

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

Ernest Hall

Interviewed by Alma Jordon

July 15, 2026

at the U.S.C.T. Interpretive Center in Lexington Park

Transcribed by REV.com August 1, 2026

Edited by Bob Lewis August 28, 2026

[this interview is not logged as of August 28, 2026]

Original is digital video recorder download (mp4, MOV) and audio download (mp3)

[equipment difficulties resulted in multiple video downloads]

1 hour, 47 minutes, 49 seconds

In attendance are Elisia Lewis, Anna Moseley, Nathaniel
Lawrence, Brenda Coates, and Anne Leblans

Alma Jordon: [00:00:15]

Good afternoon, my name is Alma Jordon, and today is July 15th, 2026, and we are at the UCAC Interpretive Center in Lexington Park, Maryland. And we also have with us today,

Elisia Lewis:

Elisia Lewis.

Anna Mosley):

Anna Mosley.

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Nathaniel Lawrence.

Brenda Coates:

Brenda Coates.

Anne Leblans:

Anne Leblans.

Alma Jordon: [00:00:42]

Okay, and could you tell me your name, your full name?

Ernest Hall: [00:00:46]

My full name, Ernest Franklin Hall.

Alma Jordon:

Okay, thank you. Mr. Hall, can you tell me about your people and where you're from?

Ernest Hall:

Well, I'm from St. Mary's County. [inaudible 00:01:06] where my people that came from, most of it. My great-grandfather, they came from St. Mary River on a boat.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Ernest Hall:

And then established in St. Mary's County.

Alma Jordon:

Okay, and you lived where? Where did you live, actually?

Ernest Hall:

St. James, 235.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Share with me your earliest memory. What do you remember first when you were a little guy?

Ernest Hall:

I don't know. Not too much to go on that. We were established on St. James Church Road, that's where we lived. Okay, I just grew up there, worked around in St. James, went to school at St. Peter.

Alma Jordon:

Okay, you went to school at St. Peter?

Ernest Hall:

St. Peter Claver School.

Alma Jordon:

Okay, where is St. Peter located?

Ernest Hall:

It's located in... Actually, it's supposed to be St. Inigoes.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Do you remember much about going to school there?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, I had a long eight years. One of them, a couple in the other one, yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Would you like to share some memories from going to school at St. Peter Claver?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, we had most... All our teachers were nuns. We didn't have any lady teachers. They were just nuns. Got along pretty good. Yeah, no problem.

Alma Jordon: [00:03:02]

Okay. Do you have any fond memories from being in school?

Ernest Hall:

Not really. I'm not taking up a lot of classes, but most I take up algebra and numbers. Because I caught myself learning to be a builder.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Ernest Hall:

That's how you need all that.

Alma Jordon:

So, numbers was your favorite subject, algebra?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, that was it. Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm. What about your siblings? Tell me about your siblings. Did you have brothers and sisters?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, there was 12 of them, brothers and sisters. So, we only got three, four of us that are still living.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Ernest Hall:

Helen and Christine, and the youngest one, Mary.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. What were your other siblings' names? Tell me the names of your parents and all of your siblings.

Ernest Hall:

My parents was Francis, Francis Hall, and the other one was Webster Hall. But I think we just made a mistake on that because he was William Webster Hall.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay. And your siblings were? Your sisters and brothers?

Ernest Hall:

Sisters and brothers. We had older brothers with William, Raymond, Joe, James, Bernard, and myself. That was the brothers. I think I list them all in there.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Tell me about disciplining in your household. How did your parents discipline all of those children?

Ernest Hall:

[Laughs] It wasn't a big deal. They were kind of bad, but we made it. [both laugh] Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Well, share a little bit about, did your family attend church?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, we attended St. James Church, Catholic Church, St. James. Nowadays, we moved and went to St. Cecilia, but it still was St. James Church. We just made a cemetery over there.

Alma Jordon: [00:05:56]

Oh, okay. So, I understand that in later years, you did mention about your arithmetic and your algebra, and that helped you get started in your business. Can you share something about your business?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, that helped a lot because I was a builder, so you need numbers. I had all kinds of experience in that. It was good. It kept me going.

Alma Jordon:

So, how did you get started in your business?

Ernest Hall:

At first, I wanted to do other things, but I had to work with the other contractors, and because they were White, they didn't have no Black men doing nothing on them. So, I worked with them until I was able to save enough money to buy the equipment I needed. That's the only way you can make it.

Alma Jordon:

What kind of business did you have, or what kind of business did you work with?

Ernest Hall:

Well. Mostly, I had all kinds of business, but I only stuck with one, construction. That's what I did. I was an operator. I worked for two of the big business people, and I worked for them. One guy worked for eight years, another one seven, and then I went and did it for myself.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay. So, did you work locally for these other businesses?

Ernest Hall:

Yep, locally. I helped to build all them schools around here. Yes.

Alma Jordon:

So, would you like to share what companies you worked for before you started?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, we had Mervell M. Dean Incorporated, Lore for Construction. Mervell Dean was the biggest builder around here. I worked for those two. They were two combined companies, but I worked for both of them at the same time. Yeah, I had to get a job for that, because then I got to... Well, after I worked for them, I went and did it for myself. I had no problem. I ain't never apprenticed since the bench. Seventy-five years, I'm still working. I don't have no problem.

Alma Jordon:

So, you're still working?

Ernest Hall:

Oh, yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Ernest Hall:

Kicking up some dust.

Alma Jordon:

Would you like to share your age with us?

Ernest Hall:

Oh, yeah, I'm 93.

Alma Jordon:

Ninety-three and you're still working?

Ernest Hall:

Yep.

Alma Jordon:

And you're still working in construction?

Ernest Hall:

Yep, that's my last business.

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Ernest Hall:

I'm still operating equipment.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay. So, you say that got started because you worked for other companies?

Ernest Hall: [00:08:57]

Yeah. We got well-known by working for the big company. Big company ain't going to have you anything out in the top [inaudible 00:09:10]. Can't make them no money. [laughs] They was billionaires. But I worked with them. I did all these schools. Spring Ridge, Leonardtown, everywhere. We did every school around here. Yep. Mervell Dean. No problem working with Mervell Dean. It's good folk.

Back in those days, everything was segregated. Black man couldn't have no business. What are you going to get a lot of clients from? They're not going to hire you unless they know you. With them two businesses, they know you. I never had to advertise or nothing. They just called me to do business for them. I built houses. I built shelters. I built barns. I built everything.

Alma Jordon:

So, tell me about, did you have a business plan when you started your business?

Ernest Hall:

Not really. I just said, "I'll buy the machine and go to work." But, I'm just lucky. I got some lucky with most people. Back then, you couldn't do what I done. No, you wouldn't. No way. You wouldn't get no business y'all. That gave me the opportunity to know everybody. I built all over the county, school board, everybody.

Alma Jordon:

Share with me what you actually did with your business? Did you have machines?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. I bought a machine. I still got machines. Most business, the last business I done, when I started construction, I had tractors and machines all the time. Still got them.

Alma Jordon:

In your business, do you have any help with any of your work?

Ernest Hall:

Oh, yeah. When I built a house, I had three or five men employed. Construction, I just let it go. I only need a couple of men for what I'm doing now because I want to do construction. Excavate and stuff like that.

Alma Jordon:

Uh-huh. Can you share with me, other than the school, some of the other type of work that you have done?

Ernest Hall: [00:11:52]

Oh, yeah. I was a oysterman. I had my own boat. I used to oyster. Then I used to... Back in them days, buy a boat and go to work. It was good. You made money. That was not necessary. Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

So, when you had your boat, did you have a particular season in which you worked? Share with us.

Ernest Hall:

Oyster season. You got that all the way up until summer starts. April, May, June. April. Something like that, and it stops. Then in summertime, I work for the farmers then, help them get the back-end, thrash the wheat. Yeah, I kept busy. I work all the time. Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Well, share with us a little bit about the oyster business. How do you go about doing that and where do you...

Ernest Hall:

Oh, yeah. You're independent. You're your own boss. You got to know how to tong. You got to know where the oysters at, and you pile them up in the boat. Go to a buy boat and shovel them up and get paid. I did St. Mary's River and Potomac, and I had... Yeah. It wasn't that easy, but it's worth it. [laughs] Yeah, it ain't too bad.

Alma Jordon:

Was there other seafood involved with the water business?

Ernest Hall:

Right. Yeah, you always got a good price on oysters, because I didn't do much. I've done fishing, but I don't do anything. Summertime, I work for the farmers and help them. I didn't have... Well, I oyster in the winter. It was the season coming back. Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

So, you actually worked with tobacco and that type of thing?

Ernest Hall: [00:14:14]

Oh, yeah. We cut tobacco, speared the tobacco and hang it. They took it down and stripped it. [laughs] That was a little [inaudible 00:14:26]. I didn't like stripping because that's just a... It's a system thing. You sit in a chair and flip it and tie it. Put your little thick thing in. You sort them. You got the top, top leaves. You got the bottom leaves. You strip them off there, different areas. You out them in. I never done much of that. I looked at them. I couldn't sit still that long.

Alma Jordon:

Oh.

Ernest Hall:

No, they sit in there all day strip the tobacco.

Alma Jordon:

But that business has gone through the wayside now, hasn't it?

Ernest Hall:

Most of the tobacco is gone. The government stopped them and paid them grants. So, all the farmers just paid for the tobacco. All the land that they plant the tobacco on, they get paid for it now. They don't want to plant the tobacco.

Alma Jordon:

Why do you think that all came about?

Ernest Hall:

Fine. Tobacco. They had a big thing there. Then they said it was cancer. They didn't develop it there. They stopped tobacco. It was just a big racket. But they still got cigarettes. Down South, they grow tobacco. We got one guy, he's an arms guy, he grew tobacco. Yeah. The first time I saw that, I went through there. He had tobacco. Back in my day, everybody had tobacco. Every farmer. They even planted it in the backyard. [laughs] It was everywhere. Yeah, they don't do that now, do they? Because they got a big shot on tobacco.

Alma Jordon: [00:16:21]

Yes. Well, getting back to your construction business, I'd like to hear you elaborate more on that and the homes that you built and all of that.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. I got into the home building way back then. I did a job for a white guy. He was a big shot. He had a farm down in Roseville. That's when I got into the building. He wanted to give his daughter, everybody in the family had waterfront property. So he gave his daughter those. So he told me one day, he said, I want to build a house for his daughter. "Build a house for your daughter? Man, I don't build no house." He said, "Yeah." He said, "You can do it." He said, "I'll watch you." He said, "You can build anything." I said, "I don't know if I can build anything." I said, "But I will try."

So then I took the machine, because I had a machine, I cleared the lot, laid it on, put the house in there. They shipped it to him and I put it up. So he come around, looked at it, he said, "I told you you could build it." I said, "Yeah."

I think then I just... Big shots get you to build something there. No problem. I stopped building, but they wanted me to keep on building. I built it in Calvert County, Charles County, Prince George County. I went in Calvert, over there in Calvert County, Solomons, in the Ranch Club. White guy had lots of them. I went in and put three houses in there.

Alma Jordon:

Oh my.

Ernest Hall:

That's the first Black man ever built anything in there. I went in there, they looked at me like I was crazy. [laughs] "What in the hell are you going to do?" I said, "What? What in the hell are you going to do?" I built it. They were satisfied with it. They kept on passing me, "Mr. Hall, you coming back to build anymore?" I said, "If I get somebody that wants a house and building it, I'll come back." They didn't want me to leave.

It was tough for a Black guy to build a house. They figured they couldn't do that, but I can build anything. See, that's what that math done.

Alma Jordon:

That math in school.

Ernest Hall:

That's it. You had to head to school.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Approximately how many houses have you built? Do you remember?

Ernest Hall:

I've got about seven around here. There's three in there, and one in Baltimore. I've got around.

Alma Jordon: [00:19:30]

And now you're doing other types of construction?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. I'm limited now. I only do septic systems and foundations for the house. I'll do the foundations for them, dig it up, clear it up them, and that's it. I told them, "I'm too old. [inaudible 00:19:51] do the housing." It's a good job. I'm still building.

Alma Jordon:

What does a typical business day look like for you?

Ernest Hall:

Well, as of now?

Alma Jordon:

Now and previously, too?

Ernest Hall:

Well, it looks pretty good, but we've got a lot of problems, because it's different in the color. A lot of white guys, they get away with a lot of stuff, but you can't get away with telling [inaudible 00:21:08]. I don't take no payoff from my life for building them. Jump, and then it's pulled out on you. What are you going to do then? Bad reputation.

Now, I've built something. They got it built right, and they say your name all around. That's how you work. I can build now. When they come to me, I tell them, "I'm too old to build. I ain't much of a builder." But they want to build something. Just put work to it. That's it. I don't do no job.

Alma Jordon:

So, what are some of the other challenges that you might have had doing your business other than possibly because of segregation?

Ernest Hall:

It's not too much. After they done that, I didn't have no problems. Most of all, they build it. [White contractors] They get paid to help them. They get their stuff built. They know I can get it done, get it done right. That's what you do. That's where your business come in at. These things that I get, I didn't have to advertise. They advertise for you.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay. Yeah, I had planned to ask you how do you advertise for your business? Yes.

Ernest Hall:

I started early. I didn't know how to advertise yet. I had some cards. I had some cards. They asked me, "Mr. Hall, do you have a card?" And I don't have no card. Give you a telephone number, you give them a call, and they'll come fix them up. That's it.

Alma Jordon:

So is your work basically as a subcontractor sometimes?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. Well, again, because I work for everybody, subcontractor. If it's a builder, if he wants me to do certain stuff for him, I just do it. I put [inaudible 00:22:52], do the wall for him, or the foundation slab for the builders.

Alma Jordon:

As a business person, what type of legacy would you like to leave for your children?

Ernest Hall: [00:23:16]

I guess they know all about it. That's it. Mostly the name of it. I don't think I did anything wrong coming up. They don't have nothing bad to say about it. No.

Alma Jordon:

How do you feel that your business has benefited the community?

Ernest Hall:

Oh, very much. Because for me, it's been a whole lot of housing, a whole lot of people. No bathroom in the house. No septic. No nothing. Outside, totally. Now I live in the woods, because I'm doing this... I was able to work with the state put bathrooms in them, plumb them, fix them up, have a nice house. Didn't cost them a cent.

Alma Jordon:

Is that right? How did that work?

Ernest Hall:

It was like they had a thing that back in there, all the old houses that had no running water, no nothing. They couldn't find nobody to correct this nowhere near. It was a Black guy working up there or something like that. They seen me working and they asked me, "Could I help them to fix these people up on housing stuff?" "Well, you pay the money, I got you covered." So he said, "Okay." So that's what he done. He funded all of them. I did White, Black, anybody.

Took the old houses, I went inside, petitioned, took a room, made a bathroom, put septic in, put them on drill well, all that. They would never have nothing. They had nobody do nothing. White person wouldn't come around and fix them up. And then I fixed white people, black people, anybody. Wherever that program says you can do, I done it.

Alma Jordon:

And this was a program through the state?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. I think Mr. Lawrence might have heard of that program. Brown, Elmer Brown,

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Yeah.

Ernest Hall:

And they had this one, the headquarters in Hughesville for Tri-County, that's the one they used to work for.

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Yes.

Ernest Hall: [00:26:20]

I did a lot of houses. Park Hall, did all that, put bathrooms, because the man... I was the only man that could do everything. Otherwise, you got to get this man. That man messed up something. Ain't no mess up. I go there, I fixed the whole thing. If I had to tear the house up, I'd build it. I'd build it, I didn't care. They all got fixed. Park Hall, [inaudible 00:26:46], everywhere. Scotland, I fixed every one of them up. All the old people. Didn't cost them nothing. They come, "Mr. Hall, How..." "Don't worry about that. You want to trust me?"

Brenda Coates:

Okay, Mr. Hall, about what year was that? Was that in the early '80s?

Ernest Hall:

Oh, let's see. I guess it was. Because '60s, '70s... Probably in the '80s. Because when I established everything, when I came back, it was-

Ernest Hall:

I established everything. I came back from the services in '65. So '65, probably in the '70s when I did all this, because I went and worked for one guy in construction, and then I worked for [inaudible 00:27:45]. Then when I went in business myself, that's when I fixed them all up because I had all my machine and I did all the people, Tri-County. Everybody that didn't have a bathroom, they got a bathroom.

Alma Jordon:

And this was through the Tri-County Association?

Ernest Hall:

I think it was like the federal government, because it was such a bad system. Everybody, big White, all them farms, you see them houses close to the water? Guess what kind of system they had? Overboard. Yeah. Big shots. I mean, railers down. Everybody had waterfront land. Guys had waterfront land. They'd build the house, over the board go.

So they went around and found all out and the health department tricked them. They go visit them and they asked them, "How y'all doing?" "Oh, fine." "Can I use your bathroom?" "Yes, ma'am." She'd go in, pour dye in there and flush it. Next morning, it's in the water in the Bay. They come tell me, "Mr. Hall, they don't have no cisterns in the Bay." I go to them and tell them, I said, "Well, I'm going to fix your cistern, but you don't have to pay for it." And they say, "Oh man, good." They didn't care.

I'd dig it all up, put them tanks in, septic system, keep them with the Bay. These guys had money. I found a lot of them had bulkheads down there. Septic system. They had septic systems right in the Bay. We cleaned up the Bay. They didn't have nobody go around and do anything for them. These guys didn't know how to do it. They had a couple White guys. I don't know why they didn't help do that. They didn't help clean it up. Yeah. I know they appreciate it because they didn't have pay me. I fixed them up.

Alma Jordon:

So were you under contract with the Tri-County?

Ernest Hall:

Mm-hmm. All they do is write it up. They would pay me for doing it. Change around. A couple of guys I found down in Ridge that they had ones going over the big, but I talked to them, and then they said, "I don't want no health problem on my land." I said, "Well, man, you ain't got nothing working here. No one wants health problem." So I said, "Okay." I tell you what. I said, "I'll fix it for you, but you don't have to talk to the health department. You don't have to talk to nobody. All you got to do is give me permission to fix it for you." He did.

And I go to the health department and tell them what to do. I'd go down and correct it. Didn't cost them nothing. Cleaned up the Bay though. Isn't that so? A lot of people around there, they don't know. They never knew that nobody had the common sense to go around to all them people and fix septic systems and clean up the Bay, make sea walls, keep from washing the land away. It was terrible, but I did it. Didn't bother me none. Yeah. Yep. All behind me. They appreciate it. I guess, when dead, you're done. [laughs]

Alma Jordon: [00:31:57]

That sounds like a tremendous challenge, but-

Ernest Hall:

Oh, man. Yeah, it is. I had no problem with it. Yeah. Actually, Maryland Soil Conservation was led up it. I mean, they went in too. I think they must have helped out because I did a lot of farmers and houses. And with what they was farming and what they was making, the [inaudible 00:32:35] costs of the St. Mary's or whatever county would help them out. So they let you come and do it then. They're not going to pay you. They're not going to pay you out of their pocket. But we cleaned the Bay out, we kept on around.

Alma Jordon:

So tell me more about, you mentioned clean the Bay out. That was just so that the septic wasn't running in the Bay?

Ernest Hall:

That's right. That's right. I was [inaudible 00:33:09] Bay become a mess. See, they didn't want that because we also... Oystered in the Bay. If you pollute the Bay, you're going to pollute the oysters. Can't do that. [laughs] It was a mess. But if we got it straight, oysters was good. They inspect the water. No problem. [inaudible 00:33:32] all down in Ridge, St. Mary's River. Man, big shots down there had no septic. They do nothing. Big home, man. [inaudible 00:33:52] down there. They had money and they wouldn't fix nothing.

Alma Jordon: [00:33:58]

That's very interesting.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, it is. I see an old man [Raley? 00:34:07] there. He was smart enough to get a big... He's down by the water, but what he done, he caught himself digging a trench. He took oyster shells they put in it. Instead of watch gravel of buying it, they wouldn't haul oyster shells from the shucking place, cheap and

made [inaudible 00:34:31]. Yeah, that's what they done. All around Valley Lee, everywhere. I dug all that mess up and put them correct stuff to them. I guess a lot of them, they appreciate it.

Alma Jordon:

I imagine that was very much appreciated.

Ernest Hall:

Yes, it is.

Alma Jordon:

Yes. Other than that, have you seen a lot more changes in the county since you've been here?

Ernest Hall:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Now they can't do it because you have to have a building permit. So that's required. You have to have that perc test that are septic with working that land before they get a building permit. So it's a lot safer now, but it's just a mess. But they do percs, make sure you can put a correct septic in for that house, for your building. If you can't do percs, you don't want to set a house from itself from not yet when you can't do it. So they made room, cut out a lot of that pollution.

Alma Jordon: [00:35:54]

So in the days when you were doing all of that service, were they doing percs at that time?

Ernest Hall:

They start percing because if they didn't stop them there after I did all of this, they would still pollute. So now they can't build unless they have a perc test so I can have a correct idea where you can get the system to work and you can build your house. Otherwise, you don't want to build a house when they land on the perc or can't perc or do not. You sit up there after housing, big house sitting up there and no septic. You put in something that's not going to work. They got a good rating now, keep it going.

Alma Jordon:

That's very interesting.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, that's separate businesses.

Alma Jordon:

How do you feel about community relations over the years, especially with your work and employment in the county?

Ernest Hall:

In the county? Well, pretty good. I ain't had no problem with it. I had a lot of problems with them because it's different color, but that's okay. I work with the county commissioners and governor and everybody. [laughs] I work with all the delegates, county commissioners, government office, Annapolis, Baltimore, WCP or whatever with them guys. Them guys do a lot too on segregation if you run in trouble

because you got people that ain't right. They're not going to work right. So you got to help. That's it. You got to help. Them guys can get them straight.

Alma Jordon: [00:38:01]

So have you needed help from the NAACP on any situations?

Ernest Hall:

No. I started with a different attitude, I guess. I didn't need them because I never had no trouble with them. I do it in the way helping them. I don't need to do nothing. I can go right home. [laughs] But they're all right. I get a little bit of help out. Now I have to get help because I deal with the health department now. You got to keep them straight. You got to watch them. They'll trick on you.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, the health department will?

Ernest Hall:

Oh, yeah. You get dollar counts. That inspector get paid off under the table. Them people do all this and then you can't do nothing. That's not right. You have to know all the tricks now. You don't know the tricks now, you don't make it. Yeah. Big business now. Big contractors come in, tear down thing, build up thing. Yeah, I definitely do that. Under the table with the county commission, money talks. That's what they do. Yeah.

Alma Jordon: [00:39:21]

So do you see a lot of that now going on?

Ernest Hall:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. A person just called me. They're building in Charles County and it's an area they got to call them there. It's house. They got accepted and everything. Now the well, whatever the well with, and they try to get the well fixed, but come to find out you only got one well driller in that whole area. He got the nod, but not that he can charge you \$20,000. You ain't got no water. I said, "Well, what the hell is that?" She said, "Yeah, that's it. You don't have no competition then." So he got it made. He charged you what he want for a well. It's ridiculous now for a well.

Now they got it down here. We got three well drillers. If I want to dig a well for a new house, how much well going to cost me? Oh, 20,000. I said, "20,000? How in the hell the pipe can be?" Call the next one. Guess who guess what he want? 23. Call the next one. "Oh, in that area? Well, I guess I'd run you about 25." There you go. Now you don't get no water. Yeah, they got it. At least you got three of them, but they're not far apart. I think they talk to each other. Terrible.

Alma Jordon:

So do you think that's why you see very few single houses being built?

Ernest Hall:

That's right. Because they bought a piece of property. You go and build a house on it. You get the building permit. So you said, well, okay. Cost of a house, there's the well come in there. He wants 23,000 for the well. The guy comes in, they got the perc. They want \$30,000 for the septic. You look around, what the hell is this? Can't beat them.

[00:42:06]

You're going to see a lot less building in the next year until they do something about this price. People can't afford a building. Can't do it. And you can't beat them because all they do... Trump messed the whole thing up. They said Trump put us into a valley that we can't even get out. He's the first president in the United States of history that got elected and made his family in itself billionaires. And the man said the other day, he's the first man to rob the United States without a gun. That's it. That's the truth. And I said, this is what can't do it now in time. Ain't that something?

And now he comes in, buys way in, takes a billionaire guy, takes all the money, pays people at the voting thing. "You go in, if you vote for Trump, I give you \$2,000." I said, "How the hell Jay know what you're going to do?" And them dummies goes in there, votes for Trump. Walks out the door, man, give him the money. Ain't that something? He didn't get elected fair. Then he gets in, he runs the country for four years and made a mess. And everything he says on him is Obama. "Barack Obama. Obama done this. Obama did that." He don't like Black people. Don't like them Black people. I guess he don't hardly like nobody. I don't know. It's just really disgusting because that ain't right.

Alma Jordon:

Yeah. Those seems like the challenges that we're all working with at this point.

Ernest Hall:

The constitution. They always do the constitution, but this man accept gift from other country. And they wrote that no President of the United States is supposed to accept gifts from a foreign country. This man made himself a million dollars in a foreign country give this man a big plane. Private plane for Mr. Trump to ride in after he gets out.

Alma Jordon:

Yes. I think we've all-

Ernest Hall:

We got a mess here.

Alma Jordon:

We all see that as a challenge.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. I'm figuring to live through it. [both laugh] It's pitiful. I don't see how he going to make it.

Alma Jordon: [00:45:12]

Yeah. Well, Mr. Hall, what advice would you give to someone that's trying to start their own business?

Ernest Hall:

It's tough now because they're going to require him. How is he going to advertise to start anything? Nobody knows his name. Even though if he had a million dollars, he still got to do a struggling. He got to go through the health department. He got to go through the zoning. He got to go through the county commissioner. He's got to get all of them paid up. He got to pay for something, every one. When he finished, what he going to do then? He don't know any customers. Nobody know him. I've been here. Been doing it for sixty to seventy years. Everybody know him, but nobody knows his work. Don't know what he going to do. So any Black person starting for business now, they got a tough road to go. Ain't no way. They can't do it.

Alma Jordon:

Yeah.

Ernest Hall:

And then you'll see in the next two or three years, there won't be no Black people starting their business. They can't make it.

Alma Jordon:

There seems to be a lot of challenges.

Ernest Hall:

It is.

Alma Jordon:

Yeah. Yeah.

Ernest Hall:

Even for any kind of little business. A White guy can go up there and he start a little something. If you look on the road, you see a lot of these guys got these septic tank pumping trucks. They went through that because they can make money on that and they don't have to go through a whole lot of that. And they can start a business. All they got to do is advertise. Put in the paper, something like that. Call it a name. They can do pretty good on that. But housing and all the other stuff, well, you can't get nothing.

Alma Jordon:

Yeah. It does seem like a challenge.

Ernest Hall:

It is. Yeah. Yeah. I think that's why it slows down the business part of the state for making money or whatever. Governor, he does a little something, but he can't do all that. He can't overcome it.

Alma Jordon: [00:47:56]

I remember reading an article from a lady that was written by Ms. Taylor from Taylor Gas.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, that's right. Yeah. I know.

Alma Jordon:

And she gave you so many accolades because she had tried to find someone to work on the church down at Webster Field.

Ernest Hall:

Right.

Alma Jordon:

Can you share with us something about that?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, she did. She was kind of like here. Well, actually, I even wish she told me she would come to me and she said it was leaking because the church was going down, but they did help do it a lot. So I went down there and looked at it. Because it's got a [inaudible 00:48:51] roof on it, these roof is a wooden shingle roof, ain't nobody wants to mess with that. And you got to be very careful. You can't just, this thing's sitting up there and it's got a picture on it.

You can't fix one of them, not less you know what you're doing. And she had a leak. I fixed it, but I'm not no people. It's a little trick to it. So then that's what she advertised me for fixing the roof. I told her, "Yeah I fixed it." I looked up and seen the hole, "oh man, how you going to do that?" I got different ladders and I fixed it for her. And I told her, "You're good to go now." So we got a lot of stuff done on it.

Alma Jordon:

And this was a historical church.

Ernest Hall:

That's a historical church.

Alma Jordon:

What was the name of it? St. Ignatius?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. St. Ignatius. Historic church. The church been there, I guess, 100 years or so. It was there when they had slaves.

Alma Jordon:

Yes. Over a hundred years. Yes.

Ernest Hall:

Yep. They fixed it up real good. Got the roof still there. The next guy they bid or want to do anything to the roof. They got to get a contractor that can take them off and put the same kind of wooden shingles back. Otherwise, you just mess up the antique. You can't just rip it off and put plywood down or put a

tin roof over top of it. Like that. It don't work. It messed up the whole thing. You got to have that roof back, put back on there whenever do it. But it's holding up good. I looked at it. She got it. She had a paint this year. Whole thing inside and outside.

Alma Jordon:

Wow. That's a historical site.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon: [00:50:54]

Well, I understand that you did some work for St. Peter Claver school. Is that right?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. I saved that school, but it wasn't me saving it, it was my uncle done it. He kind of messed me up, but that was all right.

Alma Jordon:

What was that again? Your uncle?

Ernest Hall:

My uncle. See, I learned all this stuff and done all this stuff, but I didn't stay home. I left. I went to live with my uncle.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, you went to live with your uncle?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, too many there. 12.

Alma Jordon:

When you were 12?

Ernest Hall:

Less than... it was one less, but they didn't miss me that much. [both laugh]

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Ernest Hall:

No, I did all this on my own. I stayed home till I was about eight, nine, probably 10 years old. I went. Went up with my uncle. That school was, after they stopped the school and everything, the building just sit there. It was going down and down and down. They didn't fix nothing. Just Father McSorley. Yeah, Father McSorley, they sent him down. So he came down. When he went up there, the Cardinal Gibbons

Institute was a nice building. It was all concrete. I said, "No way I would take that building down." Archdiocese said they're not going to hold insurance on it. They'll knock it down.

Archdiocese said the school was no good. They pushed it in the basement and filled it over because it was the Black school and the Black organization there. That was the reason for it. But then they made a mistake. When it said all that, I couldn't stop the guy from knocking the school down because he was a day ahead of me. But my uncle told me about it, so then I went down seeing the priest and then I looked at the school and father said, "We don't know what we're going to do with it." I said, "What do you want to do?" He said, "They says that they're not going to insure it, to knock it down and put it in the basement."

[00:53:28]

I said, "Well, we can fix it up. And then we get insurance on it. We don't need their insurance. Why can't it get insurance?" And I went down there because my uncle told me the priest want to see me about the school. So I did. I went there and I walked up there and the guy was doing that. And I walked and looked in the thing. That thing had two feet of water in that basement. The whole thing was like a swimming pool. I said, "I can't do nothing for this thing. I got to go get my boots." I got my boots, walked in there and looked around. I went to school. I noticed that. They can't fool me on that. I know it.

I said, "Well..." I said, "Father, you want this thing fixed?" He said, "Yeah, we don't." Okay. I said, "We'll work on it." So I did. I told my uncle, I said, "I'm going down. I ain't going to make no money like nothing but..." I said, "I think we can save the school." So I did. I went down with my machine because I was already in business. I dug this bad boy out the ground all the way around. I drained it, that floor, pumped all the water and I drained it. I put drain tile around the outside. Then I built walls around it.

Then I decided, I said, I looked inside it. I redone the whole thing. I did a foundation. Then I said, I decided that it had wooden shingles on it, whatever. I tore all that mess off and I said, "Let's just brick it." I bricked the whole thing up. I spent all my money and time on that building, but it's still now to stay. It looks good. I rebuilt the whole thing. I tore all the side off, I bricked it, accumulate that basement. Basement is perfect now.

Ernest Hall:

I made a hall for them, made an antique room for them. I took over the classroom. One classroom, I put all the blackboards and stuff. I had one there, put the little things there, where the kids could still be like this classroom one. I made a music room with each one. It's really good. I'm glad I done it. Nobody know I done it, but I worked the last thing. I designed it myself. I just, every night, well, I take and fool them, because I can accomplish anything. But they said, "Well, how do you know all of that?" And I ain't went no college. I ain't went to no building school. I ain't went nothing. They said, "How do you know how to do all that?" I said, "I tell you what." I said, "I can figure it, but each night the angels tell me what to do. [listeners laugh] The next day, I'm good. I know exactly how to build anything or anything."

And they said, "Man, you full of stuff." I said, "Yes, I do. I do. I have a big problem," but I said, "I get it." I go to sleep when it's strangest thing. I can go to sleep. I must dream how to do it. The next day I do the same thing. I got this problem solved. I had no problem. I don't know. I think I might be telling the tale that I've been doing it for 93 years. [laughter]

It is. I told Paul-

Alma Jordon:

[inaudible 00:56:59].

Ernest Hall: [00:57:01]

... Tell you, fix that building. But I did find a Black architect guy in Washington. A guy that got him, he came down and helped me out on it, because he kind of like... He helped me design. See that front of that hall? That hall down St. Peter? See how that thing is built? We had to design that to make it look a little better, but I had to tear all that front out and everything, and dug this thing. I made it... So I built this thing. Then I put the steps underneath of it and I put the porch on top. I figured all that at night, what I'm dreaming. It's there. I'm not telling a lie.

Alma Jordon:

It's amazing.

Ernest Hall:

They didn't tell me how to build it. They don't know how I done it. But I told them, I made an architect guy. I made him a music room there, where you put all your instruments there and you can record. Yeah. They got it. I built it.

Alma Jordon:

That is miraculous.

Ernest Hall:

It is. And to save the school. Guess who come down and took a look at it? Archdiocese.

Alma Jordon:

Oh my.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah.

Anne Leblans:

[inaudible 00:58:30 cross talking].

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, he did. He come look at it and he loved it, but then he didn't know who built it. He didn't.

Anne Leblans:

You received some recognition.

Ernest Hall:

Huh?

[crosstalk 00:58:50]

Anne Leblans:

You received some recognition.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. And then inside I tore all the walls. And guess what was in the walls? Oh, I used to have a picture. The birds or something made a nest in one side. Have you seen that picture?

Speaker 1:

Oh, that side?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. All the way down was they picked up straws and made a nest. I tore the wall, look. I think I kept it.

[crosstalk 00:59:12]

Yeah, I kept it. It was so strange. How in the hell could you get in there and do that?

And I put plate glass on top of it.

Anne Leblans: [crosstalk]

Yeah...

Alma Jordon:

That's crazy.

Ernest Hall:

And I tore all the walls and fixed it all. I redid the whole thing inside. I kept the ceilings and stuff, because that makes it antique.

[00:59:36]

Alma Jordon:

That is amazing.

Ernest Hall:

Design different. I put all the walkways in, all the walls. We dug the whole thing under the ground, cut holes in that wall, put all them doors in. There was nothing down there. Archdiocese said it wouldn't be done. They didn't help me not a bit. We got a little bit of money, because St. Peter's got a big timber track down there. We got about 80, 90 acres of woods. And the timber on it, they sold the timber to a company. They come and cut the timber. I think they made about 80, \$90,000 off the timber. So that helped them on the building, to get it finished.

Alma Jordon:

Wow.

Ernest Hall:

They jiggled around. They got it.

Alma Jordon:

That's amazing.

Ernest Hall:

It is. And people look at that thing, but it wasn't that. It wasn't looking like that. [laughs]

Alma Jordon:

And you mentioned, excuse me, you mentioned Father McSorley.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Father McSorley, wasn't he at St. James at one time?

Ernest Hall:

Yep.

Alma Jordon:

That's the same one?

Ernest Hall:

Same one. Father McSorley. And then when we finished up that building, Father Damien came in when I was still working.

[crosstalk 01:00:59]

Anne Leblans: And Father Walsh.

Ernest Hall:

Yep. Father Damien. He finished up all the way field. They have a preacher governor. They didn't know what I was doing. So I'd have showed them in, showed them a little drawing that we do. So we just kept on working till we got it done. I'm finishing up now. All these many years, they had no money. I put a ramp there. They said, this difficult ramp that I was seen in St. Mary's County. I built a place, put all this fancy ramp all the way down. I got the ramp done. Didn't have no money to buy the rails for it. You can't use a ramp that height without putting the rails on. So finally this year, they had enough money, I'm putting rails on, so I can use a ramp. And I told him, I said, "I'm supposed to have the ramp, so I can roller skate around the damn thing and come down." And I used to roller skate around the school.

I needed the ramp. Now I can roller skate. That thing's got all these twist in it. There's all these kids and I see you watch me, see if it'll roller skate all down. Yeah.

Alma Jordon:
That's amazing.

Ernest Hall:
It's neat.

Alma Jordon:
That's amazing.

Ernest Hall:
I am tired of them. I told them y'all go. I said, "You all, don't miss me when I'm dead and going. Anybody go build nothing for you." [laughter] They got a mess there. No, we got that thing. That building ain't going to be there, because I bricked the whole thing up. She's there. The only thing they have to replace is the roof. I left that roof, but that's the antique roof. You can't see that type of roof in St. Mary's County. It's made like shingles, but it's metal. And I tore parts of that and I redo that roof up there, where it's there now. But I kept that same roof. It works good.

Alma Jordon:
That's amazing.

Ernest Hall: [01:03:10]
Yeah. Nobody knows. I told you what to do. The angel tell me. [laughter] They can't beat me. They can't beat me. No, they can't. I've done a job down Rosecroft. This guy, he's a big time builder. And this guy owned Rosecroft. His son own a house. Well, it is. And I said, "Man, I ain't building no house." "Yeah." The old man said, "Yeah, get Ernest build it." He went and says, "Oh, that's all right." He going to get this big shot building in Washington, supposed to be his buddy. This guy comes down there, looks at the place. He don't go [inaudible 01:03:57]. So he saw me.

He let me do all the paperwork, all that hard part, how the house wants sit, where they had, all everything. Got it all in there. And then he pulls up first money stuff to build a house. And I said, "Okay, there's the building permit. You got to go to Leonardtown and change that to your name, because I'm not going to be responsible for your work." Said, "Well, we don't know." So he tried it. So I'll get a phone call. "Wait a minute." He says, "Hey, Mr. Hall, what's that?" He said, "We can't do nothing down there." He said, "We're going to have to get you to build a house." I said, "You build them. You're a better build than I am, I guess." "No, we can't do it."

"What?" "Nope." I said, "All you got to do is go to Leonardtown." They won't accept nothing they done. They didn't know how to do it. So be as I worked for the boys' father and everything, so I told his father. I said, "I'll go ahead and build it." So I went back with my building permit, attach it on a tree, and I started building the house. So he says, well, he's going to watch me, see what I do. I later, I put a basement underneath the house, dug this thing, blocked it, started building it. I get my drawing on the house. They make it good. So building, he come down every week, look at that. He says, "Damn, how do you get that dormers up there?" I said, "I just take a helicopter [laughter] and pick them up and sit them right on the roof." He look at me so strange.

[01:06:05]

"Man, this cat must be crazy." [all laugh] He does the [inaudible 01:06:11] too. I had more fun. I told people, I just had fun doing something. So he kept coming down, every time I do something, he come down looking. He said, "Damn." So I build an antique house, because they got this thing from Virginia. Way down there, Virginia, where these antique houses at. That's how I got it. Got these dormers. Oh, it's funny inside. All this different stuff. Antique. Got farm places. I built farm places in it that I can almost stand up in them.

Antique. He bought all the drawing down. Walked away. I'll build a house. He come look at what I done. Okay. So I finished it up, finished the house up, everybody's there. So he come and the house, he looked around. He said, "Damn," he told me, the old man, he said, "I ain't never seen nobody build a house. He has no plumber." He says, "One man, how did he do it?" The old man told him, said, "I don't know." Said, "This guy, he don't need nobody. He designed the stuff and just goes in, put down." I have my own machine. I did everything. So he messed around. He looked at the house and everything. The old fellow then paid me off from everything. He said, "Mr. Hall, I got a job for you." I said, "What's that?" He said, "I got a house, million and a half for a house to build and across the bridge going down the Eastern Shore."

Billionaire guy who wants this house. It's all different that he showed me a plan. He said, "I want you to build that." I said, "No, you ain't." I said, "I can build it." But I said, "I'm not going to build it for you, because y'all didn't do right at the first time." I don't care. Just because I was Black, they though I couldn't build a house. I said, "Nope." I said, "Not going to build it for you." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because you had a chance. I don't like nobody to do me like that. That's it." I said, "I don't need that. I don't need to go down there." He said, "Man, I'll pay any kind of money you want."

[01:08:52]

[He] Said, "But when you go, you don't need nobody." I do everything. I do all the engineering work. I do the septic. All I get is a plumber, electrician. I don't need nobody. And in most of the design, I design it myself. I had my boys built. He come there. I built those dormers that go in the house. I build them on the floor, down here. Build them. And he look at that. "Well, how they there?" I picks them up at the backhoe and put them on the roof and put them in place now. He come next day and he looks up there, "How in the hell he do that?" And then this guy here, big time, look at that, multimillionaire man. He said, "I want you come to work for me and build houses." I said, "No, you don't." [laughter] "No." I said, "I don't need that. I'm in business for myself."

Alma Jordon:

Yeah.

Ernest Hall:

But I could. I could build million-dollar houses. He think of me. He said, "How in the hell you do all this by yourself?" I said, "I don't need no help. I read my own plan. I do everything myself." And I said, "It doesn't bother me, because when I run in something hard like this, angels help me." He looked at me and said, "That man lying about the angels." But it works. It works. I've built the same dumb thing. Remember that? But I would just tell you, I was working by myself for a man. I made him a millionaire, made him money. He didn't come tell me nothing. All he said, "Ernest, we got a job over here. We need all the land cleared and whatever." He walks away. I go in, I pull up on the job. What do you think they do?

[01:10:59]

The man that owned the thing, he comes out and says, "Is Mr. Banyard [??] coming?" I said, "He might be down here." He looked at me, "What the hell is he going to do? All that equipment, by himself." And I just had more to him. I unload my stuff and I know what to do and I start going on down close to field, go to work. I worked all that day and everything. And so, he watching me, how I do it. When I got finished, I fixed him all up, got his job finished. And that day, when I load up to go back, hell, he beat me back to the shop. Beat me back to the shop.

When I got there, he's there. He went, "Mr. Banyard, how much I owe you?" I walk in the place. "What do you do up here?" He said, "Man." He said, "I want to pay this man, because I ain't never seen nobody do all that stuff by themselves." I said, "It doesn't bother me none. I'm finished." And I told Eddy, "A satisfied customer is a paying customer." [everyone laughs] He certainly did. See, I made him so he could like cry when I told him. I said, "I'm going to build something now." Construction, I can do all that. I don't need that. I'm going to help this big shot man to build it. So I did. I helped him build all them schools. He did the same thing.

I walked in there and he says, Mr. Dean was sitting down. I said, "Mr. Dean, come work. I'm going to help you out a little bit." Lord, he jumped up and said, "Son, anything you need, let me know." He said, "Because these, they need help." I said, "How the hell I'm going to help somebody? I'm the only Black man around here." And he got a whole crew of White people. What the hell? I looked around, I said, "Okay, Mr. Dean." I went on out. He said, "Anything you need, let me know."

He went out to, bought a brand new pickup truck. Need that. And I did all the work. The foreman weren't good. The foreman, he tell me nothing. I looked at the plan in the morning, I can do the work. All he was there collecting his pay. He just collecting his pay. And man. He's a superintendent. The boss comes and says, "What is he doing?" He always sat by me. One day I saw him. He walked out there and told me said, "I don't know." So he said he's going to get all this done. And all he do is sit in the office. He sent all the guys down there and said, "You all go down there. Ernest will show you what to do."

I did. Made him money. He appreciated it. He sat there and told me. I went and worked for him. I stayed there for seven years. And when I started, he had nothing. He winds up one man with a full piece of equipment [inaudible 01:14:24]. [laughs] It was crazy. He went and bought backhoe and a crane, backhoe and a crane. And I had three schools at one time. And I did all three schools. I go from day to day. And I put equipment there, haul equipment. I put equipment on each truck. And nobody runs equipment but me. One man with four piece of equipment. Nobody runs nothing. Nobody do nothing until I get there. That's it. He tell me. He didn't do nothing. Them boys, I told them what happened. Angels. I didn't have no problem. Angels told me what to do. [laughs] Actually this was a good experience and fun.

[01:15:16]

Nobody in the world would know that I had done something like that. I didn't go to no college. I didn't go to no carpenter's school and I ain't had no carpenter to teach me nothing. I took it, that math and stuff. I read all the plans myself. I designed the stuff for myself.

I made all the take-offs myself. Angels. Didn't bother me. I'm still here. I ain't going nowhere. And I told him I'd be here until I'm a 100 years old. They thought I was kidding. So the doctor told, he said, "Mr. Hall," I said, "What I got?" He said, "Man, you're in good shape." I said, "What?" "Yeah." I said, "I told you I'd be here until 100. Then I'd kick the bucket and retire." I'd be retired by then. But I said, "Right now they think I'm 60 years old." No, I ain't. I'm hitting on getting to that 100. Yeah. They don't know. They're angels. They can't beat me. [laughter]

Alma Jordon:

You have done amazing in the community.

Ernest Hall:

Well, that's a good story to tell them, the county people. They read something, but that's family.

Alma Jordon:

Yes.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. Tell them I built a lot of stuff. Angels.

Alma Jordon:

You built a lot of things with the angels' help.

Ernest Hall:

Yes, sir. Housing. That was no little job. I took that job. That's a job for, I mean, an educated guy. If he was an architect, what I was doing, I was doing his job.

Alma Jordon:

Now, what were the three schools that you were working on there?

Ernest Hall: [01:17:10]

Three schools at one time. Spring Ridge, Leonardtown. And I did all the schools that they had, we put air conditioners on. We installed them air conditioners. We built them in all the schools in St. Mary's County. That contracted. The reason he got the job, because of me. He couldn't do it. He tried it. He was in business long before I come in. And I come there, all of them laid back. The superintendent, he didn't even come out there. That's the fact too. He's staying in. He said this, and this, and this. I said, "Yeah, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to dig all this." I said, "I get this wing." And them schools, they're sitting on two acres of land. No dummy can read the plan. I dug all the footers. I've done everything for them. Made him so much money. But I didn't get rich off it. If I was White, they would give me a share in the company, something like that.

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Exactly.

Ernest Hall:

And it's proven, that I proved my own self what I was doing for him. It was money wise, because when I decided to leave, they couldn't even stay in business. They couldn't, honest to God, they couldn't. He had a son, two son, called themselves foremen over me. And when their father resigned, I stayed there a little bit with the boys. And it kind of gave me a hard time. So I said, "Okay, boys, I'm leaving." I thought they big shot. Full piece of equipment. Two big jobs. Leonardtown High, this one here, Banneker, all them big jobs they had. And I left them on one job in Esperanza, left from there. They couldn't even finish that. Couldn't even finish it. They were down there working and working. So I left. I told them, "That's all right. Help yourself." Their father was there. So he seen me.

[01:19:37]

He was slick. He owed me money. And I said, "Well, he owe me. Pay him up." I quit running business for myself. And I stopped. So I told him, I said, "I'm going to collect my check there, Mr. [inaudible 01:19:56]." He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm digging. I'm working." He said, "Would you come back and help us out a little bit?" I said, "What you got?" Building the nursing home up in Charles County, La Plata. You see that nursing home?

We built that. I started. I dug out everything. Started and left them there to keep on working on it. He told me, he said, "That job is back behind." He said, "We don't know what we're going to do." I said, "Okay, brother." I said, "No problem." I said, "I can help you." "Well, yeah. Okay." That next day, packed up my stuff. I pulled in there. "Oh, man." I said, "Yep. I'm going up and get that school all set." So I did. I took the truck, went up there, got my equipment and stuff. I put them... They stayed there for weeks. Didn't even have anything roofed in. They couldn't do it. They didn't know to operate it. I come in there in one week. I closed the whole building in, got it done. Man come up there and he couldn't believe it. What did this guy do? I said, "The angels." [laughter] When I come, I don't mess around. I put the roof on that in less than two days.

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Wow.

Ernest Hall:

Yes, sir. They had a guy. Now, his son going to go in there and run the crane. He couldn't do nothing. That man, that superintendent clapped his hand when he saw me come. I set all them joists and beam stuff in one day. All they do, stay there and I tell each one what to do, each day. Superintendent sits in the shed and look at TV, I guess. Do something. He'll never come up. He don't come up. I tell him no. I told him, "I know what to do." I look at that paper and then I'm going on. Schools built on time, made money. See, if you don't build on time, you lose money.

Alma Jordon:

Right.

Ernest Hall:

I had them schools built on time. That nursing home, after I did, I built it on time. She's done. If I was just, like I said, if I was White man who gave me a big bonus, gave me some kind of interest. He ain't give me nothing. That's the reason I told him. I said, "Okay, I don't care. I helped her and I'm leaving." But that's it. People don't realize it, but it is. That's it. I saved them bad boys.

Alma Jordon:

That's why the angels keep coming.

Ernest Hall: [01:22:53]

That's right. I told them that. They don't believe it. See, that dormitory down there, you've seen them dormitories down there, down at St. Mary City College. We built them. I help them on two of them. I've done all the work. I bulldozed it out, everything. I worked very well-

Ernest Hall:

[inaudible 01:23:24] everything. I worked right with them till [inaudible 01:23:26]. I built them things four or five stories high. I stayed on the job. I built them and I stayed there with them. I do all my own excavation. When they laid on, I do the digging. Basement, I put a basement in there. So I hit a spring, run over there in my tractor, when it's with the water puffer. And I said, "Dang on there's a spring there." And I had... Man, that [inaudible 01:23:58] is big. It's twice as big as this line. And all the way around I had most of my footer dug when I got there and I run into that. And they said, "Oh man, Ernest you're going to have to stop." "What for?" He said, "You can't sit the building on that." He said, "Because it's going to settle. We might have to move the building, the whole building down the hill there or someplace to get that much room." That dormitory is there and it's still sitting there.

[01:24:27]

I said, "No, I ain't moving on." He said... Looked at me like, "What this Black guy talking about? You ain't no big boss or nothing." I said, "No, I ain't have moving on." The superintendent like, "What?" So they turned around and called in these architects, that design, engineer, two guy engineer, architect, all them. Flew in with a plane, a private plane. We had airport up Park Hall. When the plane landed, they got off. They give them transportation down to the college there. And I was working on this dormitory. That was the second one. So they stood up there on the bank and I had my machine in the hole. And he says... The boss there, three guys, an engineer, architect guy. And the boss there from the company, Dean and them. And I sit down, say, "Hey, Mister." I said, "What's happening there?" He said, "What will you do about that?" And I looked around and said, "What do you mean?" He said, "What will you do with that?" I said, "I ain't going to move no..." I wasn't moving no building. "What?" So he kept on talking and I stood down there.

The owner Dean [inaudible 01:26:01] was standing there, the superintendent, everybody. And I said, "No, I wouldn't move it." I said, "I can fix it." He said, "What?" I said, "I'm going to dig it all out that whole square where that water coming up. I'm going to dig that out." I said, "About 18 to two feet into that, and I'm going to make a big square here."

He kept on listening. I said, "Then I'm going to fix a mat, a steel mat." I put all the steel in it. And I got the boys out. I already figured out what I'm going to do. Put all the steel in. This thing, a great big area of it. And I said, "I'm going to take this steel, drop some bricks in there, and I'm going to sit it down in there. And I got 12 or 13 inches of concrete that I'm going to pour the whole thing. And I'm going to join it back with this footer and that footer." So he listened to me. He says, "You think that's going to work?" I said, "Dang on right." I said, "It's a floating footer. And with that amount of concrete and the water pressure, and we can't stop the water pressure, but that water pressure will come up. And when I dig the old side, I'm going to make it drain so it'll come out there. And this building ain't going to go nowhere."

[01:27:31]

He looks at the boss there. He said, "Well, let him do that. Let him do what he said then." So the man come down. He said, "Ernest, you's one said it. Do what you supposed to do." I said, "Fine." So I did. I dug it all out, made up everything, put there, kept right on going with the building. I poured all the footer in the building down there. They done built the building. What how many years? The damn building still sitting there. [laughter] Ain't never cracked. Ain't never did a damn thing. [laughter] I even went to look at it myself. Yeah. That's the honest truth. It's there. Angels there.

That's right. And I'm not joking, that's the fact truth. I ain't telling no lie. Them guys stood up there and let me do all of that. I'm in water. It was water. It was coming up just like a spring. Put it there, built the building, right around on top of it and poured the floor, concrete floor in the front. And that building's still there. And I wanted to see if it... Ain't a crack in it. Otherwise, if it moved, you would see the wall crack because it's a solid building. [murmurs in the listeners]

No, sir. She's still there. Sitting right there. But he didn't know [inaudible 01:28:56] to it. That's because I used the knowledge of the water person in that area. It's just like a big ship sitting there. She ain't going nowhere and the water ain't going to stop. That's it. They didn't have common sense. [laughter] Then I said, "Now look here. Now who in the hell supposed to get paid for this?" I didn't get nothing. I just kept going on, put the building up, finished the building, left. I said, "Okay."

It works. I knew because there was a lot up there. I had a house in Town Creek did the same thing. They went to Town Creek, this guy was a builder and he wanted to sit this house here, laid it off, and I dug the basement. Walk in basement and I dug the basement. I hit a spring. Here comes the water. I said, "Hell, this ain't going to work."

Guy called, "Mr. Hall, we going to move the house." I said, "I ain't moving no house." "Why?" I said, "I'm going to dig this basement right on out. Wherever that water is, I'm going to dig on the outside of this footer. I'm going to put drain tile and I'm going to catch that spring and take some run on past the house, right to that ditch. There, you can get fresh water to ditch if you want every day." [laughter] He says, "Oh man, this guy must be crazy." He said, "No, we can't put the house here, no, no, no. We're going to move it."

[01:30:39]

I said, "Help yourself. Help yourself. I don't care." Next day, water was coming in, running down the room. I dug it just like I said. I had it at that level. I made a trench behind that so the water would go there. Okay, the water's here and it's dry here. I put the footer there, built the house. The water was still there. Went running around the house and went down. And they did. They came back, built the damn house. House still sitting there. Dry basement. [murmurs of agreement] I got that spring. They dumb. It is, it's funny. I told him, I said, "You can't beat me, the angels tell me how to do everything." [murmurs] They foolish too. But that's exactly right. I run into everything. I dig... You ever see anybody put basements underneath of the house? While they living in it?

Alma Jordon:

No.

Ernest Hall: [01:31:41]

[laughs] They have a picture of it. Charles County. This boy I worked with. He's got a rambler. So he said it didn't have enough room, but if you could get a... He said, "I know you can't put no basement underneath a house sitting there." I said, "What? Why you can't?" He says, "If I can get a basement, that would give me enough room for those things." "Man..." I said, "You can put a basement if you want to." "How you going..." He says, "I can't." He told me, "I can't pay for no basement. How you going to dig it up?" I said, "I can put you one under there." I said, "I'll talk to boss man, Mr. [Lawford?? 01:32:33], and if he let me use equipment." I said, "I'll go up there and dig it up for you." I said, "But we'll get the guy to lift your house off that foundation, put two steel beams in it. Lift the house up and leave it there. And I'm going to come, I'm going to dig the basement under the house while it's still on a steel beam.

And then we're going to dig the foot and stuff and then we're going to block it all the way up right underneath of the house there. And this wall's inside there. So then we're going to catch it. Catch those there. And then wherever these beams is, we'll leave a little space so we can put a two-foot window in." [VIDEO changes to iPhone 01:33:20] And I said, "Then we just drag the beam right on up. The house will be there." He said, "Oh man. [inaudible 01:33:25]." I said, "Okay, I'll tell you tomorrow how you can do it." And I had to ask Mr. [Loft?? 01:33:31], I said, "Man kind of pulling all the money." I said, "But I'll go up on [inaudible 01:33:36] to dig it out for him." Mr. [Loft?? 01:33:37], "What?" Said, "Yeah, you can go ahead." [VIDEO iPhone ends abruptly 01:33:40] I loaded my stuff and I went up there. So we got the guys, jacked the house up, blocked up, up there off the foundation two of these beams holding it. I took my loader, dug right on under it, dug the basement all up. Now walked all up underneath the house, left the pipe right there. I got enough digging.

[01:34:02]

He never had to get out the house. Put the pipes all back. Keep on living. She ain't going nowhere. Yes, sir. Blocked that bad boy. And when I got it there, they came, lifted it up, put it on the foundation there, pulled the beams on up. Man got a basement. I made him dug it back enough and put a stair... We dug up a stairwell, going on down to his basement, put a stairwell inside, come on up. Sitting there today, she's still there. And he didn't have to pay a cent. I got the boss paid for it. [laughter] Yeah. They paid it. They paid it. Dean told me, "Don't worry about it." And didn't even have an architect. Yeah. It's really funny. But I told him they can't beat me because of the angels. [laughs]

Alma Jordon:

Wow. You've seen some amazing stories.

Ernest Hall:

Yes, sir.

Alma Jordon:

We really appreciate it.

Ernest Hall:

Well, it's a Black guy who's helping people do it. I spent most of my time just helping people because it doesn't bother me. I see dumb stuff and I correct it.

Alma Jordon:

Yeah. That's amazing.

Ernest Hall:

But they tickle me on that dormitory though because that's a big job. Man, stood up on that hill. I'll never forget it. Look down there and ask me, "What are you going to do, about it?" [interviewer laughs] I said, "Okay, brother." I said, "I don't have to move no building." [laughter] I said, "I'm going to fix it so he stays." She's still there. She going to be there because it's water there. And that house they built in Town Creek, still there. Water still coming out. Right alongside the house, right down the ditch, fresh water. It's just a spring. It was a spring in that bank. Yeah.

[01:36:02]

Those springs them days, that was good. If you could dig them. Where I lived at, it's like a bank and this water would come down there. So I dug it all out, put a curb, put two curbs in it, drove the pipe back up into where the water was coming. And how far the water started coming right in that pipe right in them curbs. And I could store enough spraying water in those curbs. I put me a pump there and pumped it all the way up to a trailer and made that thing furnished water in the house. Cold as the devil. That water come around the bank. You could just dip it up. Cold water, just like it's in that bottle. Isn't that something? So take advantage of it. And that man come down there and though I was crazy.

Health department guy come and said, "What the hell is this?" "That's a spring." "No, you can't do that." He said, "No, you can't do that." I said, "It's coming out the bank ain't it? It ain't pollution. It's good." He got himself a bottle, caught the water, took it back, sent it to the University of Maryland. They said, "Man, you crazy." I said, "Man, this is spring water that they could sell." No particles in it. Nothing. You could just take your cup, drink it just like cold [inaudible 01:37:41]. Made good uses, still there. I guess I left him there with the spring. Still there. Down in the woods.

Alma Jordon:

Sounds like you should have been an instructor and had a class with students to teach them.

Ernest Hall:

Teach them somebody.

Alma Jordon:

Teach them how to do [inaudible 01:38:04 crosstalk].

Ernest Hall:

Well, that's what they saying now. [iPhone video begins again 01:36:59] Somebody should be able to take up something like that and do it in the county. But we don't have nobody. Color wise, you ain't got nobody Black now that I know of. These kids now, they don't want to do that. They going to go to school and sit behind a computer. [mimics typing on a computer] If they can't do the computer, then they go hungry. If they can't do that, all of them want to get into the dope business. Sell dope. [agreement murmurs] Yeah. Yeah. Boy, I took a couple of them off the street for selling that stuff. Gave them a job. I asked, "What do you think you're doing? You make no living like that, dumbbell. You go to work, learn something." I teach them how to carpenter, how to read the plan and stuff like that. They did pretty good after that.

Alma Jordon: [01:39:00]

We should have a program where you could do some of that. Yes.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. To teach them more than one way to make a living.

Alma Jordon:

Uh huh, it's gone. Okay. Do we have anybody who wants to ask any more questions to Mr. Hall?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, what time is it?

Alma Jordon:

Well, thank you, Mr. Hall-

Ernest Hall:

How you doing Mr. Lawrence?

Nathaniel Lawrence:

I'm doing great. You've had a fantastic life, man.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah, man.

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Yeah. I mean, the things that you're saying, like reading plans... I'm in construction. I'm working in construction all my life. Reading plans most people got to go to college.

Ernest Hall:

That's right.

Nathaniel Lawrence:

To be able to read those plans.

Ernest Hall:

That's it.

Ernest Hall:

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. Nobody would never believe it. But I taught my own self how to read the plan.

Nathaniel Lawrence:

That is fantastic.

Ernest Hall:

It is. And it's a whole lot of technology to it. Slide rules. And I even done all that. I've done all the engineer work for them. Not to sit up transit and did all the grades for them, all the shots, and read everything off the plan. I'm doing the job that the superintendent supposed to do. He sit in the office. The boss come. What is he doing? He's down there getting that straight. And then he says, the boss said, "Well, who told him to do that?" He said, "I didn't tell him." They were scared to say they tell... They couldn't tell me to do nothing. I learned it all. I told them I have fun now. I got two White boys worked in there. One was college. They had no education. They thought they was going to make... We thought they were going to make forams of y'all. They came up and worked with me. I taught them a whole lot of stuff. So I went... What's that? That one down there? Greenville. The handicap one. No, no. It's in... What in the heck they call that thing? Where the retarded children went.

Anna Moseley:

Green Holly.

Ernest Hall:

Huh?

Anna Moseley:

Green Holly.

Alma Jordon:

Green Holly.

Ernest Hall: [01:41:41]

Green Holly. That's it down in there. The one right down when you go up there where the 7-Eleven at now. Go back in there, that school. Yeah, we built that school. I was on the job. So we had these two boys now. One was... They were college or whatever. So man tell them [inaudible 01:42:05]. They didn't want to hear nothing I said because I wasn't in college and plus I was a different color. [laughs] So to come up there working one day and I had everything. I do all the things myself, transit and stuff. They didn't even know how to read a transit. So I set the transit up and I took the transit shot degree. He said, "What are you doing there?" I said, "When you start a job, this is what the whole school is built on this one thing that you..." The elevation is on there. Wherever I go and set up the transit, I get the elevation there and I take it with me.

I can do anything. Foundations there because that's my grade. And you see these buildings, they sit... That's what they really do. That's the engineer job supposed to do it. I had to do it myself. They college. So then I shot all the grades and I come there. They never seen nobody put curbs in. They didn't know how to put no curbs in. So I come one day and they want curbs. I said, "Okay." I showed them how to do it. And then I said, "Well, it's not going to work unless we get these metal curbs that way I can put together in what you call the curbing." Then I called Mr. Lawford, I told him about the curb. He said, "Is that right?" He looked at me like, "What in the hell do he know about curb?" I said, "That's the best

break." Sure enough, he went back, he ordered these curbs. So when the tractor trailer brought them there, shoot them down. He said, "What is that?" I said, "They're just for sidewalk curbs and curbing and sidewalk and stuff."

He said, "Who using them?" I said, "I'm going to use them." So he told the boys, says, "Y'all go out there, work with him. I ain't never seen nothing like that." He said, "I don't do no curbing." I said, "Yeah, they're good." I said, "I'm going to put them up fast. I can do it." He looked at me. I went and got the transit. So I did the same thing. I did all the elevation, showed the boys how to do it, do all the measure, put a stave in, put my string in, and I dug it all up from the curbing. [inaudible 01:44:47] told it told me. These curbs are big metal ones. I don't know if you ever seen them. You know what these are?

Nathaniel Lawrence:

I've seen them.

Ernest Hall:

I put all those curbs in, ready for concrete. So then I know the measurement and the depth, and I got one of those things, went there and dig it up. So I told the superintendent, I said, "I need five yards to pull those curbs along." So these two boys, well, they was White. So they heard me say, "Five yard." So when the big boys come, they said, "Mr. Lawford said that these curbs [inaudible 01:45:31] so how much concrete we should get for them?"

Mr. Lawford said... Around the corner, I heard him. Said, "You college students something can't figure concrete?" They said, "No." So Mr. Lawford got a pencil. He says, "How deep is it? How wide is it?" He multiplied it by seven and everything. He said, "Five yards." Boy said, "How in the hell Ernest knew it was five yards in?" [laughter] Mr. Lawford said, "What?" Said, "It was five yards." I looked right at him. I looked at him. I said, "Uh-huh." He won't believe me, but it was five yards because hell, I figured it's a concrete skill that if you learn how to read it, you can do it.

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Sure.

Ernest Hall:

Huh?

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Yes.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. They college. I said, "I told them I ain't never seen inside of a college." That's why they went broke. They didn't have nobody to do all that stuff for them. After stick the wrong [inaudible 01:46:47], I was trying to teach him to get a job as superintendent. But one boy did. He learned everything. And man, he told me one day, he said, "Mr. Hall, I pay attention." I said, "What?" He said, "I got a job with the guy that's building out St. Mary City." He got a job.

Nathaniel Lawrence:

Really?

Ernest Hall:

Yeah. He learned enough, but he got to learn how to read a plan. You can't build nothing without that multiply. Algebra. That's what she teaching me. Algebra. [inaudible 01:47:26], times, but it did come in handy.

Alma Jordon:

Yes. Well, thank you. Thank you so very much. This has been very inspirational and thank you for sharing with us.

Ernest Hall:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

[VIDEO iPhone ends 01:47:40]