to that, they were being hit up for money to, uh… for Israel. And, uh, they took Dad along as part of the draw. It was a *stag* group, though. For whatever reason. All men. And, I think politically Dad decided that wouldn't be good for the governor to go on an all-male thing… and they said, "Well, you can't bring your wife." And he goes, "Well, in--" said, "I'll bring my son." Dad was very good as Governor about including us in all these opportunities and so… and it's funny cuz there w--ended up being one lady in the group and I think she just said, 'you're not excluding me, I'm coming.' So, anyway. So, we--we went to Israel, and… um… while most of the group was talking to Moshe Dayan, the great Israeli general… Dad and… maybe two aides, and I, sat down with--for a *long* conversation, about an hour… with Golda Meir. And… um… I remember Dad just… gesturing out the window at Arabs, as they were then called -- people we now call Palestinians -- were literally breaking rocks on the highway. Uh, outside her office. Um… and sh--asked as gently as he could… this is after busing had begun and he'd really become known as a supporter of--of civil rights in general and busing in particular. "Is there any analogy between Arabs here in Israel, and African Americans in Virginia." And that's really why we ended up having such a long conversation with her because she wanted to take as much time as she… uh, as was needed… to convince Dad that that was not an analogy, of course, that there was *no* comparison whatsoever. And I think that always strengthened his conviction that there was… uh, a comparison between Palestinians in--in Israel and African Americans here. But I had read--by that time I was thirteen, so I'd read up, I'd learned a little bit of Hebrew, and, um, was able to say to--the Prime Minister, [Hebrew], which supposedly means "I speak only a little Hebrew." Uh, and we chatted back and… uh, forth, but I said, "I have a proposal… which is, why don't you make--uh, you guys want Jerusalem, they want Jerusalem, Christians want some of--Jerusalem. Why don't we make it an international city and let the U.N. run it. Um, and wouldn't that work things out?" And I remember saying -- this is part of m--the story that my father likes to tell -- cuz here we are, sitting her office in the [? 43:36] said, "course you'd have to

move your desk!" Because if we made this international city… um, and she laughed at that and went through this whole… um, Israeli version of that history, saying, "Well, actually, there was an attempt to make Jerusalem an international city. And the Arabs wouldn't go along with it, they attacked us, and so… um, we took it, we're gonna keep it, and I won't have to move my desk." Um, but, um… uh, we--we kinda got snowed, uh, as many people, uh, do. Um, on that kind of trip. Um, but I--eh--she was a very charm--even though now I would look back and disagree with a lot of what she was saying, she was a very charming, grandmotherly figure. I remember her--you know with her elbows on her desk, and her hands folded together and resting her head… on her hands and looking at me, sort of tilting her head. Um… here's my point. So we had lots of--lots of great trips, and… there was a governors conference in Puerto Rico, there's one in South Carolina where they gave us a golf cart to bring home, which my parents still own. Um… the [chuckles]--um… the, uh--so there were lots of… toy--lots of--lots of toys that we got given--this was before watergate and so you could… uh, you could go flying in the state airplane to go skiing, which we did, quite a few times. Um, and there was a state yacht, which George Allen… got rid of… quite--quite properly so… couple terms later. Um… so there's lots of fun things about it, but… after busing, civil rights just became… um, part of everything -- part of our interaction with Reagan, part of our interaction with Golda Meir… uh, and so forth.

LB: You sound like you were an incredibly self-possessed thirteen-year-old.

WH: Yeah… uh--uh--I'd say it was sort of a problem for me. My d--my--my sisters handled it *wonderfully*. My brother was too young for it to be a big problem for him. But I was much more comfortable around adults than around kids. So it was a little bit of a--reentry for me to go--after we'd left Richmond, to just go be a regular high school student. Um… uh, up in Richm--it didn't help--it didn't help that I was Republican, which wasn't exactly the coolest thing… [chuckling] uh, to be… in, uh, high school and college. I think I'd h--might have gotten a lot more dates if I had, uh… but you know we still fought republican, party of Lincoln… this was really before all these people like Strom Thurmond and--and Jesse Helms had… come over and transformed the republican party into something different that--and *none* of us is republican anymore.

LB: What do you think of as some of the--the big turning points… for the community… during those years.

WH: Well, I… would say, as a parent, that the big turning point, um… came much later, that, um… well, I'll say there was a--there was a negative turning point in 1970 because…. um, I think Dad really did do the right thing by having us go, uh, to public schools. Judge Merhige's kids had always been gone--uh, he came from, I think, a wealthy family. He'd been a very successful lawyer… and so he had his kids in private school and they--quite proper, they kept going to the same private schools they'd gone to. Uh, it would've been too much for him to suddenly send his kids… to black schools--in fact, I--you know, they probably would've been in danger because… there were--there was a bomb set off on his property--I don't mean they'd b--would've been danger from the black kids, but from… um, but from white parents. Um, my point is there were ver--there were few… other… white leaders in the community who said, "Yeah, this--the law is… this is where my kid goes to school, this--my kid's going to this school" But… um, the newspaper was leading in the other direction. It was funny for me to delivery the Richmond Newsleader when James Kilpatrick was writing editorials criticizing my father for

being too pro-integration--although by that time you didn't put it that way, but… that was the code--the code was--came out--came down to that. Um… and so, there was very little leadership, um, other than Dad saying, you know, we can make this work. And--and then it became a self-fulfilling prophecy that is… whites escaped to the suburbs. Um, and… the schools remained almost entirely black. And that scared off more whites, um, because nobody can avoid it. Or almost nobody can avoid it, wants to be a tiny minority. And so it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. So I feel like it's only in the last… ten years or so in--in--in the twenty-first century that, um, a lot of the Richmond elementary schools are really starting to reintegrate. It's a very slow process and I know, um, many of the east end schools are still… not integrated, but, um, my own daughter Beverly goes to Linwood Holton Elementary School. Um, and, um… she--it just seems very unaware of race. Um, y--uh--may--maybe that'll come later. But, um, the--those kids, uh, are just thinking about other things than the color of each other's skin. And so I feel like there are pockets now where what, um, Thurgood Marshall had been pushing for in Brown versus Board of Eduation, is happening. Um, and it's still just pockets, but… so I'd say the big turning point in 1970 was a turn backwards, where if others had been willing to lead, um… or at least not lead--or--in backwards, then we could've had, um… real equality… greater equality of opportunity and we could have had greater social integration than we did and, uh, it's really… taken another thirty years before you start to see it, and even then it's only pockets I think, Fox School, um, it's probably predominantly white but got a--a decent black population. That's probably true of Mary Munford--there's a ton of schools--public schools… that are truly integrated in the way that Brown was intending. But it's taken… first, you had the--the… sixteen years after Brown, before we had real legal integration, and then defacto integration has taken another thirty.

LB: When you think back on those years, what would you point to as an example of good leadership and leadership that was not so good? And it can be on any level, from your sixth grade teacher all the way up to the president, you know? A--anywhere you wanna go with that.

WH: Right. Certainly all of my teachers were great leaders in the sense of not treating us differently either because we were white or because we were… you know, um, uh, only… we were… we… there were maybe three or four white kids in these classes. Um, and we were not on home territory by any means. Um and of course my sisters and me and the additional advantage of begin the Governor's kids. But I… never had the sense of being treated different. I had my official legal name is Abner Linwood Holton. And my fifth grade teacher, when I did something wrong, which was fairly often, would say, "Aaaaaab-ner!" Um--

LB: [Chuckling.]

WH: … the same way she would've if we'd all been white or we'd all been black or--or whatever. And so, um… I think there was great leadership, um… at that level by, um… um, parent--uh, by teachers who… just in resisting the temptation to treat anybody differently. Um, and there were… other parents. Um, both black parents, who… um… were willing to take the amazing risk of sending their kids, having their kids be bused to mostly white schools like Mary Munford… and white parents, um, like mine, but there were others, um… there was a kid named Hannibas (?), um, John Hannibas who lived… out in the west end of Richmond -- what was then… the west end, is now downtown, but um… near University of Richmond. And, um, that

was a wealthy family. They could've either moved to the suburbs to get to mostly white schools or they could've gone to private schools, and his parents, for whatever reason… chose… um… to--to stay in the public school system. Um, so there were, um… Dad was well-known for what was doing, but there were other people quietly doing the same thing and so I'd say that was the positive leadership. Certainly the most negative leadership was from the editorial page of the Richmond Times Dispatch and Newsleader. They had been the… architects of massive resistance… to inte--to integration. Kilpatrick, James Secturn (?) -- Kilpatrick had come up with a… term, uh, *interposition*. Um, which l--dated all the way back to Thomas Jefferson opposing the Alien and Sedition Acts… in the Kentucky Resolves, um, in 1798. Um, and so they--you know, Jefferson had… come up with a notion of nullification and interposition… as a--as a support of civil rights, civil liberties, cuz they Alien and Sedition Acts were taking people's first amendment rights. But Kilpatrick flipped it the other way around and used nullification as interposition… basically the same principles that had--had inspired the south and civil war… to, um… to resist integration. And, um, by 1970 when we moved to Richmond, it was no longer explicitly… anti-black, although it was still pretty close to explicitly anti-black, but it was… all about the principle of states' rights and so forth, but all of that was just code language for 'we don't want our kids… to be in school with black kids.' And it's the same people. Kilpatrick ran all the way through from the fifties into the… seventies and he'd used these terms like, um, *mongrelization*. You know, that your white daughter's gonna, um, end up getting married to a black boy, that was always the great fear, and that was gonna create mongrels… uh, and so forth, so the language had been cleaned up a little bit by 1970, but… um… I--I think it's fascinating to imagine what would have happened if the newspapers, um, had said--had been leading, um… and I think s--you know, the churches soon to be split, there were some that were really pushing integration and others… that were--that were going the other way. Um, so there's just a…a wide array.

LB: Yeah, it's--it's interesting, um… I interviewed a couple of sisters. Uh, Renee Mills and Glennys Fleming who went to a Presbyterian church. That--they--they're black, but the church was integrated and their church would take--

WH: Hmm.

LB: … white kids and black kids on camping trips together.

WH: Uh huh, yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Churches, of course the YWCA and YMCA--

LB: Yeah.

WH: … were great leaders in that… too. Um… I don't think I ever went to an integrated church while we were in Richmond. We, um… we--our official church was Secon--Second Pres, which is close to the Governor's Mansion… and we would visit--we loved visiting black churches, because of the enthusiasm which we'd never experienced. Actually, we'd had a--babysitter--a black babysitter who'd taken us to what we called "Amenners" (?). You know, the big tent, gospel for--gospel… revival. Um… but, uh, as… Martin Luther King said, the most segregated hour of the American week is eleven a.m. on Sunday.

LB: So how do you think your experiences during those days shaped who you are today?

WH: Um. Well, very much so. Um… they, um… a lot of--I'm--so I'm an American historian and a lot of people doing… um, American History have… gotten away from politics. Um, they're… into extreme social history, or… um… they're studying… cultural representations and things like that, and so they don't talk about politics. But… um… and I'm interested in all those things as well, but I've never let go of politics. And… that would've happened to some extent just by growing up in the Governor's Mansion anyway, but by growing up as… as--a--during this period when there were all these controversial issues, specifically around civil rights… and having… um, seen my father lead in what I thought was the right direction on that, has… con--just always convinced me as a scholar that politics--you know, w--the--n--never forget about politics. And so politics has always been a part of my own work in a way that wouldn't have happened if I'd just… uh, been some lawyer's son or some… anybody else. Um… and, um… it certainly… moved… um, Tim Kaine, my brother-in-law jokes about how when he grew up, you know, you'd sit around the dinner table, talking about… um, college football. You know, who won on Saturday night and all that. And… when he first started dating my sister, we'd sit around the--the dinner table, talking about social security. [Chuckles] and I don't remember it being quite that bad, but we are a very, um--Dad and I, uh, I'm very fortunate to have a living father at… at his age of 89. Um, but we--we'll talk a little bit about the Redskins. Um… some, uh, but we, um… but we mostly--it's--it's--it is our… that's how we bond. That's how we show our love for each other is by… chatting about politics. So it certainly moved us to the left. Um… but it's also… um, become to a kind of ridiculous extent… well, I'll remember this: when I, um… I went to UVA as an undergrad and on the little housing form said, um, no, I don't want to nominate any of my buddies from high school as--as a roommate. I want you to give me somebody as different as possible from me. So they gave me Rich Goldberg (?) from Plainview, Long Island. Uh, and he got Abner Linwood Holton, III from Virginia.

LB: [Laughing.]

WH: [Laughing] And so, I guess he'd also asked for somebody different cuz it--we sure got it--each other. We ended up being great friends, but… he had the Cheryl Tiegs poster over his bed in our dorm room, and I had--

LB: [Laughing.[

WH: …a giant county map, you know, with all the counties of Virginia. So, um… to--to an extent, which--which I think, looking back, was excessive, and which I hope to sh--somewhat shield my own kids from, politics has really been part of our life. But as a chance to get that wonderful feeling of doing something good.

LB: So you've almost answered my next question, then, which is, how those experiences changed your family.

WH: Um… certainly massively. Um… you know, I think it gives us--I mean, I think one of the--uh--uh, I listen to a lot of right-wing radio and l--read the right-wing blog. And one of the things that the right doesn't like about the left, I can kind of understand. And that is a certain self-

righteousness. Um… you used the term *self-possessed*, um… and I think that's true. The--the--the--the--there's a certain… um… if I was--I was con--critiquing out family… um… I would say that I--well, I'll just critique myself, that I've sometimes felt guilty of--of a certain self righteousness. And so that's the--that i--that's the downside… to it, um… but… um… but--but I think we retain--it's almost in some sense in which we're frozen in the year 1970, um, the n--the downside thing, that's slight self-righteousness, but the upside being… um… something that I acquire from my father, uh, and all of us have, uh, a belief that you can make progress. I think so many of my peers are pessimistic, um, about the possibility of change. And I've been pulled in that direction by being a historian and being around other historians. Um, a lot of what I write about are unintended consequences and accidental effects, but there's still this side pulling… me… in the direction that my father has always pulled, which is, no, y--there's also such thing as *intended* consequences. That is, you can set out to make something better and actually make it better. Um, so I'm--as much as I--much as I feel pulled towards irony, there's a side of me that is unironic. Um… I think, yeah, actually if… there's a lot of words I could use to describe my father. Um… and I think… it's not like he doesn't get jokes. But there's a sense in which he's unironic. That is that he thinks that you really can make things better, that we're not all just kind of… um… ss… flailing in the soup. That you can say, you know, this is a bad situation and here's a plan for making it better. We can make it better. And--and I think that makes me different from a lot of my friends.

LB: Absolutely. Where was your mother in all this?

WH: Um… qu--quietly leading. Um, she, um… she came from a very conservative family, um, and, you know, Dad--Dad can cite cases… where he was pushing… um… e--eq--racial equality as a twelve-year-old. Um, there was a guy--I've always wanted to track this down, now maybe I can convince you to be this person today. There was a guy named Peace who lived in a little apartment over the garage of Dad's house in Big Stone Gap. Um, Peace, a black man. Older guy. Um, so Dad was born in '23 so if Dad can remember him from the twenty--late twenties… um, I think he's probably called Peace cuz he was born in 19--in 1865, the year of peace. Um. Uh, and… um… I remember Dad's mother expla--Dad saying, you know, "How did Peace come to live in our garage?" and Dad's mother, my grandmother said to Dad, "Peace came with the house." So he was there before they were. Uh, but you could see how people--but--but anyway, so he had p--Dad had in this ti--in this tiny little town with very few black people, he had black friends who… he saw being mistreated by other whites. And so my point is that Dad and been thinking about civil rights since he was twelve. Um, or younger. Uh, and Mom hadn't. She came from--her father was one of the real wheel horses of the Byrd Machine. The southern democratic, uh, political machine that ran Virginia. Um, and so, um… so… but then she went off to Wellesley and got exposed to a wider world, but I think she always felt this pressure from her own parents when Dad, as Dad became a leader on civil rights… um, that--that… that that was an interesting spot for her -- a tough spot sometimes for her to be in. Um, but, um… um… you might say this was sexism in defense--sexism in support of the battle against racism because she stood by her husband as he did these things, and… uh, of course Dad gets all the credit, but she… um… um, she was a very strong supporter of--of the idea of us going to integrated schools, um, and so forth. And so it's--it's a--it's kind of what you'd expect, that she… she was leading but doing it quietly.

LB: How do you think those experiences change your relationships with people from different backgrounds?

WH: Um… Well… um… I--I think that--I mean, certainly as kids, we had a… an opportunity that, um, a lot of kids, black and white, didn't have. Because still--mean, and I think in the north today, my students when I was at University of Richmond, majority--vast majority of my students are my students are white, and the vast majority of them… my impression is, uh, grew up with almost all white neighbors up in New Jersey, where--

LB: [Laughing.]

WH: [Laughing] a lot of the students -- I always kid 'em, but they're all from New Jersey -- not all from New Jersey, but they--they have lived with a different kind of segregation. Um, a--a defacto e--economic segregation that they're--from wealthy suburbs and so forth. And so, um… so… my sister Anne describes it as the… um, we have the… the privilege of being a minority. Which I think is a fascinating phrase because many people who are m--having to be minorities all the time wouldn't describe it as a privilege. But of those of us who… have the privilege of not being a minority most of the time, it really was a privilege to be, uh, in that situation. Um, and, as I say, we did see it--I'm--I--I--I never thought about it till you asked this, but I--but I--it was a lot like foreign exchange. And… occurs to me that one proposal that I never got around to making when I was at University of Richmond… you know, the University of Richmond prides itself on getting more than half the students abroad for one semester. And it's always occurred to me that rather than sending them to Australia where they're just drinking Australian beer [chuckles], instead of--uh, Virginia's Sam Adams here in--here in the States… that we should have a study abroad program to Virginia Union. Um, and exchange students just--cuz they would learn so much more across town than they learn across the world. So we benefitted from that, um… and--and I think it would've been great if Dad or Mom had been sent to Japan for a year in 1973, but, um, I think--we got that kind of benefit, uh, to a greater extent than--than if we had been--b--just by being exposed to--to different cultures.

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

WH: Well, I think about that a lot, having a six-year-old and a four-year-old. Um… and I think it's a tough question. My wife is six years younger than me and, um… I kid her about being part of this generation that deludes itself into thinking it's post-racial. Um, and that's sort of how she wants to raise our kids. Um… um… but… but--so it leads to some--some disagreements between us because, for one thing, I j--I wanna ask, you know, "So, Beverly, what, you know, how many of the kids in your school are--are black and how many are white?" And Gretchen says, "Let's don't even get her thinking about race." And--and that makes sense. Um… so you're ask… what I want this next generation to know… and, um, I'm really--I can't answer that because I'm so ambivalent a--about it. Um… uh, I'm still--I'm still dealing with post-blackness and I'm very skeptical… um, uh, of this, and I see… I think the best insight on this has come from Steven Colbert who claims to not see color, uh, but of course sees--the--that's… he's saying that sarcastically making fun of that character. Um… uh--I--I have to--have to take a pass on that one. That's an interesting question. I'll have a good answer for that tomorrow.

LB: [Laughs.]

WH: [Laughs.]

LB: Well, I'll ask you my last question, then, which is, are there things that you feel that we as a community need to particularly remember that we're in danger of forgetting?

WH: Uh huh. Um… Yes! Um… I mean, I'll start with an analogy that, uh, it's hilarious to see… politicians, um, on the right say… we don't have to worry about pollution, our air's not dirty. And… of course the reason not to wor--we don't have to worry about pollution so much is that there were people who did worry about it when the air was dirty. Um… and so, um… likewise with ss… civil rights. Um… I think, um… I th--I do think--it's--it's--I'm tempted by the whole post-racial idea that w--lovely to think that the color of one's skin could be like the color of one's hair and, uh, eyes and so forth and just so irrelevant. On the other hand, um, I think, um… well, a.) the--the--the--the inequality is still there to a huge extent. And yes, I think that, um… I'm probably not a supporter of reparations because of the--technical side of figuring it out, but… but… um… I think, uh, say, students at the University of Rich--*white* students at the University of Richmond are in danger of believing that… the privileges that they have are somehow earned. And they do need to be reminded that a lot of privileges that they enjoy were taken… not earned. And so, I do think that we need to know our history for that reason.

LB: Is there anything that I did not ask you that you would like to say?

WH: No… [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

WH: That's a good question to end with, I know people do that, but I--no, this has been fun, I think you've… mostly asked questions… you could tell I had my basic spiel cuz I've told the basic story before but you asked me a bunch of questions I've never been asked before which was a lot of--a lot of fun. I wished I'd had more coffee, but um--

LB: [Laughing] no, you were great!

WH: …no, I think we've covered everything.

LB: Thank you.

WH: Yeah, that's--that was good.