

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

David D. Marshall

Interviewed by Rebecca Rivera & Samskruthi Madireddy

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Johns Hopkins University
Oral History Collection

Interviewee: David D. Marshall (DM)

Interviewer 1: Rebecca Rivera (RR)

Interviewer 2: Samskruthi Madireddy (SM)

Subject: Home and family in the life history of David Marshall

Date: March 3, 2022

RR: Okay. As a backup, since this one died the last time. Yeah. So, everything was clear from the consent form?

DM: Yes.

RR: Okay. Perfect. So, we can start.

SM: Yeah. Could you tell us your name, when and where you were born, and maybe a little bit about your childhood?

DM: Absolutely. My name is David Marshall. I was born in Baltimore, Maryland – well, specifically, in Turner Station, Maryland. What is very unique about Turner Station, Maryland is it is, historically, a black subdivision of Dundalk, which is in Baltimore County, Maryland. It is a historically black subdivision and still remains a black subdivision of Baltimore County, Maryland.

It is a subdivision that, for many, many years, was very independent. And what I mean "independent" – it did not have its own political independence, but it had many of its own – and still does, to this day – a lot of its own business owners, its own schools, stores, libraries. Still is thriving with many, many churches. Actually, my own family has still, to this day, has its own trash removal company. It was the second formed black-owned trash removal company in Baltimore County, Maryland.

It now sits as the oldest of the black-owned trash removal companies in Baltimore County, Maryland, as it is now 70 years old. So, that is a major piece of history in Baltimore County, Maryland. And for four years, I actually sat as the CEO of that company. So, it was kind of a major shift in my career, as I've held many different jobs, if you will, or I've gone on many different career paths. But that's where I was born, in 1979.

So, I'm 42 – little old man sitting here – so, yeah, that's a bit about where I was born. I'm the oldest of three. I have two younger brothers, and my dad actually was the second-generation owner of that company. His father formed it in 1951. And my mom is now a retired educator after 38 years of education.

And, as I indicated to you young ladies, she is an alum of Hopkins University. She graduated here with her master's in 1977 and I think that that is rather significant, because you consider, in 1977, there weren't many black individuals – and probably not very many black women – here on this campus earning master's degrees. And so, she was one of those who were, I would say – not because she's my mother, but because it's true – a trailblazer in her own right here on this fine campus. She earned her bachelor's at Morgan – the fine Morgan State University – and then, she came and earned her master's and taught, as I said, for 38 years. So, my family life was an amazing family life.

We grew up very, very close-knit, and there were phenomenal family values instilled in each of us, and we've all gone on to have, I would say, fantastic careers. My middle brother's a speech and language pathologist in Hartford County Public Schools, and my youngest brother is in admissions for the nursing program at Walden University. And then, there's me, with 50 different careers, I would say. *[Laughs]*

SM: Yeah. So, you mentioned your mother and your father and, I think, two younger brothers.

DM: Yes.

SM: Is that everyone that you lived with growing up?

DM: Yes.

SM: How would you say your relationship was like as a family?

DM: Very close. We did everything together. We traveled together. Every summer, there was a wonderful family vacation that we went on – here and abroad – and we were a very – I hate to use this term, but – well, I won't use the term, 'cause I don't like to use the term, but we did the traditional things. We went to church every Sunday and we were very active in our church.

We ... On Sundays, because our parents were working parents, we did our family dinners together on Sundays. Friday nights were our go out to eat Friday nights and so, we were very, very, very close. We even, in our early life, we even would do our little games – our little board games at night when we were little kids. So, we really did kind of have, growing up, a very nice, traditional family. I mean, it wasn't without its flaws.

I mean, whose is? I know it sounds like, "Oh. It was perfect." Nothing is perfect. But I would definitely say, by and large, it definitely was a wonderful family life growing up that I very much valued and treasured. Yeah.

RR: So, just thinking back, can you tell us about your home growing up – like, the building, the street, you know?

DM: Absolutely. So it.. And that, too, it was very unique in that – so, as I said, we – I was born in Turner Station and so, when I was about five, we moved from Turner Station to Edgemere, Maryland. So, that is close to what is – so, that is close to Fort Howard, which is also a very kind of historic area where – Fort Howard is known for, I believe, the Battle of Fort Howard. I'm not the biggest history buff where that's concerned so, I won't be going into all of that, for someone will hear this and say, "Oh, he doesn't know his history." So, we'll leave that where that is.

So, close to Fort Howard, but also – kind of more known to Marylanders – one of the major factories, Bethlehem Steel Company, which is no longer in existence, but now is very well-known for another area – Tradepoint Atlantic – which has taken over that area. So, we moved there in 1984, when my mother was expecting my youngest brother, and what was so neat about that street was there were all families on that street. So, I have more recollection of that street because that's where I really spent all of my childhood. And that was a very, very close-knit street. And everybody had a hand in raising us.

And we formed very, very close bonds there and I definitely would say I had a lot of additional parents, a lot of additional grandparents, a lot of additional siblings on that street. There was a lot of love there. We were in and out of each other's homes. Sundays were very, very unique in that there was a lot of in and out of each other's homes – even eating Sunday dinner, even in and out of each other's homes. It was just – it was very, very unique, very, very hard to duplicate.

I think it was probably its own Mayberry, if you will. It was very, very sweet, very, very loving, and I think you'd be very, very hard pressed to even find that now. So many of those neighbors have passed. I often say my very first babysitter – well, not my very first babysitter, but my very first best friend was a woman in her 90s, Miss Emma Young. She was our babysitter for a period of time, but she lived there on the end house, and I would go sit on her front porch and she would say we were two peas in a pod, as we would sit on the front porch and drink lemonade, and she would tell me of her stories.

She was born in 1908 and she was very, very near and dear to me and loved me. And I loved her. And we were two peas in a pod, and she was my very first best friend. So, it was very special – very, very special. I was fortunate to have had a lot of love there in that neighborhood.

RR: So, have you been back since moving away?

DM: Very interestingly enough, life has taken on some turns. I moved back there recently – temporarily, but I did move back there with my son, rather unexpectedly. I lived in New York for some time, moved back here, purchased a home, sold it, then moved back there temporarily. But it's different now.

RR: Yeah.

DM: Yeah

SM: What's different about it now?

DM: The people are not there anymore. I mean, some of them, as I indicated, have passed away and so – and I very much wish that my son got to meet some of those people – all of those people, really, not some of them. 'Cause I loved them all. And I wish that they got to meet him 'cause they would have just spoiled him. They spoiled us and then, they would have just spoiled him rotten.

So, I wish that he got to meet them and that they got to meet him. So, yeah.

RR: So, you said like, a lot of the people are gone so, who do you think is like, in the neighborhood now? Like, how did it change? It's not the people that were there. It's not like, their kids. It's like...

DM: Well, there are still some families that are there. There are still some families that are there, definitely, and they – so, some of the – they're not kids now, they're all my age – but some of the families that I grew up with, some of their families are there so, he does get to – he has met them. They adore him. So, I guess they treat him very much like – they're like, very much like grandparents to them. What's funny about it is, obviously, people my age – they've long since had children.

So, I'm the later bloomer of them in terms of having a child. So, it's kind of funny, 'cause some of them are actually great-grandparents and my mom is later to the game in even being a grandmother. So, yeah.

SM: I know you mentioned a bit earlier about kind of how church was really important for your family and for your kind of community on your street. Could you tell us a little bit more about what church meant to you growing up?

DM: Church was really everything to me. What was interesting is, even on my street, pretty much everybody on that street went to that church as well, because the church literally was behind my house. So, it was the community church as well. And what was so unique about that church experience for me was I am a musician by profession – I'm an opera singer by profession – and church for me was part of what groomed and inspired me to be a musician. It is where I sang my very first solo.

I love to talk about this. One of the very famed Clara Ward singers – Clara Ward was a very famous gospel singer – international gospel singer. One of the very famed Clara Ward singers was my very first choir director. And she gave me my very first solo – Mrs. Madeline Satum. And she is still a member of that church to this day.

She traveled the world and she actually formed her very own gospel touring group that traveled internationally – even sang for the Queen of England. But she saw something very special in me and gave me my very first solo when I was eight years old. So, that is what – part of what – inspired me to be a musician. So, church was so special to me because they nurtured me. They nurtured a gift in me.

They saw something special in me. And I say "part of" because my parents and my grandfather, in particular, were the other part of what nurtured that. But yeah, that was special. And my community, also, because they were there. They saw that and they nurtured it and were at everything that I did.

My very first full recital was at that church, and my church family was right there with me. They were there for me. And when I went to my pastor and I said, "Bishop Ron, I want to do a recital here. Can I do a recital here?" He was like, "Absolutely, Brother Marshall. You can definitely do a recital here."

And not that they were all opera buffs, and I was singing in Italian and German. They didn't know what I was talking about, but they sat right there thrilled because they saw this little boy growing into a teenager, at that time, and they wanted to be there for me. So, they were.

RR: So, how did you get into opera?

DM: It was funny. There was a gospel artist by the name of Daryl Coley that I absolutely loved and admired, and I'd heard that he'd studied classical voice and so, I was like, "Oh. Well, maybe I'll sound like him if I study classical voice." So, I went to this music school – it's actually a church. It was one of Baltimore's first megachurches – New Shiloh Church, here on Monroe Street.

And I began to study. I wanted to study music there. They have a School of Music there, which is now called – I don't want to name it the wrong name there. I think it's the Carter School of Music now. But so, I went there. I met the famed Doctor Nathan Carter, who was the choral director at Morgan State University, and he heard me sing, and he said, "You sound like you've already studied voice. You sound like an opera singer already."

And I was like, "No, I haven't." I was 15 years old at that point, and I'd studied piano for years, and come actually here to the Peabody Preparatory and studied piano, and I wanted to sing at that point. And so, he said, "Well, you know, I'm gonna create an opening in my wife's voice studio for you." And he did. And so, I went, and I said to her – she asked me that question, and I said, "Well, I want to sound like Daryl Coley."

And she says, "As if I know who Daryl Coley is, you're gonna sound like David Marshall." And I was like, "I don't want to sound

like that. That's not why I'm here." I didn't say that to her. And so, I started to sing, and she was very kind of surprised at this sound coming out of this 15-year-old, and then, I was like, "Wow. This is special." Myself.

I thought it was special. Because really, who sounds like that? And I'm singing Italian. My first Italian art song was *Caro mio ben*, as most people start out singing *Caro mio ben*, but I was so excited about it. And so, that's what started it. And then, I decided, with her encouragement, to move on and eventually go to school and I got my bachelor's and master's in it and that's where it went.

RR: You also said that your grandfather was a big ...

DM: Oh yes

RR: influence on your music life.

DM: Yeah.

RR: Maybe more? Can you speak to that?

DM: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. His name was Paul Joseph Hardaway. I don't even know if there are enough words. We'd probably need to take days for me to just talk about him.

He was my mother's father and just my heart, is what I could say. My grandfather – you know, I don't know that there are many people on this earth that can actually say that they had someone in their life that actually saw them as the picture of perfection – you know, that they were loved that much that someone actually saw them as the picture of perfection. And I was so blessed to have a grandfather who saw me as the picture of – I could just do no wrong. Now, one would say, "Oh, he probably made you a brat." Maybe in a little bit of a way he could have – maybe, slightly – but I will say my grandfather – he also helped me in terms of my faith walk but you asked me about music so, we'll stay there.

My parents always bought me musical instruments because they knew that I loved music so, they always bought musical instruments. They always bought me microphones so I could sing in them. So, anything I had – if I banged on a keyboard, my grandfather thought it was wonderful. He just let me bang in front of him on a keyboard. It was always beautiful to him.

And he'd always say, "Boy, you gonna make something out of that one day. You gonna do something with that one day." Always, always, always. And so, I – as I was taking piano lessons, I began – I wanted to play his favorite hymns for him 'cause he was a man of great faith and so, his favorite two hymns were "Because He Lived" and "How Great Thou Art" so, I wanted to make sure I learned to play those hymns. And I played – when I learned to play those hymns, he eventually said to me, "Boy, do you think you can sing those hymns?"

He always called me "Boy". My grandfather was born in 1915 and in Farmville, Virginia. And I said, "I don't think I can sing 'em, Pop." And that was interesting, 'cause I had, remember – I said I sang my first solo at eight. But then, I stopped singing.

And I said, "I don't think I can sing 'em, Pop." And he said, "I bet if you tried you could." And so – and I would always take my keyboard to his house. I spent a lot of time on the weekends with him. And so, I played, and I did sing, and I think the first one was probably "How Great Thou Art". He said, "I knew it. I knew it."

Because a boy of 14 – your voice is – you're hitting puberty, so your voice is right shabby. It's a whole lot of cracking. It's not the prettiest sound. And so, he got to calling his sisters who – he had a sister that lived still in Farmville, one that lived in New York at that time, and then, he had an aunt that still was living and she was, I believe, 108 at that time. Lived on her own.

Called her on the phone – I was singing to them on the phone. And he told my parents, "This boy's gonna sing. You're gonna make sure that he's a singer." And so, he inspired it. Every recital, he was in the front row.

And so, oh, he was everything. And actually, one of my big dreams – outside of this organization that we'll talk about later – is to open a school for the visual and performing arts here in Baltimore for our youth and it will be called the Paul Joseph Hardaway School for the Visual and Performing Arts, because, you know, we name these schools after these prolific people, but I don't know them. I don't know them. I know him. I know what he did for me.

And I know that, actually, after his death – I found out from my uncle – that my grandfather wanted to be a blues singer and he never had that opportunity because his father did not find value in

that, and his father made him work on the farm. My grandfather was a World War II veteran and he fought for a country who very much did not find value in him as a black man. But he fought for his country. And again, he came back here – he wanted to be a touring – he played for a blues band. I did not know anything of this.

All I knew is that my grandfather, when he would leave the dinner table, he would walk up the steps – he lived here in East Baltimore – and he would sing a song, and it was only one line, and all he would say was, "Oh, there's room at the cross for me." And that was all I would hear, and he would go up to his den and read his *Daily Bread*. That's all I would hear. I could go on. My heart.

RR: You also mentioned that he was a big part of your faith.

DM: Yeah.

RR: You can – you mentioned that and said that you would focus on music, but you can talk about that.

DM: Yeah. 'Cause he would, after he would sing that line, he would go to the den and he would read his *Daily Bread* and his bible and then, take his nap. But he would always say to us – which was so special – and I knew I was always covered because he would say to all of us, "You'll always be blessed because I call your names every night." He would always let us know that there was no battle too hard because there was always a God that sat high and looked low. So, even when I think about now and what we're seeing, I always try to summon that bit of Paul Hardaway because I think, "What would he say to all of this – you know, what we see happening in our world right now?"

We're looking at this horridness with Ukraine. And what would Paul Hardaway say? It'd be very, very simple. Nothing prolific. There's a God that sits high and looks low, and we've got to take it to God in prayer.

He can fix all of this. And so, you know, I just – I would always seek his wisdom in everything, because I always felt like it would always be all right. I just would always have to go and talk to him about it. No matter what was happening, it would always be okay, because there was a man who was always praying, fervent prayer. He was always so calm.

I never saw him riled up because he was always praying. He didn't have an extensive education. He grew up in the segregated South, and he just was a man who constantly, constantly prayed. And it's so amazing, because again, not an extensive education, but it was a faith that sustained him. And that was the thing that he gave to me.

I'll be honest – he died January 5th of 2007 and there was so much of me that was just like, "What do I do now?" Because that's the man who I went to for such wise counsel. And he gave so much of that to my mom, but it was still something about him that, you know, I was like, "What do you do?" What do you do when there's that person that you knew who said, "I call your name every night"? But you try your best to carry on 'cause it just seemed like everything was all right when there was a Paul Joseph Hardaway who was on this earth, praying and just knowing – that just always saw that – and it seemed like it was all right.

When he said it, it was like – that's why I'm like, "Do you have this different kind of connection with God?" like, "what are you...?" You know? But – yeah.

SM: How has having him like, influenced your own relationship with your faith?

DM: Because I saw his at work it influenced it. Because he has a tremendous one, and I saw that when he spoke things, they happened. Again, when you have had to work through and fight through things that – I don't even know all of them. I mean, he didn't dwell. That was one thing – he didn't dwell on every negative thing.

He really did not. And I think that's an interesting thing about faith, right? You know, that sometimes, people dwell on every negative thing. And I know he had to see a lot of struggle. And I didn't really hear him talk about that, because I – and this is interesting – as you asked me that question, it's making me have my own moment.

I think that when we have a faith, that that faith tells us that when you know that things are gonna be alright, you focus on that it will, and that you don't have to dwell on the parts that are just the negative parts – that faith ultimately tells us that it will be fine, this too shall pass, and you move on from there. Because I really never heard him say – you know – he didn't dwell on that. And it's just so interesting. Of all the stories he told me, he never told me of the

hardships. And you had to know, when you're born in 1915 in the South, you had to see a lot of them.

I didn't hear them.

Thank you for that question, 'cause it made me have to have a moment of my own.

RR: Okay. So, we'll just pivot just like, a tiny bit. You haven't really mentioned like, at all, like, your sexual orientation or like –

DM: No. I haven't gone there yet.

RR: No.

[Laughter]

RR: Which is fine. That's –

DM: Yeah, yeah.

RR: – good. But we just want to ask if, you know, growing up, how did that play into family life or your life?

DM: Yeah. How did that play into it? Right. Well, I hid it. I didn't talk about it.

I will say that a good thing to start on is, when did I know, right? I always knew. Did I know what it was? I didn't know that. As I said, I'm 42 and is that something that came up in my family? It didn't come up in my family.

That's not even something that really was discussed. Now, what was interesting was I don't talk a lot about my paternal side of the family, right? So, when I went to my paternal side of the family, my grandfather on that side would say derogatory things about sexuality. He would talk about people being sweet as sugar and something – some things, you know, I don't even remember all of those things. I just know there was a derogatory thing brought up about sexuality on that side.

Nothing in my home was said negatively, but I would hear about those things. I never heard about derogatory things in my family church growing up, but I knew that there was something wrong

with it when I would hear derogatory things on my paternal side, particularly from my paternal grandfather.

RR: So, can I clarify? So, your church and then your home – people didn't say anything about it or would –

DM: Mm-mm.

RR: Do you think they had a more positive view? Like, they –

DM: They didn't have a view, as far as I knew. I didn't – it came up a little later in church – not in my family church. I'll go there in a bit. But in my early childhood, nothing really came up.

I just knew that when I was in – as early as nursery school – so, I was maybe like, three – I had this crush on this little boy. I don't know his last name and I won't even say his first name, but I had this crush on this little boy. But I didn't know what to think about that 'cause when you're a little child, you don't have the capacity to really know what's wrong and what's right. That's the innocence of children. And we like to preserve the innocence of children. You don't really – there's nothing.

Prejudice. It's taught. It is not something that we grow up knowing, right? And so, I didn't know. I just knew that – but I knew that, as a little boy, I fancied my mother's clothes. I didn't want to go put on my father's work boots; I wanted to put on my mother's high heels.

Now, those were things that I identified with. But it was interesting, too – as I got older, I didn't necessarily flaunt them around. I do remember, at certain points, if I did, my parents not necessarily being the happiest about it. But nobody said to me anything like, "You're trying to be a girl" or anything like that. Nobody said anything like – they just weren't happy.

But no one – no one said anything overtly derogatory about it. I'll say that, okay? But I just knew they weren't happy. It probably wasn't something that I should do. But we also remember – I'm 42; it's a different generation, right?

So, as time went on, I kind of – again, hearing it more from my paternal side – began to realize this is something not good. So, I realized I could not say anything about these feelings. Something's not right with these feelings. As I grew more into church, I was the

one in the family who became, I'll say, the more churchy one, and I began to go to a variety of churches with other friends. I was the one who one service wasn't enough for me.

And I was kind of all over Baltimore in the churches, and as I began to grow as a teen and moved more as a vocalist in Baltimore, I was singing in a lot of churches and a lot of groups. And, as I was moving through different churches, not my home church, then, I began to hear in the church world that this is a sin and it's to be rebuked. It's a spirit. We've gotta call the spirit out.

It's a demonic spirit. So, I didn't hear this in my church, which was the Shiloh Baptist Church in Edgemere, Maryland. That was a safe place for me. My pastor never said these things. But other preachers – so, as I began to go out of my safety net, I began to have those experiences, hear those things.

And I knew I better – because now, this is deeper than what I heard my grandfather saying, which were in joking ways. Now – because remember, I'm this person who is really, really thriving on his faith, yeah? So, now, I'm hearing about it as a sin and God is not happy with this. And ultimately, I want to please God. And I'm singing in these churches and I'm ministering to these people and now, I could possibly be this evil spirit?

Well, I can't do this. So, I just can't say anything. So, I was forced into this space of "I've gotta be delivered". And I put it up in quotes as if the listening audience could hear this but quote-unquote "delivered" meaning that I have to get this out. I've gotta pray about it, but I can't tell anybody what I'm praying about here.

I cannot. No, no, no. Don't – also, don't tell that part. That's the other thing. Don't tell it.

Just pray about it. Secretly. Go to all of these alters. Let all of these preachers, with their holy olive oil – the Pompeian olive oil that you get in the store and you cook with – let them throw that all over your head, grease up your forehead – grease it up enough to fry chicken on it – and cast this demon – this spirit out of you. Fall out in the floor.

Roll from here to kingdom come. Mess up and wrinkle up all your good suits and pray the gay away. And we've heard of this. And I will say it – it is nonsense. And I'm not gonna get struck down because I already know it is nonsense.

I'm the living proof that it is nonsense. And so – but this is what I battled for years and years and years – the turmoil of this. And this is what ultimately – not society; that played a role, but my major thing was my faith. My faith. That did the most damage.

Because I was in – I mean, people in most churches in Baltimore knew me, knew my name, knew my voice. And I couldn't reveal this. But I was – I mean, people knew me not only for my singing, but they knew me for – "He was gonna be the one that shouted all around– ran all around the church." And I will tell people – they didn't know that when I was running around these churches – 'cause I was in charismatic churches, Apostolic ones, Holiness one, Pentecostal ones – they didn't that I was running and falling out because I was trying to run the spirit out, pray the spirit out. Imagine the torture.

Imagine it. So, yeah. Have we gone there yet? Have we gone – have we dug into that space yet?

RR: So, I'm curious like, how did you come to like, reconcile these things?

DM: Very good question. So, we're fast forwarding some years now. And it was not until I moved out of this city. And so, when I was 30 years old, I moved to New York. You can be free in New York.

Anybody tell anybody that around here? Liberal city. You can just be free. Because when you go there, you see some of everything. People get on the train in tutus, and no one looks at them – except for me, who was like, "Man, you just got on this train in this tutu."

And everyone, "Okay." You know? 'Cause I wasn't used to these things. You know? Just look the way – but you know there's a beauty in that, right? Because when you're here in this city – and a lot of places – you just kind of have to conform to something.

Well, when I went there, you could just be, right? Who cares? But I didn't know that because I lived here, and you had to look "normal". What does that look like? I don't know, you know?

We think we look normal – in other places, we probably look like weirdos, right? So, I went there. And because I – as I said, I'm an opera singer by profession so, that's really not – this is not the city for that. No one wants to hear that. So, I moved there.

Huge leap of faith. Moved up there. I moved up there; very, very sanctified person, and I became unsanctified. But, I went up there and life hit. Reality hit.

I met wonderful people, but most of all, reality hit, and I began to live a real life. And I met real people and I was allowed to be in a space where no one knew who I was – frankly, no one cared – and I experienced things. And I will say that in experiencing things, it took – initially, it was a lot. And it caused me to be in a battle between "Am I going to hell or am I going to just live and let live?" And so, when I lived, I had to then have a conversation with God.

Let me tell you what God said to me. And he said it to me through tragedy – tragedy in my extended family. 'Cause there was a suicide in my extended family, and I prayed it because I was going through a very deep depression, and I actually suffer with major depressive disorder. And I think, in large part, that is because of the suppression of my own reality, of who I was, who I am. Because I did not formally come out – I skipped a little bit – to my own family til I was 34 years old. Very important to know.

But in that, I laid on my face after that suicide 'cause I said, "Lord, why didn't you just take me? Why? Because I'm battling here." I still thought it was a sin. I didn't even think gay marriage should have been legal.

Didn't at that time. And the Lord said to me in my prayer, "I called you because of who you are not in spite of who you are." That changed it all. Changed everything. Because I heard it so clearly in my spirit and it freed me and it let me know that I was not this spirit.

I was not this demon. All these things that these church people said to me was a lie. It all was a lie. Everything. Because God is a God of love.

He created me to be just who I am. And that is the breaking point. That was the change – when God settled it in my spirit. And I could ultimately be free. And that was in February of 2013.

That was it. That was it. And that's when I was like, "To hell with all of this stuff. You won't have me in this box anymore. You will not. You won't do it."

And I became a changed person. And I felt this freedom. I mean, there were still some things, but ultimately, the thing that was really plaguing me that I even said to myself, "I can never marry. I can never come out. I can never do this."

I still got a – I attempted to date, and I was telling people, "But I can never get married. I can never say – because this is a sin." I was still telling people this is a sin.

RR: So, you were dating men?

DM: I was attempting to in some strange way while telling "This is a sin." Imagine that. You go on a date with a man but then say, "This is a sin, though." How does that work? Anyone here got a good answer for that?

It's foolishness. But that is the plight – particularly of, I will say, a lot of black people who are hung up in this church faith mindset. They will say it all the time. You see it from the pulpit to the back door. Marrying – and don't – and know it.

But there is a brainwashing that is taking place and I know, saying this sort of thing, somebody is bound to say, "Who is this man so we can go into his inbox and into his Journey to Josiah DM and rebuke him?" But I will say it because it's the truth.

RR: So, you mentioned that the people in New York were real.

DM: Yeah.

RR: So, what made the people in Baltimore not "real"?

DM: That.

RR: That?

DM: The fact that they could not – and let me clarify. This is not all of Baltimore. So, please, Baltimoreans, I'm not saying it. I was not a part of – and as we talked about, you know, the community that I was really in – I wasn't a part of the "gay community". So, I wasn't a part of the bars and, you know, the nightlife, the clubs here.

I'm still not, you know? That just wasn't my community. My community really was the church community. So, when I say that,

I need to clarify because the community – the *true* LGBTQ community here *is*. I was just not a part of that community.

The community that I was a part of was the faith-based community. So, I need to bring very, very, you know, I very much need to clarify and differentiate between the two communities because they are very different. Because if you go to the true LGBTQ community here, they will tell you, "Oh, I can't do that." They will all say the same thing that I'm saying. It's just that, you know, I am not really – I'm so, I guess, just in my own world, because I was so a part of the church world.

And, you know, the LGBTQ world itself, um – and, I guess, everything that comes along with it – when I moved back here, I was just in a different space, and I just never really involved myself so much in it. And you know, I have great friends – very close friends – but I just – I'm so – I'm almost a loner, I'll say. So, I'm just like – I kind of stay to me. And now that I have a son, I *really* stay to me. I don't really – I don't have time to really get out and do these great things.

But, I definitely need to clarify that. So, when it comes to the church world, they are very much still stuck in their boxes of not being true to themselves.

SM: Were you involved in the faith community in New York also?

DM: I *worked* in it. So, a lot of opera singers, we have church jobs. So, I worked in it. And it was interesting, though. The churches that I worked in – I think they weren't – the ones that I worked in were not – they could have cared less.

RR: Do you think that was by choice? Like, you selected those churches or the churches in New York happen to be . . . ?

DM: I did select those. I was referred. Good friends of mine who are still great friends of mine to this day – they worked there, and they were like, "Hey, they've got openings." They were very prominent churches there. And they were just more liberal churches.

But New York itself is liberal. And I'm not to say that there are not churches there who don't have those closed mindsets. I'm sure that there are. I just was fortunate in that where I worked – and again, they were very – I worked in the Abyssinian Baptist Church. They didn't – I'd never heard it said there, you know?

That was one of them. Very, very prominent church. I never, ever heard anything derogatory there at all. And so, yeah. So, I don't know what their actual stance is because I never heard anything said.

I know that I was fully embraced by members there. I didn't – and they *knew*. I know good friends of mine that are still working there. They know. They're open.

No one's in a closet and no one has been said/told, "Well, you can't do that here." Whereas there are churches here where you are told, "You *cannot* do that here." You know? So, it's a very big difference. *Very* big difference.

RR: So, you said that you told your parents finally when you were 30 –

DM: 4.

RR: 34.

DM: Yeah. Uh-huh.

RR: So, how has your relationship changed with them since –

DM: It didn't change but they did need to adjust. It was definitely, um . . . it was different. You know, it was just so weird, I will say. My mother looked taken. My father ran out of the room crying.

Um. It looked like a scene from *Young and the Restless*. It just really did. My brothers were completely fine. Like, they just sat there like, "Yeah. Okay. So, what we gonna do – you know, fine."

And so, we moved – like, "Who cares? Thank you. We knew. Thank you for sharing this world news report." [Laughs] Um. You know, I think – yeah. . .

I think when you deal with Black families – Black families are very much caught on everybody else's thought process on things. And so, yeah, that's just what I'll say about it. My father said he was more concerned about how other people would deal with me. My father, knowing me, knows that – he raised me to, say, think for yourself – think for myself. So, he knows that I never cared what other people thought.

I was only concerned about what God thought. He knows I've always been a spitfire. I will tell anybody whatever I thought about them. I went to school in church suits. . . Who do you think I cared about?

I went to school in *church suits*. Church suits. What boy goes to school in church suits? Pick me. You know, so, I *really* didn't care.

So, he claimed he was concerned about what other people thought – how they would deal with me. These people aren't coming to me and saying anything to me. They dare not. Mm-mm. Anyone who knows me [*chuckles*] knows you better not.

And so, that was his claim to fame on that. And then, you know, my mom – you know, she – [*sighs*] I don't know. I just – she is – she's definitely – my mother and I are so much closer than my father and I are, so, my mother has definitely been – she definitely listens. She definitely has worked really, really, really, really hard to be very, very supportive. She has said it's an adjustment, and I get it.

I get it. It can be, just trying to understand. And so – I mean, she doesn't ask questions, but she doesn't ask questions of any of us. Like, I feel like she has always said that her parents were so invasive into her personal life that she's just like, "I don't want to do that. I don't want to crowd any of you all."

So, she doesn't; she just doesn't. And I appreciate that because I'm a very private person who likes his own personal space. You know, I don't want anyone to inquire about *anything* concerning my personal life. "I'll let you know," you know, when I say that in terms of if I'm dating, who I'm dating – any of that stuff. "I'll let you know if I want you to know that stuff." Other than that, you know, we leave it off the table.

RR: So, also, . . . I tried to, like, do a little mental math [*chuckles*], but um . . . So, you – when you told your parents, was your grandfather already –

DM: Yeah. He was deceased. Yeah.

RR: So, he never – did you ever get the chance to speak to him about it?

DM: Mm-mm. I was very much not out then. I was 27 when he died.
Hm-hmm.

RR: So, how do you feel about that?

DM: [*sighs*] You know, there's so much that I wish I could have shared, and I often wonder – but, you know, it was so weird – or interesting. When I was leaving my home church and going to a church that really is what sent me into this tailspin, I would say – so, I left my home church and I'll leave the church that I went to out of the interview. When I left my home church and I was telling him that I was gonna leave it and move on, he said, "Boy, you gotta go to a church of your kind." And I don't often – I wonder what that meant. See, he just had so much – I just don't know.

Now, he knew that I was a very charismatic person, um, . . . and maybe it was "You gotta go to a church that's gonna allow you to be freer in that." I don't know. I never heard him talk derogatory – I just never heard him say anything derogatory. So, I don't know, and I often wonder about that.

I think my main thing is – I would have loved for him just to meet my baby, you know? More than, you know, us talking about 'cause I just – you know, do you talk about those things with your grandfather? I mean, good grief. [*Laughs*] I don't want to talk about it with my *parents*, you know? [*Laughs*]

RR: So, growing up, did you ever imagine being a parent?

DM: Oh, always. *Always*. Yeah.

RR: So, what did that look like for you? Like, what did you think parenthood would be like?

DM: I felt like I would always adopt, and , you know, . . . I – outside of that, you know, I didn't really envision a full family unit. I didn't really know what to think 'cause, you know, I was still battling that whole piece of who I am. So, I didn't really think about the full family structure. I just knew I wanted to be a dad and what wonderful things I would impart to my child because of the wonderful things that my parents imparted to each of us and the experiences I would give him and the life that I would give him and all of that. So, that's what I really concentrated on – was *that*.

RR: Yeah. So, what kind of parent did you imagine you would be?

DM: Loving. Affectionate, yet stern.

SM: Do you think that's comparable to the kind of parent you are now?

DM: Absolutely. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

RR: Why stern?

DM: Well, my parents were definitely stern. [Laughs] You kind of do a lot of the times – not all the times – model those things, and I, you know, I taught for years as well as one of my major career – one of my multiple career paths. And, I believed in that in my classroom. I believe that structure had to be there. But I believe that you could not have that – that stern – without the love.

And my students always knew, *first*, how much Mister Marshall loved them. I always said it. That wasn't implied; it was said. And so, their ability to respond to me and my sternness was always fine. They weren't – it wasn't like, "He's just so mean. Oh, God" you know?

It wasn't – was never that. And in my stern, it wasn't that I came in the classroom like some *dictator*. It was never that. But I needed – there needed to be an order.

Because children thrive in that – in order and in routine. You walk into chaos – they don't like it. Children would run out of classrooms and actually run into my room. They didn't stay in the chaos. They ran into my room.

Not because I was in there, "Sit down. Sit down – " no. They didn't do – that was not what it was. They came in – they really heard this voice. This is the voice that they heard.

And if there was a moment of you needed some redirecting, they might have heard a *slightly* different tone, but it wasn't going all off the, you know, – carrying on. But what was the difference? They knew Mr. Marshall loved them, *dearly*. And there were even times when children came to my room – came to my class they didn't go to other classes, because they knew how much they were loved. So, in my parenting, I bring that over.

So, Josiah, while he is while I'm very stern, I love, love, love on him. He gets *kisses*. I rub his face with my face. And he comes –

and even after he gets in trouble. What does that little thing do? Come, and rub my face with his face and all that.

And what does he feel so fine to do that? Because Daddy's always doing that, and he knows, in some way, he can make me melt. So, you know, you have – but he also knows how far he can go. So, that's the stern, you know? You won't be doing too much around here.

SM: Yeah. We'd love to hear more about Josiah and how he is.

DM: Oh, do you really want to know all of it?

[Laughter]

Well, he'll be 5 on the 16th of this month. I just can't believe he'll be five. I got him when he was two weeks old at – I adopted him through an amazing agency here, Adoptions Together, and, I mean, what are the words that you can say about *that*? Because I even say, in my video, that he came to save my life. He really did.

He is the light in the – he's the light of my life. . . . Parenthood is that job that is, as you'll hear Oprah say, it is the hardest job that anyone will ever have. And it is. I have had some jobs, but this is the hardest because there is – there is this intense love, you know? You all have family that you love a whole lot, and you can't imagine your life without them.

But then, you have a child and it's the most *consuming* – like, it's an *obsessive* love. Like, it's crazy. You just are like, "Oh, my God." Like, you can't – it's so indescribable. Every waking moment, every second, every everything, is about them.

And then, everything in the world that you see, it becomes different. The *feeling* of it is different because you have this child that's in this world and you're like, "Oh, my God. Oh, God. What do we do? What do we do? Because he's here. He sees this, and how do I shield him? How do I protect him? How do I make it better? Because he's here."

And so, yeah, he's five. He's brilliant. He's just so smart. He's far smarter than I. So, that's the joke. I'm like, "Well, yeah, you definitely don't come from *this* gene pool, 'cause you are a little genius." He builds. He puts together puzzles in a matter of seconds [*snaps*]. He loves his blocks, because he just makes things.

He now wants to go to Disney. He likes expensive things. So, he summons me to take him on a Disney Cruise this summer, which is the most expensive cruise. I have never even *been* on a cruise yet. Now, I've traveled the world in planes; I've not gone on a cruise ship.

He wants to go on a Disney Cruise. So, he's built, with the blocks that Santa brought him for Christmas, a Disney Cruise ship, and put his Mickey Mouse stickers on the side because he wants to go on a Disney Cruise. So, I guess Daddy's supposed to take him on a Disney Cruise. It's ten thousand . . . I'm like, "Huh?"

So, yes. I mean, these amazing things it's just – it's so – it's amazing. Like, he just amazes me in so many ways. [*chuckles*] Cause I'm like, "Oh." And he's a *boy*.

He's a real boy. Like, my parents didn't have three real boys because we didn't jump off things. We didn't break things. We didn't go outside and play in the dirt. He does all of that stuff.

So, my friends laugh because I *definitely* was not a real boy. I was probably a real prissy boy. *He* is a real one and I'm like, "Jesus, take the wheel." I mean. So, then, I have to – I taught him how to play soccer. I'm not athletic, but I taught him how to – he plays it really well.

I taught him how to play baseball. I didn't want to play these things, but I taught him how to do it. And it's not because he came to me about it, but I really wanted him to have those experiences. And the joke of it is – he hits really, really, really well so, he wants to hit the ball out of the yard, into the *woods*. So, that's his *goal*.

So, I can chase the ball and go into the – I don't want to go in the woods because I'm *scared*. Something could *be* in there. I mean, I was in the middle of doing an interview one day – a Zoom interview 'cause we were stuck in our houses, you know, the last few years – and there was a lizard in the basement. So, you know we have lizards in the woods – I didn't even know we *had* lizards. And I started screaming.

So, then, I was afraid that if I went in the woods, a lizard, snakes – 'cause there are snakes in there – we even have coyotes. I don't want to go in there. He hits the ball in there and I have to go in the woods to get the ball. I don't want to do it.

So, you know, this is part of – this is what he does. And he's laughing, "Daddy gotta go in the woods. Get the ball." "I don't want to go in there. Why do you hit it in there? Can you hit...?"

So, you know, that's Josiah. He's so much. He's so much. So, yeah, he'll have his Paw Patrol birthday party, you know, because he likes Paw Patrol. . . Yeah. That's Josiah.

RR: Taking like, one step back, what was the like – what was your decision process like? How did you decide to, you know, that it was the time to adopt and start, you know, taking steps?

DM: How did I decide? Well, you know, I often say that women are not the only ones who have this internal feeling that they want to have children. Men will just not admit it. But I – it was so *consuming*. My internal feeling was just like, "It is – I need to do this right now."

Like, it was ridiculous. I would see people and their babies, and it was just like, "Oh, God. I need a baby. I need this baby. I need a baby right now. I can't take it."

It was like – I would look on Facebook and people are announcing their pregnancies and I'm seeing new babies and I'm just like, "I can't." It was crazy. And again, you only associate with this with what women will feel. No. Men feel it.

They just tell a whole lie and say, "Oh, no, no, no." It's a lie. Stop it. Stop it, men. Stop it today.

So, that was when I really, really knew. So, January of 2015, I started the process. I went to Adoptions Together, went to an information meeting, and the rest was really history on that. So, yeah. That was it.

And that whole process was, from start to finish, a two-year process, from when I started to when he was in my arms, April 3rd of 2017.

SM: What did it feel like going through that whole process with adoption?

DM: There were so many emotions because, I'll say, when I came home that night after the information meeting and was going through all

of the documents – well, the papers and all of that – there were these exciting moments of "Wow. Look at this. This is – okay." And *then*, mm-mm-mm, you get to the sheet that kind of gives you the breakdown of cost and then, I just wanted to open up my window, just throw it all out. Now, I'm not a litterer.

I am very green. But I wanted to throw it out because I was like, "Je – How do you – who – I can't." So, you know, there's that. So, I went to sleep on that really hard and the Lord said, "This is the first of many experiences of sacrifice for children" 'cause parents sacrifice for their children, you know?

You're *here*. You're in school. And I'm sure your parents, in some way, contributed to that. My parents did. My parents paid for my whole college tuition.

And thank God that they could do something like that. Not every parent has that ability. You know, so, that – you just think about that stuff. And so, there was that. So, there was the stress of that.

There were – when I got accepted into the agency itself, then, there's like this portal that's opened up where you see all of these documents. So, you've gotta go in and you've gotta start with your whole life journey. It looked like one million things to do, and I was like, "Oh, God." So, you go through those things of "Oh, do I really want to do this? Well, yeah. Yeah. 'Cause what is the end goal here? I want to be a dad."

You go through that. You go through the home study and someone in your home and you're nervous like, "So, what are they looking for? Are they judging me? Are they gonna look in the corner and see if there's a speck of dust over there?" You think of these crazy things.

You're worried about that. When really, they're not. They want to know who you are – tell your exciting life story, hear your life story. You know, kind of almost like we are talking today. Almost like that whole journey is a home study, weirdly enough.

And then – well, with some things left out. But largely, that's really what it is. Some of these questions you've asked today is a part of a social work home study, believe it or not. And then – but the part that's *so* daunting, I would say, is that time of wait – when you're just waiting on that call. The most *emotional* time ever.

'Cause you think, "It might just never happen." But the agency prepares you for that. And so, you're just on this journey. It's this constant roller coaster. But the not-fun roller coaster at points, you know?

And I love roller coasters, but there were parts of the roller coaster – you know, where you get to the top and you're like, "Oh, do I really want to do that drop?" But yeah. It was just – yeah. But it's still amazing because you wouldn't *trade* that journey. And it's a part of Josiah's story that, as he gets older and I get to share it with him, that it's a part of the story.

Because while I didn't have the experience that birth – not, well, when you are in that period when you are – how would you say? Going through it – I guess, for lack of a better term – a traditional way when, if I were with – if I were – I guess I can't think of a different way. If I were in the traditional sense of it and I was with someone and they were pregnant and all of that business – you know, I don't have *that* kind of journey, where their journey's with that, you know, you know, you get to tell that story. Well, this is a different kind, and so, you love to share *that*. And then, I hear pregnant women talk about their pregnancies.

My mom always talks about when she was pregnant with each of us and all of these things and going through labor and she *still* talks about it, 40 something years later. She *loves* to tell it. She loves it. And I love listening to it. So, you know – and she says pregnancy was wonderful and the labor was great, you know, you don't need an epidural because it's just not that bad.

[*Laughter*]

I see your face. I'll give you her number. She'll coach you through the whole thing. It's just wonderful.

[*Crosstalk*]

RR: I need to hear that. I don't hear stories like that, so –

DM: We'll talk to my mother. She's the ultimate. Maybe that should be her next career. She should be a doula or something. I don't know.

But yeah. So, wow. I don't have that – I don't get to share on that end, but this is *my* story. So, you know, there's that.

RR: So, why did you – found your agency? Or tell us about your –

DM: How did I find it?

RR: – organization.

DM: Yeah. So, I had two people very close to me who were not actually connected who actually adopted through this – through – who actually adopted through Adoptions Together. So, I did not do, as a lot of people do, and just kind of go on this research hunt. They told me about Adoptions Together, and I was like, "Oh. This is where you, this is where you? – oh, okay. Fine."

And that's where I went. Because adoption and going through – looking through agencies can be a very tedious process because, quite frankly, you hear horror stories. And I did not have that story so, that's really the – I don't even have a deep story about it. That was really the simple part of it.

RR: So, what does your – what's the goals of your organization?

DM: So, the goal right *now* of my organization – 'cause there'll be layers built in – is to help people avoid the pitfalls and problems of adoption. Because there *are* so many. And I was so blessed to have people, as I just indicated, that were closely connected to me that adopted through Adoptions Together, so I had it easy. But because I had it easy, I know that so many individuals don't have it easy. So, I want to help them so that their road can be easier because even though I did – I know what the road *can* look like because I've heard the stories.

And I've had people to ask me, "Well, how did you do this? What did you do?" So, then, my mission was – because I believe that when you want to be a parent you should be able – because I tell people all the time, "There are two things you never get over in life. The loss of a child and not being able to have one." So, as you young ladies are here earning amazing degrees in an amazing institution, this is the journey of life.

Sometimes, you graduate, you get the degrees, and you may not work in that field. But, it's fine, you know? You will find other purposeful work that you are able to find great joy in. And you just move on, and you find that joy. But you never, ever move on – *ever* in your life – move on from not having children when you want to have them and losing them.

And so, my mission is to make sure that when you want to have them – 'cause I can't help those who have lost them, you know? Can't bring them back. But when you want to have them, I can help you – especially if you want to adopt or if you are even seeking to foster. That is my mission – to be able to do that.

SM: And what are some of those pitfalls and problems that you've seen in people's stories?

DM: Well, there are agencies that are not necessarily legitimate agencies. So, I advise people in terms of how to find legitimate agencies with resources there. There are also – and I won't name anything, but there are – people right now are doing a lot of online things – kind of like – sorry to bash it, but – well, maybe I'm a little prudish – sort of like online dating. And I know your generation likes it and that's fine, but it can sometimes bring up some toads there, you know? I've done it and I've found some.

So, some of that can be problematic as well, because there is really no *quick* way to adopt a child. So, we navigate that – what to look for when it comes to that online thing. Because, again, you will not get a quick baby. You just will not. What other pitfalls?

And then, also, in that – in dealing with birth parents – so, if you're not going through an agency and dealing with birth parents – because you want to even deal with legalities properly. You need to have an attorney. You can't just go and purchase a baby randomly. You just can't do it. Again, there are no quick ways.

Because it's such an emotional thing and when people want them, you can easily be taken. But you've gotta go through it the proper way. You cannot just randomly become a parent. You want to do it – and I get it.

It's also costly. It is. And so, part of what I am endeavoring to do – haven't quite gotten there yet, but it is in the work – to deal with the costs because that's a lot of – and I think that's why a lot of people are trying to go in, kind of, other ways, is because it is. It's extremely expensive. And people ask me why and I wish I had an answer. I don't.

But I am endeavoring to do some work around that, and connecting with agencies and other places to find out, "Well, what can we do about that?" Because, at the end of the day, there are

children who need homes. And I don't know that tens of thousands of dollars should really be what we need to pay. But we also need to know that there are foster care agencies, and we have children who are in the system that need homes. So, we also need to be very, very aware of foster care agencies and how *important* they are.

And we need to be looking at foster care agencies as well. So, there are other areas, but yeah. But I'm sorry, you asked specifically about the pitfalls, but I just kind of segued a little bit.

SM: That's fine.

RR: That's good. I was gonna ask if there's any like, unique challenges that you've encountered to either being single adopting, being gay adopting. . . Any of those, like?

DM: Fortunately, being here in Maryland, I have not. No challenges at all. But I do know that there are some when you're not in a very liberal state. So, with the organization, we are spreading so that we can do some work in other *not-so-liberal* states, because the discrimination is very real, and it should not be real. One's sexual orientation has *no* bearing – absolutely *no* bearing – on their ability to parent and love children.

As I said a long time ago in the interview, "Children don't know prejudice. It is taught." And there are so many misconceptions, so many just outlandish things that people say about those of us in the LGBTQ community that I just can't even articulate – I won't articulate because they're just so outrageous that I just don't want to speak of them.

But, one – they are not true, and I'll just say that. But with that, that is what, in other spaces and places, are being said and there are many that are turned away because of that. And so, while Maryland, fortunately, is not one of those places and I did not have to encounter that – now, that's not to say that every agency – because there are some agencies that may not – I did not encounter that with *my* particular agency. But, by and large, we're in a safe place here, so . . .

RR: Hm-hmm. So, I was gonna also ask – going back to parenting – what role does your faith play in your parenting now?

DM: My faith plays a lot in praying a lot. Parenting causes you to pray a *whole* lot because there are challenges with it, you know? And you can never be prepared for all of the different challenges that come with parenting. Children have different personalities, and you don't know what those personalities will be and so, you have to – and you won't always have the answers so, you have to do a lot of prayer in order to be able to, kind of, help you in coping, because, as I said, it's a hard job. Every day, there are different things that are presented and I'm not quite prepared.

And so. And I pray for direction in order to be able to best do what I need to do to be as successful as I can because this is the job you don't want to fail at, you know?

RR: Yeah. Have you been sharing your faith with him or bringing him to organized churches like you did growing up or how does it differ from?

DM: Yes. We go to church. We go to church every Sunday. He's antsy. He loves going to church.

We have a wonderful church. We go to the Pleasant Hope Baptist Church. And what's so unique about Pleasant Hope is that it is a very – it's a very affirming church. We have an amazing pastor, who actually is the son of the pastor that we grew up – that *I* grew up with, and so, I wanted to make sure that we went to a safe space, where I could be exactly who I am. And what's so amazing about him is he presses.

He presses in spaces that are not popular, at all, because, as you heard me say, "I go to Pleasant Hope *Baptist* Church." That is not a common denomination that is going to be open and affirming, and I'm not one who is tied to a denomination. So, I would never – if you ask me about denomination, I would say I'm non-denominational. And I still am non-denominational. I just happen to go to a Baptist church because *that* particular pastor is one who is very, very vocal about his support for the LGBTQ community and many communities that are marginalized.

And so, we go there, and he enjoys it. We say our nighttime prayers. And I don't want him to have a view of God that is a view that I had for so many years so, it's very important to me that we are in a space where he does not have that kind of view that I had, you know, that God is some God who is mean and scary and is

only looking to put you in some place called hell. I don't want him to have that. I don't want him to see God that way.

I want him to see his God as a God of love who's an embracing God, who's a loving God – a God of grace, a God of mercy. And so, I will always make sure that he's in a place where he sees God *that* way and not the way that I was taught to see him. Not in the church that I grew up in, because I'm very clear to make sure that I differentiate between the two because, again, I'm in the church of the son of the pastor that I grew up in. And that's so special and so unique to me.

SM: What role do your parents play in your son's life as grandparents?

DM: Well, my mom has a more active role. Unfortunately, my parents are now divorced, so my mom has a more active role. She is there everyday in his life and so – and she enjoys this role of being a grandmother. Oh, my goodness, she is just – he is her only grandchild right now so, she is just – she spoils him completely and totally rotten. It's so interesting, because I see her very much the way that I would envision that even both of her parents would be with him, because as I speak a lot about my grandfather, my grandmother was – I spent a lot of time with both of them – both of her parents.

And I see her very much in the way that both of them combined would have been with him because they were both very, very active with all of us. And so, she just loves – she loves this role. And this was a role that she always wanted. I always heard her talk about it. And so, yeah. She's just loving life.

And he's actually with her now so, she's either been loving life a whole lot or praying to God I hurry up and get – I'm able to get him as soon as I can. One of the two are happening at this present moment.

RR: Hm-hmm.

SM: And I'm kind of just wondering – what's it like to raise a son in Baltimore? How do you feel about that?

DM: Well, I mean, it's *fine*. There are so many things that we get to – he loves trains so, like, we've gone to the B&O Museum multiple times. He's obsessed with those. And it's been interesting, because

you know, he's just not at the space where I've been able to really get out, but then, we've been shut down, you know?

The aquarium. He loves fish so, I try to get him to places that are places that he really, really, really loves. So – well, we do a lot more – well, we just were able to get back out and travel again. I'm trying to think of the – he loves to jump so, getting him to places like Urban Air a lot so he can just jump. What else? Now, I'm just trying to think offhand.

I think, for him, as much as we can just be out and active is just fine for us. We just do a lot – I will say, we do a lot – it's just so weird, I think, because we have been so stuck for two years. Two years of his life, he's really just been stuck. And I think that's the hard thing in me answering that because two years my poor baby has been stuck. And now, we are just venturing out and that's because he's got a dad who's like, "Oh, Lord. Don't breathe on – " for almost one year, I was like, "Don't breathe on him."

So, we were in the house then. So, he had one year where he was really good to be out and so, *[laughs]* it's a mess. He's got that kind of father. It's probably 'cause he has an older father who's just, "Uh-uh. We can't go a whole lot of places the first year 'cause he – mm-mm. Too much breathing. Too much touching."

And then, the one year he could get out, we got out, did things, and a lot of them were traveling 'cause I love to take him places. So, just before the world shut down, he had his passport and we were off to the Dominican Republic and we were off to Florida twice, I think, in that year, and so, he did a lot of time in the air. And then, the world shut down. I was like, "Oh, no. Now, we can't go anywhere."

But yeah, I don't – it's fine. So, now that we can get out, we are getting back out. Christmas we were at the – where did we go to? There's a place in Mount Washington. There was another big train display – this fabulous firehouse there – because again, his world is trains.

So, there was that. So, a lot of it's spent with me taking him to places that he loves, and a lot of it is trains. A lot of trains.

RR:

So, I guess we'll start to like, wrap up now. So, sort of broadly, like, how has your conception, I guess, of family grown

throughout your life, if at all? What does family mean to you now and, maybe, what did it mean to you before?

DM:

Family still very much means the same thing. It is still love. It is still – I think – well, you know what? It is more open acceptance of so many *different* – of so many differences. Because I also think that my family was so traditional, and that's just because that's from lived experience, right?

And so, I feel like having lived more and experienced more myself, I bring that difference of "Now, we see the world through a broader lens." Even though we were a very well-*traveled* family, I think that my own lived experiences have now broadened *my* immediate family's lens even to different religions, because we were very stuck in one religion, yeah? So, I think family now is a lot more open and inclusive. It is still very love – still very much love. It's still very much sharing, it's still very much, you know, doing things together.

Still very much that travel – and all of those things of exposure – but I would say now, it's even more open and inclusive, broadened, so that Josiah gets to experience things in a space where prayerfully, as best as I can, he's not doing like I did when I first moved to New York and I was like, "Why did he just get on that train with this tutu? What? What? What is all this green, purple, and pink hair?" things.

Because, you know, I didn't see all of that here, right? So, now, with my more lived experience and not thinking of things as – you know, thinking out of the box, you know? It's not weird. It's not strange. It's not – This is what it is.

And we embrace and we accept everybody for who exactly they are. And so, I think that is what *family* looks like. The family is the rainbow and that's what I want family to look like because family's also not blood, right? I have an adopted child so, family's also extended beyond what we think – people always say, "Blood is thicker than water." I don't, you know, that's lovely, but it's not all blood now in my family and it won't, you know, – I still want another one and that won't be blood.

That won't even be Josiah's blood. That won't be any of our blood. So, family will look a lot different, and we love it, and we embrace it.

SM: I guess, is there anything else that you wish that we asked you about that you'd like to talk about?

DM: No. I think y'all have dug all in my business.

[Laughter]

No, no. I think it was absolutely wonderful. I think it was wonderful.

RR: Okay. And also, do you have any ideas about what you would like to see your story used for or a way that we can showcase it? Because our class is planning on doing a cumulative project at the end of the semester and we're gonna edit some parts of all – everybody's stories that all the partnerships are working on so, I don't know. Do you have any ideas that you would like to see your story used for?

DM: You know, I would love to see it also used in terms of – because I talked a lot about the faith-based community. I would definitely love to see it used as a larger part of a project based on – for lack of a better term – sexuality *and* the faith-based community. What are the long-term effects and how do we embrace this to kind of tear down this whole thing? Because this does lend itself to a larger situation in terms of how individuals are being able to reconcile their faith and their sexuality. We're looking at a lot of people – because we have a lot of mental illness within the LGBTQ community, and I think that a lot of it is almost exacerbated by this. 'Cause there are a lot of people who say, "How can I – " because there are a lot of people of faith in this community and they are struggling, because they're trying to be able to say, "Well, there is this one side that says, 'This is just so wrong', but I know that I didn't create this myself."

So, I would definitely love to see this used in a broader discussion around that. And I've wanted to use my voice, in particular, to be able to really have that discussion. So, I would definitely love that. And definitely, I think, as you're also endeavoring to do – in terms of, how do we deal with the ability to – while this is not an issue here in Maryland, per se, the adoption process *and* the LGBTQ community? Because – and I think you are endeavoring to do some of that, but what are the barriers outside of Maryland?

Because, again, Maryland is not – it's a liberal state, but that's not the case everywhere. And my organization is doing work to be

able to tear down those barriers outside of the state, 'cause it's so important. But I definitely see those as two main things. If I think of something else, I'll e-mail it to you, but those are two things.

SM: Thank you. That's really helpful.

DM: Yeah.

SM: So, yeah, I think we will end the interview there and yeah, thank you again for coming in. Sorry about all of the mess with the rescheduling. In terms of like, going forward, the payment information – so, we're gonna be giving your e-mail address to the administration who will be able to either deliver a check to you in a couple of weeks or they could give it to us, and we could come deliver it to you in person. Whichever works better. And it does take a few weeks just because –

DM: I know how universities –

SM: – administration can be slow, but definitely, let us know if there's any issues with that whole process.

DM: Okay. That sounds good. That sounds really good.

SM: All right. Do you have any other questions or –?

DM: No. This has been most enjoyable. Your line of questioning was absolutely excellent.

RR: Thank you.

SM: Thank you.

DM: Now, did you create those yourselves?

RR: Yeah. We wrote them.

DM: Those are excellent questions.

RR: Thank you.

DM: Excellent. I wasn't prepared for – I should have been. You are all Hopkins's students. You're Hopkins students. I wasn't at – I don't know where. I don't want to say anything terrible about somebody else's school, but yeah. No. Those are excellent questions.

RR: Thank you

SM: Thank you for giving so much insight.

RR: Do you think we like – is there any questions you think would be good to add?

DM: No. I was thoroughly, I was like, "Oh, this is good. These are really good." I was very impressed.

RR: Yeah. I mean, yeah, a lot of what the class has kind of stressed to us is also trying to like, make it like, a partnership. So, working with the interviewee to go where they lead as well. So, yeah, that's –

DM: I mean, they were so good, too. I'm like, "You know, are you all journalism students?"

RR: No.

SM: No.

DM: No?

[Laughter]

Okay. And you didn't think about it? No?

RR: Maybe not.

DM: Because, you know, what's so good about it is you have to be able to one – not only ask good questions –

[End of Audio]