

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project
Margaret & Francis (Bert) Forrest, Sr.
Forrest Dental Laboratory
Interviewed by Alma Jordon
March 26, 2024
At the USCT Interpretive Center in Lexington Park
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[this interview is not logged]
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38 minutes, 12 seconds

Alma Jordon ([00:03](#)):

Good afternoon. My name is Alma Jordon, and we are at the, uh, U.S. Colored Troops Interpretive Center in Lexington Park. Uh, this is the building for UCAC, the Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions, and I'm here with Mr. And Mrs. Forrest, Francis and Margaret. Uh, and today is March 26th, 2024, and we are planning to talk about their business today. Um, can you give me your name and where you live Margaret?

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([00:46](#)):

Margaret Cecelia Forrest. I live at, uh, [redacted] in Leonardtown, Maryland.

Alma Jordon ([00:52](#)):

Okay.

Bert ([00:54](#)):

And my name is Francis Forrest Senior, but I prefer to be called Bert, B-E-R-T.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([01:02](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([01:02](#)):

And I take that nickname after a very famous barber in St. Mary's County, a businessman who inspired us.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([01:11](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([01:11](#)):

So, I just thought I'd put that in.

Alma Jordon ([01:15](#)):

Would you like to share his name?

Bert ([01:18](#)):

His name was Bert Langley, and, uh, my given name was Fra- is Francis, and of course, being the youngest of five children, uh, I was teased a bit about that name, and Bert, as I said, used to cut our hair, and I thought he was the greatest guy in the world, and I said, "I want to be named Bert," and it just took, and everybody started calling me Bert after that, and that's what I've always gone by.

Alma Jordon ([01:54](#)):

Okay, thank you, that's a very interesting bit of history, (laughs). Can you share, uh, the name of your business, and how you got started?

Bert ([02:05](#)):

Yeah. Our business is named Forrest Dental Laboratory, after us, and, uh, the business got s- if I don't know how, it's kind of a long story leading up to how it got started, but there was, we both tended- attended public schools in St. Mary's County. Uh, we attended, uh, Banneker School, uh, which was, uh, a segregated school that, at that time, from grades one through 12, and Margaret attended, go ahead you-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([02:45](#)):

St. Josephs Catholic School, and they, um, switched over to Banneker, uh, in 6th grade.

Bert ([02:51](#)):

Yeah, and, as I said, we were, we attended Banneker, and then, I- I make a long story short, the schools, uh, were integrated. It didn't just happen like that, but to make the story a little more, uh, uh, compact, uh, we ended up going to Chopticon High School, both of us went to Chopticon High School. I'll kinda skip a little bit, but they had a career day at Chopticon High School, and, a young gentleman came to Chopticon High School from, uh, the Career Academy School of Dental Technology in Washington D.C. They did a presentation. He had a- a very nice video, and I always, in school, I, at Banneker, I played in the school band.

([03:48](#)):

Margaret was also in the school band and, uh, I excelled in art and carving and sculpting, those kinda things just came naturally to me, and I knew when I saw this video about dental technology that that was the career for me, and I came home and talked to my mom and dad, and as John Lancaster liked to say-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([04:14](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([04:15](#)):

... "And so on-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([04:16](#)):

And so forth.

Bert ([04:19](#)):

... and so forth," (laughs).

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([04:19](#)):
(laughs).

Bert ([04:19](#)):
And that's kinda the short story of how- how- how I ended up, uh, going to school for dental technology.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([04:27](#)):
Now let me add that we were among the first students to integrate Chopticon High School.

Alma Jordon ([04:31](#)):
Mm-hmm.

Bert ([04:31](#)):
Well, you know, when, you- you gotta, I'll give you a little background, we- we, I don't know if you would say, "We integrated the school," because the school was built. The, at that time the- the philosophy in St. Mary's was e- especially for that end of the county. Of course the Greats Mills integration process was a little bit different from ours, but they combined Leonardtown High School, Banneker School, and Margaret Brent School, were com- they built one high school, and all of the upper class, well, I think, it was from grade, from- from the 10th, el- ninth-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([05:13](#)):
Ninth.

Bert ([05:13](#)):
... 10th and 11th graders all attended Chopticon High School. It made the integration process a lot smoother, because the school did not have a history with any particular group, so that made, at least in my opinion-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([05:33](#)):
Mm-hmm.

Bert ([05:33](#)):
... that made the integration process go much more smoothly.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([05:38](#)):
Yeah.

Bert ([05:38](#)):
So, that was, that- that's kinda how that worked out.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([05:41](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Alma Jordon ([05:45](#)):

Okay, so when, um, tell me when you started the business?

Bert ([05:50](#)):

I'll let my wife-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([05:51](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([05:51](#)):

... answer some.

Alma Jordon ([05:52](#)):

(laughs).

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([05:53](#)):

It was in 1979.

Alma Jordon ([05:56](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([05:56](#)):

Uh, he had finished up his, uh, apprenticeships and stuff after he got out of the, uh, dental technology school, he went to work for several different labs over the years, and he came home one day and said, "Hey, I think, I'd like to start a business here in the county. They don't have anything like this here."

Bert ([06:13](#)):

Mm.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([06:13](#)):

I said, "Okay."

Bert ([06:15](#)):

And at that, at that time, we were living-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([06:17](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([06:18](#)):

... in, uh-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (06:19):

Landover, Maryland.

Bert (06:20):

... Landover. We were living in Landover, Maryland at that time in a, and, uh, uh, we decided to- to move back to St. Mary's.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (06:28):

Another contributing factor to that was that our children were getting ready to... at least Michelle was-

Bert (06:33):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (06:33):

... getting ready to start school, and we wanted-

Bert (06:35):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (06:35):

... to be able to, um, have them start school here, where we knew we had family.

Bert (06:39):

We needed good, cheap, childcare.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (06:42):

(laughs).

Audience (06:42):

(laughs).

Bert (06:43):

And- and my mom was available, (laughs).

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (06:47):

(laughs), and our sister-in-law on the weekends.

Bert (06:48):

So, that's how that came about. Yeah, we moved back. Uh, another little interesting, uh, uh, side bit was that my- my grandfather, Charles Forrest had passed away, and he lived in a little trailer, w- s- you know, a small trailer, but it was, it was large enough, and he left the trailer to me in his will, and so the trailer was a perfect size to start the laboratory. So, the l- the trailer was in Ridge, Maryland, and we moved the

trailer to Leonardtown, and we stripped the inside out and put in shelving and desk and, uh, my older brother, uh, James... but we called him, "Jimmy,"-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([07:37](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([07:38](#)):

... was kind enough to help us purchase some of the laboratory equipment-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([07:43](#)):

He sure did.

Bert ([07:44](#)):

... that we needed.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([07:45](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([07:45](#)):

So, like with all people, I- I shouldn't say, "With all people," is for- for us, we had a lot of help-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([07:52](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Bert ([07:52](#)):

... in doing this. It's not just something that-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([07:54](#)):

It was like it was meant to be, you know?

Bert ([07:56](#)):

... you- you know, that we just did this all on our own.

Alma Jordon ([07:58](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([07:59](#)):

We had a great deal of help.

Alma Jordon ([08:01](#)):

Okay.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([08:02](#)):

And I was still working at-

Bert ([08:04](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([08:04](#)):

... the time for the federal government, so-

Bert ([08:05](#)):

Right.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([08:05](#)):

... we, we had backup funds, (laughs).

Bert ([08:07](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Alma Jordon ([08:10](#)):

Would you, um, tell me about your- your schooling, your dental schooling, uh-

Bert ([08:16](#)):

Okay, alright. Well, as I said, the... we went, I went to school in- in Washington D.C. It was a- a 12-month course, and we covered all of the basics that were done in a dental laboratory, from making full dentures to, uh, cast, metal frameworks, uh, some orthodontic appliance work, and some crown and bridge work. We covered the basics of all of that. And, one of the things that I really liked about the school was they e- helped you to find an apprenticeship, which, uh, I guess, today- today, uh, it, what is it called today, not apprenticeship, but, um-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([09:09](#)):

I don't know.

Bert ([09:10](#)):

... yeah, an in- um, an intern-

Alma Jordon ([09:10](#)):

Internship.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([09:10](#)):

Internship, okay.

Bert ([09:12](#)):

... Yes, internship. Well, in any case, it's real cheap labor, you know? So, I ended up doing a num- a- a one-year apprenticeship for a dental laboratory in Silver Spring, Wayne and Capone Dental Laboratory,

and I worked there for a year. I completed my apprenticeship. Uh, they liked what I did. I was hired full-time, and I worked there for four years. I ended up, uh, running their cast framework department. There were, there was me and two other guys in the, in the department. So, that's was the basics of my education in dental technology.

Alma Jordon ([09:54](#)):

Mm-hmm, okay. So, um, share with me, uh, what actual services you provide [inaudible 00:10:04]?

Bert ([10:03](#)):

Okay, alright. Well, we, I- I- I'll give you a little bit. Our- our business plan was that, uh, we would provide service to the dentists in St. Mary's, Charles and Calvert counties. The, at that time, there were no other dental laboratories serving southern Maryland, and the only competition would be, uh, mail-order, mail-order dental laboratories. So, uh, we, as I said, we've always- we make full dentures. We make, uh, cast metal frameworks. We do partial dentures, orthodontic appliance work. Uh, we repair and relines and, uh, do maintenance work on all those types of appliances.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([11:00](#)):

So, if you break a tooth or something like that, that's, he repairs that kind of stuff as well?

Bert ([11:04](#)):

Yeah.

Alma Jordon ([11:05](#)):

Okay. So, um, then you mentioned your actual dental plan, can you tell us more about that?

Bert ([11:15](#)):

Well, I- I- I guess, I- I would say, when you, when you, when you, and- and I, and I kinda get this from my good friend Elmer Brown, you know, it, our plan is basically what I said, but it certainly, it's a living plan-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([11:31](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([11:32](#)):

... it- it, uh, evolves as you evolve, and as the needs evolve. Uh, I honestly would tell you that, uh, when I was in school, and when I first started working, the way dentistry was practiced then, and the way it is practiced today, it's like a whole new world. The- the, and I'm sure you as, as a patient, you know, when- when I was in, uh, training, a big deal was impression taking, and how impressions were taken. Today, they don't take impressions anymore. It's all digital. They scan your mouth, and they send that impression anywhere in the world. I mean, when you stop and think about that, how that changes, uh, the business of so many laboratories-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([12:34](#)):

Mm.

Bert ([12:34](#)):

... because, back in the day, you, uh, based a lot, especially for smaller labs, based on the number of doctors who were in your immediate vicinity, but now, that is out the window. (laughs), you know, it's any doctor, anywhere in the world, but of course, you have to have the wherewithal to buy the equipment of today.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:04](#)):

They're expensive today.

Bert ([13:05](#)):

And it is not cheap.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:07](#)):

No.

Bert ([13:08](#)):

So, yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:09](#)):

So, back in the day, with regards to the way that, uh, people, uh, the dentists would have to send stuff away, was with the Greyhound bus, used to come through Leonardtown-

Bert ([13:18](#)):

Yeah, right, yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:19](#)):

... they put the stuff on it, and-

Bert ([13:20](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:21](#)):

... sent it to wherever up in D.C. or wherever.

Bert ([13:22](#)):

Yeah, that- that- that's how, that's how we s-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:25](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([13:25](#)):

... received our supplies-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:25](#)):
From the Greyhound bus service.

Bert ([13:28](#)):
... was on a bus. There was no UPS.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:32](#)):
FedEx.

Bert ([13:35](#)):
There was no, (laughs), FedEx, (laughs), you know. That was how- how it was done.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:36](#)):
Yeah.

Bert ([13:37](#)):
So again, you have to be ready to change as the times and technology change.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([13:44](#)):
Mm-hmm.

Alma Jordon ([13:47](#)):
So, at the time when you started your business then, the uniqueness of your business was, uh, the fact that there were no labs here?

Bert ([13:57](#)):
Right-

Alma Jordon ([13:58](#)):
Oh.

Bert ([13:58](#)):
... that- that's one, that was one of the, yeah, one of the basic premises of what we were doing, but again, you know, I'm, you- you- you're talking, you know, 40 or 45 years ago. Uh, then, not only were there no labs here, there weren't a lot of dentists here either. Well, I imagine, when we first opened, if there- there may have been six-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([14:30](#)):
Yeah.

Bert ([14:31](#)):
... practicing dentists in St. Mary's County. In today s- you have some dental offices that have four or five doctors practicing in the same practice.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([14:47](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([14:47](#)):

So, that, you know, really is... you have to take those, take that into consideration when you're talking about, you know, your business plan and- and how your business operates.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([14:57](#)):

And the adjustment has been because of those types of changes and stuff that he can turn stuff around in 24 hours-

Bert ([15:03](#)):

Yeah, right.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:04](#)):

... so, if you break a denture-

Bert ([15:05](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:05](#)):

... you lose a tooth, um-

Bert ([15:07](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:07](#)):

... the doctors call, and since I retired, I've become his other delivery person-

Bert ([15:12](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:12](#)):

... so, (laughs).

Bert ([15:12](#)):

So, that's- that's still a large part of what we d- do, is a fact that we are here, and we can provide services that even though you can take an impression and send it anywhere in the world, there are some things that you- you can't send, it still has to be done the old-fashioned way, and we are here to do that.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:39](#)):

Right, like there's somebody whose going to a wedding-

Bert ([15:43](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:43](#)):

... uh, recently, down in Florida, broke his tooth on-

Bert ([15:44](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:45](#)):

... like a Wednesday-

Bert ([15:46](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:46](#)):

... and he wanted to have it, (laughs)-

Bert ([15:49](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:49](#)):

... before he went, so that meant, you know, a lot of nighttime overwork-

Bert ([15:53](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([15:53](#)):

... and stuff like that, but he got it done, so.

Bert ([15:54](#)):

But we do, we- we- we do a lot of that. And also, I often get asked, uh, "Why don't you guys do more crown and bridge work?" But when we opened our business in St. Mary's County, people could not afford crown and bridge-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([16:14](#)):

No.

Bert ([16:14](#)):

... in St. Mary's County.

Alma Jordon ([16:15](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([16:16](#)):

In St. Mary's County, uh, folks at that time, and still today, uh, they do, uh, partial dentures or full dentures. That is a large part of what we still do, because of the economics, uh. So, you know, that's- that's-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([16:35](#)):

Adjusted as time-

Bert ([16:41](#)):

... what we do.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([16:41](#)):

... necessitated it.

Bert ([16:41](#)):

Yeah.

Alma Jordon ([16:42](#)):

So, um, do you have any employees that, uh, assist you in your business?

Bert ([16:48](#)):

I, over the years, I, at one time, we had three employees working with us-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([16:55](#)):

Plus me as a [inaudible 00:16:56].

Bert ([16:56](#)):

... yeah, yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([16:57](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([16:57](#)):

And- and- and that was when I was younger, and, uh, when we were, uh, uh, thinking of going in other directions, but over the years, I still have, uh, one guy who works with me full-time.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([17:10](#)):

And me.

Bert ([17:11](#)):

And- and of course, my wife Margaret,

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([17:13](#)):

(laughs).

Audience ([17:13](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([17:13](#)):

But that- that kind of, that- that suits us at this point, you know, we-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([17:18](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([17:19](#)):

... we- we like that size, it- it- it fits what we do-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([17:22](#)):

[inaudible 00:17:23].

Bert ([17:23](#)):

... so, yeah. So, we do, as I said, we have the one full-time employee, and, uh, and of course, Margaret and I.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([17:31](#)):

Yeah, I'm the bookkeeper-

Bert ([17:32](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([17:32](#)):

... and part-time delivery person now, (laughs).

Bert ([17:34](#)):

Yeah.

Alma Jordon ([17:35](#)):

Oh, okay. Okay. So, um, so your- your customers are basically the dental, the dentists in the area-

Bert ([17:45](#)):

That- that is correct.

Alma Jordon ([17:46](#)):

... yes.

Bert ([17:47](#)):

That's- that's the only customers that we have.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([17:50](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([17:50](#)):

Legally, a- a dental laboratory cannot work on patients.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([17:56](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([17:57](#)):

We- we- we- we don't see patients, but of course, I often get calls, yeah. You know, at- at- at onetime, I re- I hate to, but at onetime, uh, dentists, uh, legally could not advertise. This was... been since- since I was practicing, and now you go to the movies-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([18:21](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([18:22](#)):

... and you see doctors advertising, you know, in the movie theaters... they send out flyers, but at onetime, that was against the law for doctors. I mean, this is, you know-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([18:34](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([18:35](#)):

... like I said-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([18:35](#)):

Changing.

Bert ([18:36](#)):

... 35, 40 years ago.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([18:39](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([18:39](#)):

Yeah.

Alma Jordon ([18:40](#)):

Well, can you advertise?

Bert ([18:42](#)):

I advertise to dentists, but I don't advertise to the public.

Alma Jordon ([18:46](#)):

Right, right.

Bert ([18:46](#)):

Okay.

Alma Jordon ([18:51](#)):

Okay, okay. So, uh, basically your company, your business is local then, basically?

Bert ([18:57](#)):

Basically yes.

Alma Jordon ([18:57](#)):

To- to the St. Mary's, Charles and s-

Bert ([19:02](#)):

And Calvert.

Alma Jordon ([19:02](#)):

... Calvert.

Bert ([19:03](#)):

Yeah, yes.

Alma Jordon ([19:03](#)):

Interesting.

Bert ([19:03](#)):

Yeah.

Alma Jordon ([19:07](#)):

Okay. So, do you, at this point, have any plans to grow your business even more?

Bert ([19:13](#)):

At this plan, at this point, actually I do not. I'm- I'm- I'm- I'm hoping that-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([19:19](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([19:20](#)):

... one of the grandkids will have an interest, and, uh, you know, want to, but I don't, I don't know if they really are interested in that. It's, you know, it's- it's, kind of, what I do is kind of old-school, it's still hands on, and every... at least with my grandkids, everything is computers-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([19:44](#)):

Automated, yeah.

Bert ([19:44](#)):

... and that's what they wanna do, and I-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([19:47](#)):

Can't do that.

Bert ([19:48](#)):

... they've always came and worked in the lab during the summertime. Both of my kids worked in the lab during the summertime, because I want them to have at- at least a little-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([19:58](#)):

An understanding, mm-hmm.

Bert ([19:58](#)):

... bit of understanding of what we're doing and why? But I don't, I encourage them to do what they are passionate about.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([20:08](#)):

Exactly.

Bert ([20:09](#)):

And this is what I've been passionate about, but, you know, my dream doesn't necessarily mean that it's their dream.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([20:18](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([20:19](#)):

So, that's kinda how that works.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([20:22](#)):

Yeah, we've been very fortunate, you know? Our, um, son is a vice principal over at Patuxent High School in Calvert County. Our daughter is the clinical coordinator for the pharmacy department at s-MedStar St. Mary's.

Bert ([20:34](#)):

Yeah, she's a doctor of pharmacy, yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (20:34):

Yeah, she has her doctorate in pharmacy.

Bert (20:34):

So we're, you know, family wise, that's, you know-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (20:34):

Yeah, yeah.

Bert (20:34):

... we have, yeah, we've been very blessed-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (20:42):

Yeah, yeah.

Bert (20:42):

... very blessed, yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (20:43):

Grandkids, uh, one graduated, Olivia. She's, uh, Michelle's oldest, uh, child. She's, uh, now the, and I hope I get this right, Snap vital coordinator for Southern Maryland, speaks fluent Spanish. They hired her before she even got out of school. They had given her a scholarship. The last- last semester she was there, they gave her a scholarship, and she ha- didn't even apply for the job. They just knew what she could do-

Alma Jordon (21:14):

Mm.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (21:15):

... and they offered her the job, and she's been doing an excellent job of it. Uh, Sydney, my s- our son's daughter graduated from Clark Atlanta, HBCU, and so did, uh, our- our son Bert, he grad- he graduated from Morgan, uh, State University, another HBCU. Um, Michelle graduated from the University of Maryland, and so Sydney just graduated from Clark Atlanta, and before she even graduated, (laughs), she got offered a job down at Disney World in Orlando, Florida... internship there. Our grandson, uh, Bryce, he got accepted to William & Mary. All of them have been on honor role since high school, college, whatever, so we're very proud of all of them.

(22:03):

So, he's in his junior year at, uh, William & Mary, doing well.

Alma Jordon (22:06):

Mm-hmm.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:07](#)):

So, we're pleased, (laughs)-

Bert ([22:09](#)):

Right.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:09](#)):

... with how things are going.

Alma Jordon ([22:09](#)):

Very proud grandparents.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:09](#)):

And very blessed.

Bert ([22:12](#)):

And, yeah, as a matter of fact, (laughs), I know we're getting a little off point here, but, (laughs), we got a call last week, (laughs), and- and he says, "Pop-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:19](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([22:20](#)):

... I'm in Columbia."

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:22](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([22:23](#)):

(laughs), I said-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:24](#)):

What?

Bert ([22:25](#)):

... Co- you know, Columbia, I'm thinking-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:27](#)):

Columbia, Maryland.

Bert ([22:27](#)):

... Columbia, Maryland, (laughs). But now, one of his classmates, s- one of his- his fellow teammates is from Columbia.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:36](#)):

He's also on a soccer team down there as well.

Bert ([22:41](#)):

Eh, an- yeah, he's, yeah, and, uh, uh, the parents invited him down to Columbia, and I mean, that's not anything particular just to our kids, it's to all kids today. You know, they- they- they travel the world in a way-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:56](#)):

Don't think about the money.

Bert ([22:56](#)):

... that we never dreamed of traveling.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([22:59](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([22:59](#)):

I mean, if- if, when we were coming along, my, I had a brother in San Francisco, and we got to go to California-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:06](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([23:06](#)):

... and we thought, "Wow-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:07](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([23:08](#)):

... this is really s-, "you know, and it was, our, not to, you know, to take anything away from it, but they- they see the entire world, and- and I'm- I'm so happy for them-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:19](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Bert ([23:22](#)):

... yeah. Of course, and all we do is sit and wor- and worry-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:25](#)):

(laughs)-

Bert ([23:25](#)):

... (laughs).

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:26](#)):

... till they come back home, (laughs).

Bert ([23:30](#)):

Because I, because I tell them all the time, "If something happens, (laughs), I might send you a few dollars, but I can't get to you," you know? But that's the way it is.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:39](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([23:39](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:40](#)):

[inaudible 00:23:40] had said, I remember when we were at our, um, 50th wedding anniversary says, "Grandma and grandpa, I know one thing, if I'm in trouble, you're gonna get us."

Bert ([23:48](#)):

(laughs).

Alma Jordon ([23:48](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([23:48](#)):

Yeah, yeah, okay.

Alma Jordon ([23:53](#)):

Yeah, kids- kids of nowadays-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:55](#)):

Yeah, ve-

Alma Jordon ([23:55](#)):

... they-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:56](#)):

... very, very proud of all of them.

Bert ([23:57](#)):

Yeah.

Alma Jordon ([23:58](#)):

... yeah, you're blessed.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([23:59](#)):

Yes, we are.

Alma Jordon ([23:59](#)):

You're blessed, yeah. So, tell me, what does a typical day look like to, uh, your business?

Bert ([24:07](#)):

Well, I'll be quite honest with you, it- it doesn't look anything like it did 20 years ago, because now I'm only working part-time. Uh, I work, four, maybe five hour on- on a busy day, I work five hours a day, but right now I work, uh, four hours a day. But, back in the day, (laughs), when I was working full-time-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([24:34](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([24:36](#)):

... the days were 10, 12-hour days, which is not unusual for anyone in business. That's what owning and running your own business is all about. It's lot of long hours, and, uh, hard work, and I would say that, you know, if your intent is to, uh, own your own business, as I've said before, make sure that it's something that you are very passionate about, because it- it, you can't do it part-time.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([25:10](#)):

Yeah, because back then-

Bert ([25:12](#)):

You-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([25:12](#)):

... uh, for dinner, I- I'd have to take dinner out... oh, we forgot to tell. We built, after, uh, uh-

Bert ([25:17](#)):

After the trailer-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([25:18](#)):

... the business got established-

Bert ([25:19](#)):

... Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([25:19](#)):

... we built a lab.

Bert ([25:20](#)):

Yeah, so.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([25:21](#)):

And that's what he's working out of now-

Bert ([25:22](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([25:23](#)):

... which is close to the house, within walking distance of the house.

Alma Jordon ([25:26](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([25:26](#)):

So, back then when he was doing those long, long hours, sometimes it would run overnight, I would take dinner, breakfast, lunch, whatever out to him while he was still working.

Alma Jordon ([25:38](#)):

Mm.

Bert ([25:38](#)):

Yeah.

Alma Jordon ([25:38](#)):

Mm. Well, as, um, we're going off to a little something different now-

Bert ([25:47](#)):

Mm.

Alma Jordon ([25:47](#)):

... as a minority, uh, have you faced any challenges with your business?

Bert ([25:54](#)):

Yes. And I- I would say, i- it was very much what we- we just said, uh, listen, owning a- a Black dental laboratory in St. Mary's County 40 years ago, of course, there were certain challenges that we, uh, had to face, but I- I must be very honest, we- we have always tried to be good people.

Alma Jordon ([26:32](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([26:34](#)):

And I- I- I'm a firm believer that in life you get what you give, and if you treat people with respect and dignity, in most cases-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([26:45](#)):

In most cases.

Bert ([26:47](#)):

... they will come back to you with that very same thing, and that's what we have done. I- I'll tell you a little sidebar story... the very first doctor that sent us work in St. Mary's County, he had a young lady who was his hygienist. I didn't know her particularly well, but I found this out later, but she knew Margaret, and she knew me from Chopticon High School, and she told this doctor that, "I- I know them, and they are good people," and I think, based on that, he sent us-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([27:32](#)):

[inaudible 00:27:33].

Bert ([27:33](#)):

... our first work in St. Mary's County. Now, this was a white guy. Listen-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([27:38](#)):

There wasn't a lot of them.

Bert ([27:38](#)):

... and at that time, uh, I don't think there were any African American dentists-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([27:47](#)):

They were not.

Bert ([27:47](#)):

... in St. Mary's County, 45 years ago.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([27:50](#)):

They weren't, no.

Bert ([27:51](#)):

So, I knew that, but I felt... and my wife, we also felt, my dad used to say, "If you do good work, (laughs), people will patronize you."

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([28:02](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([28:03](#)):

And I knew we were doing good work, and we were doing work that, uh, uh, they couldn't get done as quickly anywhere else.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([28:14](#)):

Or better.

Bert ([28:15](#)):

And that proved to be true.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([28:17](#)):

Yeah. We became very good friends with them.

Bert ([28:19](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([28:20](#)):

Uh, with Dr. George.

Bert ([28:21](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([28:22](#)):

Um, back then, they were very good friends right-

Bert ([28:24](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([28:24](#)):

... right up to the end.

Alma Jordon ([28:25](#)):

Okay, good. As a business owner, uh, what legacy would you like to leave?

Bert ([28:36](#)):

You know, I- I- I thought about that question, because I saw it on the list, and- and- and I- I want to say, you know, we- we- we've always been involved with the co- with the community, and over the years, we, I- I- I have to think of some folks... there- there's an organization, the Minority Business Alliance, right, you-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([29:01](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([29:02](#)):

... you, I know you've it, and- and it, and it was started by a gentleman name Elmer Brown, whom I will never forget.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([29:10](#)):

We were both charter members-

Bert ([29:11](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([29:11](#)):

... of getting that setup.

Bert ([29:12](#)):

And that was, that was, that was a- a great... we got to meet a lot of great people-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([29:19](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([29:19](#)):

... we worked with them. One of them is sitting right over there, Nathaniel Lawrence, and- and- and there were many folks in that, Miss, uh, Esther Smith, she was a beautician here in St. Mary's County. She ran her business for years, uh, there were people, uh, Miss Elizabeth Wales, sh- she, uh, was a good business. Your dad Leroy Thompson... these were all people, uh, Harold Herndon-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([29:52](#)):

Yeah-

Bert ([29:52](#)):

... and Catherine Herndon-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([29:53](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([29:54](#)):

... all of them helped us in one way or another.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([29:57](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([29:58](#)):

So, you know, my thing is, as- as they say, "We stand on the shoulders of those folks," and we think about them every day, and we tell our kids about those- those people-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([30:09](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Bert ([30:10](#)):

... because nobody does it all by themselves.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([30:14](#)):

Well, as a matter of fact, um, my niece is taking her two sons and her mother, my sister, Rani, on the civil rights tour this week, sh- they're traveling all through Georgia-

Bert ([30:27](#)):

Mm.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([30:27](#)):

... and Alabama, and all of... going through all of that, she says, she wants to make sure that her children know the history.

Bert ([30:35](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Alma Jordon ([30:37](#)):

That's wonderful, that's wonderful. Mm-hmm. Uh, do you feel that you, uh, have a responsibility to the community as a business owner? I think, you touched-

Bert ([30:50](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

Alma Jordon ([30:52](#)):

... some of that.

Bert ([30:53](#)):

The, I mean, you, beyond just being a business person, we all have a- a responsibility-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:00](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Bert ([31:00](#)):

... we, uh, uh, and- and- and we- we do our best to, uh, to set a good example, to participate, as I said, in those organizations, uh, uh-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:16](#)):

He was a member of the rotary club.

Bert ([31:18](#)):

... yeah, I was a member of the Leonardtown Rotary Club-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:23](#)):

Yeah, the Housing Authority.

Bert ([31:23](#)):

... yes, and- and- and- and those things-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:23](#)):

Many others, the NAACP, don't forget the NAACP-

Bert ([31:24](#)):

... absolutely.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:25](#)):

... and UCAC-

Bert ([31:25](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:27](#)):

... you gotta get all of those in there.

Bert ([31:28](#)):

Yeah. But, uh, I- I think, that, uh, just being a citizen make, is- is where you have to, uh, you can't just sit around and-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:41](#)):

Mm.

Bert ([31:41](#)):

... complain about things not being done. You got-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:46](#)):

Mm.

Bert ([31:47](#)):

... you gotta get out there and- and, you know, as, put your 50 cents worth in.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:52](#)):

And we learned a lot of that from your dad.

Bert ([31:53](#)):

And- and we, yeah, yeah. And we've always been associated with people that have done that, so-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([31:59](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([32:00](#)):

... we've been very blessed, we truly have, yeah.

Alma Jordon ([32:03](#)):

Wonderful, wonderful. Well, this is another, uh, community type question, do you feel that the community relations changed in a positive or negative way?

Bert ([32:18](#)):

Well, I think, communi- the- the- the community is much more positive.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([32:27](#)):

Oh, without a doubt.

Bert ([32:27](#)):

But I always just see the glass as half full, rather than half empty. That's just the way I see it, but I- I don't think there's any doubt. If you look back-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([32:38](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([32:38](#)):

... on our lives, and the way things were when we were kids growing up-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([32:43](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([32:43](#)):

... and how they are today-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([32:44](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([32:45](#)):

... uh, it is definitely, you know, a, uh, I think, we're moving, uh, uh, very much in the right direction. Of course, there's a lot to be done-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([32:57](#)):

Mm.

Bert ([32:57](#)):

... and I won't get on it, you know, the, uh, political atmosphere of today, but listen, uh, (laughs), I- I often tell folks, (laughs), "I- I, if- if you've lived, (laughs), any length of time-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([33:13](#)):

Mm.

Bert ([33:13](#)):

... you've seen, uh, times as frightening or more frightening than they are today." Uh, so, I'm not so concerned about, uh, uh, some of the- the politics of the day. We, we're gonna, this is, this is a strong country, and it's- it's a good country. Uh, my dad used to say, (laughs), "There's nobody in boats trying to leave here," (laughs).

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([33:44](#)):

(laughs), yes, he sure did.

Bert ([33:44](#)):

Most are in boats-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([33:45](#)):

Come, yeah.

Bert ([33:45](#)):

... trying to come here.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([33:47](#)):

Still, to this day.

Bert ([33:48](#)):

Yeah, so, you know? The-

Alma Jordon ([33:53](#)):

Mm-hmm. What advice would you give someone whose trying to start a business?

Bert ([33:58](#)):

... Well, I- I think, I said that before, but be ready to work hard, because if- if you think working for someone is difficult-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([34:10](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([34:10](#)):

... wait until you try working for yourself.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([34:14](#)):

Be prepared.

Bert ([34:14](#)):

But again, yeah, as my wife said, "Be prepared, uh, be prepared," but again, also be passionate about what you are doing.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([34:24](#)):

That's the number one thing.

Bert ([34:24](#)):

If you love it, uh, when the times get tough-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([34:29](#)):

Yeah.

Bert ([34:30](#)):

... and they will-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([34:31](#)):

(laughs).

Bert ([34:32](#)):

... uh, you'll stick with it, and, uh, uh, that- that's what I would, I would most, uh, emphasize is- is to really, you know, be passionate and love what you're doing.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([34:45](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Alma Jordon ([34:48](#)):

Is- is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

Bert ([34:54](#)):

Ah, I think, we've pretty much covered everything. I- I- I- I know you guys have- have done this before, but I- I- I- I think, this is, you know, an excellent, excellent thing that you're doing, because I mean, honestly, there are people that- that I grew up with that I wish to God that I could interface with them today. Have a little, you know, people like your dad Le- Mr. Leroy Thompson. I talked to him some, but I was young, and, uh, uh, somewhat naïve at the time, but today, if I was to sit down with him and- and just to have that opportunity, you know, there- there- there are guys, uh, uh, like Mr. uh, I just found out this man's actual name-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (35:45):

(laughs).

Bert (35:46):

... we always called him-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (35:47):

[inaudible 00:35:48].

Bert (35:48):

... Alec, but his name was Alexander Pay m- and, uh, he- he ran a, uh, a bar in Leonardtown. He had a lot of, uh, rental properties that he had, uh, and- and when we grew up, uh, we- we thought that he was a very wealthy man, and I'm sure that by those-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (36:12):

At that time, yeah.

Bert (36:12):

... the standards of that time, he was.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (36:15):

Yeah, yeah.

Bert (36:16):

But, uh, he, I'm not sure, I- I don't know if he came from Alabama or Georgia, but he was... he came here from, uh-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (36:25):

From the South.

Bert (36:26):

... from the South.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (36:27):

Yeah.

Bert (36:27):

And he was a businessman, as I said, and he was just a guy that, uh, uh, we admired, and- and I, and I, we- we- we were blessed to grow up in that, in the home that we did because we were exposed to a lot of people like that-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest (36:44):

Mm.

Bert ([36:44](#)):

... you know, so.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([36:46](#)):

Like my father, [inaudible 00:36:47]-

Bert ([36:47](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([36:48](#)):

... uh, Joseph Suiter, but everybody knew him as Tom Suiter. He had the only African American, uh, car repair-

Bert ([36:54](#)):

Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([36:55](#)):

... here in the county.

Bert ([36:56](#)):

Yeah, so we-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([36:57](#)):

And my nephew is s- running it now, (laughs).

Bert ([36:59](#)):

... yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([37:00](#)):

So, it's still going.

Bert ([37:02](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Alma Jordon ([37:02](#)):

That's amazing. Good. Does anyone else have any questions they'd like to ask?

Mikki ([37:13](#)):

I just wanted to know, how old were you when you started using the name Bert?

Bert ([37:20](#)):

Mikki, I was probably, well, I was getting my hair cut-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([37:25](#)):
(laughs).

Bert ([37:26](#)):
... so, seven-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([37:29](#)):
I'd say around five.

Bert ([37:29](#)):
... or eight, something like that.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([37:30](#)):
(laughs).

Bert ([37:31](#)):
Six, seven or eight, yeah. Yeah.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([37:35](#)):
He- he officially named himself that.

Bert ([37:37](#)):
(laughs). Well, you know, but again, uh, we were, we- we- we were, uh, country people-

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([37:45](#)):
Mm.

Bert ([37:45](#)):
... and nicknames, (laughs).

Audience ([37:46](#)):
(laughs).

Bert ([37:50](#)):
(laughs), nicknames were quite prevalent, you know? So, yeah. Yeah. I, yeah-

Alma Jordon ([37:58](#)):
Anyone else, Meredith?

Meredith ([38:01](#)):
No, it was wonderful, (laughs).

Bert ([38:03](#)):

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... Well, again, thank you guys.

Margaret Cecelia Forrest ([38:05](#)):

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Alma Jordon ([38:05](#)):

Thank you so very much.

Bert ([38:05](#)):

We really- really, we really appreciate it, really did, yeah.

Alma Jordon ([38:05](#)):

We really appreciate it. It's been very informative.

Bert ([38:05](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Alma Jordon ([38:12](#)):

Thank you.