

## **Dallas Corey Interview Summary**

Interviewee: Dallas Corey  
Interviewers: Kristin Godsey and Anthony Todd  
Interview Date: October 29, 2014  
Location: Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center  
Length: 1 audio file, WAV format, 89:19

THE INTERVIEWEE. Dallas Corey was born in Greenville, North Carolina on May 1, 1948. He moved to Hampton Roads at nine months old and grew up to be an active member of the community. As a child he attended Booker T. Washington and Huntington High School; both were segregated schools at the time. After graduating from Huntington High School in 1966, he began attending North Carolina Central University. Mr. Corey left North Carolina after a semester in order to take care of his family. Soon after, he joined the Marine Corps and fought in the Vietnam War until returning to the United States in 1968 with three Purple Hearts. Following his service in the Vietnam War, Mr. Corey began his job at a local telephone company. His careers include the Newport News Police Department, firefighting, and security. In addition, Mr. Corey was the first African-American at many of the positions he held. Currently, Mr. Corey is an active member of the Hampton Roads community and a grandfather to twenty-six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

THE INTERVIEWERS. Kristin Godsey and Anthony Todd are seniors at Christopher Newport University. Kristin is studying Literature, Political Science, and African-American Studies and Anthony is studying History and Political Science. They carried out this interview under the umbrella of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project as part of a class at Christopher Newport University.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview was conducted in the boardroom of the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center. This venue had many historical pictures of people in the community who Mr. Corey had gone to high school with or was still friends with. We began by asking Mr. Corey about his childhood and experiences with education in Newport News. He was particularly interested in discussing the quality of education he received at both Booker T. Washington Elementary and Huntington High School. Mr. Corey also discussed his involvement in the Vietnam War and the various jobs he held thereafter. Throughout the interview Mr. Corey placed significant emphasis on the current state of race relations and politics in America today.

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### **Start of Interview**

Anthony Todd: Here we go.

Kristin Godsey: Alright. So, I'm going to set it in the middle. And, this is Anthony Todd, and I am Kristin Godsey. Today is October 29, 2014 and we are interviewing Mr. Dallas Corey. This interview is taking place at the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center in Newport News, Virginia. This interview is being carried out as a part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project at Christopher Newport University. Okay. So, we're going to start off by taking what is called a life history approach, so we begin by asking you questions about your childhood. So the first question we'd like to know is when and where were you born?

Dallas Corey: Well, I was born on May 1, 1948, in Greenville, North Carolina, and, before I turned nine months old, my family moved here, and brought me here.

KG: Okay.

AT: Can you describe your childhood growing up in Greenville, North Carolina---. Or, you don't really remember it.

DC: No.

AT: Yeah.

KG: What about--. Can you describe your childhood growing up in Newport News?

DC: I had a great childhood. I had an experience better than others, because my mother had the first black kindergarten and nursery in Newport News, Virginia. But she didn't allow me to attend. She sent me to another school so I wouldn't, I guess, be a spoiled brat. But other than that I had great friends. I met a lot of families by her having so many kids there. She had about twelve hundred kids at one time, and that's record-breaking, I would assume.

AT: That's amazing, that's really substantial.

KG: Yeah. So well, first, why did your family move to Newport News from Greenville?

DC: Opportunity.

KG: Oh, okay.

DC: Not that Newport News was a metropolitan during that time, but it did have the shipyard, C&O Railroad, the longshoremen, and a lot of other opportunities. [That] Greenville was like a one-horse town at that time. That was before East Carolina College became a university and took up half of the town.

KG: So, what did your parents do for a living?

DC: My father started as a stevedore on the tugboat--one of the only black stevedores on the tug in Newport News--and he left that job and worked for Armour Meatpacking Company driving a truck, and he did that until he retired. My mother, like I said, was [first] a registered nurse. She worked at Patrick Henry Hospital when she graduated from nursing school [in Baltimore, Maryland]. And one of the school system's longtime nurses, [Ms. Holloway], and my mother graduated together and worked at Patrick Henry together. As Ms. Holloway started nursing in the school system, my mother decided to

start a kindergarten. And the nursery part came in because all the children weren't of kindergarten age and a lot of people that wanted to work needed someone that could care for the infants, so she took on that responsibility, too. So I guess opportunity is your answer. [My mother was also a church trustee, and started first receiving federal grant monies (that she shared) to feed all those children she had and supported many other kindergartens, churches, elderly, and foster care providers. The reason being, she was first, and the government was sending train cars full of food, milk, and supplies; far more than she requested.]

KG: Awesome. Can you tell me what, in terms of your childhood, do you remember how race relations were in Newport News?

DC: Well, with the children, it wasn't like it was with the adults [somewhat]. We played football, [baseball, and] basketball together. If you don't know, this whole area was an integrated neighborhood. We had Orthodox Jews, un-Orthodox Jews, whites, blacks, Indians, and I've met some Orientals also. And we all lived together. We all--. Some of us shared meals together. You know, it was that camaraderie. But on the adults' side, it wasn't like the children, how they had their little idiosyncrasies, and we didn't have time for that mess. If we liked you we liked you, if we didn't we didn't. [We] didn't care about your color. You know, so that's how it was.

AT: That's cool. So there weren't segregated courts, or like basketball courts, or anything like that?

DC: All the schools and everything were segregated--

AT: Oh, okay.

DC: But, you know, the thing that boys do, and I guess girls do it now too, because they're just as competitive as we, but we couldn't--. You know, we thought Huntington High School was the greatest school on earth; and so did the whites that went to Newport News High. So the schools never sanctioned it, but we played each other every year.

AT: Oh wow.

DC: We either played over their field, or we played over ours. My senior year of high school, they integrated schools. The coach over there came and offered a few of us players the opportunity to come and play over there. I decided not to do it my senior year. We had a few friends that did because, you know, everybody couldn't start for Huntington, which I didn't either, but I enjoyed playing with the guys that I grew up with my whole life. So I ended up staying and I stayed and graduated from Huntington.

KG: So, going back to your parents, were they involved in any community organizations or religious groups?

DC: My mother--. They always tend to put labels like "social" and "civic club league" and those type of titles. But they were really like camaraderie to have an excuse to see each other. And they did take care of some issues, you know, because we did have--you wouldn't call them town hall meetings--but they did have meetings with the chief of police, and the mayor. [They were] brothers then, Peaches, and one of them was a judge also, so they thought they controlled the town. [laughter] But specifically, they band together for specific reasons, but we had very few at that time except race relations, you know. And it was mostly, it was almost an all-white police force. The few blacks we had, they weren't allowed to drive cars, so we never got to see them at the houses, when they had to come to your house. They had them walking, you know, beats in the alleys, and

menial tasks. You know, 'cause I'm an ex-police officer also, 'cause I thought about all of those things that through my childhood, and I wanted to change some things. You know, during my generation--the Baby-Boomers--we thought we could change things. And I think we have, I think we did a pretty good job, you know.

AT: Yes, definitely. You brought us to where we are here now.

DC: Well, to a point, because I thought we would be further ahead than we are now. It seems to be regressing, now. You know, and I just saw an incident on TV yesterday, and they said it was race-induced. And I don't understand it, you know, 'cause I have a rainbow coalition family. I have grandchildren that are Puerto Rican, white, black, and Mexican. So, I don't have any race problems, myself. I take a person as an individual. You rub me the wrong way as an individual, not because of your race, you know. You had nothing to do with your race. Believe it or not. [laughter]

AT: That's the way to be.

KG: So, we noticed that you had written on your pre-interview survey that you are a "product of an early entrepreneurial venture by a black woman in approximately 1952." After speaking with you, I'm assuming that that is your mother, and her daycare.

DC: Correct. That's correct.

KG: 'Cause we were, we were wondering about that.

DC: Well, at fifteen, she graduated from high school in North Carolina, unusual for a black female, of course. A white doctor took an interest in her because she used to assist him in the afternoons, and do, you know, menial tasks, so she thought. But he was prepping her for things. And he paid for her to go to school in Baltimore, to nursing school.

KG: That's fascinating. So, we're going to go into talking about your experiences in school and employment.

AT: So you started at Booker T. Washington Elementary?

DC: Of course, seven years. Even when I moved uptown, I walked from here to Booker T. every day. Rain, or whatever. And, ironically, the principal--after the last Jewish family on my street moved off-- my principal from Booker T., Daniel Brown, moved in the house right in front of me. And it rained, he offered me rides, I couldn't dare take a ride with him, I'd be ostracized by all my friends. And they would be waiting for me on the corners anyway, so we could walk to school in the rain, and come to school wet, and they'd send us home to get dry, and then we'd catch a ride back. [laughter] So, it didn't work anyways.

KG: Well, can you describe your experience at Booker T.?

DC: It was excellent. We had excellent teachers. Of course, you'd know that all the academic criteria that we got were hand-me-down, and things were missing, so we never were taught out of those books. All of our teachers went back-- all the way through high school--all of our teachers went back to school every year on their own, out of their own pockets. They got no reimbursements from anybody. To keep us up, to get us up. I was in--. I was taking Spanish in the fifth grade, in elementary school.

KG: Oh my goodness.

DC: Ms. Carrie Brown brought in Mr. Lawrence. Matter of fact, I think he taught Spanish in high school, college, a lot of places. And, she brought him in to just to give us some basics, to get us bilingual, I imagine, that was her point. But, it worked out, worked out pretty good. I don't know the first word of Spanish. I can read a little. And I can write

some, but I remember the basics, and that's about it, because I never pursued it after that, you know. I took music and extra science courses because they were more interesting.

[laughter]

AT: That's cool.

DC: But Booker T. itself was an experience I wouldn't give [anything] to change. I wouldn't give anything for that. You know, the people that I met and--. I grew up in the East End before I moved uptown, and my mother started a kindergarten down in the East End, so I knew everybody in the East End so I couldn't get away with anything. So I had to kinda walk the straight and narrow. A lot of great people I met down there. Lot of friends from down there, I put together with some of the guys up here, and they're like this [close] now for life. And the girls, they've been married and all of that. It was something else. Then when I moved up here, you know--. Being from the East End, we had rivalries too. It wasn't all race-related, you know. It was, "Yeah, you come from the East End, and this is uptown." And all of that kind of thing. We didn't really have gangs, but they called us that, you know, and I guess if it was two or more of us it was a gang. But we didn't cause a lot of trouble. I think when the race riots and all of that started I was in Vietnam, so I missed all of that. But we had them in the service, so it was the same thing. But to get back to your thing, elementary school was the greatest experience I could have had, until I got to high school.

KG: Oh.

DC: Yep. 'Cause the teachers there were more intense than the ones we had in elementary school. Come to find out they were all like this [close] anyway, so the elementary school was prepping us for things that were going to happen to us at



Huntington. [laughter] And then we got to meet the kids from way uptown, Dunbar [and Thomas Jefferson] students, you know. And that's where the mix came in at Huntington, at high school. We had no middle schools. I don't think they need them now 'cause that's why you have so much trouble with middle school kids, because they have nobody to look up to [or respect]. So the ones that's in the seventh, the eighth grade, they're macho. See, when we came in, in the eighth grade, we had sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and you definitely didn't want to get in their path. They straighten you out, you know. So that took out a lot of the cockiness, a whole lot of that mess. And you had to look up to those guys. So those were the examples you had to follow, not a peer your same age. What example are you going to follow? He's just as dumb as you are. I'm sorry. I'm off on my coaching tangent. [laughter]

KG: Speaking of Huntington, can you describe your experience there?

DC: Greatest high school in the world. I was so sorry that they made it a middle school. Yeah. But that was the greatest high school in the world. I couldn't have been developed any faster or better anywhere else in this world. That Huntington was something else. It was a step up from Booker T. Like I said, it got us together. And I'm not taking anything from Dunbar [or Thomas Jefferson], because they had some great teachers there too. I found that out when we met some of their students. I was in the science fair, the science club, the math club, all of that, the culture club, all of this. So I got to compete with some people, you know, same age, different school, same level, you know. And I think we still hold the record for the largest graduating class in the state of Virginia. Huntington High School, class of '66. Check it out.

AT: About how large is it?

DC: I think we graduated about four hundred and some.

AT: Oh my goodness.

DC: And we didn't have no thousand-student class, you know. And they never separated the slightly challenged. They went to school with us, they went to class with us, and they sat in the same rows that we did. There wasn't no separatism, none of that, you know, and all of them graduated that was in my class. The teachers made sure of it. And there wasn't no cheating, or none of that stuff going on. And I see a lot of them now retired, model citizens, retired from supervisory positions and jobs. And now, you know, you would call them special-ed, or something like that, and they probably would be thrown to the side for waste, you know, and I don't think you need to separate them. My wife worked in special-ed in the Newport News system from the conception. She retired 31.9 years later. And all of her students--they had proms--we still meet with them every Christmas; and they're like, forty, they're almost fifty. Yeah, they're in their late forties. So we've been with them since they were little kids. And I think it's the greatest thing in the world. But I just didn't like the idea of them taking them away from what we would call, normal. Who's normal? [laughter] So, that's why I said Huntington was the greatest. I know Carver people would say--. I have cousins that went there, they would have, opposition to that, but I don't care. [laughter]

AT: So like with like the books being hand-me-downs, like you were mentioning, were you aware that there was a difference between the quality of the materials you had there versus the white schools at the time? Were you aware of that in elementary and high school, or--?

DC: Simply because I helped bring the books in sometimes; we had summer [football] practice. I was always there; I was in the choir. We always had early practice, you know. It was never a break. And I always worked, so I had to work all of that stuff in my schedule. My parents taught me that time was money; wasted time you never get back. You can't ever make up what you lost, so get that out of your heads. If you lost it, it's gone. Try to go ahead or pick it up somewhere else. But that's the mentality that I was brought up on. I taught my father how to read and write. You know, he was the oldest in a family of twelve, and he had to go out with his father every day, you know, like I said, in North Carolina. They worked the land. That was about all they had out there, sharecropping and tobacco and cotton. I worked tobacco. I refused to touch any cotton. Now, my cousin that I call my sister, she worked cotton. I wouldn't bother it. Because of the stigma, one thing. You know. Yeah. We used to go to North Carolina every Christmas [and summer until] my parents would come later, 'cause they, you know, they had to work. So they'd put us on a bus. We caught a Greyhound bus from West Avenue to Portsmouth to catch a Trailway bus, because Greyhound didn't do local cities in North Carolina. They were too rural, you know, it was a waste of their time. And I've actually seen the Ku Klux Klan march [on the Route 13 South to Greenville, North Carolina].

AT: Oh my goodness.

DC: You know, they stopped a bus on the highway, you know; they'd come up on the bus, and look on [to] see who's on the bus, you know. And that was one of the things that just kept me perturbed with that stigma. You know, I just--. And the way my cousins were down there: "Don't look at this white woman," and "don't do this," and "don't do

that.” Man, I’m sorry. [laughter] It’s just different environments with different mentalities, and I wasn’t a part of that one. We soon changed all of that too. Yep.

KG: So, going back to Huntington--

DC: Hmmm?

KG: I know you mentioned choir and football, but what kind of activities were you involved in there, or if you could elaborate on your experience?

DC: Okay, I was in the choir five years, football, basketball, track. Played baseball one year because of my other activities, and culture club, math club, science club. I think I was in a couple of other. Maybe I did some homemaking because I love to cook. I taught all my boys to cook. They cooked their way right through college. Work, other activities. That’s about all in school because I had a lot of outside activities too. I was a junior mason and I had jobs, little part-time jobs, and I worked with my mother at the school, just to drive before age because we couldn’t get a license until we were fifteen. I got mine on my fifteenth birthday, May 1. Would you believe it? That’s fifty-one years this past May.

KG: Oh my goodness.

AT: Oh wow, that’s crazy.

DC: Yep. With a clean record, may I add, until I went to court in June. I told the judge about it, and told her why, and that was erased also. But she knew what I was doing, she just did it. I won’t say because I was black, but I just say he just did it because they do a lot of profiling. The way she was sitting, that’s all. Everybody’s going to speed in that area, because you have three lanes going into two. And they don’t write tickets for the trucks in the wrong lanes now. So, I beat that one on my record alone, she said, and my

honesty, because I told her the truth. Yeah, I sped, and he knew why. Sometimes you have to speed up, to keep from being in stuff.

AT: So, is there anything else that you can think of about Huntington High School?

DC: Best food. We used to have that. I bet y'all don't get cafeteria food like we had.

They [Ms. East and staff] cooked everything from scratch back then, you know.

Excellent.

AT: I'm sure it was really good.

DC: Yeah, man. Ate every meal I could: mine and somebody else's. [laughter]

KG: That's funny. So, we saw that you graduated before busing started in Newport News. But, do you remember--

DC: They had some buses, but it wasn't busing like you would call it. It wasn't to integrate the schools, right, because when I graduated from Huntington it was still all black, you know. But Newport News High was integrated because some of my best friends attended there my senior year. I think all the schools integrated right after I graduated in '66. Yeah, I'm almost sure that that did occur. But, during our time, nobody attended the school except when we had our little sandlot, play games out there. And [I] remember this guy Dickie Thornton from Newport News High, one of the best linemen they ever had. We had a Turkey Bowl over here at Huntington's football field, and, (22:25) he got his leg broke on the first play. I'll never forget that, he had a promising future. We just knew he was going to go somewhere. He was a good athlete too. He didn't take offense to it, and it wasn't intentional. It was just something that happened. Nobody could believe it. Big as that guy was, somebody little broke his leg. [The Hornsby boys had baseball games behind the old shop, across from the new location.]

KG: I'm curious about--. Why do you think that it took so long in Newport News to fully integrate schools?

DC: Well, the few blacks that had money were isolated, so they didn't get the clout, especially politically. There was very few whites that had political white clout, because the Peach brothers ruled Newport News during the time that I was coming up. I know all of the fifties, and part of the sixties. You know, I mean, you got one that's the mayor, one the chief of police, and one that's one of the high judges. You can't win. [laughter] But like I said, we had very little trouble out of like what you have out of these teenagers and stuff now, because one thing the families weren't forced to be broken up. That was number one. It seems like it's a system out now to break up families. Number two, even if you had a child by a woman, the man had an opportunity to get a job. When we graduated from high school, not only the shipyard--. The shipyard at that time hired maybe thirty-three, thirty-four thousand people. Right now, I bet you they don't have thirteen thousand on their roster, that they pay for. Everybody else has subcontractors, you know. And so, there's an answer right there. And, it doesn't just hurt us, it hurts everybody. And then you got the federal government [Reagan movement] busting up the middle class [and killing farms. Trickle down never happened]. And I don't know what company, or country, they grew up in, but I took economics my first year in college. And, the main thing that I know about government, they only make their money out of revenue. If nobody's working, then the government's not going to get any revenue. So if you take away all the jobs, and give them to machines, and [other countries], then you not going to have--. A machine not going to give you nothing but production, you know. And it'll take very few people to run it. But, it's not going to give you the revenue. It's going

to give the company the revenue, and then you gonna give them tax breaks where they don't have to pay it. You know, where you going to get the money from to run the country? That's why all the cities falling apart now. You know, you gotta put people to work. That's how I got to work for the City of Hampton. They brought in that Manpower Act, one of the greatest things that ever happened to this country, 'cause you got things accomplished, you know, and then you put people back to work. When people working, the cities, the states, and the federal government can get their taxes, and, everybody can kind of level off. But you destroy the middle class, you destroy America. Because [that] one percent not gonna do nothing for anybody, you know that. That's for sure. And that's not racist either, because there's a whole lot of blacks in that one percent. And they look down at us too, you know. So, there's no difference. It ain't about race now. It's going to be a class thing, you know. And it has been. A lot of people just not realizing it but it has been. I hate to call names, but I say it goes back to Ronald Reagan. You take away the farms--. This country used to feed the world, with surplus. Didn't cost us a dime. We could keep our money and send them the surplus. Now we buying tainted food from other countries, and killing our own people, and destroying our farms. You know, that's just one error. Then automation, which I can't be mad with, because it is a good product. But then if you gonna go to automation, then what you gonna do with your labor force? You know? So, it's six in one hand, half dozen [in the other]. It doesn't work. If the middle class not working, the country not working. And that's it. 'Cause that one percent gonna fight you tooth and nail. They not giving up nothing and that's for sure. That trickle-down effect never worked. It might have trickled down, but it didn't trickle down to the middle class or the lower classes because, you know, everybody's down. You up here or

you down there. Nothing in the middle. That's wrong. Something wrong with that. [What to aspire to?]

AT: Then you need somebody looking out for the common people.

DC: Well, I mean, all of us the common people or supposed to be. The country's supposed to be for the people, you know, and it's not that way. Look at what they're doing to you. Student loan thing, filibustering [on laws]. And it only takes one little stroke. Why we putting y'all in debt? Who putting you in debt? The student loans, right?

KG: Mmhmm.

AT: Mmhmm.

DC: Yeah. Yeah. But you--. It shouldn't be that way. And then the rates. Man, please, that stuff is ridiculous. I have nine grandchildren in college right now. I just sent off a bunch of money this week 'cause if they in there and they getting the grades, I'm going to help them. I don't care, you know. And they don't have to be related to me neither, because we all pool together and do different things for different people, you know. It takes a village to grow a child, raise a child, and that's the truth. It does, you know. The Bible speaks of friends, neighbors, and relatives. Don't talk about nobody else, everybody else is--. You don't want to be associated with them. For real. You know, anything other than that, it's going to pull you down, you know. Friends, neighbors, and relatives. That's the only thing that gonna ever do anything for you for free in life. And, mark my words. I got sixty-six-and-a-half years, and nobody ever done nothing for me that didn't know me, didn't care about me, wasn't related to me, wasn't a friend of, or somebody in my family, or whatever. Nope, never happened. And now the strangers try to help people, but the people that control it, it never gets to where it's supposed to go.



You know, those little things--. Commercials you see on TV about the kids starving here and there. And they're still starving here and there, the same ones. Where the money? You know, somebody gave some. Where is it? Where is it? "Oh, we had to spend this much to do that." So, what's the purpose? You know, so. Life gotta change. It gotta change.

AT: Yeah definitely.

DC: It gotta change. Y'all gotta do it.

AT: We'll try it.

KG: Yeah.

AT: So yeah, going back to the--. With the busing, in the high schools, in schools around here. They started the busing and the integration soon after you graduated, so I guess you would have been in college?

DC: Well, we had some buses but that was to take kids to another high school, because we had some that lived in this same area that elected to go to Carver, you know, because they didn't want to get caught up. Huntington was a large school. It was a lot larger than Carver, and Newport News High was the largest on that side. Some people don't like crowds. You know, for a long time I wouldn't go to a large church. I felt like, you know, you felt like a blade of grass in a yard. You can't pick yourself out.

AT: But yeah, so I guess you would've been in college when they started integration. Do you remember what you thought about that, or what your parents thought about it?

DC: Well, I started college in 1966, too, I went to North Carolina Central. One of George Wallace's alma mater [George E. Wallace, current mayor of Hampton, Virginia]. I attended there for a half a semester. Full scholarship. I had to quit. I had a son and I

didn't want to make him my parents' responsibility. So, I worked all the way up until I went to school, and I worked while I was in school, also. But all of us had to come home. The draft was still in. All of us had to come to go to Richmond for the draft board. So I went up there, and I said, "I could go back to college any time. I'm gonna join the Air Force, so my family won't be a burden on my parents. That's my family, I should take care of them. So, I joined the Air Force before I left here. Actually, before I left Durham. And I came on up to Richmond for my appointment, took the physical, ran into all the guys I played ball with, all the guys I went to high school, some of the guys I played against. And they had thirteen of them join the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps came up with this plan, this buddy plan thing. Pair up, we'll send you all together wherever you go, to whatever your job opportunity is, whatever. Whoever has the highest score, the other one can ride his coattail. Wasn't worried about testing, 'cause I had already been accepted by the Air Force. The Air Force and the Navy didn't take low scores. So I already knew. And, I didn't have enough time in college to go officer's candidate. So my deal was I'm going to do four years in the Air Force. They said, "Well, all you do is run track, coach, or take care of a gym for four years, and make up your mind if you want to reenlist or not, but that'd be a golden opportunity for you to finish your college." So I get to Richmond and all the guys said--well, you know the names that they called each other if you don't go with the group--and, "You'd be less of a man if you didn't join the Marine Corps, plus it'd make it an even fourteen." So I did. [laughter] And, they gave us a 120-day delay program because they were overcrowded. They promised too many people the same opportunity. And because I couldn't go in the Air Force--. I always liked planes. I like fast vehicles anyway. But, since I couldn't go in the Air Force and I knew I

couldn't go to officer's school, I couldn't be a pilot so, Marine Corps said, "We'll let you ride on choppers or planes and shoot guns." I like shooting too, so I said "Well, that'd be a good deal. I'll go into aviation in the Marine Corps." So my buddy's scores didn't qualify, but mine qualified for both of us. So they sent us to school. Yeah. I made honor Marine at boot camp also, out of all three battalions, yep. And they sent us to Millington Naval Air Station outside of Memphis. And that was so boring and cold and, you know, I just didn't like Memphis. And, we decided to volunteer for Vietnam, and that's how I got over there.

AT: [laughter] Oh wow. So when'd you go over to Vietnam?

DC: Let's see. I got there in the early part of '67.

AT: Wow.

DC: Yep. Early part of '67, and I got medivac-ed January of 1968 for the last time. I had three Purple Hearts. Got wounded three different times there. I got wounded within thirty days of my first arrival and then when I came back from the Philippines, on the ship-- I got hit in the hand, broke my wrist and all. It wasn't no big deal. They let me run the mailroom in the rear until they took the bandages and cast and stuff off. And I rushed that up because I didn't like it in the rear. The rear took incoming shells, artillery. We took it in the field, but we could see where it was coming from, and we could do something about it. You couldn't do nothing about it in the rear. So I hurried up and got un-bandaged to go back out in the field. I felt safer out there, you know. At least I could fight back, you know. In the rear they want to take your weapons from you, the big ones anyway. [laughter] Yep. But that was an experience I'll never forget. Never forget getting off that plane. Felt like the sky was that far from my head. And the smell and the-- I just

knew I didn't belong there. And I felt like I wasn't going to come back from there alive either. Just gotta man up, gotta fighting attitude, and we fought our way back over.

AT: [laughter] That's good. That's good.

KG: So, we saw that you also studied at Christopher Newport and at several other places. When did you start--

DC: At Christopher Newport?

KG: Mmhmm.

DC: Let's see, I put in two years at Thomas Nelson [Thomas Nelson Community College, in Hampton, Virginia]. I came back home, I got out April 3, 1970. Medical discharge. And, I worked for the telephone company so I started Christopher Newport immediately. And they even gave me my credits from my half-a-semester in school. I thought I had flunked out of everything, 'cause I really wasn't, you know, concentrating on a lot of things. And I passed everything but one course.

AT: Oh nice.

DC: Yeah. And I left there so, I say, seven--. I want to say '72 to '74, I want to say that 'cause--. I had this great English teacher, Ms. Sancetta. She wanted me to be a writer. Every time she wanted us to write, I was writing on some of my past experiences. I guess she just got thrilled [by] some of the stuff that I was putting in there. [laughter] But, like I said, I had great teachers at Booker T. and Huntington, so she was amazed at the way that I used punctuation, and, you know, she said it almost made her feel like she was there.

[laughter]

KG: That's awesome.

DC: Yeah, I wonder if she's not dead now, no.

KG: I don't think so.

DC: Yeah. Wonder if she's still alive, she was a nice teacher.

AT: That's good. So like with--do you remember, what were race relations like at CNU, or like, the other colleges and universities you attended?

DC: Well see, in the seventies, you talking about a whole new life. That's flower power years. Do I need to elaborate? [laughter] Okay. Naw, everybody loved everybody then. Even Republicans was loving Democrats, I couldn't believe it. [laughter] Yeah, but the good of the country was the common goal. And race really didn't matter, you know, because our age were becoming the adults then, and we knew the guys we played with, that we wouldn't let our --. Well, our parents didn't really care too much, long as the guys were good guys, no criminals, you know. 'Cause I had--like Dickie I was telling you about--I had all of them over the house, you know. Even after we graduated, then they graduated, they came to our stuff, we went to theirs. If they weren't playing, we went to their games, supported them. And especially after Elliot, and Larry, and Eric went to-- 'cause those were the main three stars they had over there. But they still didn't have our record. We went undefeated two years in a row.

AT: Oh my goodness. Wow.

DC: And [the city] didn't win the state championship again, 'til my grandsons graduated from Heritage. Their senior year, they won the state championship for Newport News.

AT: Oh, wow.

DC: So those are the only two state championships this city had.

AT: That's crazy. That's really crazy.

DC: That's really crazy. [laughter] Yep.

KG: So what was your first job and why did you enter into that field?

DC: You talking about as an adult?

KG: Yeah.

DC: 'Cause I worked my whole life--

KG: Yeah.

DC: Telephone company.

AT: Okay.

DC: First black on the frame, Queen Street frame in Hampton. First black. I had a lot of first black jobs.

AT: Oh wow.

DC: First black fireman at Naval Weapons Station.

AT: Yeah, we saw you put that.

DC: Right. First, well I won't say just black, but Newport News Police Academy. The first Academy they had, I was senior of that class. I took the honors for that class.

KG: Wow.

DC: Yep. And let's see what else I was first black at. Personnel and City of Hampton intern. There's something else I can't think right now. Might've been the first black in the Kiwanis Club. But I only did that because I needed them to support my program in Hampton. We were working on a winterization program, Newport News had one too.

KG: Oh, okay.

DC: Worked on the elderly, and the handicapped's homes, to make them energy efficient. I went a little beyond that. That's why I joined so many organizations, 'cause I needed their support, 'cause a lot of those homes--. Windows and doors wasn't gonna help them.

What good am I gonna put a window or door in your house, and I'm standing in your living room looking right out of the side of your wall, watching traffic go by? And so it was ridiculous to me. It was a waste of money. Put new storm windows and doors on your house, and all the air still going out the weatherboard. And I got guys that want to learn, and I got guys that can teach them. So, 'cause Mr. Braxton, that's in charge of this building right here, he was my supervisor, and we did a lot. He brought in--. We got together and he wrote grants. I bet you we brought more money to the City of Hampton--. they don't want poor people money, they say. That's why they lost the administration, they had. But old Wendell White was the mayor there then [*sic*, city manager] and anything for the good of the people. He didn't care what color they were. His best friend--they come from Langley Air Force--his best friend, Ronald Neill, was a black colonel, from Langley Air Force Base. So they did--. We went far beyond the race relations. So, I left the telephone company, my first job, because of racism.

AT: Oh wow.

DC: Had a supervisor that never graduated high school.

KG: Mmm.

DC: Worked with three Caucasian boys that were still in college. All of us were re-working the frame. They were going to the touch-tone system from the dial system and they needed us up there, you know. And I was the only black in that building, except for the janitors, you know. And my supervisor couldn't stand it. And I found out he'd never even graduated from high school and they gave him a supervisor's job. And he hated the three guys that I worked with 'cause we went out to lunch together every day. And they would come to work late, and he would move the clock--'cause you had those little

punch-in clocks then--he would move the clock to make it look like I was late. But they came in after me. And all of us had on watches and all, you know, but you time in with your card. And then they would come in after me, and instead of him--. When I brought up a complaint, instead of them firing him, or demoting him, or just moving him out of the building, they gave me [more] money 'cause I was gonna take them to the Labor Board, but they didn't reprimand him at all, you know. And they just said it was a malfunction with the clock. That's crazy. [laughter] I got to work early every day. I lived down the street from Queen Street so I was there. You know, these guys were coming from all over, Denbigh and everywhere, you know. Yeah, so it was, it was weird. And, you know, being young and dumb at that time--. I was twenty. I came back handicapped. They wanted to cut my left leg off and I told them, "If this doesn't even work, I want to come back home with everything I took." I promised my father that I'd come back the way that I left. All my parts anyway. And so, they didn't but a lot of people were getting amputated because of non-cleanliness tools. It wasn't the area, or none of that. It was [that] they just didn't sterilize the [equipment]. But, you know, there was too many of us. I mean, darn they had [500] thousand troops. They never had that many in the Marine Corps before. And it was like they almost had all of us over there, 'cause they were pulling up the Reserves and sending them over there untrained, and they got wiped out soon as they got there, you know. At least they trained us, you know. So, I left the phone company, and I went to the Newport News Police Department. Had already made up my mind to go with them: had the physical, the test, the psychological thing, and all of that. And I had--. 'Cause my father said, "You never quit a job and never get fired from a job. Never leave a job until you got another one in your hand." You know, can't ever find a



job unless you got a job, so you always take the first one first. And you never leave that first job for the other job, 'cause you don't know where you're going. Grass always look greener on the other side. But y'all know that sequence, and it isn't, you know, 'cause you taking the same problems to the other grass. It's you, it ain't the grass. [laughter] You know, so once I found out it wasn't me, I quit the telephone company, and the man that hired me wanted to know why. Now I wanted to take the job that my buddies took. Drive the truck, install the phones, sign your paperwork, I'm done with you, going on to the next one. Well, the frame made more money, there was air conditioning in the summertime, and heat in the wintertime, but I still had to deal with that man that I knew, sooner or later, he was gonna push me in a corner, make me do something to him. You know, I still wasn't in my [right mind]. We didn't know anything about post-traumatic stress then, you know. We know a lot about it and still don't know anything about it, you know. But I had it then and didn't know it.

AT: Oh, wow.

DC: Yep. I'm on my third marriage, and we've been together thirty-eight years, you know, so that should tell you something about temperament. You know, 'cause, I knew I was insane when I came back here. The stuff that I did: to volunteer for the police department, and grew up in Newport News? You know, I got a lot of hate from people that'd been knowing me all their life just 'cause I put that uniform on, you know. But then there was fifty of us from Phenix [George P. Phenix High School in Hampton, Virginia], Carver, Huntington. All of us played ball and people did know us. And all fifty of us got on the force, and it was a different attitude then. We changed the attitude of the people down here that hated the police. 'Cause the police used to do some dirty stuff to

us, you know. And like I said, we didn't see the black ones unless we came up on the avenue, you know, so we wanted to change that too. I thought I could change the--. You know how a woman marries the guy and says, "I want to change him"? [laughter] Yeah well, that's the attitude that I had. And we find out that things only change if they want to. Yep. But I had something to do with it.

KG: Yeah.

AT: That's good.

DC: I give another point of view. [laughter] Yep. One that you probably never even thought of.

AT: Yeah, definitely.

DC: Yeah.

AT: So like, with--. You mentioned on the police force that they had the black officers like, doing beats, or you know, lower, menial tasks, you mentioned.

DC: Until I got there. That thing had to change.

AT: Oh okay.

DC: You see, a lot of us had gone to college. Most of us had been in the military, different branches, or whatever. So we all had skills. A lot of us had been MPs, or did MP duty and all of this [military police]. So we knew a lot of the police work better than they did. 'Cause the FBI came down here when I was on the police force and surveyed Newport News police force before they turned it over to the state police and found out it was forty-six years behind in times. So, a lot of things had to change.

AT: So, that started changing, like, race relations on the force, or?

DC: No, we did that. [They changed communications/partnering with other departments.]

AT: Oh, okay.

DC: 'Cause you know, they had the police association. They didn't allow us to join so we formed a black police association, you know. Then they wanted to know why we had, you know. And I'm thinking, "Why not"? We wanted to belong to one and y'all didn't offer us an invitation there, you know. And I left there and joined the feds. So, things did change before I left. Some of my buddies retired from there, so a lot of things changed. Now I won't say all of them were for the good, but a lot of things changed, at least they got upgraded. [laughter]

KG: So when did you stop working for the police department--

DC: I left Newport News--

KG: --and where did you go after that?

DC: --and I went over Norfolk Naval [Shipyard (civil service appointment)].

KG: Oh okay.

DC: 'Cause --. No, I didn't. I went to Naval Weapons Station. I was supposed to have been on their security force [but] they lost the billets because--. During this time we had a Republican president and administration and they started cutting civil service appointments, 'cause that was another guaranteed career for people that wanted to do what they do and do it for the rest of their lives, and you know, be satisfied with that-- getting annual promotions and salary increases. And, that was fine, you know. It was a career, you know. You don't have to be a coordinator or the mayor [or] the chief of police. You don't have to be all that. Everybody's job is important, you know. And nobody makes any civil service appointment menial, because you look at those paychecks, you know, and then you looked at the retirement program and all, which all

has changed now, you know. And it was a good place to go to work for thirty years because those thirty--. At fifty-five then, if you was fifty-five of age and you put thirty years in on your job, you got a check for the rest of your life. I mean, darn, you start working for somebody at twenty, and you gotta put in the extra five years to get to fifty-five, and then you join full retirement from the job. And you not but fifty-five years old. You know, during that time that would've been an ideal situation. I have a son now that just put twenty years in the Navy. That's my baby son. He just had twenty years in the Navy. And they just paid him [approximately] six figures to re-enlist for four years. I mean he has a specialty job, but six figures, you know. And, also in the military, I got that top secret clearance and that walked me a long ways in life, you know. Yep. Every job I had, I had to go through a clearance thing. I even applied for the CIA. I been up McLean [McLean, Virginia], I had the physical, all of that stuff. And my wife talked me out of that mess. Yep. That was right during the Oliver North situation. I might've been hung up right in the middle of that mess. [The Iran-Contra affair of 1985-1987]

AT: Oh wow.

DC: You know, so. Glad that she talked me out of it. [laughter] Yeah, I wouldn't have taken it laying down, I told--. I would have told everything. Everybody involved. For real. I mean, secrets from your own country. Please, man. That's crazy, you know. They tell me that's treason. They kill people for that. And he took the blame for somebody else, you know.

AT: Exactly.

DC: Yeah, we all know.

KG: So you note that your wife worked for Newport News Public Schools.

DC: That's correct.

KG: And you mentioned what she did. But, could you elaborate on it a little more?

DC: Her first two years she was the reading teacher. And then they came up with Special Education. And she just loved the disadvantaged anyway; and those kids, if you met them, you'd love them too. They're something else. But, they just took her heart, and that was it for her. And she retired doing the same thing, you know. And Mr. Clark right there on that wall, he was assistant principal of Huntington when she retired. [Huntington Middle School; Huntington High School was converted after integration and became a middle school in 1981] Ms. Holloway's [Cleo Holloway] the principal there now, and she was an assistant principal there also when my wife retired. So, we just about had contact with every principal and assistant principal that ever been to that school from the time that we attended all the way until she retired. Well, up till now, 'cause I was just over there the other day. Got a grandson over there. Caucasian grandson, go to Huntington Middle School, that's correct. Eleven years old, almost six feet tall.

AT: Oh wow.

KG: Oh wow.

AT: Oh my goodness.

DC: Yep.

AT: That's crazy.

DC: Soccer beast. Yep.

AT: Nice.

DC: We let them pick their own sports.

AT: That's good.

DC: Yep. But you gotta play something. I coached seventeen years. You gotta play something for me. [laughter]

AT: So like, yeah with your wife, she worked--. I guess she was working in the school system a lot like during integration and when they were integrating? Do you know what she thought about that or her experiences with that?

DC: It had already started by the time she was in the system, 'cause she started working in the nursing home until that was too depressing for her, and that's what put her in the school system. You know, she started right at Newsome Park School, a school that she attended. [laughter] Changed, but she started right there. I can't think of too many schools in this city that she hadn't worked in.

KG: Wow.

DC: Yep. But she stayed in the special education program. All the people there were good people and, of course, the kids needed those type of people. And she made them her commitment. Yep.

AT: That's really good.

DC: But we loved--. You know, I always knew I was gonna love children anyway. I have twenty-six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren of my own.

KG: Oh my goodness.

AT: [whistles]

DC: So.

KG: That's awesome.

AT: That's amazing.

DC: And, let's see, she been retired ten years now, so. We were just discussing that the other day. But she won't go back now 'cause she said that--not even in special ed--she said "All the kids in school are too bad now." They're busting up families, then you lose supervision, and a lot are lost to drugs and other stuff in the street. Job situations mess up a lot of it, you know. And now that prison's become not a nec-- Well, they have always been a necessity, but it's become an entrepreneurship, I'll put it. And this makes no sense, you know, 'cause it's not even a rehabilitation center anymore, you know. I mean you could lock people up every day for a lot of things. You know, how far are we gonna go with that? You know. And it's always disproportionate. It's always. And I don't have to elaborate on that, you know. And the ones that should go to jail for a long time, because they got this [money], it doesn't happen. And that's not racist. That's class. And 'cause a lot of rich blacks get off just like a lot of rich whites and Jews and everybody else. It doesn't matter, you know. If you got the money, you can-- You know, even if you get time, you not gonna get what you should have got. You know. And then the ones that's in there getting time, they doing more time than they should be. So, I guess they say it balance off. Doesn't balance off for me. That doesn't equate. That doesn't sound right. And like I said, that's the new system now. So, they're gonna get their revenue one way or another, but I mean, what you getting? And put a lot of fines on a bunch of people that never had a job, some of them never finished school, what you gonna get out of that but some better criminals? And then you gonna put all of them together and they gonna come up with a good plan. They do it there all the time. Everybody in there repeaters. And you wonder why. I don't. I don't. It's what you set them out to. You know. A friend of mine had this program called Offenders Aid and

Restoration [Offender Aid and Restoration, based in Richmond, Virginia]. Had it here in Newport News, Hampton, all the way up to Richmond. I think it's still in Richmond, but they don't do nothing. Not down here for nobody, you know. Some of the crap that's on some people's records. Should never been up there. They should never been incarcerated over a twenty-four hour period. They probably would've learned their lesson from that one. But you know, put you in jail with some hardened criminals--. How hard do you think you gonna come out? If I just give you thirty days--.

AT: Yeah.

DC: You know. Your whole life would change, wouldn't it?

AT: I'd better learn quick.

DC: Yep. That's what I'm telling you, it's--

AT: Yeah, exactly.

DC: It's a stigma and then that's it. So, you ostracized for the rest of your life just from that little thing up there. So nobody will hire you and none of this. So what you gonna do? Go out and commit some more crimes, 'cause I gotta eat, sleep, and all of this. And then you got child support. Another system that lock people up for not having anything. And you have people out here with college educations that can't get a job. I got a couple that I know personally. Not here--they gotta go somewhere else. Well, I mean, everybody relocating. That puts everybody where? One place. What the other people supposed to do to survive? You know, that's--.I don't know, it's just stupid. [laughter] When I grew up, we could go to sleep on our front porch at night. We could leave town and leave our house unlocked. If anybody went in there, they took your paper, your mail, might've borrowed a cup of sugar, might've brought it back before you even got back. But nobody



went in there and bothered your stuff. They wouldn't allow it, you know. And it's just different. And we create it. Not we, but, you know, government. We create it. You know, and we--. If we can create that, we can create something positive, right?

AT: That's true.

DC: That's what I say. You know, so instead of wasting time on creating criminals, let's waste time and create something great. You know, that's the way I'd do it.

AT: Exactly.

DC: Yep.

AT: Well, it seems you've done it your whole life.

DC: Pep talk. Pep talk for my teams. Got quite a few championships. [laughter] Yep.

AT: Yeah, I mean, it's amazing that you were first black in so many different things like-

DC: That was that era. And I thought I could do it. You know how when you're a kid, you're a boy, growing up saying, "Mmm, I wanna be a fireman." Did that. "I wanna be a policeman." Did that. "I wanna go in the military." Did that, you know. "I wanna put up telephone lines." Did that, you know. I wanna do this, I wanted to--. I've painted for thirty years. I do tiles, ceramic tiles. I did all kinds of home improvements 'cause I learned all this stuff 'cause I had to do it for that program. I did that for three years there. Think we brought in some almost seven million dollars to the citizens of Hampton, where the city was fighting it 'cause they didn't want poor people programs in Hampton. "People poor, send them to Newport News." That was the philosophy. 'Cause I never wanted to work in City Hall in Hampton and come to find out the one right here was worse than that one. The mayor's a personal friend. We all grew up together, same neighborhood. He from right around the corner, you know. And his brother and I had a

private detective agency--well [it was] his brother's detective agency, I worked with him. But we did all the NAACP stuff in the state of Virginia for the while that we had that contract, you know.

AT: Oh wow. So what was it that you were doing for the NAACP?

DC: Security.

AT: Oh, okay.

DC: Yep. I think the last person I guarded was Roy Wilkins [prominent civil rights activist and longtime leader of the NAACP] 'cause I left then, and I had some other things I needed to do for me. And, civil service called me back too 'cause I worked for naval intelligence over at Norfolk Naval Base. Worked for them, and being black and the youngest one in there, of course, what did they want me to do? Go undercover.

AT: Oh, wow.

DC: You know, so, I did that for a while till I got fed up with it.

AT: Oh my goodness.

DC: Yeah.

AT: That's awesome.

DC: Yeah, well it was stupid. [laughter] Stay in the military if you suspect they doing something. Call them in and stand them up. They belong to you 'til you sign the papers that say they released, you know. Well, I had to sneak around and try to catch them doing this, that, and the other one. Just call them up. Test them, whatever. Call them up. Shoot, put them in a building. You own them 'til they get out. Put them in a building somewhere and keep an eye on them, you know. Don't waste money and time having me out almost getting killed, and all of this stuff, trying to sneak around. 'Cause of course, you know,

they were messing with civilians. You know, we got 'em all, but it didn't matter. You know, but I just don't understand it. We waste money doing too many stupid things. That money could have done a lot for a lot of other things, you know. A lot of hungry people right now, say, "Well, oh I sure wish I had that money. I could've fed my family."

AT: Yeah exactly. So like, what was it like, what were your experiences with being first black in so many different things? Like, obviously you had a tough experience at the telephone company. Was there an awareness that you were the first, like, among the--

DC: Yeah. [laughter]

AT: Places?

DC: Well, like I said I left there and I went to Naval Weapons Station Fire Department, right? Being the first black in there. Well you got, the whites from Guinea [Guinea, Virginia], that they wouldn't even get along with you 'cause you not from over there, you know what I'm saying?

AT: Yeah.

DC: So I had to put up with that mess. So, just coming back from Vietnam, I didn't like to sleep around strangers. Couldn't carry weapons on the base without permission, you know. It was found out it was real easy. All of them had weapons in their cars. You thought I was gonna be the only black asleep, or whatever--. I sat up every night, all night, until I left there. I manned the radio every night, all night. You know, couple of words slipped out because they so used to using them, you know. [They] forgot that I was even there 'cause that's how insignificant I was to them. Except for the chief--Chief Gray--and the assistant chief, and a couple of guys there that were just regular guys. I didn't bother with anybody else, you know. And of course we didn't have any fires at

Naval Weapons Station, where they made dynamite and stuff. [laughter] 'Cause they never taught us to put no fires out over there. They taught us to go to the gate and make it a way for everybody to get out of there, you know.

AT: Oh, my gosh.

DC: Yep. We had the big trucks. Yeah, and of course they tried to teach me as less as possible, but they had the schools that were mandatory for me to attend. So I went to school. You send me to school, I'll learn it. That's no problem, you know. Regardless to what they were taught about our mentality, we can learn just like anybody else, sometimes better. [laughter] All depends on what it's about, you know. And that's any individual. If you're interested in something, you're gonna learn it, you know. Every drop of it, and I did it just for spite. I had nothing else to do, like I sat up all night, so why not read? That was before I wore glasses. All those carrots didn't work, my mom told me about. [laughter] Yeah, so, I left there and I would say in time, right in the nick of time, you know. And I got transferred over to Norfolk to the Naval Police-- Civilian Police force. And that's when NIC came over and asked me "Did I wanna work with naval intelligence?" And I'm thinking, "Mmm, I can learn how to be a detective," and all they wanted me to do was be undercover, you know. And after all of that ended and we did whatever we had to do, they sent me back to the police force. And of course, the Republicans was in again, and we had a reduction in force. And there's no way that a man fifty-six years old--and I was twenty-two then--and he couldn't pass no physical. And they cut all the empty billets out to keep from hiring new people. That's what they do now to keep from losing people. They'll have a bunch of empty spots in civil service appointments. They have a bunch of empty spots, and when they come for a reduction in

force, they give away the empty spots first so they don't have to lose people. So this man, because he had--. And I have no problem with him, 'cause if I've been on that base for almost thirty years, and all I'm waiting for is less than a few months to turn age, to get my retirement, I'd bump me too. You know, I'd bump myself. I mean, just a few months before, they shoulda gave him an early out. There's no way in the world he could've been more physically fit than me. And hadn't been to any firefighting school, and by the time they sent him to the first one, he had retired. He never even took the job. He got sick before the job even came. So I got bumped, so Norfolk picked me back up, you know-- the Norfolk civil service police force. Then we got another reduction in force. Now that's two years, every time I get to three, 'cause once I get three straight years of civil service, they can't bump me anymore. So I get two years and seven months at Naval Weapons Station. Get bumped. And I get two years and five months at Norfolk Naval Base and get bumped. And I was through with civil service after that, you know. NAACP, (raising sand?) and all of this. "We want him back, we want him somewhere." They called me back. I refused to take the job. I went on and started--. That's when I started working for Hampton and started doing my own private thing and working for some other paint contractors, and cement, and tiling companies and stuff. Learning my skills. And I have to say I got pretty good. And, you know, there's a satisfaction in seeing something that you did with your hands, that you can go back year after year, after year, after year, and look at it and say, "I did that. That's my work right there." You know, and I can do that all over the state, all over the East Coast.

AT: That's awesome.

DC: You know, but, it also wears you out. [laughter] Yeah, it does. Yep.

KG: So, I know we talked a lot about education and employment, but we have a few more specific questions about the Civil Rights Movement in Hampton Roads. Do you remember any protests happening here? And were you involved in any?

DC: Yes. Proudly to say that I was on Bobby Scott's campaign committee, campaign drive [Democratic representative of Virginia's 3<sup>rd</sup> congressional district in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1993]. Who else? Let's see, Bobby, Whitaker [former Newport News City Council member Joe Whitaker], McKinley [McKinley Price, current Mayor of Newport News since 2010]. Well, I have to say that we will stick together on that. And it's not just because we're black. 'Cause we not gonna put any dummy in there, you know. We have to have a sense of-- Well [for] me, I have to have the sense that my interests is your concern also, you know. And, sometimes you don't even-- I'd go to other cities, I-- We used to do this-- We had this Black Caucus thing, you know, and I used to go to represent the city of Hampton sometimes and I listened to some of them, and, for the most part, all were generally for the common good of mankind. But there's some trifling blacks too, you know, in office. So, we not just gonna put it all on Reagan and Bush, 'cause the daddy Bush was good, but the son Bush wasn't good for the country either, you know. And I just hated-- It changed so much, 'cause we could be doing so much better as a country right now. And we could also not have so many diseases and problems in this country, health-wise, if we stop bringing in tainted crap. 'Cause that's what it is, you know. How do you go from feeding the world with surplus to buying crap and the price is going up, then you not getting what you wanted, then when you get it, it's not right? You know, 'cause it's just messed up. Then, the medicine thing? The medical thing? The pills and all of this stuff? They so expensive. You know, why? Y'all research

students develop some of that stuff, so the company take it and patent it out of your idea. And then they wanna charge a hundred thousand dollars for one pill. And it's not a cure. We just experimenting. But they got the cure pill over here. We gonna cure, we gonna do these first. But we know this one gonna work, but we gonna wait on that. That's stupid. Well, it's not stupid. I know what they doing, and you do too, you know. When I grew up, it wasn't about no money. You could tell that with the salaries we were making. It wasn't about money. My first job, with Newport News Police Department, I made seven thousand eight hundred dollars a year. Hampton Police was paying eighty-five hundred, eighty-two to eighty-five hundred a year, the first year. But, I didn't wanna go to Hampton police force. And there were reasons for that too, and you talking about --. That was a real prejudiced police force. I got a lot of black friends that retired from there, and one of them even made an officer. And I'm not gonna call his name. He know who he is. But they didn't treat any blacks right over there, you know, 'til they got another chief in. And, then Manetti [former Hampton police Chief Pat Manetti] turned on them too, so. It was --. We did pretty good here, I would say, except the only thing I--. You talk about protests? We protested Chief Blackmon [former Newport News police chief Howard Blackmon, left the department in 1975] getting the chief job over Austin [George Austin, the first black police chief of Newport News].

AT: When was that?

DC: 1972.

AT: Okay.

DC: Or one. One.

AT: Oh, okay.

DC: 1971. Austin finally, eventually made chief, but he shoulda made chief over Blackmon. He was FBI-trained, he had all-all kind of academies, and police chiefs knew him all around the United States. Nobody knew Blackmon. Blackmon didn't even go to too many schools or whatever. He was a nice man, but he didn't know nothing about no police work. He followed whatever Peach [former Newport News police chief W.F. Peach] told him when he was assistant chief, you know. He was a decorated --. I won't say that. He was a good officer. I'll put it that way. And he wasn't a bad person either. And although they said he was racist, I don't believe so 'cause he gave a lot of fair shakes. And, one thing I learned about racism, there's no fairness in it, you know. And, so I can't label everything racist, you know, 'cause if you find anything that some fairness is in it, then racism not involved. That might be an individual grievance or whatever, you know. But, if there's fairness in it, it can't be racism, you know. On either end, 'cause it gets reversed too, you know. Which isn't fair, you know. Teach you like my parents teach me: take the person as an individual. Take them for who they are, who they represent, you know. And, that's all you can do. I can only take you for your word, you can only take me for mine, you know, unless I do some investigating. [laughter] But those days are behind me. Ask my grandkids. [laughter]

KG: So what do you see as the most important accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement?

DC: Somewhat of a leveling of the playing field, you know. Well, I won't say leveling. I say recognition of the players on the playing field because it's kinda hard to be ignored if you recognized. And, back in the day, we used to get ignored. That's how things were handled. And you raise any saying, then something happen to you either legally or



illegally. But, it happened, you know. So now, we are able to exercise our voice, you know. Our vote does mean something to us, as a group, you know. And, we know politics--. We take politics all out of it. You look around. One of my wife's best friends is a white girl. And I love her to death. And it's like we grew up together. You know, and she's special ed too. But you just can tell caring people. I can care less what you're like. I have a rainbow coalition grandfamily, so, you know, how could I walk around with any prejudices, and say I love my grandchildren? That's impossible. You know. Love is love, and hate is hate. And I really don't hate anybody. I dislike a lot of people, and I dislike a lot of things. But I'll still fight for this country. I laid my life down for this country and I'll fight for everybody to have the opportunity to speak, you know. And that's about all I could say about it. And like I said, I see us coming back. But that's up to y'all to change, and my grandkids, and my great-grandkids. And I have a funny feeling that eventually, after all us old fogies die out, that that stuff will dissipate anyway, you know. 'Cause I believe in him [God]. I trust him. And he ain't gonna allow that to keep going on, you know. Shoot, you got stuff going on in families now. I mean, this whole place is messed up. The whole world is just messed up, you know. And it doesn't make sense. It's so easy to do the right thing. It's so easy to love somebody, so easy to help somebody. Go out on the highway. Any common decent courtesy out there now? Rarely. You'll see once in a blue moon somebody will stop and allow somebody in, or do something. But, you know, everybody in a hurry. Everybody gotta be somewhere and get there and ain't nothing happening, you know, if they get there. But it's just stupid. I always look on the news every morning. Not working anymore. But how does two cars riding side by side get in terrible accidents and they're right beside each other? Explain it to me, 'cause it just

doesn't comprehend to me. You know, and I can remember when Newport News had one-lane highways, and we didn't have no wrecks. Well, those cars was tanks then, anyway. But it just doesn't--. And the whole thing is nobody's giving up respect. Nobody's giving up common decent courtesy. And love is out of the question. That's a plaything word now. "I love you." Yep. It's a plaything, and they need to leave it alone. God is love, and he ain't gonna keep putting up with this. For real. And they seem to think there's more wars now than ever. About the same. Always happening. The whole thing is I ain't respecting you and you ain't respecting me. And there you got a war. And same thing about racism. I ain't respecting you and you ain't respecting me. Or I'll give you respect when you respect me. Where's the happy meeting ground there? You know? Yeah. And like you asked me about our childhood? We didn't even discuss no stuff like that. You know? We didn't. And we got mad with each other, and, if you were on my team, and somebody bothered you while you was on my team, they had to bother me too. You know, 'cause you disrupting the game, number one, and you were probably always a troublemaker anyway. Everybody didn't care about regardless to what color he was. You know, we put him off the field. We gonna finish having us a good time. I love to smile. My nickname is Smiley, I love to smile and I believe that laughter is a good path to the heart. That's how I got my wife. [laughter] And there needs to be more of it, you know. Just common, decent courtesy. And you get that, you got everything 'cause respect and everything else fall right behind that. You know. Just common decent courtesy. So, that's the path I live on. I preach it to my grandchildren. When my great-grandchildren know what I'm talking about I'll preach it to them. [laughter] I've got a four year old in the house and she had to hear it every day. And she walks around confused, but, you know, I

show her examples. And she gets it. She gets it. She don't look at nobody's color. "That's my friend right there, granddaddy." I say alright--. Well, it's Paw-Paw. That's what she call me. I don't wanna use that one too much. [laughter] Yeah, but--. And if we did that, in every household, if that was the principle, we ain't having a whole lot of trouble. We wouldn't need no police. I don't think they still--. I still don't think they carry guns in England.

AT: Oh really?

DC: Never did. Their cops carry batons. Yeah. You get what you give. For real.

AT: Yeah, on the topic of the police force, like what forms of discrimination, like in the Hampton police force, like you talked about how it was worse than here? Well, like what forms of discrimination did people experience that you heard about, or that you were aware of on that police force?

DC: Well, Hampton or Newport News?

AT: Yeah, I mean, here or there.

DC: Okay, well, in Newport News, we always got the crap jobs, and the crap details. And when they gave us vehicles, the crap vehicles. Okay? In Hampton, they always got the crap everything. And even when we was riding, they were still walking. Blacks. You know, and they weren't walking in lit--. I had to raise a point of bringing up a discrimination suit if Newport News didn't let me walk Washington Avenue. Well, you had whites working in the East End. They didn't want us to work in Hilton. They didn't want us to work in Hidenwood. But see, I worked in Newport News. Well, I've been in Newport News so long, been in this house sixty years [and] I can remember when Newport News stopped at Main Street. That was the end of Newport News as a city.

Then you had Hilton, then you had Hidenwood, Stoneybrook, Beachmount, all of that--. All those were individual towns. They didn't call them cities 'cause you had to have a certain population to have a city. So, consolidation came in. I was here then too, you know. And that's when all the --. Well, they call it improvements but that's when Newport News enlarged. It incorporated Denbigh and all of this stuff, all the way to the Williamsburg line. Newport News used to stop at Main Street. That was the end of Newport News. And it didn't go past 16<sup>th</sup> Street, because all that other stuff is landfill over there. So that didn't exist, you know. I remember when Warwick Boulevard used to be one lane on this side, one lane on that side, and a great big island full of trees and dirt and grass, without a curb, all the way down Warwick Boulevard till you got down the Denbigh end, and all of that was woods. Half of Stoneybrook was woods, you know. No question. This place--. Well, I was telling you, from 16<sup>th</sup> Street to Main Street, that wasn't a big city, was it? [laughter] Stopped down here at City Line Road, this way, and over town at the water, James River that way. That's not a real--. My drive--. Some people's driveway's that big. You know, so. So they didn't really need a big police force or none of that, you know. So, things changed after consolidation. Consolidation and integration all evolved around the same period of time, you know. And, that's when the cost of living went up, that's when the--excuse me--the value of the dollar went down. 'Cause I remember when you could buy five gallons of high-test gasoline for a dollar, and--think it was a dollar and sixty-eight cent. Five gallons of high-test. I bought fourteen cent worth of gas before and rode around for a half a day, you know. And now things are "new and improved." That's what you're telling me? [laughter] Shoot, my father told me that, and I looked at wife's father's --one of his paychecks. He gets like twelve dollars for

a whole week of pay? Twelve dollars? How do you feed the family and all of that? Well, the stores that we dealt with had books, and you signed the book, and you made your groceries, and brought your groceries home, fed your family, on bare minimum, then you go on back to work, you know. Very few families had cars, so you caught the bus or you walked, you know. Things have changed, but I still don't know if it's for the better. I really don't. I still like the time I came up in. We coulda improved that with some of this technology. Man. Big-screen TV and the cell phone, I didn't need no video games. I stay home. I like to watch movies and stuff anyway, so. Probably would've become a writer then. I would have sat around a lot. But I had to be outside from the time the sun came up until it went down. That was me as a child.

Still me now. My neighbors--they feel safe at night 'cause they know he's sitting up, he roaming around somewhere out there. But I'm in a guarded mode, they tell me, since Vietnam so I'm always looking around. I live just where that young man was killed other week, week before last? That was right out my back, on the street behind me.

AT: Oh, wow.

DC: Yeah. I thought somebody was shooting in [my] driveway, or in my backyard. So you know me, I pulled a little op on it. That thing hurt me to death. He had just come to our church two weeks ago with his grandmother. She's a member. She had been trying to get him to change his life. There's some more to that story. Don't believe everything you hear on the news. Somebody, somebody just walk up to your house, knock on the window, and shoot you 'cause you look out. That doesn't happen. Not even down here. I don't care how bad they say the ghetto is. And I'm not moving. I'm not going anywhere. They tell anyone who come down this street: don't do this around here, that crazy guy

live right there. I'm not putting up with it. You know, your parents don't know what to do with you, I know what to do with you on my street, you know. And it doesn't all have to be physical. [laughter]

DC: Yep.

KG: Well is there anything else that you would like to contribute, or that you think that we might have missed?

DC: [pause] No, I'd just make a simple statement that, although things seem to be regressing on the race relations thing, being an optimist that I am, I don't see it as large as some people seem to think it is. You have the incident here, and an incident there but, for the most part, I look at my children and my grandchildren's friends and all of that and I see a change. If it's not here now, I see a change coming real soon, you know. My wife and I--we stay around young people, around us all the time. We don't follow them. For some reason they all--. We've got so many godchildren, we don't know what to do.

[laughter] For real. We really don't. You know, our friends' children and all, you know, we go through the ceremony, but the kids that adopt us, you know. Even the kids my wife used to chastise in school, they love her to death. They come around and bring us their kids, their families and all, you know, to introduce us. And "This was my teacher right here," and "and she was stern, and she was all of that. But she was fair." And that's all you could ever ask for in life. And if we pass that message on to the youth, fairness. You know. Resp--. Not respect --. Courtesy. Common decent courtesy, respect will follow that. It's in there. It'll follow it. You know, if we just do that, then, you don't have to look at nobody's color, 'cause you don't know what their race is anyway, you know. Your father could be darker than me. 'Cause, you look at my fair grandchildren, you can't tell

that, that they have a black father, you know. You can't tell, you know. And, the black girls love 'em, so they might be able to tell, but I can't. [laughter] And I see the shock on some people's faces when they run up to me and say, "Hey Granddaddy." I come to all their games, all the events. We over the school, and all of the--. The governor was here, over the school. They gave a new exercise room to Huntington Middle School.

AT: Oh.

DC: Yeah. Yeah. Yep. I've seen you somewhere before and I can't--. Being a cop, I don't forget faces. But I am around the campus, I've got some friends working. My son helped build some of those new buildings over there.

KG: Oh.

AT: Oh really?

DC: Yeah. Yeah. One building he helped put all the windows in.

KG: Oh, my goodness.

AT: Oh wow.

DC: Yep. Yep. So--.

AT: That's awesome.

DC: Yep.

KG: That is awesome.

DC: Yep. So, my third oldest son, did all his basketball training over in Christopher Newport's gym, although he went to Saint Aug [Saint Augustine's University, in Raleigh, North Carolina]. But I had 'em--. I always kept them working out. If you weren't working, then you work out. That keeps you busy.

AT: That's good.

DC: Yeah. Can't keep 'em too busy, twenty-six grandkids. [laughter]

DC: Yep.

KG: Well, thank you so much.

DC: It's been a pleasure meeting you two.

KG: You too.

DC: Yep.

AT: It's been a real pleasure.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

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