Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the ninth of May, the year 2000, and I am finally here with Donald Coffey, after many attempts. This is the hardest man to reach at Johns Hopkins.

Coffey: Not true.

Warren: Oh, yes, it is. [Laughter] Victor McKusick was a piece of cake compared to you.

Coffey: You’ll be trying to get out of here at the end of this. You’ll be saying, “Okay, that’s enough. I gotta go now.”

Warren: Not yet. Not yet. Not yet. Not yet. I got plenty of tape, tape is cheap. Tape is cheap. All right, Don Coffey, how’d you get to Johns Hopkins and why?

Coffey: Well, I’ve got to tell a little bit of the early story as to why this was true. I’m dyslexic, and since I have a reading disability and since no one knew what that reading disability was, and I was also probably hyperactive and attention deficit and anything else you can write down, I did not do well in school. So I went to Bristol, Tennessee, and went to school and I didn’t do well in English and I didn’t do well in writing, and I didn’t do well in spelling. I still have fierce problems with spelling. So I always had to go to summer school.

So I started supporting myself when I was fourteen, worked in the service stations and throwing paper routes and doing these things. So I excelled at everything but school. Now, I
didn’t do totally bad in school, because I really liked some history and things. But I did everything with visual and oral. That’s mostly what I did. So I ran track and was state champion on a track team and held merit badges, more merit badges than almost anybody in the area. I was very active. I loved to go out in the woods, camp, and work with nature, work on cars and do anything else.

What do you do with your life? What are you going to do with your life? Everybody wants to know what you’re going to do when you grow up. So I decided the best thing to do is make a million dollars. So I thought about that, but then I decided, no, the man I really like is Robert E. Lee. I’d read a lot of about him and I was impressed by his West Point things, so I wanted to go to West Point. I wanted to be a general. So I used to even sign my things “General Coffey.”

Of course, I tried to get in West Point and I didn’t quite make it because of political problems at the last minute, and also because of Taft and Eisenhower were running and all this, and people who were supporting me were Eisenhower people and the senator was for Taft. So the bottom line, I’m a Democrat and these were Republican. People took a liking to me. Bottom line to it was that I didn’t get into West Point.

Now, what do you do? Your dream’s gone. So I went out to King College, a little Presbyterian school my sister had gone, in Bristol, a small little school. I played basketball and made the varsity basketball team my freshmen year. That’s the first time I’d really come into contact with the bigger thoughts. Because I had all these reading things and didn’t do well in school, it was sort of crazy. I’d do really well in some things, and they couldn’t believe I made an F or a D in other things. So I was head of the rat court judge, which sort of harassed the
freshmen, and in the sophomore year—

Warren: Wait a minute. The what?

Coffey: The rat court judge. The rat court is when the freshmen are under the tutelage of the sophomores for a few weeks, called rat week. You had to decide who got punished for breaking rules. So freshmen could not date anybody but sophomores. So these girls dated seniors, and I was charged with coming up with a punishment for them. They brought them in front of the rat court judge, and normally we’d spray them with F____ perfume, cheap ten-cent store perfume. The guys, we’d chain cinder blocks to their legs or something.

Well, this beautiful young lady with beautiful curly hair, this nice girl, with blonde hair, had dated seniors. Now, this was terrible. They said, “You’ve got to do something worse than this.”

I said, “We ought to tar and feather them.”

They said, “What a great idea.”

So we got honey and put honey in their hair, we got this old pillow out of the dormitory with stuffed feathers in it. This girl was so mad at me, she thought I was a barbarian. I thought her name was Crosby, but it was Cosby. I said, “Well, I might give you a break and ask you for a date,” just sort of kidding around.

Finally, I did ask her for a date, and I don’t know, whatever it was, we just fell in love. Now, out of blue, I said, “How about marrying me?”

So we decided that she’d take off and go home and I’d make money and buy a car and she’d get enough money and we’d go to Florida. We’d wait about nine months, ten months, and go to Florida. We spent every penny we had when we got married. She was eighteen and I was
twenty. And we’ve been married ever since, happily married.

Now, what do I do next? I’m married, I’m not going to West Point, I’m not doing well in school, so I transferred to East Tennessee State Teachers College. Now, I was such a troublemaker in college, I was always doing stunts and getting in trouble, that I went down to East Tennessee State. It was a great big school. So I did plastic laminating businesses and we tried everything to make money. I commuted twenty-five miles a day and worked forty-hour-a-week shift in a bakery, making bread.

Then we decided to have a little girl. We decided to have our first child, had a little girl. I said, what am I really going to do with my life? So I said, how do you decide what you’re going to do with your life? How does someone come to that?

Well, I’d been sort of religious and anti-religious. By the time you get to college, you figure out it’s not as simple as you were told. Then I thought, how did the Indians do it? How’s everybody do it? I hear that the Indians meditate, and that they don’t eat, and they go to the holy place and the dream comes to them while they meditate. I thought, what is meditation? So what is meditation? I don’t know, what is meditation? Try your hand at it.

Warren: Oh, I know what it is for me.

Coffey: What is it?

Warren: Going deep within myself.

Coffey: Okay. But a lot of people think it’s thinking. It’s not thinking. It’s doing the opposite to prayer; it is not doing anything and letting it come to you. Thinking about not thinking is thinking. I never heard of such a silly thing. How come all the people, Buddhists, and everybody around, meditates and yet I never heard the word? No one ever told me this was important. I don’t even
know what it is.

So I decided I’m going to stand at this machine and for two weeks I’ll meditate. Now, that’s like saying, well, if there’s a God, strike a tree with a bolt of lightning. I mean, you sit there, how do you meditate? So I quit thinking and I’d fall asleep. I mean, how do you—I don’t want to say, hey, this is crazy. You start thinking about something silly, what you’re going to do tomorrow. It’s the hardest thing in the world just to be absolutely still.

So after a few days of this, something would come over me, and I don’t even know what it was, it wasn’t a trance, it’s just sort of like you’re in a state of suspended stuff or something. I got this overwhelming hunch I was supposed to work on cancer. The sky didn’t open up and somebody says, “Coffey, work on cancer.” It was just I had this overwhelming—(A), I never knew anyone with cancer. I’d only seen a doctor for a few little things, I think my scarlet fever and a few things I had like that. I didn’t know any doctors. None of my friends were medical students.

Here I am a business major at East Tennessee State with a C average, having been bumped sort of out of King College, with a wife and a child, and what am I going to do? So I write the American Cancer Society. They send me some literature. What are they going to do, right?

So I talked to my wife and she said, “If you feel that’s really what you’re supposed to do, we should do it.” We decided to make it a team effort. So I went to work that day, and I went to school that day, and there was a sign up on the bulletin board that said something about the teacher as a chemist. A chemist is a teacher. I don’t know what made me go in and hear this lecture, because it certainly wasn’t anything I was interested in.
This man was Carl T. Bahner and he was from Carson-Newman College. He’s still alive today at ninety-some years old. He got up and started speaking and he said he was a cancer researcher. I ran up and I said, “How do you do this?”

He said, well, he worked at Oak Ridge in the summertime, I could come down and see him. So my wife and I drove to Oak Ridge, and he’s handling some little mice, a wonderful man. This man was the kindest—he was a Victor McKusick, just a real gentleman. He showed us the mice and said you really need to get into a graduate school and you must get into chemistry and biology.

So I go back and I get a job in the textile mill, because working in a bakery isn’t going to get me there. I had to change my major to chemistry and get more into science. So I go to this textile mill and they lay me off. I’d worked there like two or three days, and the guy who I replaced, he got bumped out of the service, he had infectious mono, and he was getting his job back.

So anyway, they said I could have a job if I could convince the research director to hire me. Well, he ain’t going to hire me; you have to have a Ph.D. to work up there. So he told me—a real kind man—that he would see me on Tuesday at ten o’clock. Well, I got up like six o’clock, there was five inches of snow in Bristol. The roads were closed, it was terrible. Had to get across the hill. Man, I let the air out of my tires, I went down, this little road was closed by the police. I gave them a cockamamie story to get through. I had to almost burn the snow away to get over this hill. There were tractors and trailers off up there and everything.

I got down to this little town called Elizabeth, over in the valley, pulled in, I’m like forty minutes late. What’s he going to talk to me for? I’m already late to the interview. I walk in, and
nobody had come to work because they couldn’t get through the snow. He had come in because
he lived nearby. He said, “How’d you get here?”

I said, “I drove from Bristol.”

“You drove? That mountain is closed up there, that ridge is closed up there. Couple of our
trucks are down up there.”

I said, “I saw them both. I got around them.”

He said, “I don’t have a job for you.” He said, “What do you want to do?”

I told him, “I want to work on cancer.” He looked at me like I was crazy. Asked me why,
and I told him I felt I should do it.

So he said, “I’ll tell you, I’m going to make you a deal.” He said, “I’m going to hire you
as an assistant chemist working at night here, as soon as the union yells, I’ve got to let you go.
They’re not going to put up with this.”

We made Firestone tire cord. Well, I went to work and I quickly learned everything there
and I started rising up rapidly, and I became his fair-headed guy. At night I go down and see what
the trouble was on the line, I talked to everybody. Everybody I talked to figure out what was
going on here. I would solve it by talking to the people. Then I gave the people the credit, the
credit for me solve it. I just listened. This man had been making the acid for twenty years, “What
do you think is going on here, Joe?” He’d tell you, this guy. Finally a guy gave me a clue that
solved a big problem.

So I was doing really well, but in college I’m getting Cs and terrible grades. I’d work over
there sometimes past midnight and I had to be there at three o’clock. I had to get out of college
and study. When am I going to study? So I’ve got a baby, we’re living in a garage apartment, and
then comes the end of my undergraduate and I apply to graduate schools. Oh, get serious. Who's going to take a person from East Tennessee State been going five and a half years full time, with a C average, and then making all these loused-up grades in chemistry and everything else?

But over at the textile mill I'm a big—doing well, okay. Dr. [Lee R.] Herman called me in, he said, "Where you going to graduate school?"

I said, "I want to go to the University of Tennessee."

He said, "You do not want to go to the University of Tennessee. The University of Tennessee is not where you belong."

I would have given my right arm to go to the University of Tennessee, and I was really not being totally honest. He asked where I wanted to go was University of Tennessee, but what I didn't tell him was I had applied to the University of Tennessee and all these places rejected me flat out. They kept my ten dollars and said, "So long, sucker." He said, "You've got to go to my alma mater."

I says, "What is that?"

He said, "Johns Hopkins."

I said, "Where's that?"

He said, "That's in Baltimore."

I said, "Where's Baltimore?"

He said, "Between Washington and Philadelphia."

I said, "That's Yankee country." [Laughter] He was from Buffalo, New York, a very distinguished man.

He said, "Oh, yes, I got my Ph.D. with Ira Remsen." And he said, "I want you to go up
there and work your way in.” He said, “Now, they’re not going to let you in, but you go in there and do there what you did here, Hopkins will take care of you, because when you go to Hopkins and you get up to bat and hit the ball, they let you play. But you’ve got to hit the ball. They’ll let you play. Doesn’t matter who you are. Okay? So I’m sure if you could ever get in there and do what you’ve done here, that somehow or the other they’ll take care of you.”

So with no more than that, I’m headed to Baltimore. Well, I went on line that night and I was down there talking to one of the guys and they said, “Oh, your old buddy Harry Brandle said to say hello to you.”

I said, “Where’s that no-good sucker?”

They said, “He’s in Baltimore.”

I said, “What’s Harry doing in Baltimore?”

They said, “He works for the Westinghouse Corporation at a place called Friendship Airport right outside of Baltimore.”

I said, “Do you have his number?” This was his son-in-law.

He said, “Oh, yeah.”

I said, “Give me his number.”

So I called Harry. I said, “Harry, I’ve got to have a job. I got to work for that place. You’re an engineer at Westinghouse?”

Now, I ran—this is sort of an engineering making tire cord for Firestone. What it is, you take wood and you put it in solution. I give you a block of wood and say dissolve it. Do you know how hard that is to do? To bring it back as a fiber, extrude it back, it’s called rayon. If you put it out as a film, it’s called cellophane. So this is not very complicated. It’s just putting wood in
and bringing it back. So Firestone rayon tire cord was made by us, taking Georgia pine, wood, putting it in solution of viscose and bringing it back in acid and getting it back. So I knew a lot about engineering.

Now, why was he working for Westinghouse was because they were making air-inflated radar antennas, big things you could blow up, radar antennas, and transport them with helicopters and blow them up, take them down, and make mobile units. Westinghouse had made [unclear] to keep the Russians out. We were making marine mobile units and they were having a hell of a problem with these things, because no engineer knew how to handle coated fabrics. And we were experts in coated fabrics, Firestone tire company. He said, “Oh, they’d love to have you.”

I said, “Well, how do I get an application?”

He said, “We’ll fly down. We’ll come interview you.” He said, “They’re losing millions of dollars up there on this project. They need people like you.”

So they got a plane, they flew to Bristol, Tennessee. Two engineers got off with Harry and they had a whole list of fifty questions, and they fired these fifty questions out and it was simple. I knew all the answers. It was simple stuff. What’s [unclear]? What’s [unclear]? All the things you have to know. Phyosianates [phonetic], all about coated fabrics. They said, “Well, we would certainly be interested in hiring you.”

I said, “Can I go to Hopkins?”

They said, “Oh, yeah, we’ll pay your way to Hopkins.”

I said, “Well, I’ll take the job.”

They said, “We haven’t told you what we’re going to pay you.”

I said, “Just give me the going rate. Whatever it is, just give me the going rate.”
So they told me it was a very good salary and they said, “When can you go to work?”

I said, “Well, I graduate in May 23rd, and I’ll be up there on the 24th.”

And I actually walked across the thing, got my diploma, got in the car and drove straight to a place called Glen Burnie [Maryland]. Well, there was a wild trip. I went in to Glen Burnie. I didn’t know you could have that many used-car lots and hamburger shops. Besides, Fort Meade all hung out there and there was all these Army families and some [unclear], but good people. We had a lot of fun.

There was this crazy guy building an indoor mall, named the Harundale Mall. It was getting ready to open. Some guy named Jim Rouse. I mean, it was a crazy thing. I went down there and he had birds inside this thing and fountains. Nobody had ever seen anything like this. And it was a great hit. Then there was this thing called the Baltimore Colts. This was 1957, and I was just beaming with all sorts of stuff. This is great. I went over and we become—did things real well right away.

Then [Dwight D.] Eisenhower came in and cut back the budgets, balanced the taxes, and balanced the budgets. The same old merry-go-round we hear. They immediately came in and laid off a third of their engineers. Now, they had never laid off an engineer, even in the Depression. They were going to lay off one-third of their engineers and seven support people.

Now, remember I don’t have an engineering degree. I’ve done all this by experience with chemistry degrees. But since we’d solved some problems, they decided to keep me. Here we are in this burned-out department, nothing to do, dull as hell, making little pieces of air-inflated radar antennas. On October the 27th, 1957—you have to check the dates around this—October of 1957, the Russians fired up their satellite. Holy moly, everybody got excited about space.
So then what happened was, I’m not getting into Hopkins. I’m doing very well here. I’m having a great time making money as an engineer. Well, we start working on the conductive coatings on things like the echo satellite and stuff. I’m having a great time, but this isn’t what I’m supposed to do.

So I go up to a place called McCoy College, which they pay for, Johns Hopkins night school. I must say that they had some pretty good professors, but McCoy wasn’t the day school by any means, and almost anybody could get into McCoy if they applied and behaved themselves. I wasn’t doing well at night. But they had one professor, Alex Nickon.

**Warren:** Who is it?

**Coffey:** Alex Nickon, A-L-E-X, N-I-C-K-O-N. I started taking some of his courses. I was impressed. I think he was a [unclear]. But the other man, a man’s name you should know, was Donald H. Andrews. Donald H. Andrews. Now, hold that aside just a second while I tell you about my first arrival on the campus.

First time I arrived on the campus, I hadn’t been here long, said, “I’ve got to see this place. I’ve got to see Remsen Hall.” My wife, with a little baby in her arms, and me in an old beat-up Chevrolet, at night drive up to the Homewood campus. We arrive there and I find Remsen Hall. I park the car outside. My wife’s sitting there with the baby, and I go inside and see what it’s like. I come out, I can’t believe it. She said, “What do you think?”

I said, “Honey, I am so impressed. I mean, this is even a greater place than I dreamed.”

She says, “How’s that?”

I said, “They buried the son of a bitch in a laboratory wall. Right there on the landing, they have buried him in the wall.” I mean, can you imagine a scientist who’s buried in the wall of the
laboratory? I said, “It says ‘Behind this plaque lie the remains of Ira Remsen.’” I said, “Here I am with Ira Remsen, the guy who trained Dr. Herndon, L.R. Herndon.” I said, “This is great.”

So I came out, I said, “Where’s the hospital?”

There was some guard there and he says, “It’s the building right down the road here on the right.”

So I drove down there. Of course, that’s a Marine hospital, and I thought that was Johns Hopkins Hospital. I says, “This isn’t much bigger than the hospital at home. I thought it would be bigger than this.” I said, “Well, you never know, you know, they must be really full of good guys in there, if that’s as big as it is.”

So we started driving down St. Paul Street, and she looks on the map and says, “Here it says Johns Hopkins Hospital.”

I said, “Well, we were just at Johns Hopkins.”

She says, “No, here it is on the map.”

So we drove up Broadway and holy moly, look at this place. This is really a hospital.

So I go back to Westinghouse, and we’re doing fine. I get to McCoy, but I’m not learning anything, really getting involved. I start messing around at night and I volunteer to wash glassware just to get inside the labs. They thought I was crazy, and I said, “I just want to get inside your chemistry labs.”

Warren: At Homewood?

Coffey: At Homewood. No, at Homewood, because even though I was taking courses, I’m not really in the midst of it. Then I met DiGeorgio [phonetic], I think his name was, who was a graduate student at night, and we start doing some experiments and things start moving up, and
he introduces me to Donald H. Andrews, the former chairman of the Department of Chemistry. What a wonderful man. He took a real liking to me. He started talking to me about information transfer, equations, about infrared, about how you use the vibrating box with atoms in it to figure up different frequencies of vibration, how the benzine ring bends and stretch using stroboscopic lights [unclear] freeze movements. What a genius.

So you’ll understand a little bit more what he did, not only he figured out what the spectrum of infrared was by taking this down in octaves in an infrared from the vibration frequency called the Donald H. Andrews model, which was the Brussels World Fair show, but he took this down to making a dance with music, taking the vibrations of ethanol and different molecules, and then scaling them up, you could hear them, and having his wife play piano music while the molecules danced. He was in Life magazine with this story called The Dancing Molecules in the ’30s, as the man who could understand this.

I have carried this all the way to the cancer cell today. This, right now, I’m working on it. Supposed to meet with MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] about that if you came in today. I’ll tell you more about that in a moment.

So Donald Andrews was just an incredible human being. He did that dancing molecules for the American Chemical Society meeting when it was in Baltimore. It had the choreography and the music by his wife to the infrared frequencies of things. Real stuff, but really great. This is not getting me into cancer. You know, this is all very interesting.

Then I see a notice on the bulletin board. It says, “Johns Hopkins Hospital is looking for someone to work on seventeen ketosteroids in the urine of hypothesectomized [phonetic] patients with prostate cancer.” Well, I didn’t know what a seventeen ketosteroid was, I never knew what a
hypothesectomy meant, I didn’t know what this prostrate—prostate gland was, but it said cancer. So at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, a man named Dr. Tesar [phonetic], Charles Tesar. So I go down here, the first thing I did is I cut left off of Orleans Street onto Broadway and got a ticket from the police. You can’t turn left off of Orleans onto Broadway, and the police gave me a ticket. That was my welcoming.

So I pulled in and parked and came up to see him. He interviewed me. I told him I’d been a chemist, I’d been a chemical engineering, I’d done all this stuff, gone to McCoy at night, worked for Donald H. Andrews. He says, “Well, we’d love to hire you. When can you come to work?”

I said, “Tonight.”

He says, “It’s not a night job. It’s a day job being a technician.”

I said, “But you pay two dollars an hour, and I couldn’t support my wife and family, and my father’s dying of heart trouble and the family support.” I said, “I’ve got to work as an engineer in the daytime, and I’m work at night on this.”

He said, “Nuh-uh, you can’t do that.”

So I worked for nothing. He said, “You’ve seen too many movies.” He said, “Why do you want to do this?” Too much television, he said.

I said, “You write Donald H. Andrews and you write to Homewood and you write Dr. Leo Herndon, two great chemists, and after you read their letter of recommendation, if you don’t want to hire me, then I won’t be hired. But until you do that, I want to work for nothing. I want to show you I can do this at night.”

So he wrote them and they gave him back this great letter. He said, “Okay, come on in.”
So I extracted urine and I worked at night. I wound up there, and they’re doing dog surgery. I said, “Do you want your shoes shined? Do you want the place cleaned up? What do you want done here? I want to learn this stuff.”

Pretty soon I was learning to do surgery and helping the surgeons, and I knew they didn’t know anything about chemistry and I didn’t know anything about medicine, but we’re going to learn this together. We had just a great year of it, and at night.

So Dr. William Wallace Scott was going to try to find a replacement for Dr. Tesar, who was going over to Brussels on a Fulbright scholarship, and they needed someone to run the lab for a year. Dr. Horst Schermer [phonetic], who’s a big doctor in town here, he went through our residency program, urologist, [unclear] city, he said, “Coffey can do this.” He was a German resident here, but American, from Germany. He said, “Coffey can do this.” So he said, “Bring him down here.”

So I went down to see Dr. Scott. And Scott’s a terrific man. He says, “I hear you can do this job, you think.”

I said, “I’d like to give it a try.”

He said, “What do you make?” And I told him. He couldn’t pay but about half of this. He said, “Oh, no, we’re not in that range.” He says, “It’s only for a year.”

I said, “I’ll take it.”

He said, “You’d take that kind of cut in pay, well over 50 percent, and a job that runs for a year?”

I said, “Yep. I have to [unclear] with the wife, I guess I’ll take it for nothing.”

So I took the job, I signed [unclear], July 1st, took the job, went to Westinghouse, told
them I was quitting, gave them enough notice. They said, “Tell us what you’re making and we’ll give you a 20 percent raise.” They thought I was going to their competitor.

I said, “I’m taking a big cut.”

He says, “You’ve got cancer? Somebody in your family got cancer?”

“No,” I said, “this is what my dream is.”

They said, “Man, you don’t want to leave this. We’re getting ready to go into space. Why do you want to leave this? You love this.”

I said, “I love it, but it’s not my calling.”

They said, “Okay, you can come back at any time. If you don’t like it, come back.”

So I went up, I had it for one year and I didn’t know what I was going to do, I thought I might have to come back in a year. And I went to work like crazy. We ran that lab like it was wild, okay? Down there every night and daytime working like a dog. Then about halfway through it—

**Warren:** Now, wait a minute. Describe that lab to me. What were you doing?

**Coffey:** This lab was on top in the Brady, it was on the top floor and no air-conditioning. It was in the attic. It was one of the oldest labs, where Mercurochrome was discovered. It was started by Hugh Hampton Young. Tesar, who that room’s named for him, Charles Tesar, which I got a picture of, [unclear], was laboratory director, and this is where residents came up to do two years—a year of research. It was the research laboratory from Brady, urological department, and one scientist, Ph.D., Dr. Tesar, an older man, couple of technicians. Okay? And all the animals were back in the back, and this old rickety elevator that went up there. It was so hot. There were pigeons living in the room where we kept our glassware. They’d fly out. It’s on the very top of
the Brady Building over the accident room, over the old emergency room. I mean, it’d get over almost 100 degrees up there in the summertime. There wasn’t even a water cooler up there. And this is where I worked. I ran that laboratory.

Now, you know why they call them residents? It’s because you couldn’t get married; you had to live here. That’s what Osler required. So they had bedrooms for all the doctors on the floors below us. But by 1945 when Dr. Scott came in, they stopped all that, and so now there were bedrooms up there with a maid and everything, and they didn’t live here anymore. They just rested there. Had a little bit of hanky-panky.

So here I was running the labs up over the residents’ bedrooms on the seventh floor of the old Brady. So we’re having a great time up there. And about halfway through the year they said, “You’ve got to go to graduate school.”

So Dr. William Wallace Scott, who had been at Chicago, and had been there when [Albert] Lehninger was a young assistant professor, because Scott got his M.D.-Ph.D. there and came here to be the chairman of urology when Dr. Hugh Hampton Young died. So he came here as a thirty-four-year-old chairman of urology. So that’s ’45 or back in that time. Then he’s hiring me in ’57, and he still runs the place, Dr. Scott.

So anyway, I’m running that laboratory for him. So Dr. Scott knew Albert Lehninger, and Albert Lehninger was the great biochemist of all times who had built the basic science building for them when they brought him here. I mean, they built that new building over there. He was the biochemist, he wrote the great book called Lehninger’s Biochemistry, which is still one of the great textbooks. He just died about maybe ten years ago or eight years ago. Lehninger was brilliant. And he called me in, and he had this letter from Scott. He says, “I hear you want to be a
graduate student.”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “It says here you went to East Tennessee State Teachers College.”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “I guess that’s in East Tennessee, isn’t it?”

I said, “You got that right, sir.”

He said, “They say you have a C average.”

I said, “Yes, sir.”

He said, “I don’t guess there’s any use to write them for recommendations, is there?” He says, “I’m just going to ask the people you’ve worked with around here, but I want to do one other thing. Based on these letters I have in front of me,” because he’d kept copies of Dr. L.H. Andrews’ letter and Dr. L.R. Herndon, “we’ll have each member of our faculty interview you for an hour and we’ll decide.”

There were about eight or ten faculty, a day and a half of interviews. And, man, they just crucified me. They’d ask me a dozen questions. I didn’t know half of them, you know. What I didn’t know is nobody else knew most of them. They asked me, “How do you know you have seventeen ketosteroid when you analyze it?” They’d [unclear] holes, I didn’t know the answers to all these things. When I went home, I said, “Boy, they crucified me.”

But I got this letter said, “You’ve got a graduate, you can go to graduate school here.” But they offered $2,400. I can’t live on that. I told them I had to have at least $5,000 to exist. I had to go work part time. Leonard says, “You can’t work part time and be a graduate student.”

Then one day they called me in and said, “We’re going to give you 4,000.” Later I found
out that Dr. Scott secretly paid the other $2,000.

So I went over, and now I’m all full of vim and vigor. Now, before I, go I’ve got to go to my first cancer research meeting, and this is going to be held in Chicago, and I’m going to go up on the train all night, can’t get a room or anything, and boy, do I want to meet Carl T. Bahner. He must be up there. He’s a big cancer researcher. Carl T. Bahner from Carson Union College.

So I went on the train. I’m telling this story up to now to Horst Schermer [phonetic], who’s a German resident who I’ve been working with up there. We’d work at night together. I told him how mysterious all this was. So we’re sitting here in a hall with maybe 1,500 people, maybe 2,000, in Chicago, and I say to Horst, I’ve got to see how to find out where Carl Bahner is. I look on my left, and the man sitting next to me is Carl Bahner. I said, “This is him.”

He says, “Who?”

I says, “Here.”

He says, “You’re kidding me.”

Now, what I just Horst is that I’d been over to biochemistry, I looked up everybody who worked in cancer, and there was only paper in cancer, by this old man named Leslie Hellerman, who was sixty-one years old. I thought he was ancient then. He was sixty-one. I went up and asked him if I could be his graduate student when I came to the department. He says, “Yes, welcome aboard.” Then he wouldn’t let me work on cancer. He said I had to work on the interaction of [unclear] and everything. So I was disappointed, because I didn’t care any more about that than you do, but I figured I’ll do a good job.

So I knew I was going to be working with Leslie Hellerman. So Now I’m sitting next to Carl T. Bahner, and I said, “Dr. Bahner, do you remember me?”
He said, “No, I don’t believe I do, son.”

I said, “Well, I’m Don Coffey.” I said, “Many years ago I came down to Oak Ridge and you had—”

“Oh, yeah, yeah. How you doing?”

I said, “I’m doing great.” I said, “I made it all the way to Johns Hopkins.”

He said, “Johns Hopkins?”

I said, “Yes. I had to go the long way around.” I said, “I went to the textile mills and I went to Westinghouse, and now I’m up there working some labs, now I’m going to be a graduate student.”

“Where you going to be a graduate student?”

I said, “Biochemistry,” called physiological chemistry in those days, “in Dr. Lehninger’s department.”

“Oh,” he says, “one of my classmates there.” He said, “The guy was a classmate. He’s a great scientist. His name is Leslie Hellerman, look him up.”

Now, that’s the guy I’m going to work with. Horst Schermer says, “I can’t believe this.”

I said, “Horst, I can’t believe it either.” I says, “That’s who I want to work with.”

He says, “Oh, he’s great.”

So I went over and I went to work for Leslie Hellerman, and sure enough, we started writing papers and making discoveries. Things were going great. The second year I had to take my preliminary exams and I flunked them. Three of us flunked them: myself, Gary Akers, and Shen Shan Wong [phonetic]. They chuck us out. But then somebody said, “Wait. They’re only ones who had published any papers, for gosh sakes. Those guys are the best publishers we’ve
So Lehninger called me in and said, “What’s wrong with you? How can you be this good and this poor?”

I said, “I don’t know. I’m never good at taking tests, sir.”

He said, “You don’t understand. This is graduate school. This isn’t the Boy Scouts. I should have know when I took you with a C average from East Tennessee State that you’re not going to make it here academically.”

I said, “Well, that’s true, I’m having trouble.”

He says, “I’ll tell you, if you ever flunk another course, you’re going to be walking down Wolfe Street with a pink slip talking to yourself.” He was mad as a hornet. He was pretty good about it. He says, “We’re going to put you on probation. You’re going to take it over again. I can’t believe that you did this poorly.”

So that night I went out and I was coming into work, the next night I was coming into work, and there was a guard at the front gate, and he was a fat guy. He’s an old alcoholic, he smoked a cigar and he had “Mother, I love you,” tattooed all around the arm, and “Semper Fidelis” on the other. He’d been in the Boxer Rebellion up the Yang River, and a retired Marine. He’d been in China. I’d stop every night and I’d chit-chat with John about China or something, and we had a great time.

I come in that night, and he says, “You know something? You’re going to be the next professor here.”

So I went upstairs and Gary’s working away, and I said, “Gary, John he thinks I’m going to be the next professor around here.”
I’ll never forget it, he looked at me and he says, “Coffey, Lehninger says you don’t know any biochemistry. John, that alcoholic at the front desk, says you do, and you listen to John. You know what’s wrong? You’re stupid. That’s why you’re being thrown out, you’re stupid.”

I said, “You know, when you put it like that, it’s so brutal. Why am I paying attention?” [Laughter] But I was desperate for praise.

So I went down to get a coffee that night and I said, “John, why do you say I’m going to be the next professor?”

He said, “I’ve picked all of them.”

I said, “Okay. Who’d you pick?”

He said, “I picked Mountcastle.” He started naming them off. He said, “I’ve been here thirty years or something and I’ve picked them all.”

I said, “Wait a minute. You picked all the—”

“I picked every one of them.”

I says, “Okay, who’s the next professor going to be?”

He said, “That little bald-headed guy that came down here from up in New York.”

“I know that little assistant. That little guy?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, I know him. Yes, I’ll keep an eye on him.” I said, “Okay. If I keep an eye on him and he becomes a professor, I got a chance.”

He says, “Yes.”

I said, “Well, that’s Dan Nathans, so I’m going to keep an eye on that Dan Nathans guy.”

He says, “Oh, and that other guy,” and it turned out to be Hamilton Smith. There was
somebody else, I can’t remember.

Then he looked over at the Traylor Building, he says, “There’s never going to be a breakthrough from that building.” Now, I’m working with seances now.

I said, “John, tell me why you say I’m going to be the next professor.”

He said, “You’re the only three guys that come in here at night on weekends.”

I said, “John, I thought you saw some gleam in my eye, some quickness of step.” I said, “The only reason I come in here at night on weekends, I’m half as smart as the other bastards, and I’m telling you if I didn’t do that, they’re getting ready to throw me out now, even when I am doing this.”

“I don’t care why you’re coming in here. If you come in here at night on weekends, you’re going to be the professor and you guys do that.” He said, “Don’t worry.”

The first three guys that become the professor out of there were Gary Akers, who’s the head of biochemistry at Washington University at St. Louis [unclear]. The other one was Shen Shan Wong, the big professor down at University of Virginia, lipid stuff, and myself. We rose up very fast to be professors, okay, when we finally got going.

So I become his assistant professor and Lehninger now puts me on the faculty and then they discover I’m dyslexic. Liebowitz [phonetic] working beside me, he saw my notebook, saw this mess you’re seeing, said, “My gosh, Coffey, you’re dyslexic.”

I said, “What’s that?”

He said, “That’s a mental problem.”

I says, “Screw you, Liebowitz. I’m as smart as you are.”

He said, “No, I’m telling you, man, you got a problem.”
I said, “I don’t want to hear you. The only problem I got is this”—

“You got a mental problem.”

That’s making me making mad, I got a mental problem. He says, “You can’t spell and this and that, you mix letters up. You’re always making these errors. Look at your notebook.”

I said, “I’m careless.”

He said, “No, no, no.” He says, “I know about this. You got to get tested.”

Well, of course, I’m dyslexic. Then they decided they were going to give me a little bit different time. No. They understood I may have trouble with tests.

But anyway, back to the story. After I became an assistant professor, I saw a light on one night over there in the Traylor Building.

**Warren:** Which building?

**Coffey:** Traylor. It sits over here next to where the dean’s office is, biomedical engineering, right next to the Ross Building. It’s an old building, big Traylor Building that sits in there.

One night I saw a light on over there and some guy’s moving around over there. I could see from my building to their building. So I call one of the hotshots over there and I said, “Who’s that guy on the northeast corner on the fourth floor?”

They says, “It’s a new guy here.”

I said, “What’s his name?”

“His name’s Dan Drachman.” Drachman’s one of the big stars here that does m______. I took a Magic Marker. I never write on the wall. I called everybody in my lab together, I said, “See this word, Daniel Drachman.” I wrote it right up on the wall. I said, “This guy is going to be the next professor here,” and he was. He’s still one of the great stars here.
So I now understand that if you want to cook, you don’t take courses in cooking. You love to cook, you stand in there. If you love to take photographs, you’re a great photographer. If you love to play the violin, play it. If you love to play the guitar, play the guitar. It doesn’t matter how many courses you take, it doesn’t matter about anything, it matters how much you love it and want to do it. If you love it and want to do it, you don’t need any courses in photography. Oh, you have to learn, but it has to come from the spirit. That’s what that was measuring; it was measuring your real love for this.

That’s what Herndon has seen in me. Somewhere he saw that and thought that’s why I could do it. So now, I get to the end, and Al Lehninger is going to put me on a faculty.

Warren: But before that, I’ve got to turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Coffey: In a minute, it’s going to curl your blood.

Warren: Curl my blood, all right.

Coffey: Yes. So Lehninger gives me a faculty position. Now I’m going on the faculty. I got thrown out a little earlier. Now he wants me to take over, think about taking over Hellerman’s operation, he’s retiring. I said, “I want to work on cancer.”

He says, “You can’t work on cancer.”

I said, “Why not?”

He says, “It’s a [unclear] for biochemist. People in basic sciences don’t work on diseases.”

Do you understand that, how important that is at that time? That’s not entirely true, but it was in biochemistry. So I thought, what am I going to do?

He said, “You can have this lab, but you have to work on the enzyme kinetics, which you
do well."

I said, "I'm not going to take it."

Now, here I started to graduate school twenty-eight years old, I'm getting out at thirty-two. I'm on the faculty at thirty-three, and now I’ve got to turn down the best job offer in the best department in the world. I said, "I’m going to work on cancer."

I picked up the *Gazette*, it said, "Paul Talalay is coming to Baltimore." Man works on DNA, RNA. I thought, Williams-Ashman. Guy Williams-Ashman, hyphenated name. So I immediately go down, knock on the door. Talalay said, "Yes."

I said, "I want a job." They don’t give faculty positions to people knocking on doors around here.

He said, "Who are you?"

I said, "I work for Lehninger."

He’d been a graduate student when Lehninger was assistant professor at the University of Chicago, when Bill Scott was the assistant professor. Bill Scott brought Lehninger here, Lehninger brought Talalay here, Talalay’s the young whippersnapper really running pharmacology. When he heard I’d worked for those guys, he said, "Let me check this out." He called me, he said, "Come give a seminar."

I gave a seminar on DMEO acid oxydase in the Hurd Hall. Great seminar, had nothing to do with drugs. He decided he wanted to hire me. He said, "Dr. Coffey, you know anything about any drugs?"

I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "What?"
I said, “Alcohol.”

He said, “You’re in charge of the alcohol lectures.”

I’m still giving the alcohol lectures thirty-five years later. Still giving them, okay? I know more about alcohol—don’t put this in the book—than anybody in the State of Maryland. I’ll tell you how I know it. I spent two years at Seagram’s, learning how to make whiskey. I learned what sour mash is, I went to the American Brewery, I learned what hops is. I went with the Baltimore Police Department once to pick up drunks. I snuck in the Alcoholic’s Anonymous meetings. I went to halfway houses. I went up on the floors and I learned about [unclear]. And I went down to St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, where they do alcohol research, and every year I spent two or three days down there learning about research.

It was Cecil Robinson [phonetic], we’d take one out of four medical students and give them three martinis on an empty stomach, the other one would be given an equal amount of orange juice. So out of a class of 120, we had thirty drunk medical students, and we’d test them for ______, standing stability, breathalyzers, which we designed, alcohol in the blood. I mean, see how we learned it? I mean, it’s like cooking.

I can tell you, just so you’ll see a few of this for fun, I carry it to the nth degree, Princeton. If you drink, it knocks out a hormone coming out of your pituitary gland, which keeps you from urinating. When that hormone goes, you urinate. It’s called an anti-diuretic hormone. So you lose more water than you take in. So no one on a desert drinks, because if you do, you lose too much water, except one desert, the Mexicans, they drink. The salt, the sodium chloride, around the margarita and the potassium from the lime exactly blocks the effects of ethanol on the anti-diuretic hormone. So you hold your water. You don’t lose any water when you drink a margarita.
You say, well, wait a minute, what about all those little banditos who are not drinking margaritas? They’re doing shots of tequila. First, they have a container, which holds exactly one shot. They’ve got to be careful what they’re doing. Can’t drink too much. Then they got to lick their hand and hit it with a salt shaker. Lick it again, it gives them the exact salt. Squeeze a lime, take a shooter. That will exactly block the anti-diuretic effect.

What happens if they’re drinking beer? Corona beer has plenty of fluid in it, and enough salt, it’s a little bit, doesn’t have enough potassium. Take a lime, put it in the top of the Mexican beer, okay, Corona beer. This is all worked out. This is called alternative medicine. People have figured this out.

So what happens when you sell a gallon, a fifty-five-gallon barrel of whiskey, and somebody’s taking a gallon of whiskey off, put a gallon of water in it. So now it’s fifty-five gallons of whiskey, one gallon of water. Well, how do you know somebody didn’t do that? Because they have a test for it. [unclear], the test is, that if you take a flint lock and cock it, put the powder in the flint lock and wet it with whiskey, boom! If it fires, it’s 50 percent or more alcohol. If it doesn’t fire, it’s 49 percent or less. That’s called proofing the barrel. A hundred proof is 50 percent ethanol. In Mexico, they put a worm in it, and if it’s got the water in there the worm decays, okay. This has all been worked out.

Now, when you come in out of the cold, your nose is cold and your hands are cold. Take a shot of whiskey, you feel warm. This is where alternative medicine gets you killed. You feel warm, don’t you? Warms your hands up, warms your nose up, but if you’re out in the cold and you do that, it increases your peripheral circulation, you heat exchange, you’ll die quickly. So the Army does not allow alcoholic beverages above a certain latitude in the Arctic, because if you get
drunk, you’re going to die.

So those little priests in the Catholic Church in the top of St. Bernard Pass, which I’ve been, where they had the dogs trained to take the kegs out of whiskey to save the people coming up the mountain trying to get from Italy into Switzerland, and they got a drink of whiskey when they were cold, they may have felt warm, they’re going to die.

Warren: So it’s the last thing they touch. [Laughter]

Coffey: It’s the last thing they do. Anybody [unclear] was a mixture of finding out what happens when you’re inside the house versus what happens when you’re outside. So if you want to warm up because you’ve been really frozen up, give them whiskey. Do not do that out there.

So anyway, I’m going to go through alcohol. When I say I know alcohol, trust me. So that’s what I’m doing. You see, I operate, that’s the way I operate. So now I hold four professorships. I never had a course in any of them.

Warren: Now, let’s talk about that.

Coffey: Wait a minute.

Warren: Let’s talk about that.

Coffey: Wait a minute. And I am president of the American Association of Cancer Research, two years ago, the largest organization, the oldest in the world, 14,000 members from all over the world. They have to vote; it’s a ballot. I was president of the American Association of Cancer Research. Okay? There’s a plaque up there on the wall over your head.

So this doesn’t have anything to do with anything, except going out and learning, like you learn about alcohol, you learn about prostate, learn about cancer, learn about drugs. Whatever you do, if you want to be a photographer, if you want to be a writer, don’t take courses in
writing. You have to go out—I mean, it helps to know some of the [unclear] rules. But if you go out and observe good writers and work with them and study them, and work at it, you’ll do great.

Now, I want to show you one that will help you see how it works. One of the things I have done, it’s one of my greatest contributions, is I can spot talent a mile away. Okay. I can spot talent a mile away by letting other people spot it for me. So I go to the head of the Year One Program, and I say—his name is Ken Burns, big guy now, dean at Florida. Ken Burns. I said, “Ken”—he’s an assistant professor. “Who’s the smartest student you ever saw at Homewood that’s going to go to medical school?” Year One student.

He says, “Oh, that’s the smartest student in the Year One Program, oh, I guess that would be Drew Pardoll.”

I says, “Who is this guy?”

He says, “He’s an astronomer.”

I said, “Where he is?”

He says, “Out at Homewood.” He says, “His professor started dying of kidney failure. He tried to design a way to save his professor and damn near would have done it except one flaw in it kept it from working, so they never tried it, but he’s a real little cookie.”

“He’s an astronomer?”

“Yes.”

“So where do I find him?”

He said, “Go out to the observatory at night. He’s out there every night.”

So I go out to the observatory, little house on the edge of the campus there, right in the middle of it, near the faculty club. I think they’ve torn it down now. He pulls the chain, this roof
opens, and he has it fixed up with the president so he can turn the lights off around that place, streetlights, for five minutes, while he starts this little motor running and it tracks the stars. So he gets in there running around like crazy, and I go in there and I say, “Hey, how you doing?”

He says, “Good.”

One of my students I had here named Dave Shortle, who’s a good man, and Dave was an astronomer and I took him with me. He knew Drew.

He says, “What can I do for you?”

I says, “Show me Andromeda.”

“Sure.” He looks up and there’s Andromeda. I mean, I had never seen this beautiful Andromeda up there. He’s got it all fixed up. This guy’s really good.

I say, “I hear you’re going to be a medical student.”

He says, “Oh, yes.”

He’s coming down off of the Year One Program. Now, we just opened our Cancer Center, which I had worked with getting it here in the early days.

“Come with me, kid.” We go down in this empty beautiful lab. “That mess is yours.”

“What?”

“That mess is yours.”

He says, “For what?”

I said, “It’s yours if you ever want to work there. It’s as simple as that.”

“Why are you saying this?”

“Because you’re good. I don’t care. You’re good. Don’t worry about me. That’s yours.”

Well, [phonetic], comes down here, he ends up over there. Do you know Drew Pardoll?
Warren: I wrote a caption on him. I didn’t know who he was until now.

Coffey: Oh, gosh dang.

Warren: There’s a picture of him in the book.

Coffey: Oh, he’s a wild guy.

Warren: You know who’s standing next to him? You.

Coffey: Who?

Warren: You.

Coffey: Oh, gosh. Drew comes down, and he’s a medical student and he is just crazy. Okay? First of all, he tells me that he thinks the Mountcastle course is beneath contempt. I think, well, somebody’s got to go tell Mountcastle this. Two of the great students, one from Harvard and this kid are telling me that Mountcastle’s course stinks. So they tell me he’s not up to date and he’s not keeping up. I’ve got to go tell him. I mean, my job, I hate it, but I got to go tell him. I’d want somebody to do that for me. I say I’d better call him, one of the big old-time professors over there.

I call him, I said, “Listen, you think Mountcastle will allow me to tell him he needs to fix his course up?”

He said, “I don’t know what he’d do to that.” He says, “Who are these students?”

I told him and he says, “Who? Drew Pardoll?”

I says, “Yes, why?”

He says, “He’s third from the bottom in that course.” He says, “You want to come see his exam?”

I said, “Yes.” I walked over there, you couldn’t believe it, it was the dumbest bunch
of—he just hadn’t studied this stuff. I says, “I cannot believe that kid had me go in there and tell Mountcastle that he didn’t know his physiology. Mountcastle would have killed me.” [Laughter] Anyway, so Drew is crazy, but he’s brilliant.

So then I said, “Who’s the next smartest guy?” I got [unclear] got them in this room. Bill Nelson, I got Alan Partons [phonetic]. I just run them down. Everywhere I went, everybody would say, “Oh, Coffey has all these bright students.” I didn’t have any, I just got them from Hopkins. You know what I mean? I’m a caretaker. The garden, you throw some fertilizer out there and up comes these beautiful roses, but it’s the seed that did that, not me. Now, we didn’t hurt them, that’s for sure, okay, but we made sure [unclear].

So anyway, we were doing those sort of things, and I wanted—and here I am running my—I mean, being a professor in pharmacology, when Talalay calls me in, and he’s going to Europe for a year and he wants me to take over the department. I said, “No way in hell am I going to take over this department.” 1974.

He said, “Do me a favor.”

I said, “You’re going to give this job up?”

He said, “I’ll tell you what I am doing. I’ve got to rethink my life.” He’s about fifty years old. “If I decide to give this up, you’ll be the first to know.”

So I had been elected vice chairman of the medical school council. Now, here I am a Ph.D., the first vice chairman of the medical school council elected by the M.D.s, and the man who was on my council was the only chairman elected by his own faculty. Now, nobody elected their own chairman their representative on the council, except this department. This man’s name was Russell Morgan. Dean Russell—later he become dean—he and I became great buddies. I
mean, this man is really a wise man, like Abraham Lincoln.

He says, "Coffey, you've got to go to medical school, and you go two years," he told me later, "and I'll make you an M.D."

I said, "No, I won't, I will [unclear]."

He says, "You got to take two years of clinic. You've got the basic science."

I said, "No, I want to keep working."

So anyway, we went on, and I became the chairman of pharmacology. He wanted me to take it permanently, and I told him, Morgan did, I told him, "Here's the deal. Triple my salary, give me three times the space, give me three administrators, and tell me I never have to get another grant, and the answer's no."

He says, "This doesn't sound negotiable." [Laughter]

I said, "It's not negotiable."

He said, "Why would you not want it?"

I said, "I'm on a mission to do something about cancer, and I will not be the head of a department."

So Talalay calls me up, he's not coming back. I run the department for a year, turn it over to Dr. Robinson and Dr. August, and here I am a professor of pharmacology and a professor over here.

But what I want to do is get with cancer out at City Hospital. Owens was head of the medical school council, I was vice chairman, and I sat him down and told me a story up to where I told you. "I want to be in your cancer center."

He said, "Welcome aboard," and I became his deputy director. We're going to build the
best cancer center in the world, from nowhere. And I won’t go through the trouble we had. We went through every storm and and fight you could think to get this cancer into the ’70s.

One day my phone rings. Ring, ring, ring. There’s a little kid on the other end, he says, “Dr. Coffey, can I get an appointment to come see you?”

I says, “Okay. Where are you, son?”

He said, “I’m in Washington.”

I said, “What’s your name?”

He said, “I’m Bert Vogelstein.”

I said, “Who are you?”

He said, “I am a pediatrician working down here in Washington with Bob Gallo [phonetic].”

Well, Bob Gallo was [unclear] viruses in those days. And I said, “Why do you want to work with me?”

He said, “I read your papers and I’d like to work with you.”

I said, “Okay. Where’d you go to school?” [unclear] learn about this, see who this person is. You don’t know who they are.

He said, “I went to Hopkins.”

He went to Hopkins. I said, “You do any research here?”

He said, “Yes.” He said, “I worked with the head of biophysics.” It’ll come to me in a minute. I’m terrible with this dyslexia. Biophysics. It’ll come to me. His wife’s a wonderful lady, and he’s still around. Howard Dintzis. Howard Dintzis. And Howard Dintzis wouldn’t say anything nice about his mother in those days. I’m just kidding. Don’t put that in print.
So I call Howard and he says, "Oh, yeah. He did immunology with me about clumping of the receptors. The guy was brilliant."

Now, I only have five people in my lab. When I started my lab I only want five people, one technician, couple of graduate students, a couple of fellows, and myself. That’s all I have. I have one room. I have the smallest-sized operation of any faculty members at Hopkins past the rank of assistant professor. Okay? So everybody else is on their own around here, not me.

So Howard Dintzis says, [unclear]. Howard Dintzis is a tough guy.

So I call up Paul Lietman, and Paul Lietman had told me he’s great. Paul had given me his name, too, that this guy was good. Paul Lietman says—in fact he’d gotten Paul to ask me to call him. Paul Lietman says, “He worked for me and he did this drug class, and he’s a math whiz.”

“No kidding.”

So then I was walking down the hall and I see big Bill Zinkham. Do you know how Bill Zinkham? Big Bill Zinkham—Bill Zinkham’s his name—was a professor of pediatrics. He was one of the greatest given doctors that you’ll ever meet, probably one of the greatest human beings here, out of the Victor McKusick mold, in pediatrics, in cancer, taking care of children when they’re all dying. He grew up on a farm out here in western Maryland. He’s retired. Still around somewhere, but wonderful human being.

I ran into him and I says, “Bill, do you know a kid named Vogelstein?”

He says, “Oh, yeah, I know that guy. He used to be chief resident.”

I said, “What was he like?”

He said, “He was one of the most astute clinicians I ever saw.” He said, “He could solve a problem in a flash.” He said, “He could diagnostic [unclear].” He said, “He was wonderful. I
don’t know what happened to him.”

I said, “Well, he’s down in Washington.”

Now, right now I’ve got another Drew. This guy is really big-time good. So I walk in my lab. Now, I know this kid can walk on water, and I can walk on water, but it has to be frozen. This kid was a water walker. That’s what we used to call him, “Water Walker.” I walked in, and John Isaacs is there, and I said, “Please tell me you don’t know the name Bert Vogelstein.”

He says, “I know him.”

I said, “John, how do you know Bert Vogelstein?”

He says, “He’s a tennis singles champion of the State of Maryland. He beat a pro tennis player one time, then he blew out his knee. He’s one of the greatest tennis players in the whole state.”

“Now, is this guy a pediatrician?”

He says, “Yes.”

So that does it. I go flying over there. I’ve known Bert Vogelstein over the phone for like fifteen minutes between these calls and this talk. I went over to Al Owens’ office and I said, “Al, I want to make a postdoc who’s applied for a postdoc, assistant professor sight unseen.”

Al said, “Well, we don’t make people assistant professors sight unseen around here, Coffey, at Hopkins.”

I said, “You’d better check this one out.”

He said, “Why don’t you bring him up, let him work here six months, and if he’s half as good as you think he is, we’ll make him assistant professor.”

“No way, Al. This guy is going to be made an assistant professor.” I’m calling my chips,
man. Twenty years here at that time, I've been here forty now. I said, "I've never let you down. This is the man." Also got Andy Feinberg and all these other kids that came through the same system.

So he calls, he says, "Okay. Where you going to put him?"

I said, "I'm going to give him my lab, part of my lab. We'll raise the money. We don't care what it takes to get this kid here."

So I called the kid up, I said, "When can I see you?"

He said, "Anytime."

I said, "What about right now?"

He says, "Well, I can't there right now."

I said, "I'll be at your door in fifty-eight minutes."

He said, "Well, I was getting ready to go home."

I said, "When do you finish eating dinner?"

He said, "Eight o'clock."

I said, "Okay. I'll be there at ten minutes after eight."

I drove straight to Washington, knocked on the door, expecting to see Godzilla. Here's a guy playing music on the piano when I walked up, [unclear]. This guy's playing a piano. Concert music. I mean, this guy's a good pianist. Knock on the door, he opens the door, I say, "Are you Bert Vogelstein?"

He said, "Yes. Sit down. Sit down, have a cup of coffee, talk a minute."

I said, "You can't be my postdoc."

He says, "What'd you come here for?"
I said, “You’re going to be an assistant professor.”

He says, “Why am I going to be an assistant professor?”

I said, “Because you’re better than me.”

He says, “I’m not better than you.”

“You’re better than me. Trust me about it.”

He said, “But I want to work for you. I want to learn what you know.”

I said, “Here’s the deal. I want to give you my graduate student, Drew Pardoll. I never give away a graduate student. We’re going to do two papers. You will never see me again unless you invite me into your lab. Never. Unless you ask me, you’ll never see me. I’ll stay back and help when I can.”

He says, “What’s up here?”

I said, “Nothing up here.”

We sign him on. He comes up. He doesn’t get his first grants. He’s beginning to think it’s time to go back to pediatrics. I said, “Bull. Don’t worry about it.”

He’s gone on, and he’s one of the best scientists in the world. I have no credit for that man. That man is—Bert Vogelstein was one of the most talented guys before I met him, that you’ll ever meet, and he still is. So everybody says, well, I had nothing to do except get him here and get out of his way. Okay? So that’s the way it works. So I don’t even care that this be written up. All I care is that Bert Vogelstein does his thing, and that’s my contribution, is to help those guys get in here.

Andy Feinberg, have you interviewed him?

Warren: No.
Coffey: Oh, he’s crazy. He was going to be an astronaut and we got him in here.

So that’s what we do. Does this make sense to you? We teach people, and you have to decide whether this is a research institute, a hospital, or a teaching institute. You’ve got to be a triple threat at Hopkins. I don’t take care of patients, okay, but I certainly work on patient’s problems. But I’d certainly better teach and do research, and so I decided not to have a big operation and to never go for any big prizes, just help teach people and help contribute to cancer.

So I work with advocates. I spent sixteen years running the inner-city young group here. My wife and I ran an inner-city young group in a mixed neighborhood, called Govans United Methodist Church out at Govans on York Road. I was the youth director and the head of the MYF, Methodist Youth Fellowship, there for sixteen years. I haven’t done that for years. That went from 1960 to ’76, or something like that.

I was very active in all sorts of civil rights things. I’m head of the diversity council. I was shocked when I came here, having been active in the South, that they separated the blood here, as I told you, and there was black and white wards.

Warren: Talk to me about that.

Coffey: Well, there’s nothing much to talk to you about, because if you say too much about it, it sounds like they were bad people and they weren’t.

Warren: That’s exactly what I want to talk about.

Coffey: Yes. What it is, my mother couldn’t vote. Why couldn’t my mother vote? Because she was a woman. Well, what happened to Woodrow Wilson and all those people, Ben Franklin, and President George Washington, and all these great people? How’d they let a country not have women voting until the 1900s? How come the University of Virginia never had a black? How
come Hopkins never had a black graduate student or a black faculty member? It wasn’t as evil as it sounds. It’s just that you get caught up in the system and this seems like—you go to my church and they didn’t accept black people in the South. We’ve treated black people—the way it was in the South, they didn’t like the black person as a race, but they liked the black person as an individual.

When I came up here, they said they like the black person as a race, because they don’t interact with them as an individual very much. And it took me a while to see that this is a different approach to things, but there was no—even though it was evil to the black person, it was not evil people doing it. It’s just they didn’t understand. They’d didn’t quite cotton on.

But you ask me how Victor McKusick—I think Victor McKusick is one of the kindest men in the world. I think A. McGehee Harvey and all these great people were wonderful. How Osler put up with this is beyond my belief, but it happened, and things I’m doing right now are just as bad in a hundred years from today, they’ll see. We still haven’t gotten how women are treated here right. Okay? We’re working on it, but we’re not even close. Okay? We’re getting closer.

When I arrived here, there was definitely black wards, and it was apparent there were no blacks. What’d I do? I go picket in line down in front of the Hopkins? No, I don’t do that. I just think that I wish it wasn’t like this. When I got here, the first graduate student arrived here who’s black—you ought to interview this guy. His name is Tyson Tilghman. He’s on the school board in Maryland. He got his Ph.D. with me in biochemistry. He went off and became a big professor in research at Maryland, and he’s a wonderful guy.

He wrote a book called *The Agony of the Anglo Saxon*, that they can’t hug each other and
shake hands and really interact as human beings. I know exactly what that’s like, because I grew up in the South working in service stations with blacks, and I tell you, they had more fun than we ever had. We don’t have this human interaction they have, this excitement and love for each other. I mean, it’s sort of really strange. I can’t put my hands on it, but the only place I see it really prevalent now is when I’m in South America, Panama, and places where they have Mardi Gras things and everybody’s celebrating. It doesn’t matter your age, your sex, let’s just have a good time and let’s all be human. It’s a wonderful thing.

Well, anyway, coming back to this, the first guy to show up—well, that was the first one, and the first black postdoc, I think, was working in our lab, named Joseph French, worked with Dr. Hamilton. Now we’re talking about 1960, ’61 period, okay, when they came here. Now, he told me he was the first black postdoc, and he’s working on the brain, he’s been in the Army or something, an Army position or something.

But one day there was a knock at my front door. This is the part that I told you is going to get a little interesting. I brought you a thing about this. There was a knock at my front door, and a black man appears. He’s an old black man. I said, “What can I do for you?”

He said, “I want to help.”

I said, “What do you want to do?”

“I want to help you, doctor.”

I said, “Do what?”

He said, “I’m retired, and I want to be of help.”

I said, “Well, what do you want to do?”

He says, “I want to wash your floors, I want to take care of whatever you want done
around here. I just need enough money to keep taking my Social Security.”

I said, “What’s your name, sir?”

He said, “Charles Robinson.”

I said, “Well, what do you think you’re best at?”

He says, “Let me look around and see how I can help you.”

He walked in. I had a cup of coffee, he said, “Where’d you get that?”

I said, “I made it. Have some if you want it.”

He said, “I don’t drink that stuff. That’s no good. That’s frozen stuff.”

He said, “You got a couple bucks on you, a buck on you?”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “I’ll make you some real coffee.”

I thought he was going to take my money and run. So I gave him a buck. He went down to the market and bought some fresh coffee, ground coffee, took a linen thing, took a few eggs, broke the eggs, put the eggshells and crushed them up, put this in there, tied a knot around it, brought this thing to boil, and put this thing in a couple times, which filtered through all these linen.

I am telling you, to this day there is no—and the eggshells turned brown with the tannins. That cup of coffee was the best damn cup of coffee I have ever drunk. He says, “We know how to make coffee.”

I said, “Lord, man, that is good.”

He said, “Don’t drink that crap. You deserve better.”

He said, “Now, what else do you do?”
I thought, man. And it didn’t matter what the trouble was, when Charles came down the hall, everybody smiled. I’m going to show you a picture of him in a minute. So he was just wonderful. He’d talk about how lazy we were or something, about when people weren’t working hard and stuff. He says, “These kids, they’ve got to learn how to work.” Everybody thought he was old school. Took care of the animals, had this interaction with animals that was just like they loved him and he loved them. We were doing surgeries and he took great care of them. He had an upbeat spirit.

Well, 1968 came when I was running my youth group, and I was really active, and I thought we were going to turn all this around. And Charles I wanted to write a book on. Then here one day I’m going up York Road and I’m getting some gas, and all of a sudden a police car pulls in ahead of me. He says, “Turn the pumps off. Stop the pumps. Get these cars out of here. Turn those pumps off, kill the switches, lock it up and get out of here.”

I thought, “What? What are you talking about?”

The guy says, “What are you talking about?”

He says, “This is a police order. We want those pumps locked right now. Sell not another ounce of gas tonight, okay. Lock those pumps, pull the plug, out of here, get out of here.”

Martin Luther King [Jr.] had been shot and the riots had started, and they’re shutting down the gas pumps on York Road for the Molotov cocktails and stuff. I didn’t know what they were talking about.

I whiz back to work. I said, “Wait a minute. I’ve got to get back down there,” because around Hopkins, you know, and it was sort of quiet there for a moment. Okay? And then it erupted. I mean, I have never seen anything like this. I mean, they’re throwing Molotov cocktails,
there’s 200-some fires, and there’s no fire department, no police department. I mean, there’s mobs out there in the street tearing down everything.

As far down York Road and Monument Street as you could see, the potato chips, the chairs, the windows were all [unclear]. Everything’s in the street. I mean, this is bedlam, right? We’re 52 percent black, 48 percent white, this town, there’s fire calls everywhere out there. Holy cow. All of our efforts have failed. I mean, this isn’t working, okay? Forget civil rights. This is just terrible. We’ll never recover from this. We will never, never recover from this. I can’t believe the hatred I’m seeing out there.

Not one person at Hopkins was hurt. Not one dollar’s worth of property damage. We sit with no police protection, whereas some of the big hospitals took over seventy rounds in other cities. There was all sorts of troubles in some of the big cities at these hospitals. They didn’t touch this place. It was like a wall around it, okay? Now, I know some of the stories, and I know some of my friends were involved with them getting guns and trying to protect the [unclear], but [unclear]. The police came in [unclear] made them back off.

The next day I was just shocked. The 102nd Airborne, 101st, I can’t remember which came in, they’re hitting people, [unclear] the street. I learned two things, that when there’s no law and order, you don’t want to be there. It’s like Gone With The Wind when Clark Gable says, “When the Army leaves here, this is going to be bad.” And when the National Guard was there, it was like they didn’t respect them. But that 101st Airborne arrived, I remember, I’ll never forget it, a jeep came up whizzing up the street with a black sergeant standing up with a bullhorn, “Clear the street.” Okay? And this man is running down with a television set, down between Krieger and the thing, try to run down, he’s caught in that trap. He said, “Halt!” Okay? And he didn’t. He
said, “Drop it!” And this guy ran out and he clubbed him and he went straight to the ground. He was like he hit a light switch; everybody quieted down. It was like law and order has returned.

Okay? And the 101st was moving around now.

Now, they seal it off so we couldn’t get downtown, and let the ghetto burn. There was still fires. There was no fire department. I watched all this and I thought, this is terrible. This is just terrible. I mean, you know, we’ll never ever get this city back. The guy who I thought was so wonderful, because there was a man name Mahoney, as we know, who was running and his spiel, and he turned on a radio and he just blasted everybody. I thought there’s our only chance is we got a good man, is Spiro Agnew. He was a total turkey. I mean, a flaming turkey. I just couldn’t believe that this turncoat could do this to the black leadership.

So I came in there and I was in a state of depression. We’re sitting in the library talking about this. Charles Robinson walks in. This is the only thing you’re going to see sitting on my desk, is pictures of my family. Charles Robinson walks in. Charles Robinson says, “It grieves me to hear young doctors talking like this. It’s getting better.”

“Charles, do not tell me that. Now, you’re an optimist, and I will not listen to bullshit. It is not getting better, Robinson, it’s getting worse.” I said, “You’d have to keep me up all night telling me it’s getting better, every twenty minutes [unclear] the question. I mean, I’ve been around too long, Robinson. You’re just one of these happy, buoyant optimists. I’ll tell you, we’re in deep kimshe.”

He says, “It’s getting better.”

I said, “What’s your evidence?”

He said, “Dr. Coffey, I’m the son of a slave. My mother and father were brought over in
the hulls of the ship to the city of brotherly love, and our family was sold. Do you know what that means? Finally they kept my wife and mother together, and they took them to Virginia. I was born fifteen years after the war, and it was terrible.” He said, “I saw a man hung and nobody at the University of Virginia said anything. Nobody at the Catholic Church or the Protestant Church said anything, and nobody in the press said anything. Do you know what that means? I’m going to tell you, Dr. Coffey, the people of Virginia are wonderful people and my friends. I saw that happen.

“I decided I’m getting out of there. I’m going North. I came to Baltimore and I decided to work my butt off, and I went to work for a copper company here in Baltimore. One day my daughter had an abscessed tooth, and I was going to take her to the dentist, and I was going to get my paycheck and take her to the dentist. I went out and they said, ‘Charles, the banks went broke. You don’t have a job. We don’t have your paycheck.’”


“Well, my father, who was an old slave, he says, ‘Always getting better, Charles. It’s getting better and you’ve got to believe it. The sun’s going to come out.’”

He said, “Do you remember when I was operated on, I couldn’t pass my water? You all were here.”

“Yes.”

He says, “You came up to see me and said, ‘The sun’s going to come out, Charles.’ I
thought I felt like dying.” He says, “I’m an old man and asked you why don’t they just let me
die?” He says, “The sun’s going to come out.”

He said, “Well, the sun did come out.” He said, “I didn’t tell you,” he says, “I went home
and cried when I lost my job. I had $1.74, that’s all I had. Everybody had been laid off around,
there was no welfare, and I took that and bought fish and I stood on that corner and sold fish.
And I put my kid through college.”

Then he says, “Then my wife, who I loved, died of diabetes in the blood, they took her
legs off and she died.” He said, “Then here I was an old man and I met this women.” He said,
“Now, I only went to school a few days, a very short period of time, and the woman who taught
me to read in Virginia got fired, her husband, because his wife taught me to read.” They weren’t
supposed to teach the blacks how to read.

He said, “So here I was, she taught me to read the Bible, and I read. That’s the only book
I had, so we read all about the Bible. My father would tell me all about these stories, we’d talk
about them and sing about them in church and stuff.”

And he said, “So here I was with my wife dead, I wanted to die, I was so depressed.” And
he said, “I met this woman later and we got married. We got on board a Boeing 747 jumbo jet,
707, we flew to the Holy Land.” He pulls this picture out of his pocket. “Dr. Coffey, this is the
son of a slave who is in the Holy Land walking around the tomb, on a jumbo jet, and you’re going
to tell me there’s people out there on television that have shoes. Very few people had shoes.
Nobody had a car. Nobody had a radio. Even those people rioting out there have television sets.”
He said, “You’re telling me it’s not getting better?”

He says, “I’m going to tell you what I want you to do. I want you to get up off your butt
and rebuild this city.” The Inner Harbor was full of boxes. It was just terrible down there. “You go and build this city. Get past all this. This is like an earthquake. San Francisco got by this. We’re going to get by this. We’re going to come together, but it ain’t going to come together sitting there wringing your hands.”

He says, “When you start saying it’s getting worse, get to the nursing home. Get the hell out of the way.” He says, “Old folks, it isn’t like it used to be.” He said, “I’m just grieved that you, as a young doctor, ‘It’s getting worse.’” He says, “Why don’t you get to the nursing home or get up and go do something about it?” And he got up and left. He even left his picture there.

I said, “Charles, will you make me a picture, a copy of this?”

He said, “Yes.” So he made me a copy of that. This was 1968. So I put it on my desk and it’s damn near weather-torn.

Now, I’m going to fast-forward eleven years later.

Warren: But I’m going to have to put in a new tape before you do.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

[Note: The quality of this tape is extremely poor. Every effort was made to provide an accurate transcript, but where this was not possible, [unclear] is noted in the transcript.]

Warren: Mame Warren. It’s tape two with Don Coffey on May 9th, 2000.

Coffey: So here we’re talking about Charles Robinson, and he’s telling me to get up and go do something about this. So now it’s 1968, the riots have just occurred.

We’re going to fast forward to eleven years later. One of the best medical students who ever went through there, a wonderful human being, the nicest kid you’ll ever meet, he was almost like a missionary doctor. He was just a caring, giving young man, and he was getting ready to
graduate in a few months. I don’t remember where he was going to go, but he was really going to
go do something. I think he was going to go serve somewhere. He was walking about the
[unclear] about six o’clock, about this time, a little later, six o’clock, and a black young man came
up to him and said right here on the corner, “Give me your hamburger.”

He said, “No.” And he shot him in the chest. They rushed this student into our emergency
room, and his own class members work in the emergency room, had to open his chest and try to
save him. He died. I cannot tell you what a horrible show that was to have a young medical
student killed near his graduate—he was one of the finest persons in the world. I tell you, we
were in a state of shock. I was furious. We all were furious.

The students were ready to write the *New York Times* and people told them to keep calm,
and then the hospital called some press conferences, although ill-advised. Things were said about
the students that were just—it shouldn’t have been said. Public relations’ handling of this was
poor. There was anger. The students were so mad, they were ready to print a paper, and so they
came over and wanted to use my office for all this, and saw me as a friend. I tried to calm them
down.

Evan Friedberg, who’s a professor now at University of NYU, head of dermatology, was
then here, he tried to calm them down. The fact that we were working with them so closely made
the dean and some other people think we were rabble-rousers, but we were trying to just get some
sense in this thing.

I went to the Southeast district police chief, [unclear] some sense in him. He says, “How
long has Hopkins been there? How long has Hopkins been there? How long have we been here?
How many years has this Hopkins been here?” Well, about a hundred years then, or close to it.
"How many people go through here every day?"

"Fourteen thousand."

"How many people been killed here in the history of Hopkins? How many people been killed at Harvard? University of Maryland? Social Security complex?" It's one of the safest places around, not for your pocketbook, not for mugging, but if you look at the murder rate, for the number of people, it's extremely low. It's amazing. But around here it's a sea of red dots on the map of people killed around here, but the center's an island.

Lehninger had been cut on the hand when he and his wife at eleven o'clock left over there at the Inn and walked down to Dunbar at night with her with diamonds on, dressed in—and somebody asked for her purse and he wouldn't give it to him, and he tried to pull it away and the guy him lightly on the hand. That was an injury of a faculty. We've had one other thing, we had a young lady who came in early in the morning and was attacked and held and some bad stuff. But murder, no way.

So he said, "I can put the police dogs in there, but I think that person was turned over within an hour after it happened to the community." He said, "I don't think you want to do that. You had no damage in the riots. You've got to get your security up inside for crazy people."

This young kid had been about five years old and his playground was right down here when Robinson gave me that picture. Eleven years later, he's sixteen years old. I'm going to show you a picture of Johns Hopkins when Robinson gave me that picture. Now, the reason I showed you that picture, because the medical students came to see me en masse. They said, "Dr. Coffey, we want you to give the commencement address for his class."

I said, "You're asking the wrong man. I can't do that. You've got to get a preacher."
They said, “We think you got to do this.”

I said, “Not me. Not me.”

They said, “You’ve got to do it for us.”

So I thought, my gosh, what am I going to do, you know. I had to give the commencement address to his graduating class a few weeks later, parents and everything. What am I going to say? What is there to say? So I thought, well, hell, Charles Robinson, he told me it was getting better. I ain’t gonna tell these kids it’s getting better. I’m not going to tell them is the only murder. They don’t want to hear that. So I said, I’m going to tell Charles Robinson’s story.

So I called Robinson out of retirement. He came in. I said, “Robinson, I’ve got to tell you something. Tell me where you’re from. I want to hear where you were born.” That’s what I did. “I want to hear the details of what you did as a little boy. I want to know how you got to be who you are. I want to know about this picture. I want to know some more things.” Then it started.

He said, “I was born near Amherst, Virginia.” Holy hell. Amherst, Virginia.

I said, “How close would you be if you went out Route 50 towards Culpepper and at Buffalo Creek turn right?”


I said, “No, I’m not lying, Charles.”

He said, “You’re kidding me?”

I said, “I’m not.”

The place I’m taking them to is a little place called Coffey Town, up in the mountains, where a dirt road runs down and there’s an old church and a graveyard, called Alto, Virginia, on
the map.

Now, what happened was, I didn’t know I was from there, and about six months before my sister went down to run down our history, I wasn’t interested in history. We thought we was from Culpepper. We thought we’d come down from those hills that you knew about there, but we didn’t know much more than that. They said, “That’s not where you’re from. You’re not from Culpepper. You’re from Alto.”

They said, “What happened was, your grandfather was a Civil War veteran, he fought for the Confederacy and was caught in the battle of Chancellorsville, the Battle of the Wars.” He’d been held a prisoner at Elmira in New York for three years. He was released and he had never seen his son, his son was born three months after he left. So his son is three months and 29.9, whatever, he comes home and sees his son.

They go up together on this rock form up there, and his father used to be an old man in his late eighties, and he falls off a horse, breaks his hip. His son sells his horse. His son was real old. I mean, he’s sixty years old. He beats him with a cane for selling his horse, and he leaves. “That was your grandfather. He never came back. He went over the mountain to Culpepper and we went down to Bristol and never came back. Your folks are up there in the mountains. You’re not from Culpepper.”

So we beat feet, my sister did, only to find that the lost generation has been found, they knew all about—I didn’t know who my great-grandfather was. I didn’t know any of this. There’s a church there and this whole history all the way back to 1650, and they have a slave named Alonzo, Alonzo or something like that, up there and all this stuff.

This is within 400 yards of where Charles Robinson’s father was a slave, down the road a
quarter of a mile right where it says his father was a slave. And the slave my grandfather had his father knew. [Tape interruption.]

So anyway, he knew my grandfather. I said, “What was he like, Charles?”

He said, “He’s a wonderful guy, cantankerous as hell. He used to chew tobacco sitting on that church. He built that church, that old church up there.”

I said, “That’s what I know.”

He said, “He’d sit there chew tobacco and he’d spit and sometimes the wind would be—he’d have to watch it. My daddy hit me with some of that stuff accidentally.” He said, “He was a wonderful man.” He started telling me stories about my great-grandfather.

We sat there and I said, “Charles, you know, this is so mind-boggling I can’t tell the medical students this. I’m just going to tell them up to what we did here about this, okay? I’m going to show them a slide. I’ve got this slide that the Baltimore Sun took of Hopkins when you gave me that picture, and I’m going to go down there right now and take a picture of what it looks like today. I’m just going to show that picture and talk about things getting better. Okay?”

He said, “Well, can I tell you a story?”

I said, “Sure.”

He said, “I don’t think I’d tell them about all that slavery stuff.” He said, “It won’t do you no good, it won’t do them no good.” He said, “It’s best that’s between you and me and our history. We’re friends and this is what it’s about. Dr. Coffey, we forgive all that, we got to go on now.”

I says, “You’re right.” I says, “How did America, land of the free and the home of the brave, with Jefferson and Washington, and Thomas Jefferson, who talked about dignity, had
slaves, my grandfather—how’d they do this? How does Hopkins separate the blood?”

He said, “They ain’t bad people, it’s just they get on the wrong side and they just don’t see it.”

So I brought up today for you, and you’ve got to look at this very carefully. I wish I had a slide projector to show it to you. Okay, here he was. I’ve got to get a slide projector. This ain’t gonna do it.

Warren: No, no, no, no.

Coffey: [unclear]. This is taken out of the Baltimore Sun in 1968. Okay? And this is the playground upon which the child lived in that house who killed our medical student. Now, keep looking. Look carefully. There is no place. There is no football field. There’s no place for the elderly. There’s no playground for the kids. There are roaches in there. And I showed that slide and I said, “Whose fault is this?”

Warren: Oh, and there’s the dome. I see it.

Coffey: See the dome?

Warren: Yeah.

Coffey: Now, look at the Kennedy. See the Kennedy?

Warren: Yes. Yes.

Coffey: Okay. I said, “Let me tell you something.” I said, “This is the fault of the black man, it’s the fault of the white man. It’s the fault of people we’ve taught.” You can’t have this. “This is exactly the same photograph the week our student was killed.” Now, see the dome?

Warren: Yep.

Coffey: There’s a high-rise up, but now there’s no jobs down there, except drugs. We’ve
squeezed out every job down there, and the stock market’s selling up and those people are selling down again. Okay.

So now I show that and I showed that to the students and I said, “Tell me it’s not getting better, but don’t tell me that it justifies that kid killing our student. But don’t tell me you justify doing this to his folk either. This is the seed of trouble that we bred here.” I said, “Hopkins can do better than this. We can do better than this.” Now there’s no black doctors down there anymore. This is the highest place in the nation for doctors and the death rate around Hopkins.

Now I want to flash forward, and there’s a great man here, and his name is Tuttle, Reverend Tuttle. Reverend Tuttle was the heart, lung and soul of—heart, lung and spirit—you’ll get the name, everybody knows him around Hopkins. He is a black minister who takes care of East Baltimore. [unclear] he takes care of it. He’s wonderful.

He gave a talk when we had the summit for cancer. At that time Mrs. [Dan] Quayle was speaking, the Vice President’s wife, the governor, the dean at Hopkins. Everybody left, one after another left. They left there [unclear]. They left there. As each dignitary spoke, it got further down, everybody left. I was the last speaker. Tuttle was the last speaker, and I was next to last speaker. So he got up and he said the following, he said, “In the area code 21205,” which it was then, he says, “there’s the most doctors per square foot of anywhere in the world and the most specialists. There’s a number-one hospital in the world. More medical funds come into that hospital than any other hospital in the world, and yet in the area 21205 there’s the highest rate of hypertension, death, childbirth death, prostate cancer deaths. It’s one of the worst in the nation.

“Do you think that putting more doctors into Hopkins is going to solve our problem? Putting more clinics into Hopkins is going to solve our problem? It’s not going to solve our
problem. I’m not against Hopkins. I think they’re doing great things, but they aren’t reaching the people. They aren’t serving the needs of our people. There are people who have special needs they don’t even understand. So we at the churches want to help. We’ll work with Hopkins. They must work through us by empowering us, not coming out and putting us in one of their studies. That ain’t gonna work anymore.”

Tuttle was one of the greatest speakers, and the guy’s so good. [unclear] everybody knows him. He’s wonderful. But he shows it why Hopkins can’t—just like you saw that ghetto, that’s the health of those people, the economy to health.

So, to me, this is the greatest institution, so Walsh goes out and we have three African-American residents up out there on the wall, trained here. Mike Burnett, he did a lot about—stuff that led to Viagra. I mean, he’s the guy that did nitrous oxide. Ron Morton, who’s a professor, faculty member down at Baylor. Kevin Phillips up at Minnesota. We went out and got—the rest of that board back there is lily white and there’s one woman up there. All those hundreds of pictures there’s one woman and three blacks. They all came because Walsh worked at it. Now we have two [unclear].

So it’s going to happen, but it’s not that Hugh Hampton Young was a evil man, but he wasn’t doing right. So I don’t like to point fingers at these people, because I do not believe that they really were doing any more than we made them do as a society. I think if they had to separate black blood and white blood, and give white people black blood back then, this place would have rioted. There would have nobody come to this institution.

So it isn’t easy to just say, “Go do it” any more than I tell you, “Go solve the homeless problem.” That ain’t gonna be solved. But, boy, when you turn the people who are mentally ill out
on the street and you bring Vietnamese veterans, Vietnam veterans, and you don’t give them a chance to rehabilitate from all the trauma and treat them like we treat them, there’s going to be trouble out there. So we can do better than that, and I think we will.

So anyway, that’s all I got to say, but Charles Robinson is a very special story. Now, here is the last of this. Charles Robinson died. He died of prostate cancer, the very thing I work on. He died right here.

Mary!

Mary: What?

Coffey: Just open the door if you would a minute.

Mary: Huh?

Coffey: Open the door a minute. Mary, this is Ms. Warren.

Mary: Oh, hi.

Coffey: We’re talking about Charles Robinson, okay.

Mary: Oh!

Coffey: So Charles Robinson died. He died in this hospital of prostate—show her that picture he had done for us. Just go look at this. He brought this in—you’ll have to get up and go in and look at it. He gave us this right before he died. As he was dying and in bad condition, he brought us this picture.

[Inaudible conversation in background.]

Coffey: So Mr. Robinson, his mother had brought over on the slave ship a plant that they had kept going, and it died finally. But he gave us a piece of that plant to grow.

Now his funeral occurs. Now his funeral happens, and I’m going to his funeral. I have
bought the first new car I have ever owned in my life. I never owned a new car, and I bought a new car. This car is not very old, and I am driving into the worse part of West Baltimore in the afternoon when there’s gangs standing on the corner with gold chains and bandannas on their heads. This is not the place you want to be even in at high noon. I’m the only white anywhere around. There’s a bunch of beat-up cars that look like they’re burned out that should have been hauled off the street.

I had to park my car way up at the end of this and walk down with these guys on each corner selling drugs, to go into that church down at the end of the corner. I don’t see any white people around. I figure, well, Charles would understand if I don’t get killed here, I’d still care about him, but I decided I’d do it. I parked my car up there, and I walked through all of this incredible crowd of toughs, okay, about five or six gathered little crowds here and there. Went in the church, and it was the most uplifting service I have ever been to in my life.

This man got up and he says, “We want people in this audience to tell about the spirit of Charles Robinson.” People were getting up and telling stories one after another. Then he says, “We have his favorite songs, will be sung by his grandchildren.” One of his grandchildren had written a poem, and this was the most moving scene. The rafters went up and down. I mean, people were happy. He said, “We’re celebrating here this man.”

He says, and I laughed at this, he said, “We’re now going to feed Charles to the worms.” He said, “So everybody, everybody gets fed to the worms.” He says, “We just got to go back to the dust together.” He said, “Now, I want everybody to come by here and say goodbye to Charles, and then we’re going to take him out there and put him in the earth, then we’re all going to come back here and we’re going to have a big spaghetti supper in the basement. If anybody
wants to join us, just bring anybody in that wants to join us. Charles would want that. Everybody come by here. We’ll be singing his songs.”

I’ll tell you, you could not believe this happy spirit of that funeral. It was what a funeral really should be, you know. People were happy, they were hugging and shaking hands. They were talking to Charles. They just carried him out of there, and it wasn’t like it was sad at all. I said, boy, and I walked out of there and I walking away and I said, “Man, it’ll be my luck for my car to be gone.” I’d get out of here, had a new brand-new Saturn sitting up there right off the show room. I walked right by that crowd, they knew I was going to that funeral. They didn’t touch that car. One or two of them waved at me, that was that. Isn’t that something? [unclear] Isn’t that great? So that guy is one of the real greats.

This was 1971 in the Holy Land. This is not true. I got the wrong thing on that. He’d been to the Holy Land before that. I put the wrong date on it. ’61, I think it was.

Anyway, moving along, that’s the Charles Robinson story. So I think this place, and Charles will tell you—and I don’t want this written down. I don’t want this written down, because this is [unclear]. But we tried to grow prostate cancer cells from patients. Couldn’t get them to grow. You know, he [unclear] heard this story.

Warren: Yes, I read it in a magazine.

Coffey: Yes. Well, one of my students came to me in the back—and not many people who even know this—and he says, “We finally got the prostate cancer to grow.” We looked up the name. It was Charles Robinson’s cells. I could not—I said, “Don’t even tell me this, okay?” I said, “Let that rest just right where it is, okay. Just go ahead and let that be part of the thing. I don’t even need to know about these cells anymore.” I know that’s part of it, but, boy, a few of those things
makes you begin to wonder about things, you know what I mean? So Charles is okay.

Warren: You’re still meditating, too.

Coffey: No, I tell you, I still meditate, but I’ll tell you one thing that’s—did you ever read a book that everybody threw away, called The Prophet?

Warren: Sure.

Coffey: Okay. What does it take to be a teacher? What is it to give? What is it to pick your work? Well, I threw that little book away when I was a student. That was bullshit, you know, you read something like that. Somebody gave it back to me who was interviewing me to talk about a teacher. They said, “Your life is like what you get is like that of Gibran and Osler, living in airtight compartments.”

I said, “Wait a minute, what are you talking about?”

They says, “Have you ever read it?”

I said, “Sure I read it.”

They said, “Have you read it recently?”

I said, “No, I haven’t read any of that stuff.”

They said, “Go read Osler’s A Way of Life.” Have you ever read that?

Warren: Nuh-uh.

Coffey: I think I got it here. Oh, yes, here it is. Here. Here. Here. When you get a chance, okay, take this with you and you can bring it back later. This used to be read by all of the medical students. Open up the front thing. I think it was written to me when [unclear]. I think it has something to do with a patient dying or something. Read in the front of that and see what he says.

Warren: [unclear].
Coffey: Okay, you can read that later. That’s back when he was a student or something he wrote that to me.

Warren: Thank you.

Coffey: So what happened was, Osler talked about how we live in airtight compartments, and that was a commencement address that he gave to the students at Yale about being a doctor. That’s a very important book. I don’t think they make them read it anymore. But this person came in and said, “You do, you teach the way Gibran said.” Now, I want to ask you, how many great teachers have you had? How many great teachers have you had?

Warren: Three.

Coffey: Three. Okay, now, remember the max I’ve ever heard is four or five, it’s usually three or two. Okay. What was it about them that made them a great teacher?

Warren: They were as tough as nails. They made me good.

Coffey: Yes. But they may have done it in a way different than you can imagine. Now, I want you to get there and read what’s on that wall behind you that Gibran wrote about teaching. And let me know how close that is to what they did.

So what they do is they don’t beat it into you; they hold a high standard and show their love for it. And if you’re ready to love it, then you can take it and run with it. If you don’t, then you don’t need to take crocheting or whatever it is that you’re going to take. Okay.

So to me, that’s what it’s all about, is you come in here as a teacher, and this is a great place, this is the greatest institution. It was everything that Dr. Lee R. Herndon said it was.

Luckily, Dr. Lee R. Herndon [unclear]. His son died of cancer, and I went back and talked to him about it.
But the one that I really liked was Carl T. Bahner. He’s still alive, and he invited me to come down and open his chemistry department about fifteen, twenty years ago, and be the keynote speaker. I went down. It’s one of the top Baptist schools down there in Carson, Tennessee. They’ve won the national championship, Class II. They gave me an honorary degree down there two years ago or last year.

It was just great to go back to his school, with him sitting there ninety-one years old, his wife’s dead. She was treated here at Hopkins and did well for years. He’d come by to see me. Here he was, he knew I was elected president of the ACR. And what a great man. And to go down there in the hills of Tennessee, where I had left to go down [unclear], I don’t know what those callings are. [unclear]. It’s too much.

Warren: A while ago, quite a while ago, you talked about that Hopkins if you step up to the bat and you hit the ball, Hopkins will let you play. Tell me more about that.

Coffey: They’ll let you play as long as you play fair. If you fake it or you do something really bad, they don’t want you to play. What they do, they give you a chance, and most people go about to the level they should be at.

Warren: But how does it work? Who is “they” who’s giving you the chance?

Coffey: The dean doesn’t tell you what to do. My chairman doesn’t tell me what to do. I can work on anything I want to. My chairman expects excellence. If I ever fake something or did something shoddily, he’d go crazy. He’d absolutely go crazy. But he’ll let me do whatever I want to. Now, I have to come up with the stuff to support myself. I have to get the grants and I have to do stuff, but when you give a little lecture, the chairmen aren’t there. So why are you giving it? Because it’s part of what you do. It’s like a fire person, a firemen, you’re there to put out the fire.
I used to think my Scout master was paid to be a Scout master. It was years later when I was [unclear], he wasn’t giving [unclear] and when he got back late, the parents were all mad. It wasn’t like there was somebody out there had elected him, paid him to be a Scout master. I sort of saw the Scout master like a school bus driver. Your job is to be a scout master. We’d go out and raise Cain. I didn’t realize they were giving their weekends to do this, you know what I mean? They’re giving up a lot to do this. Never crossed my mind.

Same way at Hopkins. I think when you see the quality of the people around here, they’re all—I mean, there’s a few turkeys here and there, but overall in the great majority of people, there really are talented, caring people who really want to give the next generation [unclear] a chance. Now, sometimes they get a little too old and stuck in positions and they’re not quite as graceful as maybe they should be. But in general, this is just—you couldn’t find a better place.

You asked me how many times I’ve seen a shoddy act, somebody stabbing somebody in the back, some really shoddy piece of work here, interaction. I don’t see that. I don’t see that. When it came time for Vivian Thomas, and they did that so magnificently. When it came time to turn a hospital around, put the front in the back, the back in the front, the flowers out front, the trees, this is pretty darn well done. Getting Dan Nathans out of retirement. Dan Nathans, when he died, that memorial service was one of the most moving memorial services you’ll ever see in your life. It wasn’t sticky, it wasn’t overdone. People came from everywhere.

[unclear] and I walked down with one of the old-timers, said, “This is what it’s about, isn’t it?”

I says, “Exactly. He talked about integrity, he talked about teaching and caring and trying to make it better,” and he wasn’t just saying it, he believed it. Deep in his soul he believed it.
Maumenee, McKusick, Nathans, [unclear] so you can see them easier, but the younger ones are still there. Dan Lane, it's just incredible. Incredible good people. Milton Eisenhower, I'll tell you, Milton—I worked with Milton Eisenhower when I was on the medical school faculty. I tell you, that man was something else. Did you know him?

Warren: No, tell me about him.

Coffey: Oh, I have to tell you one off the record about him, and then you can see, but don't put this on the record, because it will hurt people.

I went on the medical school council and I was elected there by the people, and the rest of them were there because they're warlords, chairmen. So they don't want me there. This is something they've never had before, a commoner in the House of the Lords. They asked for a vote for the new chairman of OB/GYN, and they call, "Okay, all in favor say aye."

"Aye."

"All opposed say, 'Nay.'"

"Nay."

President Eisenhower looked at me—who is this guy anyway? "Dr. Coffey, would you tell us why you voted nay?"

I said, "Yes, sir." I said, "I read the man's CV and I read his papers, I went back and looked at the two people before when they were appointed. This man is not of the caliber of those other two, and I don't think that we've got the right man here."

He sat there without saying anything. I mean, it was like an hour, it seemed like. He said, "I'm going to take a little president's prerogative here and shelve this vote until next time."

The next thing on the agenda, we went on, and then as he's leaving he says, "Can I see
you a minute in the dean’s office?”

I thought, “Oh, my gosh. What am I doing? I just stick my mouth, big foot in every time I do something. I don’t know why I’m doing this for. I don’t belong here.”

He says, “Were you voting the way you felt or the way the people who elected you feel?”

I said, “Well, I didn’t have time to talk to them. I was voting the way I felt.”

He said, “Which way should you have done it?”

I said, “Well—.”

He said, “Are you voting to represent yourself or to represent them? They vote you because you feel like they do about things, or how do they do this?” And I’m standing there and trying to do my best with those questions. He said, “Let me tell you how it goes, Dr. Coffey.” He says, “There’s no answer to those questions. Some people think you have to vote to represent the people, and other people think [unclear] it better be the way you feel. I guarantee you if it’s ever a question of morals or principle, you’ve got to vote the way you feel. On the other issues [unclear], that’s another tough one. I don’t know exactly about that. There’s been debates about that.”

He said, “But let me tell you about this vote you took today.” He said, “you’re right. This man is not the man.” He said, “This is a tragic, tragic, tragic day at Hopkins.” He said, “I’ve come out of retirement, and the reason I’ve come out of retirement, we’ve run into a major problem here, and I’m back here trying to get this back on the road.

“They’ve been trying—every time we put up a new head of a department around here, we usually get our first or second choice. We never go beyond our first or second, almost always our first. This time we went down to our eleventh. The other ten do not want to come here. They
don’t want to come here because if they came here, they’re going into a dilapidated OB/GYN department. Obstetrics and gynecological facilities are [unclear]. It’s just incredibly bad. I don’t know who would tell anyone in their right mind to take this job.”

He says, “That committee’s been out there fighting all this time, and they finally got this man his name is Ted King to agree to take it. Now, why am I calling you in here to tell you this? Because he’s going to see this vote, he’s not going to see who voted for it or against it. But this reminds me of the rabbi who got a card when he was in the hospital, said, ‘By a vote of 73 to 22, we wish you a speedy recovery.” [unclear]. [Laughter]

“I think we want this man to start with a clean bill of health as we can, but I’m not here to beat you down and change your vote. It may be that on this matter it’s just as important for you to stand your ground on that, young man, and decide [unclear] nay vote, and we understand it. It wouldn’t be as simple as we all say yes to help each other out. I’d hate to be in your position. I don’t know how I’d vote, but I thought about that a little later, is this kid right or wrong?”

He said, “But I thought you should hear all the issues before you cast your vote, and as long as you feel like you’re casting your vote right, I don’t care how you vote. I’m not going to be the least bit alarmed if you vote aye or nay next time, but I did want you not to come in here as a young man off the street and not understand what the issues are.”

So he calls the next time, and I thought about this, and I thought, “No, I’m voting for this guy.”

So he said, “All those aye.”

“Aye.”

“Nay?”
Somebody looked at me [unclear]. He didn’t get to me. He was absolutely telling the truth and they can think what the hell they want to.

Now, things went on, we had a dean here named Dave Rogers. Do you know about Dave Rogers? Well, David Rogers was Carl Rogers’ son. Carl Rogers is a confrontational psychology guy from California. He was one of the all-time great doctors from down at Vanderbilt and he came here as the dean back in 1967–68 period, ’70 maybe. He wanted to open up free medical care and dental care to all East Baltimore. He had a whole new way of delivering medical care, whole new super, super liberal approach. It wasn’t going to work. As he tried to push this through, the place became polarized.

He thought it was time to get rid of A. McGehee Harvey, so he called Lincoln Gordon to see what would be necessary to get rid of A. McGehee Harvey, and Lincoln Gordon called Mountcastle to see what he thought. Mountcastle went in to see because he thought they’re trying to fire one of our chairmen. He stormed in to see Dave Rogers, and Dave Rogers said, “I didn’t say that exactly.” He was just seeing what the policy was. He said, “I can’t work with a liar.” I mean, it got really bad. It broke up into the red and green army. I mean, he called in Talalay and told him he’d serve at his discretion. I mean, it was a really tough battle. Hopkins never had dirty laundry like this. It got printed up in Science magazine, all this stuff.

So now what are we going to do? This is when we had to bring into this mess people like President Eisenhower. So now I’m gone on my vacation, and I come back and there’s a letter lying on my desk. It says, “Dr. Eisenhower wants to see you Wednesday at three o’clock.” Last time I saw him was that day of the vote.

So I got flying out there and I thought, “What’s he want to see me about?”
I walked in his office, “Read this, please,” and he hands me a letter. It’s a letter of resignation from Dave Rogers. Well, I wasn’t born yesterday. Rogers can’t run this place anymore. He might be a liberal, but he can’t run it anymore, he’s lost control. I said, “This must have made your day, sir.”

He says, “It’s a catastrophe.”

Remember I told you about the other catastrophe? That’s minor compared to this catastrophe. He said, “Let me tell you what this is about. We put a search committee, he was number one on our list. I brought him here. He is a wonderful man. I recruited him, and he’s marching to a different drummer. It isn’t going to work and he has to go.

“But who failed? David Rogers failed for doing what he’s always done, or did we fail for not understanding what we were hiring? Who’s fault is this letter? It doesn’t matter whose fault it is, David Rogers has resigned. Now what matters is what we do next. Here’s what we do next.

“I’m calling you in here Coffey, because you’re head of the faculty, the faculty representative. I’m going to tell you I’m not going to accept this letter until David Rogers has a job equivalent to this job. He’s a great man. If it takes us six days, six weeks, six months or six years, I’ll accept this when he has a wonderful job to replace this with, and not until.”

I thought, “Boy, is this a class act.”

Went out, sure enough, took a while, the guy [head] of the Robert Wood Johnson [Foundation], he’s now dead, he was brought back to be the commencement address, he loved Hopkins, Hopkins loved him, he supported everything. He’s a great man. Many years later I had to go to see Dave and we talked about those things. He went out to raise money at the storefront Hispanic medical service things and help African-Americans. He’s done a terrific job at Robert
Wood Johnson [Foundation]. So he should be at Robert Wood Johnson, that’s where he did more
help than he could have ever done here. He should not have been dean here.

Old Milton Eisenhower could always get to those things. Whenever it was over with it
didn’t matter what, and I can give you twelve examples, every decision when he finished—oh, he
said, “Who do you think we need as dean here?”

Now, he said, “I’d like to ask you, who do you think should be dean?”

I says, “Well, I want to do three things with you. I’m going to tell you, (a), how well I
know the person, the strengths of them as a dean and the weaknesses of them as a dean, and
that’s what I’ll do.” I said, “Let me start with my own chairman, Paul Talalay. Paul Talalay is the
type of man, if you walk in the room you want to put your hand on your billfold. He doesn’t seem
totally sincere. But if you fell in the river he’d be the first one to throw off his jacket and dive in.”

He laughed like hell. He said, “Would you be pushed—are you going to speak openly like
that about everybody?”

I said, “Absolutely.”

He said, “Would you be pushed out of shape if I asked my provost to come in and listen to
that my new provost?”

I said, “No.”

He said, “You can still speak as candidly?”

I said, “Yes.”

He says, “Dr. Steve Muller,” he says, “this is Dr. Coffey. This is Steven Muller, my new
provost. Sit down, Coffey.”

I don’t know how much of this you want, but you see what I’m driving at, this guy was
good. He understood human nature. He understood. When he’d sit there with that little baseball hat in that box for the Orioles games, he was the best little fan, but he was still the dignified president of Hopkins. You know what he did? He built Penn State. Did you know that?

Warren: Yes.

Coffey: He’s the man who put Penn State on the map, and is that ever a great institution.

    Well, now, you’ve been longer than you’ve planned to. It’s 5:32 and you didn’t plan to be here this long.

Warren: I’ve had a wonderful time.

Coffey: I wish you the very best at this.

Warren: Thank you. This has been a—this is the ultimate cherry on top.

Coffey: No, no, no. Let me tell you, I’m not being this—I tell my wife every day, I said, “The greatest thing happened when I married her and we had our children.” I said, “But we came to Hopkins that night and I walked up on that landing and I looked at that plaque and I realized, boy, these are some kind of people.” I said, “It’s never stopped since then.”

    I walk up and down this hall now, Bill Zinkham’s retired and all these people, Bill Scott, they’re all such wonderful people. You get the end of it. You think it’s hard, it’s very hard to say what it is, but it has something to do with what Osler did. I mean, he said, “Step back and let the students see.” There’s a plaque down that hall, you know that plaque about—and I want you to walk out and see this plaque and this will be the final thing, and you can get this from Paul Talalay.

    Which way you going? Out to the parking building?

Warren: I’m going down Washington Street.
Coffey: You’re parked on the street?

Warren: No, Washington Street, the Washington Street garage.

Coffey: You have to pay to get in there, don’t you?

Warren: Yes.

Coffey: No, you don’t. The reason you don’t have to pay is because I just got one of these things for these visitors from MIT and one of them didn’t have a car. [Laughter]

[Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

Coffey: There was once this man named [Jesse] Lazear. He was a Hopkins resident. He went down in Cuba to serve with the Yellow Fever Commission.

Do you know this story?

Warren: Please tell me.

Coffey: Yellow Fever Commission. That was when the guy, there was a hospital in Washington, military hospital, Walter Reed was running it. This young scientist believed that he figured out by talking and observation that the mosquito carried yellow fever.

Well, that was the farthest thing from anybody’s mind, that yellow fever was carried by mosquitoes. He argued with Walter Reed and he didn’t want to hear this. Walter Reed left for some trip in the United States, so the story goes, and he decided to take a bottle with mosquitoes in it and put those on the—caught out in the wild, and put those on the arm of a patient who had yellow fever and let them bite the patient that had yellow fever. Then to transfer that bottle with a little card on it over to his arm and then let the mosquito bite him.

Now, he knew that if he got yellow fever, if he was right, he had a 50 percent chance he was going to die of yellow fever. Fifty percent chance he was going to die. He moved the bottle
over, they bit him, then he recorded everything that happened, every hour, each day, right on through how long it took him to start feeling funny. How long to get the fever. Right up until he died.

It became apparent that he’d solved the problem. He died and his body was sent back. His records disappeared. Later Walter Reed got credit for solving the yellow fever problem.

Many years later the story broke, and in fact, it’s named Camp Lazear now down there, and somebody noticed there’s a plaque about that guy, and they came into the hall, main hall hospital, and there’s a plaque on the wall, an old plaque. Paul Talalay knows about this, because he’s the one, I think, helped clean it up or something. Nobody knows who put that plaque up, but whoever put that plaque on that wall knew the truth. They knew the story and they did it beautifully. So this mysterious plaque hanging on that wall. So when I walk by that, it’s man, Lazear was a real investigator.

So it’s those kind of people, the history, Osler the, that book you’re going to read, the Lazear, the fact that Reed Hall was one of the all-time great statisticians, the fact that Welsh thought that the way to stop all this disease was prevention. Made the School of Hygiene saves more lives than anybody. Everybody up and down Osler’s way of teaching, all the way up and down, it perpetuates itself.

Then people who’ve been here believe in it and they give the money. You can’t believe when you go to these donors, these associate meetings. I remember this year I was sitting there and Bloomberg’s last year had given $50 million, and at the time the stock market was looking a little bad, and I said, “Boy, I’ll bet he wish he had that 50 million back.”

Then in a few years he gave another 50 million. I mean, here’s a guy out of his heart
giving $100 million. That is a lot of bread. [unclear] oh, no, this is really super duper stuff.

I think what they see is they see that there’s something interesting about this place that brings the best of humans together. Not that it’s perfect, let me tell you, we still separate the black and white blood.

Anyway, I’ll let you go at that. When you go out what I want you to do if you would, you get in the main corridor, just walk down there, when you turn right to go to the Christ statue, instead of turning right to go to the Christ, walk twelve more feet down there, you’ll see the plaque on your left. Big plaque on the wall on the left as you go down towards the parking, but right past the main corridor.

Warren: The plaque to Lazear.

Coffey: The plaque to Lazear, and read what it says. When you read that you’ll say, “Whoa.” I sure would like to know who put that plaque up. But Walter Reed never—

Warren: I’ll see if I can find out that answer for you.

Coffey: Yes. Talk to Paul Talalay, because to me he was the one who tried to find out, and has records of all the plaques, but I don’t think there’s one of that one.

Warren: Interesting.

Coffey: Well, find out—

Warren: I presume he’s talked to Nancy McCall. She would know.

Coffey: That’s right, and you’ve got to make sure, like your report things, you got to check your facts, because some of these stories that I’m telling you could end up—

Warren: Oh, you got the Lazear story right.

Coffey: Like Churchill.
Warren: I’m thrilled to have you tell it to me.

Coffey: Churchill was asked, okay, was asked this question—oh, Bob Consadine or somebody, one of those great reporters, I don’t know, [unclear] is that a reporter? [unclear]. One of the great reporters in Washington was asked a question one time, “What made him a great reporter?”

He says, “You always check your resources.”

He says, “What’s the great story you ever worked on?”

He said, “Oh, the greatest story I’ve worked on was in the Second World War when the lights were out over the city. Churchill was visiting Washington, and he said to President Roosevelt, ‘What’s the greatest site you’ve ever seen?’ “He said, “The greatest site I’ve ever seen is late at night when everybody’s asleep they put me, occasionally, they put me in the wheelchair and they take me out the foot of Lincoln and I look across that reflecting pool and I see the Washington Monument, the Capitol and other things in the reflecting pool at the feet of Lincoln. That’s the greatest feeling I’ve ever had in Washington.”

He said, “I’ve never been up there.”

He said, “Let’s go. Let’s get the Secret Service tonight and let’s go turn the lights on and let’s go up there and look at that.”

They called the Secret Service about two o’clock and they said, “They turned the lights off.” So they carried Churchill and F.D.R. and they stood up there for fifteen minutes and then they brought the wheelchair down and put him back sitting up.

He says, “I was writing this story up and I thought I better check this story.” He says, “I called the British Embassy and asked them, gosh, that’s a lovely story, but there’s not a word of truth in it.” [Laughter]
So sometimes I feel like, I hope all this lore we learn is true, but I hope so.

Anyway, you take care and thank you for coming.

Warren: Thank you.

Coffey: Mary Elizabeth Warren from Annapolis.

Warren: Yes, but don’t call me Mary Elizabeth.

Coffey: I know, my middle [unclear] her middle name. Her name is Eula, E-U-L-A, that’s the first name. Her middle name is Mame, and she cannot stand Mame.

Warren: Oh, that’s great.

Coffey: Whenever I’m going to bug her, I said, “You know, Mame, don’t get so mad,” and she’ll throw something at me.

[End of interview]