Donald Perry

Interviewed by Lubna Azmi

March 1, 2020
LA: Lubna Azmi

DP: Donald Perry

Date: March 1, 2020

Subject: Donald Perry, a 1961 graduate of Johns Hopkins University, talks about his life, career, and his experience as one of the few African-American undergraduate students at Hopkins.

LA: All right. Hello. It is Sunday, March 1st, 2020. It is 12:26 PM. My name is Lubna Azmi. I am a freshman here at Johns Hopkins University. And today, I'm here with Donald Perry. We are conducting an oral history in Jordon Steele’s office in the Milton Eisenhower Library. Donald, how are you doing today?

DP: I'm doing fine, thank you.

LA: Oh, good to hear. And it's really just so good to finally meet you. And I'm just so excited to actually get into everything that we've been talking about the last few months. So yeah. Donald, where are you from, and where do you live now?

DP: Okay. I am from Baltimore, Maryland. I was born here 1941. I'm now living in Columbia, Maryland I have lived most of my life in New York. My mother's home, Peekskill, is considered my home as well as Baltimore.

LA: Good. So tell me about you growing up in Baltimore and both in New York.

DP: Okay. I grew up during World War II. I started...I came to this life in 1941 – the year the war began. No connection. [laughs] But I had my first memories, of course as a child, of the war. And through a child's eye, I was unaware of the horror that later I learned about. So most of the things I had of memories of the war were selfish; like the fact that my mother would hoard Hershey bars and bananas when we could get them. We had rations for things like gasoline and kerosene I meant. Things like that. Which of course to us was a real hardship. We had very little understanding of what was happening across the oceans. But in spite of that, the memories were good. There was one thing that does stand out that I caution all parents. And that is, be careful what you take your
children to. It's not only such things as – they can learn about the ABC's when they're ready. Don't force it on them too soon. And I'm speaking of this from the standpoint of, I had nightmares that lasted with me until I was out of high school.

One of – let me give you an example of what I mean. My uncle took me to see the shots of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that were released when I was seven years old. That was too much for a child. I had nightmares about that. The shadow of the man disintegrated, blown into bits. The three-legged dog. Also the war time propaganda, like the child – the rape of Nanjing, the little baby sitting in the middle of the railroad tracks all alone. And there are destroyed trains all around. That was horrible. The circus when I was, again, seven years old. We were at the circus, and the couple was doing a love duet here in Baltimore. And they fell backwards. The man fell and was able to cushion the woman. But he broke his back. And he got out of the hospital, they extended care after...well it would've been a good five years.

LA: Yeah.

DP: And don't tell me the people go to see falls when performance are there. It's a horrible experience, and you never forget it. You don't go to see them fall. You really don't. So those types of things, be careful of what your children are exposed to. Because it does make a big difference, and it has a lasting effect. I came from an abusive household. I had memories of my father that caused me to visit -- view a monster pulling the arm off of my mother. These are things that are not fit for children, and it does have a big impact.

LA: Yeah. and how about in your pre-teens and your teenage years in high school? Like, how did you allocate your time in Baltimore and in New York, and how was life like growing up then during that time in your life?

[0:05:00]

DP: I think my life was very pleasant. It seemed to me. Of course looking through a child's eye, everything – I don't remember...I mean, I thought I had a very good life. I was very fortunate even though my parents separated, I had two sets of loving grandparents. And I feel they were the best. I didn't realize at the time how brilliant my grandfather was – that he taught me tolerance, acceptance and love of other people...that my grandmother felt the same way. We were never allowed to make ethnic slurs or racial slurs or religious slurs or any type of individual...as a group to slur them.

And I feel that was very important in making me a better person than I
would've been had I not had that type of training. And I think it's very important we say it's a cliché. It's very difficult to teach a child to hate. And it's our responsibility to teach them to love. And the whole idea that our Western civilization is built upon since the time of the Romans when we adopted Christian, Judaic values – all three of the major Western religions believe in love, agape, in tolerance. We are told certain religions, “Oh, they don't believe in tolerating anyone who doesn’t believe.” That's not true. Most religions – Muhammed taught us to love those who had the book. Judaism teaches us to love. If you're not a Jew, you still ought to be loved. And of course, Christ took it to the ultimate; that agape is the highest type of love. And it's to be practiced.

And I think if we did that, we would have such a better society. And it's so easy to love. You have to struggle to hate. You really do. And it's difficult to hate something that you know or someone that you know. And when one of the things that – at least, yeah, we can’t regulate the way people feel and believe. But we can regulate their behavior. And if their behavior is set along the right path, they will come to the conclusions that are needed. I think that the difference between when I was in school starting 73 years ago and the child starting today – or even the last few years – that they have a view, or at least they are exposed, to other people. Everybody is not like my family.

But I love them, I accept them. I can't close off the fact that in our society today, I will know people who do not have my religion. And I will love and respect them; whereas if I were isolated, I don’t think I would know that. I think that one of the most important things is ethnicity. When you live in a neighborhood, when your neighbor doesn't look like you or like most of the members of your family – though increasingly today, we're so mixed we don't know what to do.

But when you're dealing with people who come from a different culture, a different background and you gain so much from it, the one thing I most treasure about living in New York and about living in Washington and now living in Ellicott City is the fact that I see the world. I have friends even, certainly acquaintances and neighbors who come from every background imaginable. People I never thought I would meet anyone...I remember one time picking up a guy to give him a ride to the campus, and he told me he was from Lichtenstein. I never expected to meet anyone from a small country like that.

LA: Yeah.

DP: And I think that life is richer when we do it. The fact that we can dine with the best of the world's cooking that we converse with people who have had experiences we will never experience – some of which we don't
want to, but we want to know about them. I am proud to have known all kinds of people. And I think that when you get to know people, you feel very differently even about yourself.

[0:10:00]

I felt as bad being in the Nazi concentration camps as I did being on the slave ship that was reconstructed. You could understand why people feel the way they do. And then, of course, let's not forget the positive side of it; to be able to enjoy the food that other people enjoy, to be able to see what they find amusing, what their music and art is like. That's important.

LA: Yeah.

DP: And it enriches life.

LA: And for you having that knowledge and going into your life with that love and acceptance of people, how did it influence your experience in high school? Do you have any recollection of any memories of people you encountered maybe that had that same love – that same tolerance of people?

DP: Well I was in high school at a time where we were making a transition. It was difficult. The 1954 Supreme Court decisions came down, and Maryland – thank goodness – did not believe in massive resistance. They decided to try it as a freedom of choice thing – which meant, of course, that the schools remained segregated for the most part. But at least they were making progress. There was some disturbances, but nothing very bad. I think they handled it very well. Because I don't think even though anyone who observed from the University of Maryland, the University of Texas – Thurgood Marshall was paving the way for this and it was inevitable.

But still. The fact that the Justice decided that this must be a unanimous...Warren decided it must be a unanimous decision. "All nine of us must agree. Because it's going to be controversial." And it was. Of course, Little Rock exploded. Mississippi exploded. But we did it. And sure, we still have a lot to do. But that was a pivotal decision, and I think that it is that and the armed forces – the integration of the armed forces. I think those two things did more to transform us and make us a better people and a more united people than we had ever been before. And let us hope that current events do not see that disappear.

LA: Yeah. and did you go – what was the name of your high school?
I went to – the Booker T. Washington was the junior high school. I went to Frederick Douglas here in Baltimore. It was, then, one of the best high schools in Maryland. It has since fallen. Well there's a funny story about that I must tell you. To make it acceptable, it was previously an all-girls – white girls – school. In order to keep schools separate as possible, they moved the white girls to a building next to the caddycorner, Greyhound and Trailways bus terminals. Now where would you most not want a girl's school? /laughs/ Next to a – I mean, I don't mean to interrogate people who ride buses. But let's face it. You get some characters. And they gave us, say, a swimming pool.

And that was great. Let me tell you something that every chance I get, I get so angry that I have to tell it. One of the things they did to us was that the school board decided that the boys would have to swim in the nude, because the lint from our trunks would clog the filters. Yet when the girls had the pool, they could of course have full body bathing suits. I needn't tell you that this was a child abuser - or whatever you want to call them – paradise. And sure enough, the swimming coach some years after I left was arrested for molesting boys. I never appealed to him, because I was young, immature and he liked more manly boys.

But the fact that they would require us to swim in the nude – particularly when we're going through puberty, you have questions about your own sexuality, about your own desirability and all of this. I just think that was one of the dumbest things and the cruelest things that I have seen done to children in school. And this was – as far as I know, it was the decision of the black school board. 'Cause we had separate school boards. And why they ever followed this abuser advice and decided to do that to us, I will never know. I never learned to swim. I had to wait.

And one summer in Peekskill when my grandmother had her seven grandchildren there, I learned to swim. And it happened that it was a white female instructor. My grandmother got very upset, because the woman told me, "Oh, you've made remarkable progress because blacks don't usually learn to swim this well." Well I think she probably didn't realize that was not only racist, but it was a bad thing to say. And I have no hard feelings about her. In fact, I was so proud of having learned after it took me so long, and I was one of two students who learned to dive at the end of the year. And the reason I was able to dive was that a friend of mine's father took us to teach us to dive. And his son wouldn't do it. And when I did it, his son finally decided he would try.

And so, it worked out for everyone. But we had such a good time. And learning to swim again was changing point. In New York now, if there's a
pool available you have to be able to swim to graduate. and I agree with that. Because look at the children who die by going into a neighbor's pool or not being able to swim. In fact, I don't like to go on a boat with predominantly non-swimmers because of that. I really don't. But that was important to me. Very important. It was like I'm worth something, because I was so difficult. I didn't realize that when my father joined the navy, he couldn't swim. But of course, the navy had a novel way of teaching you then. They'd just throw your body in the water, [laughs] and you'd sink or else you were humiliated. But I was glad I learned.

LA: How was it going – so it was an all-black school that you went to. Co-ed.

DP: Yes. It was co-ed, it was all-black. We had one the entire season – I would say we had one white student for a short time. A young woman who had transferred from Pennsylvania. Her mother decided she could – didn't make any difference to her. She'd go to the nearest school. But after a few weeks, she discovered that the neighbors. Didn't like it, and the daughter was not comfortable. Because the other white kids, "What are you doing, going to school with those people?" But that was just an aberration until the change. Now I don't know what that high school is like today. I know it's not what it was. Ours, for example, was the last class that had four years of Latin. And that, I'm grateful for. That's why languages came easily after Latin. I learned more English in Latin than I learned in [laughs] English class.

LA: And for you, you majored in linguistics.

DP: Yes.

LA: That's right? And so, after high school where did you go? Where did your life take you? Where did you major in linguistics?

DP: I majored in Germanic philology. I read Icelandic – old Norse, that is; old, high German, middle high German, old English, middle English, old Saxon. Those were – the Gothic. Because I wanted to understand the evolution of the English language. And it was fun. The only thing about it that was not fun was that when you're reading medieval language, it's dirty. As anyone who is able to and has read Chaucer and [laughs] – it's dirty. And I remember one time, we were with Professor Anderson who was the Icelander who taught me old English, Gothic, et cetera. [0:20:00]

And we had a visitor – a graduate student – who had taken the Gothic. And he was with us. And the only thing really in Gothic that survives other than one page of a calendar is the Bible and parts of the New
Testament. But we were discussing one of the words there that happen to – in modern English, in modern German – is a very filthy word. But at the time that the Bible was translated in 325...around then, AD into Gothic, it was not dirty. And so, we ended up with the discussion Icelandic, dirty words tend to be three letter words. In English, they're four, but actually three if you consider it's an orthographic thing the “CK” is one letter, basically, for example. But anyway. Speaking about this with a man in his '80s, he was professor emeritus. It was embarrassing. But when he giggled, then we sort of relaxed. But it was just part of growing up.

LA: Yeah. And where did you study?

DP: Here at Johns Hopkins. Yes.

LA: Okay. So what got you to Johns Hopkins and like...?

DP: Johns Hopkins. Yeah. The only two schools that I know of on the East Coast that specialize in that type of, not linguistics in the sense of like structural linguistics, but in the terms of philology – University of North Carolina and Johns Hopkins. Johns Hopkins was recognized as the finest school in Maryland, and I felt I wanted to go here. My first time with anything to do with Johns Hopkins was at – one of my heroes growing up was Doctor Linus Pauling, a Nobel Prize winner in chemistry who decided he would devote his life...like Schweitzer who, 30 years, he did his thing. And then 30 years, he went to do missionary work. I think that when Linus Pauling decided that he would devote his chemical knowledge to medicine, I was so impressed. And the first time, I was still in high school. I hadn't been accepted yet. I didn't know, but I was determined to get to Hopkins. And he did a two-part lecture open to the public. The first day, it was on chemical cures for mental illness – disease called phenylketonuria, which develops from inability to digest certain ketones. And they cause retardation. That's not the word. I'm sorry...under-development of the intellect. And the second was – and this was very new then. This was 1957 – was on sickle cell anemia. Which of course has one benefit, and that is that it resists malaria.

But very little was known, and it was interesting to hear him. And I was just fascinated. And the other person that really I knew about that associated with Johns Hopkins was a gentleman who was betrayed by a fellow professor and given over to McCarthy. He wrote a book, Ordeal by Treason. He was in out of Mongolia, Doctor Owen Lattimore. And he was accused of being a communist or fellow traveler. Whatever. And of course, working in the library, I got to meet him. And, I mean, I was just absolutely thrilled. So the people that I saw lately influenced at the
community that Hopkins had on the community...yes, I wanted to go to Hopkins.

LA: So how was your experience once you got to Hopkins?

DP: It was mixed. I enjoyed it. We still had a long way to go. Hopkins was still predominantly white and all male. Except for, the graduate school did admit women because a woman who forced them to by giving them money to save their biophysics lab. And she insisted that women be admitted. They said, "Okay. We'll admit them to the graduate school." But it was still – Johns Hopkins had specified in his will that the school be open to the sons of freedmen – the ex-slaves.

[0:25:00]

Of course then, the idea of male and female schools was not widespread. So it was accepted that it be...but times change, and the university should've reacted quicker to the fact that the world has changed. They resisted and kept the number of blacks very low. And I entered out of the whole...there were certainly more than 1,000. I think it was close to 2,000 undergraduate freshmen. And only 4 were black. When I left, only 2. So it stayed low. And as the NAACP discovered and gave the information to the neighbor, Hopkins had a quote on Jews. Only a certain number of Jewish students were to be admitted.

And I'm sure if we looked at the record back in the '50s and '60s as Asians became more prevalent in education, there was undoubtedly some type of quota. They would seem determined that it would remain an all-white-male institution. And this was true, and it colored the way I felt about the university. And they were so disingenuous about it. For example. In 1961 when we had formed the group and we were protesting and so forth, one of the things we brought up was, "Well you don't even have students of color from foreign nations. You don't have any African students." "Oh, we're getting a Rhodesian." Guess what? It was a white Rhodesian in a white regime that was like South Africa. So that was not the answer that we were looking for.

But I want to temper that with, I'm not bitter because there were so many wonderful people. When I needed a summer job, the first thing that the employment service did was stick a broom in my hand. That turned out to be a blessing. Because one of the areas I cleaned was where the chief librarian's office was. And he noticed how well I did and how I made sure that I did my job...that when I applied to the library, I didn't go through the office. I went to him directly. And I was hired. And Jeanette Kabeem, Classification, was one of the most wonderful people. She really helped me so much. And it was a wonderful experience working in the library. I
almost became a librarian because of it, and I still am fond of librarians and the service they perform. It was wonderful. And of course as a language major, they were glad to get me. So I loved that.

LA: The group that you just mentioned – that's actually how I found out about you and how we were able to connect. Can you talk about what it was, what it was named and what you were doing?

DP: Okay. Well I didn't – it was towards the end. We were not that formal about a group. We wanted to get together for having a greater impact for – how should I put it – for making sure our voice was heard. We started largely a group of graduate students, for the most part, who were appalled at the lack of responsiveness of the university to the fact that the world was changing. There was the Supreme Court decision on no more segregated schools. We were beginning to see – starting with North Carolina A&T, starting with North Carolina with the sit-ins. And we worked with a group. Again, very informal, predominantly blacks with some white neighbors of ours that we started predominantly doing sit-ins, et cetera. It was very funny at first in a way.

[0:30:00]

Because Maryland had a statute that came from the English common law about hotels and places of eating and dining and so forth – drinking – that if you wanted to bar somebody, every person that you wanted to bar individually had to be told, "You're not welcome here." And it was about a page-and-a-half. And it was somewhat pathetic, because many of the restaurants – the people did not speak English. In one case, one of the owner's daughters was the one who had to read this legal document. Because it was written, of course, in highly legal language. In fact, it became funny, because at one point one of the young women would just get tired and say, "Let me finish that for you. I can read it for you." That's how it became almost like a joke.

But we were appalled at what we saw. I was very young. I was barely 16 when I started college. So I was the youngest member of the group. I couldn't even go in a bar, which was then 21 by the time I graduated. And I sort of – to a degree – was like their mascot. We met in one of the student's offices in the biophysics lab. And since at the time I still didn't drink beer – I had no interest in it. But I would be the beer keeper since I didn't drink. And there was a door, refrigerator. And never the light, because the light switch was there.

But the beer was always right there when I opened the door. And I was rather shocked to find out when I asked, "Well what is that room for?" Said, "Oh, that's a specimen room. Right now, we have a couple of
cadavers.” Well I [laughs] didn’t know that. Suppose I had walked into the clothes, and I walked in and found that cadaver. But anyway. It was a group of predominantly graduate students, as I said. And I guess that they were people that cared. It was almost entirely white. Let's face it.

LA: Wow.

DP: The very few black students and most of them were afraid to participate...that the school might take action or something. And they were just afraid.

LA: Yeah. And how many other black students were there that were a part of it?

DP: I think only one really. There was seven at the total at the time. And one did join us. None of the graduates, none of the black graduate students joined us. And there were very few of them. But there were some. I don't know why. You see, you quite often don't have to beat somebody over the head or tell them, "You can't." You can make it clear that I will retaliate if you don't do what I say. And that was the fear. Like one young woman told me, “I may want to teach. I'm not going to sign any petition granting equal rights or any of that kind of thing." We had just gotten over the McCarthy period. "And I'm not going to take a chance. I may want to teach. And if they see I've signed something like this, they'll say I'm a communist."

So it was a time of trial. But again. The expression is so true. If you want to know – if a man wants to know himself, let him see how he handles adversity. And even in the worst of times, there are people who will stand up. You know the old thing? I can't remember the exact words about, "They came for the Jews. I said nothing, did nothing because I wasn't a Jew. They came for the Catholics. I wasn't a Catholic," et cetera, et cetera till – and then, they came for me. But there was no one to stand up for me. And that is so true. You get to realize that as King so eloquently put it, adversity against one of us is adversity against all of us. Injustice against any one of us is injustice against all of us.

[0:35:00]

And one of the things that has changed from 50 years ago – for example. Asians did not want to be called people of color. They did not want to associate with us or with any people of color. Latinos were busy blonding their hair thinking they could, you know, be accepted if they got rid of their accent. And each ethnic group acted alone with exception, in many cases, of the Jews. Because they knew what persecution was like. And in fact, when – I shouldn't say the name – a restaurant that was Jewish
refused many Jews. Because to them, they were just blacks. And then they found they were Jews, they were apologetic and invited them back. And the Jewish community hit them hard. That was not acceptable at all. Now that you know that they are Jews, they're still dark-skinned people, and you had no right to do that.

So with the exception of the Jews, it was very little support. There really was, except for individuals like Mike Ambrose, Roman Catholic. And when we'd tease him about being in the church, he'd say, "Better to work for change within the church than to be without and not have a voice." And he was so right. Because later, the shock of shocks, I joined with the Latter-Day Saints. The Mormons. And they were the only religious group – other than of course the Dutch South Africans and so forth – who were...the Dutch-reformed who did not join the Civil Rights Movement. But what impressed me when I saw them was, these people had from the time of Brigham Young – a century-and-a-half – been taught that blacks were cursed. And here when the church changed, they changed.

And when I talked in that church and felt so welcome, I couldn’t believe it. And then when the bishop was black, that did it. So it was a time of great...I guess all times, as the Chinese would say. "May you live in interesting times." It was an interesting time. There was the best of us and sometimes the worst of us. I remember having a cross burned in the lawn on campus. Of course, the police did not. It was a cross. I mean, anybody who can look at a burned cross and see it's a cross. One of the worst things was the police. But it's the community’s fault. I commuted. That's why when they refused Duke Ellington service when he was a visitor at the Greek restaurant, I was not with them. Because I wanted to get home before dark. And I'm serious.

LA: Talk about why you wanted to get home before dark.

DP: The police. They were doing what the community wanted them to. Roland Park is a very exclusive community. And they wanted it all white. The only blacks they wanted were those who worked in the kitchens who drove the cars or, you know, generally were service people. And I remember one time specifically when I was really annoyed that – luckily I held my temper. Otherwise I would probably be dead. The officer took my identification, and it wasn’t laminated. It was just plain cardboard. And he looked at it, and it had been raining. and it was a nice puddle there. And he made sure he was right over the puddle and just let it fall into the puddle.

And this was the type of insult that we got used to. You never knew when...I'd be waiting at the bus. "Boy. Come here." This type of thing. I don't blame the police, though. They were doing what the community
wanted. Then when I came back to Maryland and came to Howard County – which in spite of a certain President, had a consent decree which required a...going back years, that they have special sensitivity training for dealing with people with disabilities and for people of different ethnicities.

[0:40:00]

Specifically because they made the mistake of stopping a black doctor in his Lincoln Continental and abusing him. And part of the settlement was, "You're not going to do this again." And it has worked. I know I've been out past midnight walking – which I sometimes do and I did when I was younger, or I did until I became ill – and I didn't have any fear of the police. They never bothered me.

The one time they stopped me was, they were looking for two young, white men who had – well, they were boys who had...they were at a home for people with mental problems, and they had not checked in. They had gone missing. These boys were troubled. Many of them came from broken homes or dysfunctional homes. And I remember when the officer stopped me and asked me about it. He said, "I just want to remind you that the community is more danger to them than they are to you. Because kids like that are abused. Let's face it. You know? They obviously – that's where predators...they find young people like that. Broken homes, unwanted, et cetera. And so, I was proud of my neighbors that they were found. I was in an age-restricted community. And many of my neighbors came out to make sure that when the boys were picked up, they were not abused and they were taken back into where they belonged.

LA: And that was – what time of your life was that? It was Howard County you said?

DP: Yes. Howard County. That was about ten years ago. Just about ten years ago. Right.

LA: Okay.

DP: That way.

LA: A big change from versus when you lived in Baltimore with Baltimore PD and then...

DP: Big change. And New York was just as bad. Long Island was worse, I think, in many respects. It was really worse. I remember, for example, one time profiling is such an ugly thing and so unnecessary. Police officers stopped me. I was walking my dog. A lab.
LA: How old were you here?

DP: I was in my early 50's.

LA: Early 50's.

DP: He stopped me and said, "Let me have your identification," and so forth." Stand over there." And then, he called it in. Then when he came back, he said, "I just had to check, because you fit the description of someone who robbed a car." I mean, robbed a store earlier. When I found out the description of the perpetrator, it was a man in his late-teens, early 20's, black man. I'm a black man in my early 50's? You can't tell the difference between 30 years of age? I mean, this was absurd.

LA: Yeah. And your experience in Roland Park. How old were you then?

DP: Then I was about 14, 15. Yes.

LA: 14, 15.

DP: Between the ages of – I'm sorry. Between the ages of 16 and 20.

LA: So that was in college.

DP: Right, in college. Right.

LA: Okay. And so, the organization that you said you're a part of – I don't know if you remember the name. But it was...do you remember it?

DP: No.

LA: It was the Committee of Basic Freedoms.


LA: Yes. And so, what was your involvement specifically within the organization, and then what was your guys' impact in the school?

DP: I was just supportive. As I said, they were forming as I was beginning to leave. So I only had less than a year to work with them. What we did was, we raised issues. One, that to show you how times have changed...I don't know if this is important, but I think it does represent the times. We had a young, gay man who worked – who was black – who worked in the library. And, I mean, he was really gay. Obviously. And these students were giving him a rough time. And a couple of us went to see the President to ask him if, you know, he could do something. And when the
President says, "Well, you know, so-and-so brings it on himself. So don't expect us to be able to protect him from what he brings on himself" – well at the time, we accepted that because that's the way everyone felt about gays. I mean, you know, they weren't very popular. Let's put it that way. And I don't think anyone would do that today.

LA: Yeah.

[0:45:00]

DP: But we accepted it. But that was the type of thing we would bring up. One of the things, working in the library. Sometimes I would have coffee or, as they liked to say, tea with library workers. Most of whom were white and female. And I remember one cold winter's day, a group of guys rolled rocks up in snow balls and pelted us trying to hit us with the rocks. This is the type of thing that we tried to face with them. You know, do something about this type of behavior. And of course, admissions. That was the main thing. Because there was just such a dearth of admissions of people of color, of any color.

LA: Oh. 'Cause I had looked at the document that you guys had drafted towards that administration. And you guys had recommendations and demands of them.

DP: Sure.

LA: Yeah. One, undertaking educational campaigns eliminate discrimination for blacks that would potentially attend JHU. Number two, to add black high schools to their touring to help build connections. Number three, hiring process to align with the equal employment opportunity ordinance. And number four, for JHU Board of Presidents to publicly denounce discrimination and segregation. "No person is truly educated until he can leave his tolerance behind him," was a quote within it.

DP: That expresses it. You see, one of the things that concerned us...for me, it wasn't such a problem because I was living in town. I wasn't on campus. But a black wouldn't know where to get a haircut, because they wouldn't cut his hair around there. There was no place we would go to lunch. None of the restaurants were integrated. The only restaurants were in Northwest. There was one in particular that was integrated. But otherwise, we couldn't go any place together. Amazingly I managed to get into a theater with an understanding with the owner – she decided when I asked, "I really want to see this film" – it was a theater that specialized in German films. And they had the Life of Beethoven.

And she said, "Well if you come in here with any idea of demonstrating,
you're not going to be admitted. You can come by yourself or with a friend, and you can come like anybody else. But the minute you make it into an issue, you're not welcome." But at least she let me in. That was progress for that time. But that was the sort of thing we had to deal with. In fact, it was funny. Because when the black students were from out of town...yeah. They would come to somebody like me to ask, "Where can I get my hair cut?" Now that may seem like a little thing, but the university could do something about that I feel. We gave them a lot of business.

LA: Yeah.

DP: But of course, we had segregated fraternities on campus. So it's a little hard to tell somebody else when your own house isn't clean.

LA: Yeah. And you have spoken to me about some of your activism on campus and like your role as a student. So how did you interact with other students?

DP: Again. That was varied. People are individuals. And unless the society sets a tone, you're going to find a wide variation. For example. The President of the Newman Society. Again. I won't give his name, because I'm sure— I have forgiven him—and I'm sure that he might not be the same person if he's still alive. But in a chemistry class, he objected to my sitting beside him in a lecture and got up and moved. "Do you have to sit here?" And when I said, "This is where I want to sit," he got up and moved. So you had that type. But then, you had completely different other people that were just completely different.

[0:50:00]

But you can't really change unless institutions take a lead. People are happy with their lazy, prejudiced thinking unless you show them it's wrong or unless you give them examples. Like, I remember that – one stereotype I don't fit among others is, I'm not an athlete. I was always the last one chosen when, you know, they used to have that habit of lining you up and you chose...the captain of the team choosing, then they would take turns. I was always the last one. Well Hopkins, of course, had – for freshmen – a compulsory physical education where you were exposed to everything from golf to lacrosse, of course.

And I remember when it was time to wrestle so that he could avoid pairing any one of the students with me and causing both of us embarrassment, the wrestling teacher would wrestle with me. Now that's pathetic. I was glad he did, because then I didn't face the possibility that one of the students would not want to touch me. But then on the other hand, again, as the world's worst athlete I did find somebody who did like to play badminton.
And I did too. And I found somebody who liked to fence, and I did too. But those aren't the typical, you know, rah-rah sports.

And of course, anybody who goes to Hopkins who doesn't play lacrosse – I mean, they're like somebody from Mars. But see there, you can't judge everybody under the same ruler. I mean, there's such a mixed bag. The only thing I do really fault...the administration for not taking the lead. I really do. They did not take the lead on the social changes that were coming. They did the same thing with women. They held out till they could no longer hold out. I would've expected a more progressive attitude. A university by its definition should be inclusive. And that they failed to see their role to lead the community bothers me.

LA: Yeah. And for you as a young person being able to stand up for that and show love and show tolerance...how was that like for you? And why were you that person? You've talked about other students and how they went about things. How did you see yourself fitting within the community having those ideas?

DP: I felt that it was such a rich, diverse community in so many respects in spite of itself. I felt that I had opportunities that I had never had. I felt that I'd met people that ordinarily I wouldn't cross paths with. And I just felt that – number one, I was very fortunate. "Why me?" One of four selected to attend, and with the full scholarship. I mean, that was really luck. That? I didn't earn that. That was luck. And I felt I owed something in return. I was proud of the public education I got before that to get me there. I was happy with being there. I felt that I owed something. I really did. The taxpayers spent a lot of money on me.

As it turned out later, the government paid my graduate degree program. Because I was working for the government at the time, and I was in a special program. I mean, I feel that when I look back on my life, I have very few regrets. Because most of the things were opportunities. Even the bad things were opportunities. And I really feel that I have been really fortunate. I got more than my share out of this society and out of life in general. And now when I'm facing a life-threatening disease, I am shocked at the compassion – not sympathy. That, I didn't want on any circumstances.

[0:55:00]

But I'm surprised at the love I felt. I'm surprised at the care I've gotten. Yeah. There have been some bad experiences with care – particularly with privacy and dignity and that sort of thing. But since I've been dealing with the oncologist – and they're all women – and they have treated me with more courtesy, privacy, respect for my dignity than I have had in a
long time from most men. Particularly urologists. So what I'm trying to say – I guess I'm rambling – is that I feel that, if anything, I should be paying back. I owe this society. I owe the people who helped me. People will often say – when you say, "Oh, I don't know how I can repay you," you can repay me by providing help to another. And that is so true. Many of the people like Miss Cabeen, I'm sure, have gone on because they'd be over 100. And I really feel that I owe it to them to see that I pass on what they passed onto me.

LA: Yeah.

DP: You're smiling?

LA: I am. No. Yeah. 'Cause I just love hearing about your entire experience. And it's really interesting to just see the contrast of how things are now here to how-

DP: Oh, yes.

LA: Yes.

DP: So it was worth it. The efforts of so many people.

LA: And you were one of those people.

DP: Well, but don't forget. There are people who gave their lives. That's why when somebody tells me they're not voting, I get very angry. I say, "Fool. Do you realize that people died that you would have the right to go into that booth? You owe it to them." If you don't think you are worth it – don't ever tell me you don't vote. "They're all alike." People died to give you that right. And that includes whites. That includes women. That includes everyone. The whole country was founded by people who were trying to escape some form of regression. Isn't that true?

LA: Yeah. Yeah.

DP: People died to come to these shores. And it's up to us to make it worth it.

LA: Yeah.

DP: Sorry. I don't mean to preach.

LA: No. No. I love it, and I completely agree with you. And it's a big struggle. And I know you're very humble with your role that you played on campus, but I just want you to talk more about some like...was it difficult for you to really take stances of – because you were one of,
what...when you graduated one of two black students. Like, how was that process for you?

DP: I never had the fear that some people have. As long as I'm not accosted physically, I don’t – you're not going to scare me by telling me you're going to withhold something or something of that nature. 'Cause I'm going to fight you, and I feel I have a chance of winning. Now I admit I’m going to try my damnedest to avoid physical confrontations, because I'm not going to win. I'm not a fighter.

LA: You're a wrestler.

DP: [laughs] That was short-lived experience. It was enjoyable, though, to at least experience that, know that this is one of the things, aspects of life that people do wrestle. The Greeks did it. Why can't we? But I guess it's a question of just deciding how far you're going to let it go. And if you don't speak up for yourself and for others, no one will; and that when you consider, again, what people have done...we like to tell the story of Peter denying Christ.

[1:00:00]

But what about the people who stood with him? What about the people who went to the gas chambers themselves for standing up for those who were being gassed? There have always been people that make life worth living and that make you feel that, "If they could do that, then so little is asked of me. Certainly I can do my little bit."

LA: Yes. And what were your sentiments during your last year? How did you feel – like in that...I know that things have changed for you and how you viewed your experience. But in that time, how did you feel? How did you feel about the school? How did you feel about being a Hopkins student?

DP: Okay. I will confess that when I left, I was somewhat bitter. I was disgusted with the lack of progress, with the lack of commitment by the university. And I didn't want to come back. I didn't want very much to do with the school. I never joined the alumni. I've never been to a homecoming, et cetera. Over the years, that has softened. That, "Who am I to judge them? They had other priorities. They had other pressures."

Yes. I have changed from that, because I did not want anything to do with the university. I just wanted to get away. I even forgot about – I always had such a positive view towards the library staff and the library. But I wouldn’t let that bring me back. But I cannot stress how much that library experience was...I don’t know what makes librarians such special people, but they are.
LA: Yeah. So you had told me that when you had graduated, there had been instance – do you remember what we talked about? 'Cause it was you and one other black students that when you had walked onstage. Something had happened. Can you talk about that?

DP: Oh. At graduation, Edward R Murrow was our guest speaker. And he had to change his remarks. It was obvious. When I got up to get my degree, they booed me because I was an activist. And the nerve of him, the attitude was, you know, "He's not staying in his place." And I knew that things had been said about me, because the white members of the group told me in many cases what was said. And of course, I can understand why people would be afraid. I can understand why people are afraid. Because when you have – I don't know if you've ever seen the pictures of the Little Rock Nine. The little girls and boys who walked through that howling, spitting crowd of people.

I had experienced nothing like that, but I can understand how fear does take...I mean, look how many martyrs the Civil Rights Movement alone has produced. You do have a strong fear, because I insist it's always the other side – although now you wonder – that has all the violence. And let's face it. They do tend to be of a specific type. And the fact that they had had the nerve to burn a cross, the fact that I didn't feel comfortable leaving the campus at night...tell you a funny incident that happened there. This is funny. Sometimes I would have dinner or lunch – but mostly dinner – on campus at the dorm with friends. And I remember one evening we were...by this time, of course, I was President of the German Honor Society, et cetera. And I had native fluency. And we were talking in the dorm. We were in the dining room. And they didn't hide their disdain.

[1:05:00]

And one of them said, finally, "He's probably a war brat and learned German before English." Well that's very insulting to assume that a black American can't learn a foreign language, but it was funny. I had to laugh. I really did, because ignorance can be funny when it's not directly hurting you. I just wanted to say that on the side, because I thought that was one of the funniest experiences I had had here on campus. But there was that...when faced with just how much some of these people hate you, it is daunting. It really is frightening. The only thing that surprised me was that, to a degree, they hated the whites who fought for black rights as much – if not more – than they hated blacks ourselves. That always shocked me. It's like an admission that, "I know I'm wrong, and this person is right. So I hate them for showing me up." That's really the way I read it. They would never say it, but that's what I feel they must be feeling.
LA: And were there influences from civil rights going on in the Baltimore community on your guys' activism on campus?

DP: Yes.

LA: Okay. Can you talk about those?

DP: Well we had a group of young black people who were not only students, but just generally members of the community who engaged in the sit-ins. I guess they were mostly students at other institutions. But not all. Funny incident there. One of the people who had become one of my best friends, Herb, was Jewish. And he would quite often go with a young black woman as a couple to try to get seats at a restaurant. And it was hilarious when we thought about it. They got to the point where they assumed that Herb was black and that she was white. Because she was light-skinned. She wasn't that light-skinned.

But it shows how people must feed their own prejudice. They couldn't imagine that Herb could be that interested in the black – particularly the theaters. They really...he was almost banned. But I guess with that around us, we felt – to a degree – somewhat challenged by the fact that...here, if in North Carolina and Georgia and places where they are really treated violently, if they can do something how can we sit here when we're out fairly safe? I mean, nobody's going to shoot us or even dare to spit on us in a restaurant. Whereas these people had to go through that daily.

LA: Yeah.

DP: So yes. There was that influence that we felt, "They are doing their share at a great cost. Certainly we can do something." And I guess one of the things that really, absolutely annoys me...I just don't know how to express my annoyance enough. Route 301 – routes going between Baltimore, Washington and New York. Particularly New York and Washington were being used by Africans and by people of color from all over the world, because the United Nations in New York and the government here in Washington – there was constantly travel between the two – that was the concern with Congress with passing the civil rights act for equal accommodations. They weren't concerned about the native black Americans.

[1:10:00]

They were concerned about the Russians who were whipping the shit out of us – excuse me – in the UN by pointing out our prejudice and wooing
African nations and so forth to, you know, promote their policies. And I just found that somewhat ironic and annoying; that that seemed to be more important to Congress than the fact that their own citizens were suffering.

LA: I just also wanted to show you in regard to the Committee of Basic Freedoms – and I want it to be on record. I was going through the old Johns Hopkins News-letters, and it is...if we count it, it was in 1961 published on March 3rd. So about, what, 59 years ago. This was published 59 years ago and like two days. The freedom committee, and it had a little section of your guys' organization. Here, I just wanted to show you. Right there.

DP: Okay. Where are we?

LA: There.

DP: Oh.

LA: Yes. But I just wanted to leave it for the record on March 3rd, 1961 there was a small publication in the Johns Hopkins newsletter about the Communitte of Basic Freedoms.

DP: Uh-huh. Okay. Yes. That was just toward the end, because by June I was gone.

LA: Yeah.

DP: So it was only a few months that I was really with them.

LA: Yeah. Do you know about their impact after you left?

DP: Not really.

LA: Yeah. I didn't find much in the university records. It was only that paper.

DP: You know, I think they had a collection of people that came together at that time that looks like a critical mass. And probably, people had moved onto other things. I mean, you know, look. We were involved in Vietnam – all the things that...there were other things taking people's attention. And maybe that's the reason. That's all. Or let's look at it positively. Efforts were being made. The university was beginning to exert a more open – now I don't know how they do with admissions or any of that, but they did appear to be more open to the idea that we're here to service the entire community.

LA: Yes.
I really do feel that there was a change in them. I hate to put it as us and them. It was a change in the leadership of the university, I feel, that probably helped. Now one thing that I have to tell you that was very annoying...again, I won't use his name. One of the leading television news people-

For Baltimore city?

For Baltimore city...began a broadcast when we were having a demonstration here.

In what year about?

'61.

'61. Okay.

“Well it's Spring time again. The Hopkins students are on the march." He was saying that, you know, this was like, "What are you – Spring break, getting drunk in Florida." That's what he equated this with. and that was rather annoying. I can still see his face and the disgusting...his look when he was talking about it. But hey. What are you going to do?

Yeah.

But I think that the whole country was undergoing change. And maybe the committee people decided there were other ways of doing this.

And for you, after you graduated where did life take you?

Well I moved to New York. I took a job in a university library. Really, again, enjoyed that. But pay was rather static. And meanwhile, I had registered as a substitute teacher. Well in order to get a teaching certificate in New York, you must take New York history and a certain amount of education courses. The school was so desperate for teachers, they were willing to do that – for them to take the pay to pay for it. What happened was two things. They found out that I had had one year of Russian at that point. They wanted to hire me to teach Russian. They were that desperate. Don't forget. We had just been humiliated by Sputnik and by Russian men and women walking in space, and we were behind. So every school wanted Russian.

But what really got me the job was, I was substituting for the German
teacher there who was planning to leave the following year. She had been wounded in the bombing of Dresden. Allied bombs. She had one leg, etcetera. She wanted that one last year, and then she was going to retire. And so, they wanted a teacher there to take her place. But I was — when I was substituting for her, I didn't know this at the time. The daughter of the Vice President – President of the middle school – was in my class. And we were talking about Wagner and his trip across the Red Sea...I'm sorry, the North Sea. And he heard the story of the flying dutchman, and that's when he wrote *The Flying Dutchman*. And of course, I loved Wagner too.

And when I was so enthusiastic, this young lady told her mother about, "Oh, the substitute teacher and the music" — well it turned out that they needed a junior high music teacher immediately. These little brats had so tormented this woman that they drove her to a nervous breakdown. She was a Hungarian refugee. In Hungary, a teacher is a person of quality — you know, respect. And they drove her to a nervous breakdown. So I agreed to finish out the semester, but uh-uh. I saw what it was like. They gave me about a two-week honeymoon, because they had never had a black teacher. They gave me about a two-week honeymoon, and they treated me as nasty as they treated their other teachers. And I said, "Uhh-uh. This, I can't take."

And I had gone to school in the inner city, and we didn't behave that badly. I mean, they were really bad. When I was told that, "Well this group of boys – you can't let them go to the restroom alone with each other, because they're experimenting." I'm saying, "Junior high, 7th graders? I don't believe it." "Yep." And of course, let's just say that they were not very polite. They really weren't. But that was an interesting sideline of getting...till I decided to instead go with the federal government – which I don't regret. Again. They sent me on tour in Africa to set up a budget system there. I traveled all over the US, including Alaska. And I got to do a lot of things that I wanted to do. Now of course, with everything there's a negative. But I had a good career. I loved it.

**LA:** What was the negative within that career with the government?

**DP:** Well for one thing, I got put in Civil Rights to enforce the EEOC. And that's a job — if you do it well, they're going to take it out on you. Nobody wants you to succeed. There also was a point where I took noise complaints for the three major Metropolitan airports in New York. And Newark, JFK and LaGuardia. And people are really nasty. I mean, really nasty. The abuse I had to put up with...but I couldn't talk back to the taxpayers in kind. And that was one of the ugliest things I have ever been through. I mean, those people were nasty. As if it were my fault personally that they were getting aircraft overflights. They were getting the benefits of the economics of the airports. And of course, we wouldn't
dare say it. But when the military did exercises – which were rare – our attitude was, "Well that's the cost of freedom. Those jet fighters up there to intercept any intruders into our airspace. So you better be damn glad that they're up there. So that little bit of noise a few minutes is not going to kill you." And of course, the Concord was landing.

[1:20:00]

And that was one of my special projects. I had to get up in the morning and go to meet the flight, because we had court-ordered it. We had to measure the noise. And wow, was that hated. Because of course only the rich flew the Concord. I mean, what did they start out? At about 1,5000 dollars. And by the time they ended, it was over 5,000 dollars a trip. And they offered a 25,000-dollar special where you'd have cocktails and celebrate at the French embassy, get on the Concord and come back. And in New York, you'd be [laughs] – time to celebrate a second New Year. But who has 25,000 dollars? And that's per person, not per couple. So that was no fun, because they were justifiably angry But you don't have to treat – we are just public servants. We are not...I didn't fly the plane. Oh, they were nasty. I mean, really vulgar. But anyway.

LA: How about, how long did you work for the government?

DP: 33 years, 8 months and 13 days.

LA: Wow. Wow. Why did you keep track of it that way? You're very specific with how long you worked.

DP: When I worked for the government, it was different. The rule was, 55/20. If you had 55 years of age and at least 20 years, you would...I'm sorry, 55/30 for those of us who didn't have jobs like air traffic controllers or military – you would get 75 percent of your salary. High 3 as base retirement. And the way things were going then, within five years you were earning as much as you did when you retired. So it was really – that's why people took it. The salaries weren't that great.

But with that type of retirement...and plus, we had special Blue Cross, Blue Shield because it covered the Congress people – were part of it. We had the best when they...no one else was getting mental health. Well I guess you could say we needed it. We got mental health benefits, et cetera. So there were very big advantages to working for them. And I enjoyed it. I really did. I got to work on some projects that were simply amazing. I worked with the radio tech that commissioned in aeronautics. RTCA 125, which was a committee to decide on a new landing system we would be using. I mean, that was absolutely fascinating. And it was politically very sensitive, because we had pushed a system on the British
that was better – that was not as good as the one that they had.

And they were out to get us on this one. They weren't going to let us. But we were allied with the Russians and the Australians who had added a scanning beam, which technically made it very superior. And the Russians agreed that we should get it. But the English and French had their colonies lined up against us. And the Germans had their system, which they knew they weren't going to win. But anyway. So it was an interesting time. I really enjoyed it. I learned an awful lot about the scientific part of just what it meant to be able to land the plane in almost zero visibility and fly across the ocean. At that point, we had never lost a passenger over the Atlantic or the Pacific. And the only time we'd lose incentives, because of...you know, terrorism. No plane ever – because of engine failure in anything like that has ever been lost over the ocean. That's a hell of a record. And I liked being part of an organization like that.

LA: Yeah. And for you, after you finished working, where did your life take you?

DP: I didn't want to stay in New York because of the cost of living. I mean...

LA: What part of New York were you in?

DP: I was at Kennedy, which meant I was in the city but I didn't live in the city. I lived in Long Island. But Long Island is very racially prejudiced. Very. I mean, Valley Stream right next to where I lived, black person bought a house there, they'd burn it down before they could move in. That's how bad it was.

LA: And what year was this?

[1:25:00]

DP: This was in as late as 1983...was when I left. Out of that area. No, I still stayed there until '93 when I retired. But I'm thinking of '83 because of – I had to laugh. When I first moved there, I consulted...you know, I used a housing directory. And the man just frankly told me, "Well, you know, you're going to be difficult to place. We don't get many blacks in Long Island in this area. Unless you want to live in Rosedale" – or Rochdale or whatever. Rochdale. Which I made clear I wasn't interested in Rochdale. It was a ghetto. But anyway. A woman called me, and she said, "I understand you're looking for a room immediately because you are looking to move into the area. And you either want to lease or rent an apartment, but right now you want a room."
And I said, "Yeah." She told me, "Well she had a room" – how wonderful it was. And yeah. I really, "I'm reading your application, and, I'd really like to rent to you." She said "There's just one thing, and that is that the laundry room is off of where your bedroom will be. So my daughter will have to come through to wash your clothes." I said, "Oh, hell no." I'm not even going to – because when she sees me, she's going to say no because she doesn't want her house burned down, number one. Even if she doesn't care. But I said, "Oh, no. I'm not going to deal with that." But Long Island is bad. It is bad.

LA: What were some memories that you have that you faced prejudice?

DP: Well the usual with the cops and that sort of thing. I mean, they were really bad news. We tried to work with the group [coughs] to get – excuse me.

LA: You okay?

DP: Yes. Just swallowed – to get a group of...to get some housing, equal – well for the poor people. Not racial so much as poor people with modest incomes. And it was very difficult. The community was so hostile. The Republican party branded itself...what did they call it. Oh, the Unity Party, to avoid using the term "Republican," because it was so unpopular – particularly it the black community. Well of course, that didn't bother me, because my family – most of the New Yorkers were Republicans. My cousin had been elected mayor of a town in New York. Peekskill. He was first appointed by Petaki when he became – when he became governor. And then, he appointed Richard, and then Richard went on his own. and plus, Petaki had made him in the meantime also his – what do you call it – commission of motor vehicles. So I had Republican roots. But we were Rockefeller Republicans. The Republican party was different. And I don't know of any Democrats in my New York side of the family then. We were all Republicans. So it wasn't a question of, I was against Republicans. That certainly wasn't the case, because we grew up Republicans.

LA: Yeah.

DP: Now in Maryland, of course, it was different. But in New York, many black people were Republicans. The only thing that was funny about that was like my aunt, who had her own business would say, "Yeah. You people run out and vote Republican, and the next month you're out of a job." How did she figure that? But anyway. I didn't want to argue with her, because she was not a fun person you would argue with. [laughs]
LA: For you, your resilient soul and just the way that you stand up for what you think is right – how did that characteristic of yours lead you in those situations?

DP: Well one of the things that I feel is at...first of all, to put it bluntly, I don't think you can survive this life if you don't have a sense of humor and first starting with yourself. You've got to be able to laugh at yourself. Otherwise you won't make it. You'll go crazy. I think that we have to look at situations – there are several things about that.

[1:30:00]

Not only a sense of humor, but also a sense of, "Who am I judge? I haven't walked on my own in his shoes. Maybe if I were in his position, I would feel the same way." Then you've got to consider that we're all different, we have different likes, dislikes. We don't have to agree on everything, but we can disagree without being disagreeable as the expression goes. And that quite often, you find that by having somebody who has completely different ideas, you not only learn from them, you may change your mind or you may strengthen by knowing what the counterarguments are.

So keep your mind open and don't say, "Well if you don't agree with me on everything, I'm not going to be with you." Now if you're hurting me, yes, I'm going to fight back. But if we disagree, we disagree. And I think that's very important. And you'll never convince people by hating them or by turning away from them. I think that we don't have to love each other, but we have to work together. We have to live together. And I think that's incumbent upon all of us. Can't blame the other guy, Wwell he doesn't like me. That's why I'm having problems." Hey. What can you do to help yourself?

LA: Yeah.

DP: I know I've taken an awful lot of time rambling.

LA: No. No. No. No. No. Don't even – no. For you, looking back, I know that your recollection of these memories are influenced a lot by the way that you think now. So how far do you think you've come from where you were in high school going to Frederick Douglas to now living – where do you live now?

DP: In Columbia.

LA: In Columbia, Maryland?
DP: Yes. Yes. I love Columbia.

LA: So how have you changed? How have things changed for you?

DP: Well I feel that I'm a much more mature person. I feel that I have gained from so many experiences. I feel that I've had more than my luck. I've had more than...I felt love from so many people. I mean, when I found out about this illness I thought, "This has done it." And instead, not only was I greeted with compassion – not sympathy – that I didn't want, and I didn't feel – I felt really agape. Real love. And I feel that I'm better able to work with almost anyone. I'm able to be a neighbor and a good neighbor with everyone.

I have never in my past life remembered living in like...I grew up mostly in homes. But living in an apartment – I've been here nine years now, and I have never had but one neighbor I didn't like. And I didn't like them for a reason. They almost set the house on fire. But as disliking them as people, no. I just felt they were awfully...well, that and we would leave a little note on the mailbox, “Apartment 404. Outgoing mail please,” they would take it off and put it on their mailbox. Now that was a little nasty. [laughs]

But anyway. I feel that I'd become more tolerant of others and of myself. I remember I was about 30 years old, and I was having trouble with the car. And I went to a television program where they were going to have a car expert on. But one of the people also on there, they took samples from the audience, was a handwriting analyst. And when he got to me, he frowned. He didn't know who I was. He just had this writing.

[laughs]

And he frowned, and he said, "This is written by a young man. He's very critical and very judgmental. But the worst part of it, he's most critical of himself." And I thought, "Wow. That's an indictment. You need to do something about that." And I felt that he was right. I am very critical, but I think I expect so much of myself.

LA: Yeah. And for you, you mentioned your illness a little bit earlier in the interview. And you just talked about it now. What would you like to say about it? Give some background about what's been going on when you got diagnosed.

DP: Sure. Well I first had a problem with PSA. Prostate antigen...what do they call it, prostate – well anyway. With the prostate-specific antigen. What happens is, there is a test that produces a figure that is a pretty good predictor except for a few exceptions of prostate cancer. And prostate
cancer's particularly heavy in men – black men, rather. It's only men. Black men tend to get the aggressive type more often. It's a hereditary thing. We don't know why. No explanation. But when I first got it, men are given such bad treatment with urologists that I left nothing -_ I wanted nothing to do with it. And I went for seven years – which was really a mistake, because that could've cost me my life – when finally my primary physician said, "You've got to do something. There's no reason to die of something that's curable. You've got to take care of this. We've got to look into what can be done."

LA: And when did you have this talk with your primary physician?

DP: Last year. Last June.

LA: So you found out in 2013?

DP: Yes. I found – yeah. That was then. But then in the meantime, I had been told, "Oh, it's non-aggressive. Don't worry about it. We'll just observe." And then seven years later, I get a call from the Newman, says, "Oh, no. Your PSA has shot through the roof. You've got to do something right now. You can't wait any longer." I thought, "Well this is a big change. First you tell me, "Ah, we'll just observe." And that's what happens quite often, but it can change and can change overnight apparently. So I lived with it. Luckily my best friend at church, she had a friend she introduced me to. He had been through this. He had not only been through prostate cancer, his wife had died of cancer about a year ago. Plus he himself had two other types of cancer. 'Cause it can easily spread. And yet, he's now cancer-free.

And he told me about his physician. When I met her, I said, "Yeah. This is what I'm looking for, professional examination she can give me." And her medical assistant was the same. The doctor is the one who sets the tone. And these people at Johns Hopkins have been marvelous. Marvelous. Now I don't understand why when it comes to a male problem, they don't have males to take care of males. But I will say this; that I have dealt with five people there. All but one were female.

And I had nothing to say but praise. Professional treatment, with respect. I mean, you know, people forget that men aren't exhibitionists too. We don't like to be exposed, and we certainly expect certain minimums of privacy. We don't want anybody seizing our genitals, excuse me. But that's the sort of thing that I was so against. But now I'm happy. Now I've lost time, and I shouldn't have waited so long. But I was at the point where I would rather die than go through another dominatrix exercise. That's what I feel I went through.
And so, yeah. I lost some time. But I still have hope. And hey. I'm 78. Now the average lifespan if you take men and women together is 78.6. That's just a little over – that's a little under where I am. Now one of the oncologists told me – the one male. He said, "Don't look at it that way. That depends upon lifestyle and other things. And the longer you live, the longer your chances, the better your chances of living longer." Said, "You can't compare yourself to that average. Because that includes suicides, people who have died drunk in automobile accidents, people that have died in bar fights. None of those are factors with you. So don't look at that. It's meaningless."

Because I told him, "When I was in high school, according to the statistical tables – actuary tables – my race, my place of birth, I should live to 59.1 age. That should be my age, lifespan. I'm 20 years over that almost. So what...you know what I mean? You can't worry about life expectancy and so forth. The only thing I want to do is make sure that my life has been worth living and that I've made the world a little better place. That's all that's important at this point. Because, you know, I enjoy working with young people. I work with young missionaries constantly. The young men get on my nerves, because young men have very poor eating habits. Give them beets, and they act like you're going to kill them. [laughs] They won't eat red cabbage. I mean, "Really?"

But I know that as soon as they go back home, they get married, their wife is the best cook in the world and they'll eat anything they put...just like they know they had to do that with their mother, because dad wouldn't tolerate them criticizing the mother's cooking. But anyway. I enjoy working with them. They enjoy me. And I like the fact that members with growing children use me in a way that I like being used. They won't listen to dad, particularly the boys, but they'll listen to the old man. Like when I warn them about certain things and get them to see things like peer pressure. And, don't think that anyone loves you who tells you, "Just this one time won't hurt. Everybody's doing it.” They want you to do something that's harmful. Otherwise they wouldn't put it that way. Right?
that. I remember it was Thanksgiving, and he cried and said, "Once a man and twice a child." Because, you know, you have to be taken care of like with dietary – with toilet problems, et cetera. And that's hard on an adult. And I just admired him. I had an uncle on my mother's side of the family. Uncle Pete. He was the last living relative – last, oldest male on both sides of my family. And now, that's me. I'm the oldest male on both sides of my family and only one female. And that includes by marriage. The only one older than I am, she's older by one year and one day.

But anyway. I admired him. And it was the little things that...my father, when he was around and he wasn't drunk, was pretty good like with teaching me to tie a tie and to tie a bowtie and that sort of thing. But Uncle Pete also did a lot of things. Like little things like, "Well put your undershirt on the outside so that if you have plumbers, you know, with huge pants ride down people don't see your underpants. Well of course, now they do that deliberately. But little things like that [laughs] that I think made life better for me. Those two.

And on the personal level, I think, those two were the most influential people of anyone. Now in an influence on various...my nephew. He was – Melvin— was visiting me. Spent the summer. He was having problems at home not getting along with his brother and so forth. His brother was very violent. And he spent the summer with me. And because he was an athlete, he went home a week earlier before school started because they had to be ready for the game by the time, you know, school started. And he made his first touchdown, first game. And, oh, we were going to celebrate. But I couldn't make it that weekend. We were going to make it the next weekend. The next weekend, he was dead. A drunk driver. I think the school librarian expressed it when she assumed I was the father. Because Melvin and I were so close. And, oh, we had our differences. And I see how difficult it is being a parent. But many of the things that I learned, I got to pass on. For example. His best friend named Sock. One day, I said to Melvin, "Hey. Do you like corned beef cabbage?" And he said, "Oh, I don't eat that Nig food." I said, "Hold it right there. And you call Melvin your best friend? Suppose he said, 'I don't eat that N food if somebody offered him chitlins.' He wouldn't say that." I said, "And if you asked him, he would say you wouldn't have said what you just said. Don't you ever say that in this home again." I came home one day. He's looking at MTV, and it used to be mostly music. Well they're dragging women across the stage in chains.

I said, "What is this?" "Oh, they like it." I said, "Turn that TV off. You and I have a talk." So we covered that. And I got on him about Grace
Jones looking like a man and couldn't tell whether it was a woman or a man. And I said, "Would you like to date her? Would you like to be seen with her?" So, I mean, you know, little things got the message across. I won't give the total details, but there were little things that we had to get across about like wearing the jeans too tight. I told him one day. "Don't you want to be a father? Well if you keep wearing your jeans that tight, you will never be a father." [laughs] Brutal truth. Or little things. But it was the best summer I had. And honestly, I really miss him. His own father was too drunk to come to his funeral. So we had repeated that with my father. So I could relate to him. Luckily his father's friend took him driving, and they disappeared until after their funeral.

[1:50:00]

But the kids all thought I – well those who didn't know. Like, Wishy-washy older lad. And my sister begged me to get him to get a haircut – which I finally persuaded him. But he sent some of the hair in an envelope to his girlfriend, which I didn't know who she was and he never told me. But I thought it was funny. But again. We went through it with that. The black kids would tease him about his hair and the way he looked. He looked like a Latino, and they called him Spick and so forth. And he reacted by disliking the Latinos.

And I said, "No. You're picking the wrong target. It's the people who say ignorant things. And what's so bad about looking like a Latino?" So we went through it, and I think I had a big influence on him. Because somebody needed to tell him those things. His mother, when it came up about this dragging women across the – "Well, you know, that's the community we live in." And I said, "Jackie, that's the father. Nobody tells these kids when they're saying something stupid, and they're expressing a stupid idea. Don't let him get away with that. If you don't want to tell him, I will definitely tell him and I hope you don't get mad with me." She said, "No. No. It's just that...I don't know. You know, it's just the community we live in."

I said, "Well you're part of the community, and change begins with you." Right? So we had a good time. But I think that was when I really want to believe in an afterlife after Melvin...the relationship we had. Because I really felt as if he were my son – if I ever had a son, it would have to be Melvin. And I heard all men want a son. Well Melvin was mine. But I feel very lucky. And also, not to cheapen any particular relationship, but I felt that – I feel that at most times in my life, the right person has come along at the right time when I'm about to do something stupid. Somebody was there to protect me when I was in great need of anything from moral support to money. There was always a person right there when I needed them.
LA: Yeah.

DP: That answer it?

LA: It does. Yes. And we spoke the other day, and you were talking about how you still feel there are quite a few things you still want to do.

DP: Oh, yes.

LA: Yeah. So would you like to talk about some of those things?

DP: Well I sort of put it off possibly never doing it. And particularly now – right now. But I've done quite a bit of traveling, but I've never been to China. And after taking the time to study Chinese, I think I deserved to go. That I really want to do. There are a few things I'd like to do with my church. I like the people I'm dealing with. I really do. Now when I first became a member, I had an assignment that I never will forget.

The church is very strong about morality; sexual, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, all of those things. Only marriage sexual relations. Anything else is considered adultery. But the bishop gave me an assignment with another person. We always travel in pairs. We try to. A man who had joined the church, and he had a...this was during the '80s. No, I'm sorry. It was during the '90s. That's right. During the '90s, early '90s. We still weren't sure, you know, exactly what. There was no cure and so forth.

[1:55:00]

And the bishop was very direct about it. And he closed by telling us, "You know, you are more of a danger to him than he is to you. So don't go to him with sniffles or a cough, et cetera." Well unfortunately, my companion was having marital problems.

And his wife insisted that he take these three small children with them. And he wasn't supposed to do that, and he couldn't do that. If he was in the hospital, the children had to stay on the first floor. They couldn’t enter a ward four with the ward where the AIDS patients were. And if he was at home with three other men that they...to say if they had, the children couldn't go in. So that meant that sometimes I had to go by myself when his wife insisted that the kids go with him.

In fact, she eventually left him and the three kids with him. I'm not saying that I know what her side of the story is, but that's unusual. Well anyway. I got used to the fact that I had to do it by myself. And one of the things we do is like agreement in a sacrament, we call it. We break bread and
water. And I just wasn't going to give him that with latex gloves on. I just figured I'm protected. I'm not going to do that. Well luckily, the doctor never peeked in and saw me when I was doing that, because he would've really been angry. But unfortunately, I was in California on business and pleasure when he died. And I really regretted that I was not there to accompany him at his last hours. Because we had become very close. And I vowed that if ever I had to do that type of thing with another person that I would make darn sure that I was there to the bitter end.

Because I can't imagine dying alone that way when even your own family is afraid to touch you. That's pretty horrible. But that's the way we treated people with AIDS. They were like lepers. So I guess that I want to make sure that if I ever have to comfort somebody on there at that point...because I'm sure that there will be a person for me. When Bob– the man who goes with me...now I don't need him every time. But he goes with me, because Pauline – my friend – had introduced us. And I told you he had cancer and three different types. And he really was a big help to me. I mean, I wouldn't have gone for treatment had he not introduced me to Doctor Dudley and to Miss Walker, nursing assistant. If he hadn't introduced me to them, I never would've sought treatment.

LA: Yeah.

DP: You see, one of the things we forget – you never know what influence sometimes or what comfort you are for another person. Therefore you should always expect the best, and you should always be there to serve. Because who knows? Like I think of people who have committed suicide because they felt so hopeless. And if somebody had just been there to talk to them, will they have suicide lives? But some people are so desperate that they don’t even think about that. But if we are looking out for each other, I think that's important. I really do.

LA: Yeah. And so, even when you say that I think it really goes to show how you've served your community throughout your life. You've served as a public servant. You served when you were in college for equal rights for the people even that came after you. You know? And it's really telling about who you are as a person. I just wanted to ask if there was any last thoughts that you have?

[2:00:00]

DP: Well I have a question about that or a comment to that. My community has served me well. I feel I've had more opportunities than I deserved, more than my share. Or as some people would put it, blessings than I deserved. I did nothing to deserve the good luck that I've had. It was a gift. And so, naturally I feel that it's time to pay back some of that. Had
the best education, I've never been hungry, I've had good medical care. Those are things that billions of people on this planet do not have. True? Okay.

LA: All right. Thank you so much.

DP: Well thank you. It's been a pleasure. I'm sorry I...I really feel it was more for my benefit than for yours. I hope I'm helping you with your research. But like the fact that you gave me a chance to vent and to say some things that I feel are important to me.

LA: Yeah. Thank you so much, Donald.

DP: Thank you. Okay.

[End of Audio]