

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

George Gaither Forrest

Interviewed by Carol Locke-Endy

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at his office (county administrator's office in the Governmental Center

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[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

Carol Locke-Endy: This is an interview with George Forrest conducted in his office of the County Administrator in the Governmental Center in Leonardtown, Maryland. The interviewer is Carol Locke-Endy. To begin, would you give us your full name and the year and the place you were born?

George Forrest: George Gaither Forrest. I was born 1938 in Leonardtown, Maryland.

CLE: We agreed that this interview would focus on the chapter of your exceptionally interesting life that has to do with leaving and then coming home again to the County. But perhaps before that, a little context would help. So, tell me about your people.

GF: I think that's a good place to start. I am one of these -- and my family is one of these families that I think God has chosen as the ones that he's gonna smile on because both my parents are still alive. My father is 92; my mother is 86. I -- and they live in the house that I was born in. In fact, [the] midwife helped my mother deliver my oldest brother and me in that very same house. They have modified the house a bit. It was a

four-room house. It's now eight, maybe nine rooms. And, I think one of the beauties of having them still alive is that I get to see them every day. And, that's a double-edged sword. It can be a good thing and then it can be a challenging thing because my mother says to me in the mornings, when I leave the house, "I don't want you to go to work and mess up!" [Chuckle] Which kind of gives me that feeling that she still thinks that I'm a little boy, although I'm 65 years old? But, that's my mother's way of showing her affection.

I guess a good start point is--since we're gonna talk about my leaving and coming back -- I graduated from Banneker High School, which was a consolidated Grades 1-12. The school is still there, but it is an elementary school now. It was the African American High School in the northern part of the county. There were three high schools: one in the southern part of the county, and it was called Jarboesville; and then there was a Catholic school, Cardinal Gibbons; and, of course, Banneker. That educational experience for me was probably the beginning of what marked at least where I was gonna go -- or at least created in me this desire to want to go further and do more.

When I left -- When I graduated from high school, I had said to my parents, "I need to get out of Leonardtown" because in those days Leonardtown was a separate but equal community. And, I'll tell you separate but not necessarily equal, although it was a fun place to grow up, an awful lot of fun. When I grew up, high school was probably like most high schools. We had our athletic teams. We had all the things that everybody else had, and we had excellent teachers. My principal was a guy named Richard Ryan and he had a Ph.D. and he was a Phi Beta Kappa. And in 1956, I didn't know what a Ph.D. was and had no concept of what Phi Beta Kappa meant. He forced us to take language

classes, physics classes all the kinds of things that were designed to get you ready to go to college.

Well, I have -- There are five siblings -- five children in my family. I have an older brother. I'm the second of the five children. My oldest brother was I guess I can say he's probably the perfect child: He was a good athlete; he was a good student; has my father's name. So a lot of my -- my misbehaving is probably because I needed the attention that I thought my older brother got. And, I think it's a second-child syndrome. Whether real or imagined, I thought it was there.

But at any rate in 1956, after graduation I had no idea that I was gonna go off to college until August when I decided that I really didn't want to work in tobacco any more and [chuckle] I needed to do something, and I needed to get away from Leonardtown. I didn't really think that my father was doing enough to have an impact on the way we were treated in the county. And I guess that was because in the 50's, it was the beginning of the -- I guess you can call it the African American Revolution or the reawakening of African Americans. It was the 50's and 60's that organizations like the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee, the Black Panthers -- all those were part of my college experience. We did sit-ins and marches, and I can remember in college we integrated or sat in at a restaurant north of Morgan. I went to college in Baltimore at Morgan State University, and there was a restaurant there called Reed's Drug Store. And, we sat in there with the -- under the threat of not only being arrested, but being expelled from school because the President of the college thought that this was not what young, bright, educated African Americans should be doing. We shouldn't be rebelrousing and those kinds of things. So, I went there and majored in political science.

Ended up taking ROTC because Morgan is a Land Grant college, and Land Grant colleges in those days required all male students to take at least two years of ROTC. The ROTC program at Morgan was an Army ROTC program. I had no intention of going into the military. In fact, my goals were to finish Morgan, go to law school, and then become the greatest civil rights lawyer that ever lived -- none of which happened because I didn't work hard enough in college to get to that point.

But anyway, I did take ROTC and then had the good fortune of getting into the advanced program which meant that at the end of the four years, you were commissioned 2nd Lieutenant. And, had that experience. Went off, spent 23 years in the military and I'm gonna the long way to get here about how I ended up getting back home. But, spent 23 years in the military and retired from the military, worked a year in Saudi Arabia. And then, a friend of mine was the Athletic Director at Morgan State and said, "Our football program is in disarray. We need somebody to come back and work on retention and academic performance of athletes." So, I ended up going back to Morgan. Coached football there and taught some classes in the History department for almost nine years. And then, my friend lost his job. And [chuckle] when he lost his job, the life of a coach - the reality of coaching set in and I got fired and retreated to the safest place that I know, which is home.

And when I came back to the County, the first opportunity I had was to work at Ryken High School, which was a Catholic School. I went there and interviewed for the coaching position. But when I got there, the President of the school said, "We need a -- We just lost our Dean of Students and it would really -- We think that you could do the job." So, I applied, got it, stayed there three years.

And in that process, I really found out how important my father really was and what my father really had done. Because those 23 years that I was gone, my father continued to do amazing things. He was the first African American School Board President. He worked his way with Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co. from a simple line foreman to a 1st Line Supervisor. And then, left that job and ended up working with the court system up until last year. So, he'd done an awful lot. He had done an awful lot, and I just didn't -- I didn't really have an appreciation because when I left in '56, I was young, hot-headed ready to raise my fists in defiance. Down with the man and wear dashiki's and afros and get in touch with the revolution, and my parents were -- My father, in his own very quiet way, was making some substantial changes in the way -- in life in St. Mary's County. I remember an interesting story. I was stationed at Ft. Myer, which is right outside of Washington in 1964, and I think that was -- Yeah, '64 because that was the March on Washington -- Martin Luther King March on Washington. And, the unit I was assigned to was the 3rd U.S. Infantry: the Presidential Honor Guard, but they also had an additional duty of riot control, which meant they were the troops that would be sent into Washington in the event that there would be a civil disturbance. So, I think the March was in August. My date may be off a bit, but my parents called me and said, "We're gonna be up in August for this March that's being orchestrated and run by this young African American reverend, Martin Luther King." And, they called me and after I got that called, we went to a briefing and the briefing was that, "You guys will be prepared to go into the city to do riot control in the event that there is some whatever." And, I am going, oh my God! I have to make a decision here! If I -- If I -- If I do go into this, what happens if I see my parents there or somebody that I know?"-- Because I think there were

bus loads of people from St. Mary's. Fortunately, nothing happened and we weren't committed. But, those were the kinds of things and the kinds of participation and activity that my father did that really helped me realize what an important person he was and how influential he was in changing some things.

He was key in getting John Lancaster elected. I think my father was his campaign chairman when he ran, and John Lancaster is -- or was -- and John's still alive and healthy and vibrant and challenging and one of my mentors. But, he was the first African American County Commissioner and served for two terms, I believe.

Let me see. And so when I got back to Ryken, I had the opportunity to really spend some quality time with my parents because the whole time that I was away, we would come for the summer and I would bring my kids, and the kids would come and stay -- spend time with Grandma and Grandpa. And, but, never really had an opportunity to sit and talk about my father's philosophy. Because when I was growing up, he worked an awful lot. He worked awfully hard so we didn't see him a lot. He wasn't -- My mother was probably -- We talked about my father a lot, but my mother was really the -- the matriarch who held the whole things together when he was out chasing lots of his dreams. And, lots of his dreams were delayed because he had children and lots of children, so he didn't accomplish -- We thought he didn't accomplish all of the things that he really did, but he's very content in what he's done. And, he's been recognized and lots of those kinds of things.

So, my coming home really was a God-send because I believe that in my heart of hearts - - and this may be melodramatic, but I think that the three years of combat in Vietnam, I think God allowed me to survive so that I could come home and really appreciate and

find out who my father was. Because when I left home, I really didn't have a high impression -- I didn't hold him in high regard. #1) He was -- I thought -- and, I think the term is -- and I've never said this and I would never say this to him--but I thought my father was really an Uncle Tom because he, he, he survived and that's probably what you needed to be able to do. And in a lot of ways, my mother [chuckle] tells me that I'm an awful lot like him and I hope that my children [chuckle] don't see that as being an Uncle Tom [chuckle], but also seeing it as, as developing these survival mechanisms that will allow you to exist in a society that is -- that still has a long way to go, in terms of recognizing people for their, their human quality. And, I guess that's a long way around to how I got back.

CLE: George, when -- I'd like you to talk a little bit about the way you perceived the racial issues in the County as a kid, as a teenager when you went away and the extent to which your family talked about it. What -- You obviously learned things at home about black and white and you developed considerable anger to make you not only want to leave St. Mary's, but to join the Revolution. And so, I'm interested in the kind of growing up learning about race that you had. You obviously had another kind of learning when you were in the Service. When you came back here, some things have changed and I wonder how of the change is in you and how much of it is in the situation?

GF: Let me -- I think the discussion of race at home, when I was growing up: It was not a conscious discussion. It was kind of a matter-of-fact. It was more about: These are the kinds of things that you need to have in order to be able to, well, stay out of trouble. Because there was not a lot of race mixing, we didn't encounter -- I personally didn't encounter a lot -- I mean direct discrimination. I mean, nobody ever said to me that,

“You can’t go to this fountain” or whatever because we didn’t have the separate fountains or whatever, but we did have separate facilities.

I remember the [chuckle] -- a couple of things that stick out in my mind is there’s a theater in Leonardtown -- It’s still there. It’s called Nook ‘N Monks. At that time, it was called the New Theatre because Leonardtown was a bustling little metropolis and it had two movies. But, the entrance for the African Americans -- colored people -- Negroes, whatever we were called at that time was the back way. And, I used to think that either they believed we were awfully stupid or we were so afraid that we wouldn’t challenge the system. There was never a person on that door to collect money. We were expected to go there, stand and wait and when the ticket collector from the front thought that there were enough people there he would come and collect your money. Well, [chuckle] my brothers were all very obedient, would do that [chuckle] and I would go in and go upstairs and take my seat. And if the guy came up and wanted to collect my money, I’d pay him, but I wouldn’t stay there. And, I know that once I did that and my -- we got home and my mother was absolutely horrified that I would do something that that would cause some problems because she was always concerned about boys and what would happen to us if, if, if we got in that kind of trouble. I think the thing that probably really cemented my wanted to get outta here is a very important part of my parent’s life -- and still is, and a very important part of this community is its religious fervor: good Catholic community. And, I am in no way slamming the Catholic Church, but the Catholic Church failed African Americans miserably, particularly in my growing up.

I remember once we had a new priest, a new, young, energetic priest who wanted to bring diversity to the county. And so, he asked my mother if it were possible for me to study to

be an accolade. And like all boys, we -- all of us -- wanted to be priests until we found that there were girls and there were more important things than being a priest. And so, he taught me the rituals of the mass and how to serve and learn Latin and did all those kind of things. And on graduation, he said, "Once you finish, we'll have you do mass at the big church," which was St. Aloysius.

Well, the good parishioners of the county -- First of all, I guess they believed he couldn't get me to learn all of the stuff to be able to do it because this was something that only bright, young, white children could do. But, I learned it all; I did all the stuff and passed all the tests. But on that Sunday that I was supposed to serve, the head pastor told him it would cause too much trouble and I would not be allowed to serve. I could serve in the chapel in the priest's resident. I told him I didn't want to do that. My mother said, "You have to do this. This is God's will," and whatever.

And so, I did and it was from that point that I started to think about, "Who is this God?" and "Why is he doing this to me? I think I've done all the things that I'm supposed to do." And so, it kinda challenged my thought process, and then I really started to think about religion and what religion meant. One of the first questions in the Baltimore Catechism is, "Who are you?" And, every Catholic child knows the response is, "I'm a child of God created in his image and likeness," and that's a pat answer. And then, I used to start to look around the church and try to figure out, "Where is this image that looks like me or my parents or anybody?"

The other thing that used to really bother me -- bothered us an awful lot as we got older -- is when they did communion on Sundays, the white people went first and we would have to wait. And, I remember this woman who -- My parents know her well because I think

my mother had a confrontation with her -- who was late for church and communion had started and we were all in line; and, she came from the back of line, forced her way into the front and nobody said anything. And, this was -- this was then I started to think, "What are my parents doing? Why are they putting up with kind of nonsense?"

And then, I really kinda drifted away from the concept of Catholicism and what it really means because the church really wasn't doing -- I mean, maybe they were and we just didn't know about it, but I don't ever remember priests coming to our house. I don't remember any of the kind of religious exchange that I see going on now. And then, I got to college and I think college, too, was a defining because we had a Catholic Club in college, which was called the Newman Club. And, our advisor was a military chaplain and he'd been in the Marine Corps. And, he started to talk to us about defining the deity and what the deity really was and to talk more about spirituality than religious stuff. I mean, the pomp and circumstance of the church is wonderful and whatever, but spiritual - - minus the spiritual piece, it's really empty and really hollow.

I -- I -- Just, hindsight is a wonderful thing. I now sit back, as an old man, and think about some of the symbolism or the lack of symbolism in the church. I mean, the welcoming people to God's house and then doing the whole ceremony with your back to them, I mean, is just wild and to have the notion of, "I would want to participate in a ceremony where you're receiving the body and blood of Christ and you're so afraid that - - "because there were rules like if you let this host touch your teeth, if you touch it with your hands, if it falls on the floor: all of those kinds of religious fear kinds of things that were used as control mechanisms. And again, as a young man I didn't realize that, but I do know now that that's probably what it was really all about. Because the more we

know about it, the more we're gonna question.

I remember the Sisters used to tell us, "Don't ask those kinds of questions." [Chuckle]

And I'm going, "But my teachers in school are telling me to be inquisitive and ask questions and challenge and probe and try to find out and research." And then when you say to the nuns, "How could Mary possibly have had a baby when biologically you're telling me that this is what it takes to make that happen?" And, the Sisters constant response was always, "It is about faith. It is always about faith. And when all else fails, reach back and grab your faith." Well, if your faith is really shaky from the start, how do you reach back and grab it?

But, I think I -- I think the changes in Leonardtown have been -- kind of coming back and seeing it, the changes have been an awful lot cosmetic change. But, there has been some real human change because I know that, just in my parents -- family -- and I'll use my family as an example: My mother is really race conscious. And because of the, I think, the amount of scarring that she had growing up and what she saw happen to my father, she's still really not comfortable around white people, and she's very guarded around white people. But I think as she gets older, and she changes and her grandchildren change, and her great-grandchildren change, and one of her grand -- one of her grandsons is in a interracial marriage, and she has grandchildren who are memorialized or monument or whatever in this office because they are wonderful children and she sees them -- Because my mother often refers to white people as "the others" [laughter] and we laugh because I know when my youngest son got married and the first question she asked was, "Is he marrying one of the others?" Because she had met Lisa before Chris and Lisa decided to marry. And I said, "Mother, yeah." And she said, "Well you know, that's not

gonna work. That is just not gonna work.” And so, it was strained for a long time.

When Chris -- When Alex and Jessica came along, I mean, it's -- Lisa is just like the all the other kids.

And I think -- I think you've heard me talk about this before: I think that was the fear surrounding desegregation. I don't think it had anything to do with schools and water fountains and separate places to eat and all those kinds of things. I think that was all on the surface. The surface -- the real -- the real difficulty -- And again, the reason they fought so hard against school desegregation is: If I sit next to you every day, the fear about what you are and what you are not is gonna go away because you'll know. You'll either like me or dislike me because what I do to you personally, not what I look like; and, we're seeing that all the time. It's just the more you are exposed to other people, the better you understand who they are and what they're all about, and you will realize that all of us really want basically the same thing: peaceful life, the best for our children, safe, secure. Those kinds of things, and I think -- I think the architects of segregation understood that. They understood that better than those of us who were pushing to get it because we thought that it was about something different. It was about, “They don't want to share the water with us.” I mean, that doesn't hold a lot of credence because even in slavery days, they drank out of the same glasses, the same whatever. It was about this mixing and it was about this elimination of a race. And, I guess if I were in a position of the chosen race or the privilege class, I would be intimidated, too. And, the way I attack this intimidation is eliminate, change the person or the entity that can make that happen, and that is the African American male.

Whatever --I mean, if [chuckle] we -- We smile now. If there is an interracial marriage,

the children -- I mean, it's finished. They may have green eyes, blue eyes, whatever, but they won't have blond hair and they'll be high yellow, but they won't be recognizable. And, I think that the power source in this country understands that and it is -- It is a fear and it's the realization that the European ancestral folks will no longer be the dominant race. I mean, all you have to do is go to Florida or [chuckle] Los Angeles and you'll see the browning of America. It's not coming from East to West; it's from the South and I think that's a -- I think to fear that is short-sighted. Lots decisions around this country have been short-sighted and have caused some great pain because we're still trying to preserve that peace.

And, there have been some really far, far-reaching visionaries who said, "We need to make some changes." One of my hero's is Harry Truman, and Harry Truman is a hero because he realized that #1, I cannot afford to have a military fighting force that's separate and equal because when the bad guys start to shoot, they don't care what you look like, what you're political persuasions are. They just want to make sure that you're a big enough target for them to hit, and he realized that immediately. And, I think that the military -- and I am really prejudiced about the military because it is the social institution that has been in the forefront of really changing this country in a lot of good ways and in a lot of negative ways. Because at some point, we have leadership -- military leadership who believe that the only solution is to go kill the other guys. And so, diplomacy is not part of their, their charter.

But in terms of social change, in terms of scientific changes, in terms of medical change: Lots of the medical stuff that we do now—

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

--of using airplanes to -- or helicopters -- to Medivac: I mean, it's routine at this hospital. I mean, and that's a military concept. I mean the whole notion of computers. I mean, the military had these humongous machines that were doing all of their computer work. And the result of that, we have these PC's now on everybody's desk. So, and there is a communication of lots. But again, in the social arena, the military has been -- Their ability to be able to mandate, to legislate change -- And an in organization like that, you can do it.

In a democracy like we have, to legislate it doesn't work all of the time as well as we would like it to do because I think the change will come through socialization. My father is often -- will often say, "If -- If I invite you to my dinner table, then the social exchange that's gonna go on there will be real." And, I think the whole notion of Salt and Pepper, doing a breaking-of-the-bread kind of thing was designed around that concept because you can't get made with me when you're eating. Impossible! You may want to go sit by yourself, but it's probably not gonna happen and so there is the social mixing that I think is really important; but, there is a lot of work that needs to be done.

I use this organization that I'm in. We pay a lot of lip-service to diversity, but there are segments of the society that are excluded from what we do. I mean, in this county in the next five years, one in five citizens will be over 65 years old and we talk about -- and me, too -- and we talk about affordable, diverse housing and we don't bring that group to the table to talk about it. I mean, we -- we see this proliferation of apartment buildings that

are three stories. The more stairs you put -- The older you get, the less number of stairs should be in your house. So, we ought to be looking at communities and housing pieces that are designed to accommodate one-fifth of your population. I mean, Cedar Lane is a wonderful place. Too many stairs; too tall; too high-rise.

My parents: I'll tell you, my parents would rather stay in their house and struggle with the steps in their house than move out and move into an apartment kind of collective box. There's a--I think the Germans experimented with putting people in these -- They were the first ones to start experimenting with putting people in these boxes, these controlled communities or whatever, and we're doing basically the same thing. So, so diversity in the county is something that we pay lip-service to, but we really need to focus on it. We have a work force of probably 750 maybe, maybe a few more. In the management ranks, there are three managers: one is a division -- I mean a Director and she has a double whammy on her. She's a woman, she's young [chuckle], and she's African American and the lowest paid of all the Directors. So, we have to work on that. We have another guy who is a Director of Marcey House -- He's not a Director but a Division and does a super job. But, both of these agencies have to raise their own money because the perception is they're softer side of government and these guys aren't -- they don't have the ability to do the hard stuff like Planning & Zoning and Public Works and Finance and -- [chuckle] And, I have to remind people: You know, they have a pretty good business department at Morgan and Howard and whatever, so these guys aren't gonna come out and not know what it is that they're doing.

So part of my challenge -- if I have the opportunity to be the County Administrator is to figure out ways to make that at least a little more balanced. Am I gonna change it?

Maybe one, two people at a time, and I think that's -- My father tells me all the time: That's how you make change is one person at a time and that, then, has some kind of ripple effect. I think the rew -- I -- My mother tells me all the time I have difficulty holding a job since I've been back in the County because I've had [chuckle] least five, six jobs! [Laughter] That's why I came home. But every time I do, I always go back to the probably the one that probably changed me most -- other than the military -- is my experience as a Principal of a high school because young people, like they say in their vernacular: They keep it real and they will tell you what's on your mind. If they don't like you, they'll tell you why they don't like you. And if you listen to them, they'll help you solve most of the problems around them, but you just have to be willing to listen and include them in the process.

And, I use that same management style that I used with my kids -- that I use in the high school I also use it here. I tell these guys -- Directors, in particular: If you want the workers, the guys down in the weeds to really work hard, you make it their program. You let them help establish what the rules are, how we're gonna implement the rules and then they will be -- they will be responsible. If you use your role as a benevolent dictator and lay it over them, they'll do it but not with a lot of zeal. So, okay.

CLE: What happened to the revolution? And, I guess that question is perhaps national but also local. Was there one? And, the contrasts that you saw at age 18 between your father's way of one at a time and being able to survive by being flexible versus the young man's way of the revolution, have you become your father as your mother thinks and does that always happen to the revolutionary? And, is there a revolution for the younger generation that needs to happen now in relation to race?

GF: You know, I think most revolutionaries get co-opted, I think. I think I am my father. I think rather than kicking down the door now what I try to do is convince people that they should open it, but the objectives are the same and that is to get inside. Now, if you do it my father's way and you get inside, the logical thought is that you will be more acceptable, accepted as opposed to -- Because if I kick it in, then I'm forcing my way in and I'm forcing my way to the table. Sometimes that has to happen too. I think that what happened -- at least in my little narrow part of the world, is the Revolution lost its steam because the revolutionaries got what they really needed and it was more material stuff. It was, "Give me the opportunity to do this." And then, that's not the case with everybody because there are lots of guys who are still doing a tremendous amount of things.

I remember once having a discussion with a young man about -- and this was when I was at college about -- and I was teaching at college -- about revolution what you needed to do and how you needed to make the contribution and he said, "You know the first thing I gotta do is I gotta survive. I gotta get a job so I can eat and feed my family and whatever. And I can go out and be the revolutionary and then watch my counterparts with their BMW and their Lexus and whatever and I don't necessarily want to struggle."

So, is a revolution for young people? Absolutely, but I think it's more of a moral revolution than how we, we -- how we change our physical environment because Leonardtown has really changed. I mean, we have Chez Dukes, the Café des Artistes. We affectionately called it Chez Dukes because it used to be Duke's Restaurant, Bar & Grill and we just threw the fancy -- But again, that's change, but has Leonardtown really changed? Probably not. I mean, we still have Leonard Freehole. There is still this underclass. The majority of underclass are African American. There is still a hesitancy

to accept people for who they are. I mean, we still--We are still really quick to categorize and put people in boxes. It's sometimes humorous sitting in this office. And if I am out in the front office doing something, the notion is that everybody else out there has an important role and I am probably -- I'm not confused with the custodial guy because I have on a tie. But if I didn't have a tie, they would probably think I was maintenance. And then, there are people who come to the county, local people who come in and are amazed that you can do things like, "I didn't know you could do that." Well, my job is to do that. My job is to make that happen. I have the training, I have the experience, I have the know-how to make it happen. Because I don't look like you think a County Administrator should look doesn't negate -- doesn't negate the fact that I can do the job. I remember once we were -- and this was back to my military days -- We were -- Part of this unit that I was in was a ceremonial unit and they traveled around the country doing patriotic shows. And, we were in Columbia, South Carolina and I was the Commander of this organization. And, we went to the hotel -- and I had a driver. Not that that meant anything other than that all Colonels have drivers. It's not a big thing. It's more of a function of the organization as opposed to status. But, we went to this hotel and I went up to the desk to start the conversation about getting the room and my driver, who happened to be white, was an enlisted man. The hotel guy looked past me to the driver and said, "Are you in charge and do you want -- What are we attempting to do?" And the kid was totally embarrassed because he's going [chuckle], "That's the Colonel." He didn't see what the guy behind the desk did, and I had some choices. I could be very angry and rant and rave and whatever and I just basically said, "Well, he's Specialist and the way you can tell in the future, the rank structure, is enlisted people have their rank on

their sleeves, commissioned officers wear their rank on the lapel. So, it doesn't matter what the rank is: Just the first thing you do is if you see stripes you know that that is a non-commissioned officer or an enlisted person. And if you see something on their upper left, then that's an officer and that's how you figure that out so you won't have this difficulty again because there are guys who will come in here and tear this place apart, in terms of not -- because with that attitude we could have said, "Okay. I'm gonna take all 500 of these guys and we're not gonna stay at this hotel. We're gonna go across the street because you have personally embarrassed me."

But, you take those opportunities and you use them to teach lessons. I don't know what kind of an impact on the guy, but it was -- these are the kind of situations. And, I think my fear though -- and when we talk about revolution and is there a revolution for young people -- is, particularly for young African Americans, I don't think they're ready. I don't think they are prepared because they don't have an understanding of what the society really is all about. What we've done is we've re-segregated ourselves and so, the rejection of anything that is non-ethnic, at least your ethnicity, you reject. Well, that's okay if you have a viable alternative that you can relate to or go to. But, Math is Math is Math and English is English is English and you can -- you can -- You can probably try to create a substitute and that's okay and it works some of the time, but, but, but the universality of that doesn't happen. So when you are thrust in positions of responsibility and positions of leadership, or when you kick the door open and you step inside and you're asked, "What did you bring to the table?" and you can't articulate that, you can't communicate that, all you've done is kick the door in. You haven't -- You're not gonna have an impact.

So, I worry an awful lot about how maybe my generation or the generation has failed to tell these guys, "Yes, it's okay to have a revolution. You need to do a revolution. You also need to -- Most good revolutionaries understand the bad guy and they don't totally reject them. What they try to do is learn as much as they can about the bad guys so that when they have the opportunity, they can overthrow them; but, you can't overthrow folks and you can't change systems if you don't know what the system is. I mean, how do you change government if you don't vote? And, you don't vote because you don't understand the Constitution, what the Constitution says because it was written by white guys and you're made because Jefferson had an affair with Sally Hemming. So, that's okay. I mean, he did that. You can't change that or whatever, but the words in that document mean more to you than the relationship that he had with his woman, and you need to understand that. You need to know what your rights are and how you can impact the system to make that change. I don't think that -- I used to tell my young guys that I used to work with all the problems: "You know the only -- What makes me said about you guys is you're one-dimensional. You're one-dimensional people. You only know one music. You only know one language. You only know one style of dress. You only know one thing and that's your own individual ethnicity." And, lots of folks died, struggled, suffered, whatever so that you could bridge that gap and we went back, which is fine for the system because the system says, "We don't have to worry about these guys. They've already rendered themselves harmless because they don't understand the system."

How do you change the -- How do you change or monitor the system if you don't understand at least the basic principles of economics? Is economics white? Maybe, but I

would venture to say that in Timbuktu that had an economic system that worked and worked pretty well, but for some reason we kinda reject that. So, it's gonna be really hard for younger, for the younger generation -- particularly African Americans to make a change unless we make some quantum leap forward about how we get prepared.

And, there are lots of good kids. I mean, some of the things that I -- that cause me alarm, though, is I've been to four graduations in the last five days and I'm sitting there. While everybody else is -- maybe not everybody, but as folks are focusing on the pomp and circumstance and whatever, I'm looking to see how many guys have National Honor Society Regalia. Two at Great Mills, one at Chopticon, none at Ryken and I can't remember the number at Leonardtown. That's frightening! So what that means is they're either not in the AP courses, they're not doing the kind of work or they are doing like my nephew who chose -- a conscious choice not to be a good student because of the rejection that he would have. Why, he didn't want to be in that old Honor Society.

"Well, you want to be in the Honor Society so that if, by chance, the opportunity to go to Yale is presented, you can do it and you don't limit yourself by saying, "Well, I don't want to do that" and then you wake up one day and all that's left is, "God, maybe the only place that I --"

Not that I -- The College of Southern Maryland is a wonderful organization. It serves a -- But again, there is so much more, but you have to get ready to do it. I mean, and I don't know how to do that. If I leave -- If and when I leave this job, I would really like to go back into working with young guys because it is -- they are -- They are what will fuel the revolution. And, I have -- You know, I say at the top of this: My family is blessed. I have a grandnephew -- and Quinten is five going on 65 because his mother's a teacher,

his grandmother's a teacher, his uncles are teachers. He hears, in addition to all the fun we have, he also hears intellectual conversation about lots of things. He's exposed to lots of things.

Just as an example: The other day I went home for lunch and he was there, and he had a shirt on that had a spider on it. And I said, "Quinten, good looking spider there. Nice insect," and he said, "Wrong, Uncle Hands. Spider is not an insect. It's an arachnia whatever."

And I said, "Well, what is the difference between an insect and a spider?"

"An insect has six legs and a spider has eight legs. Insect has three parts to his body and a spider is one part," and this was a five year-old kid? So you tell me that he can't learn? Yes, he can if you give him the right kind of stuff. So, that's what needs to happen. We need to have -- and I hope that between now and the time -- and it won't between now and the time that Quinten gets to high school, he won't lose that -- that spark. I mean, he's a reader. His grandmother reads to him. I mean, those are the kinds of things that I think we're missing and then it all just kinda tails back to the family piece and how important all of that is and how we've got to convince --

And, my role to these young guys is to try to convince them that, "You're too young to be trying to raise children. You don't have a clue of what it's really all about. So, you need to wait until you get prepared, you're able to provide not only the material things for them but the mental kind of growth, the mental kind of strength that they're gonna need to survive." I think that most of young African American boys who get in trouble have a good mental toughness, but it's not intellectually based. It is: "I just need to be masculine and brute force." And, it's okay to be strong. But if you temper that with

some, as the ladies out in my office tell me, “the feminine side of your being is really important,” and I think we miss that an awful lot.

So yeah, there is a revolution. There needs to be a revolution. There needs to be a moral revolution. I mean, the fiscal kind -- The change in the environment. Yes, I can eat wherever I want to eat. But if I can’t afford to go there, what difference does it make if the restaurants are desegregated? What difference does it make if the schools are integrated and at PTA meeting and you’re not there and I need to talk to you about your children and whatever? So, all the gains that I think we’ve made have been -- We just have to rekindle that in young people, and I know that I have nieces and nephews who will do that. But at the broader population, it needs to happen on both sides. Yeah.

CLE: Which was what Martin Luther King was about in the last chapter before he was assassinated. George, how do you keep on keeping on when, when you have to absorb so much of the racial attitudes that haven’t really changed, but you have the willingness yourself to continue trying to make change? It takes a toll some place. And, your father, clearly figured out how to live with it because he’s 90 plus now. But, we often say that African American men suffer health problems at a great disproportion and that, perhaps, it is rooted in what they absorbed from society.

GF: And you’re right: I think I am on the plus side of the statistic because I think the average age for African American males 55, 56, somewhere in that time frame. So, I’m 10 years over. I’m probably using somebody else’s 10 years, but I think a lot of it has to do with what’s important in your life. And, I tell these folks around here all the time: Probably what helped me define what’s important in life is having been in combat [pause] and realizing that the decisions that you make in combat will have a devastating effect on

somebody if you don't make the right decision. So anything that I do here is easy. The kind of stress that's put on with the lack of diversity, or diversity climate -- I choose not to let it be that big of a burden because I have a refuge and that refuge is at 12:00, if it gets really squirrely in here, I just go home and my mother has lunch, and I sit and listen to my father talk about the good old days when it was really tough. You guys don't know tough. And then, I have some really good friends in the community. Guys like Sam Walker and Mike Whitson and there's a whole host of guys who -- and Ernie Bell and those guys and I -- Ernie Bell and I are about the same age and we grew up in two different societies. I mean, his parents lived in Leonardtown and he didn't know who I was and I didn't know who he was. We have a common bond. Ernie Bell's bond and my bond are we were both in the military so he understands what it takes, what it took, what he had to do, what I had to endure and it was no different. So, we have that common purpose.

Sam Walker, who is probably of God's true Saints. I think if God ever decided -- If God ever said, "This is what I think a minister should be or pastor should be," he picked Sam Walker. And I -- It will be a loss to this community because he's gonna go back and take that to South -- North Carolina. It's those kind of folks. It is--There are other people in the community who just make you want to do better because they don't expect you to do anything. My father and the principal at our high school used to tell us all the time: "You have to be twice as good, twice as smart, lucky as hell and pray an awful lot because nobody expects you to do anything." I mean, it's like this job. And, people are even bold enough to make those kind of statements. I went from here over to Planning & Zoning. One of the Commissioners -- and I won't name him said, "We have no expectations from

him. All we want him to do is hold the organization together.” Hew! If this were the marching orders of anybody else, it would have probably been, “Okay. That’s a license to steal. They don’t expect me to do anything so why should I do anything?” But, my mind set won’t allow me to do that so I went over there with a hell-bent on: “When I leave this place, it’s gonna be better than it was when I got here; and, I think that’s what strengthens us.

And again, I keep going back to -- I’m not a very religious person. I am a spiritual person and I really believe that God, in his own way he or she, put you in situations to make a difference, to make a change, and he gives you choices. The choices can be: I could very easily say, “I’m oppressed. I’m downtrodden. I am” all those kinds of things. I could take -- I could use that as an excuse, but you know what? People don’t want to hear that. People don’t care about how much you suffer as an African American. That does mean -- to the general public, it doesn’t mean anything. Most people see me and say, “You have a good life. What are complaining about? Why are you worried about equity and ethnicity? I mean, you have a wonderful life. Look at you!” And, what they don’t realize is that every single day I come to work, I have to pay attention to small things that the normal guy would not have to pay attention to and it -- And it -- I guess the other thing that I keep going back to is: I am amazed that people are amazed that I can do what I do. And I go, “But, a guy who goes to college, a guy who finishes college, a guy who has a Master’s degree, a guy who successfully completed a military career, a guy who principalled a high school, a guy who ran student -- folks or whatever, a guy who worked in the defense industry, a guy who came to county government should be expected to do something.” I would be disappointed if I couldn’t do it and so should you,

but you shouldn't be surprised. And, my bosses are surprised that I can do this.

And, the patronization is the other piece. I mean, it is like: "You know you did a hell of a job on that today. You must of did some reading." Well, why would I come before you if I hadn't read the paperwork? I mean, why do you think they put this on my desk? And I -- You hear that often. I mean. And as I said, you take -- You have some choices. You could take--

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

I think I was talking about that I am often surprised that people believe you have the capabilities that you have. And again, I draw a lot of my strength and the source of a lot of my humor from my parents. My mother [chuckle] says to me all the time, "We didn't send you to Morgan for nothing [laughter] and we invested our money wisely" or whatever. So.

But, I think part of my responsibility -- and now I go back to revolution -- part of my responsibility to cause change to happen is to convince people, or to change the stereotype that there are -- that we are a multi-talented and multi-faceted people and that we appreciate the same kinds of things that everybody else does and we want the same things for our children. And, I always try to look for -- look at people and try to find some common thing that we can expand on.

I have a really good friend who is from the West Coast and happens to be of the Jewish faith and we often compare our growing up, thinking that there were going to be lots of

differences. I mean, the -- the physical differences are very obvious. But beyond that, her mother believed the same kinds of things that my mother did. As an example: Once the bed is made in the morning, you never go back unless you're sick. You don't wear your hat in the house. Everybody sits down to eat. Nobody stands up and does that. Every -- And, it's just little things.

We used to talk about when we would go on summer vacation, when my father was--And again, we were fortunate because my father used to take us out of the County on summer vacation, even if it was to go to Washington. I remember the first time we went to New York. I guess I was 10. Amazing, but the same kind of behavior in the car that they did in California, we did back here. The same kinds of rules about what you do when you meet people and the same kind of behavior in their community as in ours. I mean, I lived in a community where my mother's sister lived next door. Her oldest--her youngest sister lived across the street. I had an uncle that was two houses down. So it was community raising, and hers was the same. I mean, her father's brother was a pharmacist -- Her father was pharmacist. Her father's brother was a pharmacist. They all lived in the same neighborhood and the expectations of these children were all the same.

So, the common--the commonness: even though we were a coast apart and different religious backgrounds but basically the same, and I think that's one of the keys to why this nation has been able to survive is: Although we are very different, we all have some basic common stuff that we all want to get done. And, I worry about the divisiveness of pulling us apart by trying to make us more different. I think ethnicity is a wonderful thing, but it needs to be an inclusive. Yeah, you need to know that I'm different in whatever, but the purposes -- The purpose is the same. My bosses here, the new boss's

mantra is: "Communications and common purpose" [chuckle], and we have to market that, what that looks like. But, I guess it is --

I guess to wrap this up: I am a blessed person. I think that I have been extremely fortunate. I think that my deity, whoever he or she is smiles on me all the time because no matter which direction I go, they always seem to be there to get me turned to exactly where I need to be. But, I think it all goes back to having this real firm base of behavior that was instilled in me a long, long time ago and I tell my sons all the time: We tried, basically, to do the same thing. I'm not sure that they listened all the time because I didn't listen to my parents all the time, but it is -- It's important to have it because you could come back to it. [Chuckle] And, it's the same as here I say to people: "Process is your friend. If you have a process and you adhere to that process, you'll never get lost. And if you have a set of standards growing up, you can never get lost." What I find with a lot of youngsters is they don't have that baseline of behavior. I guess a good analogy is it's like a boat. There is a -- There is a beam that runs down the middle of the boat that keeps it righted. And unless a storm gets really bad, it can list to the left or to the right or whatever, but it will always come back to center. But if you don't have that, if you believe that there is no norm, there is no norm with behavior, with language, with lack of participation; you don't know where to go. And so if you stray over to the left or the right, you'll continue to go because you can't get back. You don't know how to get back. Every -- Every single child -- There are no bad children. Every single child is a good child. We just haven't given them the right kind of stuff to make good, smart decisions. And I think that's the philosophy that if we talk about a revolution, that's the kind of philosophy that I think will make the next revolution or the coming revolution work.

But, you can't have a revolution that's all over and has no real purpose and -- Where do we want to be when this whole thing ends up?

And if I had any regret about my life and I don't really have any, I think the biggest regret that I have is I probably could have spent and should have spent more time with my family because I think families are the stuff that helps you grow, helps get you through. And I mean my immediate family, my sons and their involvement and exposure to my father because they need, now more than anything, to be around him and be with him. And, they do. They come an awful lot and they just--and I know he loves it. They kinda just sit and listen to him, and he's becoming more open than he used to be. One time, my father was very closed, very personal, withdrawn inside. I mean, a lot of the stories that I'm now finding out and hearing about, never talked about because it's probably too painful.

And, I think I can relate because it's like -- it's like being a veteran of war: You don't -- Until you move a long, long, long ways away from it -- I don't know whether you saw the article in The Enterprise on Memorial Day where I talked about -- I have just started to be able to talk about those kind of experiences because they were extremely painful. Painful so to the point that I know that I don't want my grandchildren or anybody else's grandchildren to have to go through that horror.

And my last comment: I think that -- Not that soldiers are the answer to everything, not that the military is the answer is everything, but I think the lack of military involvement in the highest levels of government has caused us to make some really -- I mean, we should never, at least in my mind have been anywhere near Bagdad. Never! And I think that had there been more involvement in Congress by former military, we probably

wouldn't 'a gotten there. We wouldn't have gotten there, and now we're back-peddling trying to make out -- We're trying to rationalize what we already did, and it's scary because the opposition: Their not sending out strong opposition. And, this guy landing on the deck of an aircraft carrier doesn't make him a great man. No, it doesn't make him a great -- And again, I -- I worry about that, and I worry about it locally, too. We're just not -- We're just not -- But, some much for my political [chuckle]--

CLE: Thank you very much, George. This was wonderful.

[Tape ends, end of interview]

[End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]