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# Oral History Interview

with

## John Oswald Greene, Sr.

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**Interviewer:** *Kerry James Reed*

**Narrator:** *John Greene*

**Location of Interview:**

*Online: Zoom Interview*

**Date of Interview:** *4/25/24*

**Transcriber:** *Kerry James Reed*

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### **Summary:**

John Greene discusses his memories of Growing up in Colored Rosemont, his experiences going to Howard University; his career as a gospel choir director, his faith, and his work on the Colored Rosemont initiative

### **Notes:**

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<b>General</b>	Colored Rosemont; Gentrification; Parker-Gray; City of Alexandria; Black History; Neighborhood; Community; Church; Religion; Family; Gospel Choir; Chitlin Circuit
<b>People</b>	John Oswald Greene Sr; Stanley Greene; Veronica Greene; Vanessa Greene; Tammy Greene; Robin Greene; Sarah Becker; Virginia Wheat Thomas; Robert Cross; Mark Waterson; Jordan Morrison; Samuel Thompson; Mamie Thompson; Lenora Carter; Ed Carrie; Lillian Carrie; Sherman Berry; Jordan Morrison; Pearl Morrison; Marion Cross;

	Fred Major; Maria Major-Edwards; Anna Smalls; Dorsey Watson; Lucille Hubbard; Parker Waterson; Larry Turner; Vincent Lee; Douglass Bass Sr.; Everett Bass; George Carver; Clive McFadder; Tina Turner; Ronald Davis; Melvin Miller; Mary Fields; Cordon Lou Payne; Frank Barr; Clover Demaine; Frank Worthy; Drew Worthy
<b>Places</b>	Rosemont; Colored Rosemont; Wythe St; Madison St; West St; Pendleton St; Parker-Gray; Charles Houston Elementary School; Lyles-Crouch Elementary School; Watson's Store; Dorsey's Store; Henry St; Eisenhower Ave; Jamieson Ave; Howard University; USO; Fayette St; Santullo's; Adkins Homes; Patrick St; George Washington High School; Camp Glenn Kirk

**John Greene:** [00:00:07] Ok. Good morning. My name is John Oswald Green, Sr. Today is the 25th of April 2024. [00:00:18][10.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:00:22] My name is Kerry James Reed. I'm 27 years of age and it is April 25th, 2024. So, thank you so much.... [00:00:28][6.1]

**John Greene:** [00:00:28] I didn't give my age. I'm 73. [00:00:29][1.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:00:31] Okay. No problem at all. So, thank you so much, Mr. Green, for agreeing to do this interview. It's been a pleasure getting to know you over these past few months, both at the meetings and in our conversations. I suppose we can start from the very beginning there. Where were you born? [00:00:46][15.0]

**John Greene:** [00:00:48] You mean the city? I was born in Alexandria, Virginia, and specifically in the house, the home that I grew up in, 1312 Wythe Street, which is in Colored Rosemont. [00:00:59][11.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:01:01] 1312 Wythe Street. So, it was a home birth then? [00:01:03][2.0]

**John Greene:** [00:01:03] Yes. My doctors weren't allowed to practice in the white hospitals, segregated hospitals. [00:01:11][7.7]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:01:16] So, you mentioned that you lived on 1312 Wythe. Could you describe your earliest memories of that home? [00:01:24][8.0]

**John Greene:** [00:01:27] Earliest memories of, just the family and as the family grew. I don't have a lot of memories from... We're sort of like in two sets. There's almost four years difference between myself and Vanessa, Veronica and Stanley and myself were born, well, Veronica is '46, Stanley '48, and I was born 1950. The next birth was 1954. The next, the real only connection, only one memory that I do have is my father bathing the three of us, the three older ones. [00:02:04][37.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:02:08] Absolutely. So, what about your first or earliest memories of Colored Rosemont? [00:02:15][6.6]

**John Greene:** [00:02:17] And one of the things that sticks out most, the earliest memories, are the elderly gentlemen of the neighborhood gathering on a stoop. It was, I guess, concrete stoop that was sort of, hexagonal in shape that sat in front of the Cross's house, 1321 Wythe Street. And I can remember the men gathering in there for in the evenings, particularly in the summer. I have no idea what they were talking about, what they were discussing, but I imagine it was the events of the day or what was going on in the world. [00:02:54][36.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:02:56] That's a very, you know, interesting memory to have, I think, of this sort of communal gathering that you witnessed. Were there a lot of communal gatherings in Colored Rosemont? [00:03:07][11.5]

**John Greene:** [00:03:08] I wouldn't say a lot of communal gatherings, but that that memory sticks in my mind of the elderly gentlemen of the neighborhood, Mr. Cross. Mr. Robert Cross, Mark Waterson and I can't recall any of the gentleman, maybe Mr. Jordan Morrison. But I can remember them gathering around that stoop. And, with the advent of the new construction and the demise of the West Street buildings, that was one of the first things that sort of touched me when I saw that stoop destroyed. [00:03:43][34.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:03:44] Absolutely. [00:03:44][0.0]

**John Greene:** [00:03:46] I'm calling it a stoop, but it was like a stone, it was like a seat that sat between the curb and the sidewalk. And how it got there, who put it there, what the purpose was, I don't know. But I do remember men gathering there to talk. [00:04:00][14.1]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:04:02] And you said that was outside of 1321, right? [00:04:04][2.4]

**John Greene:** [00:04:05] Yes. [00:04:05][0.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:04:05] Okay. [00:04:05][0.0]

**John Greene:** [00:04:08] 1319 I believe where the stoop was. So, it was like in between. But you know, it was really in front of 1321 [00:04:17][8.9]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:04:19] Absolutely. So, just for the sake of the interview, can you briefly describe Colored Rosemont? Just in general. [00:04:27][7.7]

**John Greene:** [00:04:28] In general, looking back, I think it was sort of an idyllic existence for blacks during segregation. We were aware of segregation and my parents, I think, tried to shield us from it as best they could, but we had a pretty much happy existence. Sort of contained in our own particular neighborhood. [00:04:57][28.7]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:05:00] So you mentioned that you would call it an idyllic existence during segregation. So, what in your mind made it idyllic? [00:05:10][10.1]

**John Greene:** [00:05:13] Well, we were, although we were aware of what was going on around us, you know, we just, we were self-contained. Our needs were met. Most of the men worked. I know my father worked hard. We had a community store, and there was a community seamstress. We used to go to Mrs. Carter, who was on, I think it's 633 N West St. She was, I think she even did some sewing for Sears and, probably Sears and Roebuck. But the community seamstress. So, we had, pretty much, it's an odd comparison, but sort of like what I remember about Amos and Andy. We didn't have any particular, totally professional people like doctors and lawyers. But, you know, we had people that we looked up to and respected, we were taught respect. And, what else can I say? Well, you know, we were sitting pretty much self-contained and segregated. [00:06:30][77.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:06:33] Absolutely. So, you mentioned some of your neighbors briefly when you were referring to the elderly gentleman such as Mr. Cross and Mr. Waterson, can you describe any other memories of your neighbors? [00:06:48][15.5]

**John Greene:** [00:06:51] I pretty much remember... I don't remember 1301, Mr. Outing, I remember the name. I can pretty much name all the people on our street. The neighbors on my street when I was growing up. Coming from 1301, the earliest

memory, I don't remember the Outings, but I remember when the Terrys moved there and next door to them, as we were reviewing yesterday, is listed on the map as 1304, but I thought it was 1307. That was Samuel Thompson, I believe his name was, and Mamie Thompson. And then there were the Carries, Ed and Lillian Carrie, who were Jehovah's Witnesses, which was sort of different in the community. But, you know, they didn't really stand out other than promoting their Watchtower and, I can't remember the, Awake, those are the two publications that the witnesses were using, I imagine they still use today. And then next to them were the Waterasons, 1315. Next to the Waterasons were the two Cross homes, I believe. I know that several people lived in that, it was a small, narrow house, that was 1319, and then there was 1321. I do not remember Sherman Barry, which would be the next house, I think that was 1327. I remember the Burtons living there. And then of course, on the corner, 1329, was Jordan and Pearl Morrison. On my side of the street, I believe, the eldest daughter I believe she was, of the Crosses. I don't remember this, but I was told that she, Marion Cross, lived at 1300 Wythe. And between 1300, the next house would be our house, 1312. This is on the east side of the street or the south side of Wythe St, 1300 block of Wythe St on Rockwood Street. Next door were the Majors, initially. And then I remember briefly Mrs. Major's sister, Ms. Earl, her first name escapes me, she and her husband lived there for a moment. And then later on the Armstrong's moved in. On the corner, which was sort of like 1300 Wythe, the 635 N West St also had a Wythe St entrance. It was sort of this corner property, but I remember the Louis's living there. And then, I can't remember the name, but that I remember the Rosa Lee [unintelligible]. I can't remember the last name, but I remember them moving in. And then later a cousin, distant cousin of mine moved to that property. So, that would be the 1300 block of Wythe St. [00:10:10][198.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:10:13] Very impressive memory of all your neighbors. [00:10:14][1.5]

**John Greene:** [00:10:15] Yeah, well, you know, it was a close knit neighborhood. [00:10:17][1.8]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:10:19] Absolutely. Very interesting. So, can you describe what your house specifically, 1312 Wythe, looked like? Or looks like? [00:10:27][8.5]

**John Greene:** [00:10:28] Yes. Two bedroom bungalow. Which is, it's sort of described in some of the documentation about Ms. Virginia Wheat Thomas. They were, when I say cookie cutter I'm

thinking, you know, all the modern architecture that's going up now that, you know, all this glass, but the two bedroom bungalows, I know our house was that style. The Burke's house, which was 7, I can't remember the exact address, but it was next to 727. 713 and 715, I believe it was, N West St, 633 at N West St. And another house that's gone, Ms. Anna Smalls lived in, was next to the Worthys. Those were all the same A-frame sort of brick homes, two bedrooms. Two bedrooms, bath, kitchen.  
[00:11:26][58.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:11:33] Absolutely. So, I've heard a lot about your mother being a fabulous cook. And a lot about how your father would, you know, had a certain idea about how he wanted meals to be prepared. Like, the 2 or 3 meats, I believe, per meal is what I've been told. [00:11:53][19.8]

**John Greene:** [00:11:54] Particularly on the weekend, yes. My father was a great eater. my mother would say he ate everything. But he was a huntsman and he was a man of refinement was right. I know the legend of my mother's cooking. I think she was known for that in the neighborhood. But my recollection is that that was my turn off about vegetables. I think she overcooked the vegetables. [00:12:19][25.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:12:20] Really? [00:12:20][0.0]

**John Greene:** [00:12:21] I learned that as I got older. That was why I didn't particularly like vegetables. I think they were overcooked. [00:12:26][5.6]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:12:28] Interesting. Very interesting.  
[00:12:29][1.4]

**John Greene:** [00:12:32] But, you know, we, every weekend we had biscuits for breakfast. Salad and rolls protect the home rolls on Sunday for Sunday dinner. [00:12:41][9.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:12:44] Well, I asked the question because, you know, I've seen 13 12 Wythe several times at this point. And, I was curious about what the dining situation was like. So, when the whole family would gather together, where in the home did you eat? [00:12:58][13.9]

**John Greene:** [00:12:59] We ate in the dining room. Because the family is so large, there was only six seats around the dining room table. My two youngest sisters ate at a card table that was set up in the living room. We all had, you know, we all had our

family meal, particularly the Sunday meal. And table had to be set, you know, strict instructions on how the table was set. Mostly the girls did it. But as I became a teenager, I remember, that, you know, there was a rotation, sort of a rotation set up by my mom with, setting the table, clearing the table, and washing the dishes. So, it's not uncommon, I think, in large families, especially at gatherings that there was a quote unquote kids table didn't eat at the main table. But, you know, that's the only room, there was barely room for the six people around the dining room table. But that's the way it was.

[00:14:10][70.9]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:14:12] What are the sleeping arrangements like in the home? [00:14:15][2.9]

**John Greene:** [00:14:17] My parents had their own room. Before the last three girls were born, I don't recall. But my earliest recollection is that my brother and I slept in the living room, sofa bed. And my four sisters, there were two beds in the other bedroom that my, four sisters shared. Two slept in each bed.

[00:14:41][23.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:14:45] Interesting. So, you described Colored Rosemont a little while ago as self-contained. So, I was curious if you can, remember any of the businesses in Colored Rosemont? Or any, you know, you mentioned that there was there was a seamstress, etc., etc., and so forth. Were there any places your family would go to shop for groceries or anything like that within the neighborhood? [00:15:07][21.9]

**John Greene:** [00:15:08] There was a neighborhood store. The Watson, we called the Dorsey store, but it was Watson Store, and it was on the corner of Payne and Madison. The Watson's had a home, next to, which was on N Payne, which would be the 700 block of N Payne, which to me, as a young child, I looked at as sort of, not necessarily an estate or a mansion, but it was like a larger home with a large yard. And there were only on, that side of the street there were only two homes, and they both had, what appeared to me to be large properties. It was a neighborhood store. Dorsey Watson was the son, I'm not sure. His sister, Lucille Hubbard, and her daughter, I believe, can't remember, also ran Rainbow Restaurant, which was on the corner of N Henry and Madison St. So, but I assume, just based on what they were doing, that they were pretty well, you know, sort of well-off family. I'm recalling stories of Dorsey riding his bicycle to DC to get supplies for the store, and it was a neighborhood store, like a corner store. They carried



everything, various sundries. And I don't remember particularly meat or anything like that, but I [laughs] I remember going in, purchasing things, particular candy. My weakness as a child. Soon as I got a nickel, I would go to Dorsey's and buy a bag of bonbons, potato chips. But, then again, I remember penny candy. I remember the displays in the store. I remember the people that worked in the store, which were family members of the Watsons? I can remember purchasing, going to purchase, hosiery for my mother. Stockings with the explicit, [laughs] explicit demand, don't bring her any red fox stockings. But I don't remember, I remember not the red fox, but I don't know what color of the palette she wore. And I can also remember that, my mother doing my sisters hair, that I think the most popular pomade made for females, for Black females, anyway, at that time was Royal Crown. But my mother specifically used a product called My Knight. M-y k-n-i-g-h-t. And it was in a black can with little writing. So, this is a strange memory that I have. But going to Dorsey's to get, and we used to buy, you know bats and balls, jacks, stuff like that, toys and stuff like that. That was just, you know, a sundries and necessities. I imagine they sold canned goods as well, but I'm not sure. [00:18:21][193.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:18:24] Soy, you mentioned that the Watson's home on N Payne Street, I believe you said you considered it to be, almost mansion like in its proportions. [00:18:35][10.6]

**John Greene:** [00:18:36] Well, it was larger than any other home. [00:18:37][1.7]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:18:40] And that got me interested in sort of the, the architecture of the neighborhood. Did most people have those bungalows, or was there a lot of variation? [00:18:48][7.6]

**John Greene:** [00:18:49] There were variations. Well, yeah, there were there were variations. The best I can describe, particularly on the Wythe Street, what I remember on Wythe St. The bungalow, our house was the only bungalow on Wythe Street. The other homes that I said were built by Mrs. Thomas. 600 and 700 N West Street. [00:19:16][27.9]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:19:23] So, when you go to the store and you and you would buy the jacks and the other little children's games, where would you all play? Where would you play in Colored Rosemont? [00:19:33][9.7]

**John Greene:** [00:19:37] My brother and I had a little more leeway; I think it was more strict on the girls. But pretty much, there was a neighbor that called us the gold children because we weren't allowed, we were, you know, we had a yard, and we played in front of our house, on our porch or in our yard. But my brother and I did have that same opportunity to roam, I guess because we were the males. But there was one neighbor that particularly I can remember referring to us as the gold children, because we didn't, we weren't allowed to roam like some of the other kids the neighborhood. [00:20:12][35.8]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:20:18] So, do you have any idea where the other children would roam? [00:20:21][3.0]

**John Greene:** [00:20:23] Where? I have no idea. There was a, there's an apartment building there, but behind our house and behind the Bass house, there was a, as kids, you know, imagination, we called it the mountain top of Tennessee, which comes from the Davy Crockett thing. I remember vaguely there was a home there years ago, like a shanty or a shack. And I think there was a, I think back in those days, they referred to the people as deaf and dumb, but it was, I think it was a mute lady. I didn't think she could speak, but, I remember her mumbling. I can remember walking in the neighborhood. I can remember, her living in a house that I thought was a shanty-type home. But after that, you know, as I got older, that home was gone. And it was sort of like I was just like, mounds of dirt and fauna that grew there. And that's where, you know, that's where I would go to explore me in another neighborhood kid. That's where we played. [00:21:40][77.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:21:45] So who in the neighborhood did you play with? [00:21:47][2.1]

**John Greene:** [00:21:49] My first recollection would be the grandson of Parker Waterson, which was directly across the street from us, 1315, with Larry Turner. Was my first recollection of a neighborhood playmate. And then as I went to school, I had a, or I considered my best friend at that time, that was 618 N Patrick St, Vincent Lee. And oh, my next door neighbor, also godfather, Douglas Bass sr. His grandson, Everett Bass, who was not quite two years younger than myself, when they would come to visit their grandfather, I remember playing with them. Who his grandmother named Bunny, I think because he sort of had, not really bug teeth, but I think his two front teeth were sort of prominent as a it's a very young Child [00:22:48][59.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:22:52] So growing up, what was your, did you have a favorite aspect of Colored Rosemont? Like, you know, obviously the family, of course, but and the stoop that you mentioned as well. But is there anything you remember now that really sticks out to you? [00:23:05][13.1]

**John Greene:** [00:23:07] The seamstress that I mentioned. So, that's 633 N West Street. I can't remember Miss Carvers first name. But anyways, her grandson also lived there, and he was, his name was George Carver, and he kept the latest R&B music, you know. Yeah. Hi Fi, we called it back then, I think it was floor mile Hi Fi. And on the weekends he would take his bath and put on his, [laughs] whatever, talcum powder or whatever. I can remember him, cleaning up and then playing, we heard all the latest music that would sort of light up the neighborhood. Which didn't, it wasn't a disturbance, and he didn't play late at night, but, that's how we kept up with the latest, R&B hits during the time. This is early 50s. [00:24:08][61.6]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:24:14] Do you remember any of those R&B hits? [00:24:15][1.3]

**John Greene:** [00:24:16] Oh, anything Motown. [00:24:17][1.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:24:17] Anything Motown? [00:24:17][0.0]

**John Greene:** [00:24:21] And I want to say, I believe it wasn't... I want to say that Clive McFadder was one of the ones somehow. For some reason, I can remember, I think it was Clive McFadder that went to his home once. I also remember this wasn't Colored Rosemont, but there was a recreation center on Pendleton Street, which is next door to the [unintelligible], my first great friend. Ike and Tina Turner on the chitlin circuit came to perform at that rec center. And I can remember peeping through the window to see the show. There was no air conditioning at that time, but the rec center, we called it the USO, I think it was at one time, but I remember it as a rec center. But growing up, we never, I can't remember any of us actually hanging at the rec center, like a lot of kids do. But I do remember the Ike and Tina Turner review coming through there. [00:25:27][66.8]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:25:29] Did you see anybody else on the Chitlin circuit whenever it would come through? Or was just Ike and Tina Turner? [00:25:32][3.5]

**John Greene:** [00:25:33] Not in the neighborhood. But, you know, I can remember going to the the old convention center in DC. But also the Howard theater in Washington, D.C. [00:25:46][12.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:25:50] So, we've been talking a lot about the streets of Colored Rosemont, and then you just mentioned that the Pendleton Street, where the USO was, was not part of Colored Rosemont. So, I was curious, briefly, if you could describe the boundaries of your neighborhood as you remember them. [00:26:05][15.2]

**John Greene:** [00:26:05] As I remember it, I thought it was, to the east would be Fayette St, the north would be Madison, south would be Pendleton, and to the west would be West St, N West St. So, from my recollection, that's 1, 2, 3 to 4 blocks. Self-contained. Since doing this initiative, I wasn't aware that the Shepherds who have a house in the 400 block of N West St. They lived in the 500 block of Madison St, I believe. And my only recollection of the 1200 block Madison St was Parker-Gray High School. But evidently there were homes or houses and families that lived there before that building, Parker-Gray. [00:27:06][60.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:27:11] So, how old were you when the development of the Adkins public housing starts to happen? [00:27:17][5.3]

**John Greene:** [00:27:19] I was a teen, and I can remember, it wasn't really trepidation, but, there was concern that public housing was coming into the neighborhood. So, that would have been late 60s, '66 to '68. I say '68 because the neighbor directly across the street, the new 1315, which was the end of the public housing, was a classmate of mine, the Parkers. It was a husband and wife and they and, that was only one daughter, but there was 4 or 5 boys there, and Mary was the oldest, which was my classmate. [00:28:07][48.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:28:12] So, you mentioned a little bit of unease, I guess, about the Adkins homes coming into the Colored Rosemont neighborhood. Would you say that was a communal reaction, or is that just your in your family? [00:28:28][15.9]

**John Greene:** [00:28:29] I sort of think it was communal because there was sort of, I would say melancholy of losing the neighbors that we had. And the new neighbors, it was like sort of totally multiplying the number of people who have actually lived in that community. That's what cased the destruction of

the store, the neighborhood store. As I've mentioned earlier, on the 700 block of N Payne St, there were only two properties there, they had only two homes there. And to the south of the Johnson property, there was a, well [unintelligible], but it was like a field, it was a vacant lot. And that's where we played, you know, we turned into a baseball diamond. Where Wythe St goes through in the 1200 block, that was just a field, a mud field. And, I attended Charles Houston, which was, once in the 900 block of Wythe. But if it didn't rain, we could go straight up Wythe St. If it rained and was muddy, we had to go around Madison or Pendleton St to the school. I think we mostly went Madison St, Payne to Madison, Madison to Patrick, and Patrick to front entrance of Charles Houston on Wythe St. [00:29:59][90.1]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:30:05] So, briefly, you went to Charles Houston for elementary? [00:30:08][3.0]

**John Greene:** [00:30:13] Yes. The interesting thing about that, and this sort of a caveat, when I was still in school, because my birthday is in October, there was, it wasn't K through 12, and I think I forget the different formulations of public education. But we had what was called high and low so you could start school in September or February, depending on your birthday. So, I always remember being proud that I skipped the second grade, but it was really like half of a semester that I skipped. And the interesting thing is when I started in February 1957, the following year they added an addition to Charles Houston. And I can remember going to Charles Houston, and taking a school bus to go to Lyles-Crouch [Elementary School], the old Lyles-Crouch, which was on Wilkes St. That one there now is a brand new Lyles-Crouch and we would ride from, we would go from there to Lyles-Crouch for instruction. When the construction was complete, and I think it was that third grade, the fall of my third grade year, that we went back to the new Charles Houston, Charles Houston with the addition. Somewhere around that time, I think that after that third grade year, the year that I skipped, or that semester that I skipped, they stop that high and low. And that was just, you either started in school in September and if you missed the fall cutoff date, you had to wait until the following year. [00:32:07][113.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:32:11] Yeah, that's an interesting policy. I've never heard that before. [00:32:13][2.6]

**John Greene:** [00:32:14] Yeah. That was, I'm not sure. I'm pretty sure that the white kids did the same thing. But, you know, I can remember that high and low. I enrolled in the high, the high

was the second semester, low was the first semester of the year.  
[00:32:31][17.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:32:32] That's interesting. I wonder what the rationale behind that was, since as you describe it to me, it seems disruptive. [00:32:38][6.3]

**John Greene:** [00:32:40] Well, and to me it makes sense because I guess we didn't know anything else. But, you know, the older kids like kids born from, well, I can think of at least four people in my class that were born in '51. I was born in 1950. So, instead of starting school in September of 1956, my birthday's at the end of October. I didn't start until February of 1957. And there are members in that class that I remember that were born in February of 1957. So instead of having them wait until September to start school, they can start and then, you know, that semester that started in February. The half year.  
[00:33:31][51.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:33:34] Thanks. Makes a bit more sense to me. So, when the Adkins Homes first got, construction first started and developments first started, you mentioned that the melancholy feeling, like a lot of the, you know, the character of the neighborhood, I guess, was slipping away. When they were finished the neighborhood still feel like the Colored Rosemont you grew up with? [00:34:00][25.6]

**John Greene:** [00:34:05] Well, getting used to the number of people that were in the community were, you know, was different. It was, you know, it's more people. And then the miseducation, the belief that people that were in public housing were different. And that, you know, once they moved that that was, that was quickly, you know, erased. We met some very fine people. I was familiar with all, from 13, what used to be 1301, which was what? One, two, three four houses. Individual houses with space in between were now, 1301 to 1315, 13579, 15. There were six units. So, and we knew all the people, you know, we came to know all the people that lived in those, and the public housing on the West St side. And there were other people that, of course, that lived within the court or whatever the environs where of the Adkins development. [00:35:12][66.9]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:35:16] So, you mentioned a belief in the difference of people who are living in public housing. Was that a common belief in the neighborhood? [00:35:25][8.8]

**John Greene:** [00:35:27] I wouldn't say it was necessarily common in the neighborhood, but that's sort of like, how can I describe it? That was sort of what the belief was, or the feeling of public housing at the time, I think. And then once we lived with them, that notion was dispelled immediately. People just like everybody else. [00:35:52][25.6]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:35:56] So, if you have to put a percentage on how much of Colored Rosemont was redeveloped into the Adkins homes, what percentage would that be? [00:36:06][10.1]

**John Greene:** [00:36:09] What percentage? Oh 75%, well, I would say 60% to 75%. Not quite 50, because, see, the problem I'm having is that, what I described as the environs, you know, the Madison St, the Madison to Wythe St, and from the middle of Wythe to Fayette St, that's the Adkins homes. They were oh, I don't know, there wasn't even 20 families, but it went from 22, you know, to several more, I don't know the number of how ever many units that were put in the Adkins housing. So, that was, you know, like a population explosion. [00:37:00][51.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:37:03] Absolutely. So, we've talked about, both in group and you and I about, you know, the city's possible use of eminent domain to take some of these homes and redevelop them into the Adkins developments. Could you describe your memories at the time of this happening? Were your neighbors around Madison? [00:37:25][22.8]

**John Greene:** [00:37:27] I remember, and I don't know if we discussed this earlier, but I can remember there was some discussion of them wanting to take more of the property, which would include what they just took, the West St. And, I think Ronald Davis sort of alluded to this yesterday in the meeting with the, Melvin Miller, and I think it was Gloria Tucker as well. Sort of trying to organize to fight the quote unquote eminent domain or the development of the Adkins project. But, at some point it changed to only half of that block of Wythe St and Madison St, as opposed to going all the way up to West. So, and I don't know the particulars of what happened, and I would be curious to see if there's any documentation to what Ron alluded to yesterday. I'm sure that there should be, but, I think Melvin Miller is still living. I know Tucker's dead, the lawyer Tucker is dead, but I believe Melvin Miller is still living. He might be able to give you some background into what the fight was, how the fight proceeded, and what have you. [00:38:53][86.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:38:55] Absolutely. [00:38:55][0.0]

**John Greene:** [00:38:56] I can remember, and I don't have any proof of this, but it seems to me I recall, that although it was eminent domain, there was something about people signing to sign their properties over. And the first person to sign that I heard, and I don't have any proof of this, was Ms Mabel Thompson, which was 1307, but it's listed as 1304 on the map. But she was the first one to sign. And that was the beginning of the taking over of all the rest of the properties.  
[00:39:28][31.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:39:34] So, very briefly, could you describe your father? [00:39:37][2.8]

**John Greene:** [00:39:41] Hardworking, family man. Loved this family, loved his kids. I don't recall this, but as an infant I believe we had, like I said it was sort of two sets. I was sort of like the baby for four years, and I had Bronchial pneumonia. And because they didn't, you know, I couldn't be treated in the city of Alexandria, well, I guess I could if they found the right doctor. But I think we were, looking for African-American physicians, so I was treated at Freedman's Hospital, which is now Howard University hospital. It was part of the, Howard University campus. And there was a neighbor that would always say the story about how sick I was. And I know my father was, I think he got some money from a GI Bill or something. He attended school for watchmaking. And that was one of the things he did, like, his third job. And he would go to school and come visit me at the hospital. I have no recollection of that. But the thing that I want to mention is that I believe we had a coal burning stove or wood burning stove, and then we got a gas space heater because of my condition, my bronchial pneumonia. And I don't recall, or don't know how long, I think that was in hospital for an extended period of time. But I know that when I came home they had a gas heater, which was in the dining room, from what I can remember. Yeah, it was in the dining room. [00:41:27][106.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:41:29] Interesting. Could you describe your mother? [00:41:36][7.0]

**John Greene:** [00:41:39] Homemaker. Very proud to be married to my dad. I can remember that. There was, in the advent of segregation, there was a strong... People never want to put the "E" on the end of my name. Particularly white people because they thought it was British, not British but Scottish, I guess, or Jewish. And we had to always remind people that our name ended in an "E." Although there are several, my great grandfather had several kids, he was married twice, but the



story in the family is that my great grandfather always said that, "Greene without the 'E' is the color, not the name." I remember that very distinctly. My great grandfather died in the 30s. I was not born until 1950. But people, particularly white people, in business or in the city, they were always trying to refer to my mother by her first name. And she would always correct them and say she was Mrs. John H. Green.  
[00:42:47][67.7]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:42:50] Interesting. Seems like there was a lot of pride taken in that name, Greene. [00:42:54][3.8]

**John Greene:** [00:42:55] Yes. And then during that, during that time, you know, that was before the women's movement. Most women did identify through their husband's name. Particularly homemakers. [00:43:08][13.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:43:09] Right. Absolutely. So, you briefly mentioned your, your great grandfather, did your parents talk a lot about the family history growing up? [00:43:21][11.9]

**John Greene:** [00:43:23] Not a lot about the family history. I know I knew a lot. My father came from a sibling group of eight, he was a twin. So, four girls. My grandfather was a cook for the, road crew of the Southern Railroad. So, they weren't well-to-do or necessarily middle class, but they were better than a lot, better off than a lot of people where they lived. I can remember that we always went to the family church for what they called homecoming, or back then they called the big meeting just the fourth Sunday in August. And I still go to that church on the fourth Sunday in August. And I can remember my grandfather going to the property, the home that his kids that he built with his kids each year. Each year he would go back there. People had started to demolish the home and I can remember the last time, there was nothing but concrete steps where a porch used to be. And I can remember seeing my grandfather standing there crying. I think he retired in '56, but I think the moment they moved from Orange [County, VA], probably '55, like '54, '55. But he was still working, I think he was commuting back and forth because, you know, he had free pass to ride the train on Southern Railroad. [00:44:50][87.1]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:44:51] Right. [00:44:51][0.0]

**John Greene:** [00:44:53] On my mother's side of the family, my mother came from a sibling group of nine. And I knew all of her siblings, but, she never talked about her father, and she didn't

care about her father. The father abandoned them. And I have since then discovered who my grandfather probably was. I got that from one of her brothers, one of her younger brothers. But my mother had a very strong disdain for her father.

[00:45:23][30.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:45:28] So, you mentioned that your family would attend the, you call it the family church, the fourth Sunday in August? [00:45:36][8.4]

**John Greene:** [00:45:38] Yes. That's on my father's side. My great grandfather was, and I want to go there, but I don't have the records. It's Blue Run Baptist Church, but it's called, it's Barbourville, technically, but I think the address might be Gordonsville, it's not far from Somerset. I believe it was a white church initially and then when it became Black, I know my great grandfather's name is in the records. He's one of the early parishioners. And my grandfather was a deacon in the church before he moved. So, that was on my father's side. On my mother's side, my mother's home church was Nazareth Baptist Church, it was in the corporate limits of Orange County.

[00:46:29][51.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:46:31] So, did they both come from Orange County then? [00:46:34][2.3]

**John Greene:** [00:46:34] Yes. [00:46:34][0.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:46:35] Ok. So, are there any family traditions that they pass down to you and then you have passed down to your children? [00:46:47][11.7]

**John Greene:** [00:46:48] I only have one child, but I've got three grandsons, though. The only tradition that I can really hold on to is holiday meals. Christmas. Easter. Thanksgiving. Sort of got away from the Thanksgiving as we started our own families. But I can remember my older sister hosting Thanksgiving dinner, and I believe probably my another sister hosted Thanksgiving. But Christmas, for 20 some years, the year that my father died, my wife and I hosted the family for, first it was immediate family, and then we expanded it to other family members. We hosted Christmas dinner here in my home. My father was a twin, who had two kids. And so although his son was in Michigan, his daughter was still here in the area. And my uncle's wife and his daughter and their daughter and her family that we sort of started including them. And then there was another sister. We had as many as 50 people in my house,

sometimes for Christmas. And the house is not big.  
[00:48:12][84.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:48:16] Would you say the emphasis on family gatherings was something that your parents tried to instill in you and your siblings? The importance of family?  
[00:48:22][6.7]

**John Greene:** [00:48:24] But it was something that we grew up knowing, you know, and you mentioned my mother's cooking, and there were people, you know, my father always was a great provider, and my mother always cooked enough for all of us. But you never know who would stop in. And it was always if somebody came by, and it was always enough for somebody else to eat too. There's a big joke in the family, I won't mention any names, there's an ex-neighborhood person that stopped by once. I guess it was a Saturday morning [laughs], and she was offered breakfast and she said, "I believe I will. Shocked you, didn't I?" And that's the sort of running family joke, you know, there was always enough food for. Not just us, but whoever would stop by. [00:49:16][52.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:49:21] So, you mentioned that you went to, Charles Houston and Lyles-Crouch. You also went to George Washington? [00:49:27][6.5]

**John Greene:** [00:49:28] I didn't go to Lyles-Crouch.  
[00:49:30][1.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:49:30] Oh, you did not. My mistake.  
[00:49:31][1.0]

**John Greene:** [00:49:32] No. We were transported to, it was the old Lyles-Crouch building. We were still little Charles Houston denizens. And I can't remember who else went there, but they were adding in addition to Charles Houston. Because of the construction, so the instruction could continue. I think Deborah Turner told me, and I wasn't aware of this until we started doing this, that they went into the, I believe it was the old school board building, which is now, well, was the Companion Center, which was that the 300 block, or 400 block of S Washington St, I think it was 300 block of S Washington St. And she remembers going there during the same period, and Deborah's two years younger than me. [00:50:27][54.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:50:28] And that was middle school as well, or there wasn't middle school? [00:50:38][10.4]

**John Greene:** [00:50:39] Kind of interesting. We didn't have a middle school. There was an eighth grade, the school was one through seven and didn't have kindergarten. And in the eighth grade there was a, well, that was Jefferson School, and I think it used to be called Prince Street School before it was... no, no, no, no. I'm getting confused, but the year that I went to eighth grade was the first year, not the first year, but that's when they started integrating. They wanted Black kids to enroll in the white school, which would have been Jefferson, which is where Jefferson Houston sits now. 200 block of N West St. I can remember several of my classmates that went, and I can remember crying because I didn't want to go to the white school. So, on Parker-Gray for the eighth grade, and then after the eighth grade, my mother enrolled my brother and myself and to GW. And the following year there was total integration and all the Parker-Gray kids came to GW during my sophomore year, which would have been my brother's senior year. So, I went to Charles Houston one year, one school year at Parker Gray and all four years of GW. [00:52:10][91.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:52:14] What was GW like during integration. [00:52:14][0.1]

**John Greene:** [00:52:16] I can't remember the particular incident, but, like my freshman year, there were there were not a lot of Blacks. But there were, you know, there were Blacks there that you had to sort of, for want of a better term, you had to get enrolled to be included and enter that school. And that was the only, no, Hammond was still around, Hammond still existed. And I'm not sure of any Black, how many Black kids were in Hammond, but you can count on maybe two hands the number of Black students that were that GW in my freshman year. And I don't remember the incident, but I can remember something happened in the cafeteria and it wasn't like in the Deep South, you know, we weren't called the N-word or anything like that. But I just remember that there was some sort of fracas or something that happened in the cafeteria, but I don't recall. It escapes me now. But other than that I remember, I think my brother played football. I was in the band. Yeah. And then, you know, I don't remember any really overt racial things that occurred that first year. One of the things that, my brother and I often discuss or have discussed, and I won't say often, was the 'Remember the Titans'. I know, my wife and my son love that movie. I detest it because it's not my memory of integration in the city of Alexandria. We didn't have that sort of thing, from what I was told. But I've heard it in the movie and Coach Boon and all that. It didn't happen that way when I was in school.

And that was, my sister was four years younger than me, I think that was during her tenure at what was then T.C. Williams. And that was a big thing when they built the school. I know most, I will not say most Blacks, but a lot of Blacks detested the name being changed to T.C. Williams, who was a staunch segregationist and the one who [unintelligible]. And it took almost 50 years before they changed the name. Not to mention the statue at the corner, intersection of Prince and Washington Street.

[00:54:47][151.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:54:48] Yeah, it's good that these things have been changed, especially that statue. The statue was just egregious. [00:54:54][6.4]

**John Greene:** [00:54:57] [unintelligible] to the South, you know, like the South [unintelligible]. I remember watching, my mother loved The Beverly Hillbillies, and I can remember Granny, "The South will rise again." And, you know, that whole usurping of U.S. history, I think that, and I don't want to get too Political, but I think Lincoln ceded too much after the Civil War. And still the boldness and segregationist has to perpetuate that sort of thinking, even in our education. You know, not the D.A.R [Daughters of the American Revolution], but there's another organization of southern white females that perpetuated that. All those statues and all those things they came with that long after the Civil War, it was during integration that a lot of it sort of came about. But the segregationists they, you know, they held onto their beliefs and had influence on the instruction that was in public schools. [00:56:07][69.7]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:56:09] Yes, it's really interesting to read about how, you know, how the Lost Cause myth and things like that was really perpetuated by the people who had nothing to do with the Confederacy, really, except for some tertiary connection. So, you mentioned that you played in the band at GW. When did you start playing music? [00:56:29][20.3]

**John Greene:** [00:56:31] Probably in the fourth or fifth grade, I can't remember. It was early on. First teacher was an old neighbor, her name was Mary Fields. The education, particularly for Black kids, I imagine the same thing happened in white schools, we had general music, we had art. You know, there was a totally well-rounded educational experience. So, I started on down on the Tonette, and I've always loved music. And once we got a band teacher, Cordon Lou Payne, I started on clarinet. And then there was an all city band, which was the two Black elementary schools, a combination of Charles Houston and Lyles-

Crouch. And even to this day, I believe music teachers had more, particularly, instrumental music teachers, had more than one school. So, I think Mr. Payne had a better set up in Lyles-Crouch, I think it was a more modern facility, the newer Lyles-Crouch. So for All-City band, I used to have to walk to Lyles-Crouch again for combine, it was a combination of Charles Houston and Lyles-Crouch students. And I've always had an interest in music, was pretty good on the clarinet. And then when I got to GW, there were several forward thinking white teachers in GW. I always credit. Mr. Frank Barr was the band instructor at GW and when I was in the ninth grade, he introduced me to the Bassoon, which was similar to the Clarinet. So, and then he had, my brother played string bass, and he had my brother and I playing in the musical, "Stop the World: I Want to get Off," at the little theater. That was my introduction into Pit Orchestra, if you will. Clover Demaine, who was the wife, the female of the Demaine funeral home, which is on S Washington St, she had something, I don't remember what her position was, but she had something to do with the Little Theater at the time. I can remember her, and I remember going to rehearsals and playing for shows at the Little Theater, playing the Bassoon. So then, let me see, I played Clarinet in marching band and Bassoon in the orchestra. And then Mr. Barr left when I was a junior, we got, I can see his face but I can't recall his name. But then we started a drum and fife core, which was no flute. We played fife and, as opposed to the marching band there was the drum and fife corps and, you know, tricornered hats and the whole thing. So, I did that for two years, I think, junior and senior year. [00:59:56][204.7]

**Kerry James Reed:** [00:59:59] Was there a big focus on musical education at the schools you went to, because it seems like with the all-city bands and, you know, Frank Barr and I think his name was, Mr. Payne? [01:00:09][9.7]

**John Greene:** [01:00:12] Payne, Cordon Lou Payne, I can always remember. He was instrumental music teacher and his wife was vocal music. No, I guess it was, it's probably mostly my interest. That, you know, I was just really [unintelligible] with music. And I can remember because we had a small house I used to rehearse in the bathroom or rehearse in the backyard. [01:00:40][28.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:00:51] So, were the teaches you had at GW, were they predominantly black or white? [01:00:57][5.7]

**John Greene:** [01:00:57] I don't have any Black teachers.  
[01:00:58][0.9]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:01:00] No Black teachers. [01:01:00][0.4]

**John Greene:** [01:01:02] None whatsoever. [01:01:03][0.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:01:03] So, then I'm guessing there was not a big focus on teaching Black history at GW? [01:01:08][5.2]

**John Greene:** [01:01:09] I didn't have any Black history at GW, but I do remember in Charles Houston, you know, back then we were given a week, and it's the week of Lincoln's birthday week, February 12th. And that's before Black history became a month celebration and tribute. The church I attended now, for Black History Month, we sing it was the Negro national anthem. The Johnson brothers wrote it, but now it's referred to as the African-American national anthem, I believe. But I can remember, Mary Fields, first music teacher, making sure that we knew the Negro national anthem back, oh, early elementary school. And, of course, we studied Black history. I can remember it in elementary school, but I don't remember in high school that we did any Black history whatsoever. [01:02:08][59.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:02:13] So, what made you want to go to Howard? [01:02:15][2.1]

**John Greene:** [01:02:19] It's interesting. I was made aware of a scholarship by a guidance counselor who was not my guidance counselor, but I, and I said I Didn't have any Black teachers, but she made me aware, there was a scholarship for two males and two females to attend Howard University. Provided by an Admiral Barrett, I can't remember his first name. But, the whole integration thing, I didn't apply to any HBCU other than Howard. And I got the scholarship and that's, you know, it was, well, you know Howard was considered the capstone of Negro education. That's not really a joke, but that that was the moniker that was attributed to it. And I just always was fascinated by Howard University. Other than the two people that got the scholarship, I can't think of anybody else in my class that went to an HBCU. They either went to Virginia State or to Hampton [University]. [01:03:26][67.6]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:03:32] Yeah. What was your major at Howard? [01:03:34][2.9]

**John Greene:** [01:03:35] Music education. Music education. That's what my degree is in. [01:03:40][4.8]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:03:43] So, I assume then that your love for music that was fostered throughout high school and elementary school influenced your decision? [01:03:47][4.3]

**John Greene:** [01:03:48] To be honest, perfectly honest, when it came time, I didn't know what I wanted to do. And it seemed like just the right path to go since I had done it all my life. I laugh at it now, but I can remember as a 17 year old going into Howard University that I said, I want to major in music and business. But, I stayed in music and the College of Fine Arts. [01:04:14][26.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:04:18] So, when we talked previously you said something really interesting to me and I would love to, you know, talk to you some more about it. So, when you first started going to Howard, you mentioned that they did not encourage the study of gospel music. [01:04:33][14.8]

**John Greene:** [01:04:36] Gospel music was considered illegitimate music when I first got to Howard. The year before I went to Howard. There was a big demonstration because it was during the Black Power movement. So, that would have been the class, high school class, of 1967. There was a big protest and they shut the school down. And, there weren't any black studies. There was not any, that was there was no Afrocentric study whatsoever. And the quote unquote capstone. And because of that unrest and then, of course, the assassination of Dr. King in April of 1968 and the riots and all of that, that sort of was a whole new movement, changed the whole direction, you know, the navigation of Black education, the black institutions of higher learning. Mordecai White Johnson was the president, and I want to say he was the first Black president of Howard. And then after the unrest, James Cheek became president of power, during my tenure. And all of the, you know, the music study was definitely Eurocentric, you know, opera or, classical. There was no study of, you weren't even allowed to play gospel music in practice rooms. Contemporary of mine, who was a year ahead of me, who was a renowned gospel musician, now Richard Smallwood, he had a group, as well as Donny Hathaway, come to think of it. People would practice in the practice room and if the dean or someone would come through, you would stop, you know, this doesn't make sense to me now, because you could hear them. The practice rooms were not soundproof. And he would peek into each practice room, but I remember people running to warn him that Dean Lawson was coming



through. So, if you're practicing, if you're doing any sort of gospel dancing or even jazz for them, for that matter. We were warned to head out, somebody was coming through. Practice rooms were in the basement of the Fine Arts building.

[01:07:00][144.7]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:07:04] This is just, you know, this is a piece of history that I'm not aware of and perhaps speaks more to my own ignorance of, you know, Black history than anything else. But I guess I just had this assumption that, even prior to Dr. King, that there was a appreciation of gospel music in HBCUs. [01:07:28][24.4]

**John Greene:** [01:07:30] I beg to differ, I think Howard was the first, well, I won't say we were the first gospel choir, but we were the first gospel choir to sing S.A.T.B. [Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass]. And nowadays they've moved to three part as opposed to four part harmony in gospel music. An interesting documentary, about the advent of gospel music, even in the church gospel music was frowned upon. You know, it was, spirituals, anthems, hymns. That was the bend. That's what you were supposed to sing. That was what we call, quote unquote, high church. And it wasn't until, oh, I would say, I think Thomas Dorsey is considered the father of gospel music, that you had the sort of revolution and the big revolution really came with the advent of Edwin Hawkins. And that was during my tenure at Howard, and our departments really became gospel. That was the change in contemporary gospel music. [01:08:37][67.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:08:41] So, did you start directing gospel choirs while you were at Howard? [01:08:44][2.9]

**John Greene:** [01:08:45] No, no, I didn't. It was totally, not really a fluke. I had no interest. To be perfectly honest, there was a certain, how should I say it? There was a certain characteristic attributed to choir directors, you know, effeminate homosexual. And I didn't want that, you know, I couldn't identify with that. And I was still going to my home church once I graduated from school. And the minister at the time, his wife was a pretty good pianist. And I enjoyed the music. And there was a whole big thing about, well, particularly in a small black church, that everybody's sang the same part. And Vivian Howard approached me about directing the choir, because she would play but sort of on the side. Some people have the talent they can play and direct at the same time. But I was approached by Vivian to direct the choir and the choir was pretty popular at the time. The advent of contemporary music,

again, with the Hawkins, the whole Hawkins flavor. And there were quite a few gospel choirs in churches at the time. The point of bringing Harmony and excellence tuned to gospel music, you know, sort of appealed to me. And so that's how I sort of got, involved with the choir in my home church. And then I left, I was sort of wandering because I wasn't getting what I wanted. And I sort of left that church, and there was a friend of mine that needed some help at another church, and I started directing there, another CME [Christian Methodist Episcopal] church in D.C. And then, the music sort of went flop in my home church again, and they asked me to come back, and I worked there. Then, I grew up in a methodist church, it was an itinerant ministry. And we were presented with a minister that I didn't particularly care for, and I didn't like the direction he was going, and I just left the church. And I'm no longer Methodist, I'm a Baptist, but that's another soap opera. [01:11:24][158.1]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:11:26] Absolutely. So, you said that you first started in your home church. What was your home church called? [01:11:30][3.6]

**John Greene:** [01:11:30] Russell Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. So temple seven or about the street? About five blocks from College. Rosemont. Right down the street from the blank is a resource center. [01:11:44][13.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:11:49] So, do you have any special memories for your time as a choir director? Did you ever travel around the mid-Atlantic? [01:11:54][5.7]

**John Greene:** [01:11:55] That's, you know, that's what sort of got on my nerves. Almost every Sunday we would travel somewhere. We were always, now I won't say in demand, but people wanted to hear us. And, I can remember getting comments all the time that, you know, we did a lot of, it was not necessarily repetition, but there was performing songs that were popular in the gospel industry, the gospel genre, the popular gospel music that was heard on the radio. And always saying, you know, that we sounded just like what the recording was. But, I attribute it to attention to detail and musical excellence. [01:12:39][43.9]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:12:41] Yeah, absolutely. So, you weren't playing in a choir, just directing? [01:12:47][6.1]

**John Greene:** [01:12:50] Yes. I have, limited piano skill. I had to do a piano proficiency exam to get my degree. And so the exam was, the faculty would call out, other than the recital was not

on my instrument, I did my gratitude recital on Clarinet. There was, scales, they would call out a number of scales for you to perform, one study and a performance piece. And I remember I didn't have to play the entire performance piece that I'd prepared. My piano teacher prepared me for it. But, you know, I was able to pass that and get the degree, of course.

[01:13:35][44.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:13:38] So, how do you think that gospel music has influenced your faith? [01:13:44][5.8]

**John Greene:** [01:13:47] Well, gospel music or music, period. Because I love anthems and I love spirituals as well. But, a lot of it is biblically based, and it sort of emphasizes the teachings, the scripture, you know, scripturally based. It's sort of, I won't say compromise, that's not the term that I'm looking for, but it supports the training and beliefs that you have in your Christian education. [01:14:26][38.8]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:14:30] Absolutely. So, do you have any memories of practices around faith, growing up at Russell Temple? [01:14:39][8.9]

**John Greene:** [01:14:41] I'm not sure I understand your question. [01:14:42][1.1]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:14:42] So, I guess in colored Rosemont, did everyone go to the same church or? [01:14:46][4.1]

**John Greene:** [01:14:48] No, we were the only ones, no, no, there was one lady that did go to Russell, but she left and went to a Baptist church. But, no, everybody, for the most part most of the major Black churches were represented. Russell Temple. There were people that went to Third Baptist, there were people that went to Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church. That was a neighbor that went to Zion Baptist Church, which is on S Lee St, I believe. And then, of course, my current church, Alfred Street Baptist Church. So that's, oh, Ebenezer, can't leave out Ebenezer. Pretty much all the Black churches were represented. Even Saint Joseph, I left them out, the Catholic Church.

[01:15:39][51.1]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:15:43] Did Russell Temple look the same as it does today when you were growing up? [01:15:47][3.7]

**John Greene:** [01:15:49] Pretty much. Other than, you know, there's certain improvements. The kitchen, the lighting, that

sort of thing. But yeah, it's still in the same spot. And just the thing about that, I believe the minister, I guess it was an itinerant minister, but the minister at the time when we joined the church, and I joined the church as a child with my mother. The property where Russell Temple is was a property that that minister who was also an insurance salesman, insurance agent. I believe the story is that it was a property that he had and that the church was built there and his home is now across the street from the Black History Resource Center. When you see that Cadillac parked out across from the projects. That was where it came from. [01:16:47][58.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:16:48] Very close. [01:16:51][2.3]

**John Greene:** [01:16:51] Just close enough to the community. [01:16:53][1.6]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:16:59] Does your family have any special practices around faith? Like, you know, meals in the afternoon, every child in Sunday school or anything like that? [01:17:06][7.1]

**John Greene:** [01:17:07] Well, I mean, we went to, [laughs] we were a little different. There was a neighbor, I forgot that this was a church, the Bethel Presbyterian Church, which I believe is now a Jewish church, which is one block from the Black History Resource Center, the little white church at the corner of Patrick St and Wythe St. That was a Presbyterian church when we were growing up. And that's where we went to Sunday school, but we went to service at Russell Temple. And going to Sunday school and the Presbyterian Church that afforded me exposure to, overnight camp. I went to Camp Glenn Kirk in Gainesville, Virginia. And that was another integrated experience. I know my brother went two years. I know I went one year, two years. But the neighbor around the corner was Frank Worthy and Drew Worthy and I, we were the only, pepper in the salt at that camp. But it was a great time, you know, it was on, you know, summertime, something to do. [01:18:08][61.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:18:12] Is it a, I'm sorry, was it a Bible study camp? Camp Glenn Kirk? [01:18:15][2.9]

**John Greene:** [01:18:16] Presbyterian. [01:18:16][0.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:18:18] Presbyterian? Ok. Presybytarian camp [01:18:19][0.8]

**John Greene:** [01:18:21] I think my sister went one year to. My older sister. [01:18:31][10.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:18:35] So, returning then to Colored Rosemont, could you describe the history of colored Rosemont? As you know it? [01:18:45][10.7]

**John Greene:** [01:18:48] Only that, you know, I remember the reference being called Colored Rosemont. I understand the moniker was attributed by the neighbors because it was the first place that Blacks could buy homes. And although it didn't look like anything in Rosemont to me, they, you know, Rosemont, which is on the other side of the railroad tracks. That's how they started calling it Colored Rosemont because that reflected the home ownership of lower middle class and middle class people. [01:19:23][35.6]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:19:28] And then Virginia Wheat Thomas, when did she start to build the homes? [01:19:32][4.2]

**John Greene:** [01:19:33] That I don't know. I can remember her coming around to collect the mortgage. And I remember, I have a vague memory of her. [01:19:39][6.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:19:41] Oh really? [01:19:41][0.0]

**John Greene:** [01:19:42] Yeah. Yeah. I don't know when she died. I can't remember when she died, but I can remember her coming around collecting mortgages. And then another interesting fact, this just sparked in my mind. Well, my mother didn't work, but early on she did work. And the only work the Black females could find unless they were professional like teachers, was a day's work, and my mother worked for a family, and I want to say he was an admiral, but I think he was a lower level. I remember he was a Navy, and, the last name was Martin. I can't remember where they lived, but I can remember, I don't recall the incident, but I can remember that they had a daughter that went to GW, Paige 'what's her name', and somehow she was, maybe something on the Alexandria government at some time later in life. I wouldn't know if I recognize it, but, maybe it was Captain Martin. But, they took us to the bowling alley and got expelled because little colored children shouldn't be in the white bowling alley. So, although my mother worked for them, there was sort of a relationship that they had that, you know, I don't know. Anyway, it was odd time, I'll put it that way. I'll say they were babysitters, but, I sort of had a white babysitter at one point, which was sort of reverse, for the times. And

growing up, we had, we played croquet, you know, we were exposed to a lot, you know, just in our own idyllic community.  
[01:21:40][118.9]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:21:42] Yeah, absolutely. So, you mentioned to me previously the men who would, you know, gather around the stoop, in your neighborhood. And it got me curious, were there any, like, Black leaders in your community? So the fight against, you know, Melvin Miller fighting against the development of the Adkins homes, was there anybody from from the neighborhood that really... [01:22:07][24.8]

**John Greene:** [01:22:08] Melvin Miller was not. [01:22:08][0.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:22:11] Right, right, right.  
[01:22:12][0.6]

**John Greene:** [01:22:13] But Lawyer Tucker owned the house at 1301, I understand. So, by then I just knew the name. I, you know, have no recollection of him. Knew where his office was.  
[01:22:28][14.9]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:22:32] And then, you might have already addressed this, but you don't recall any large communal gatherings or social events outside of, you know, people going to each other's houses on holidays? [01:22:42][9.9]

**John Greene:** [01:22:43] Yeah, no. There was certain members in the community, the big thing was the Departmental Progressive Club, which is on Gibbon St. And there were members in the community that belonged there. My father never belonged, they tried to get him to join, but he never belonged there.  
[01:23:02][19.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:23:06] But were there any Masons in the community or members of the Elks Lodge? [01:23:09][3.7]

**John Greene:** [01:23:11] There are a couple of Masons and then the old Bates House was purchased by a section or set of the Masons at the last, the West St development, the Madison St that's where that was. The Masons lodge was there on Madison Street. I don't remember, you know, I know there were people, there were members of the Elks and Masons, but secret societies weren't really that big in my community. To my recollection.  
[01:24:04][52.8]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:24:07] So, when you were directing the gospel choirs, were you still living in Colored Rosemont at that time? [01:24:17][10.2]

**John Greene:** [01:24:19] I lived in Colored Rosemont from birth until, like 1975, '75 or '76. Yeah, must have been '75, '74 or '75, I can't remember. And then, I moved in with my sister in Park Fairfax, after that I purchased a condo in Park Fairfax back in 1980. So, I got married in Fairfax County in 1983. [01:24:45][26.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:25:03] So, when you were living in in Fairfax County, did you did you come back to Rosemont frequently? [01:25:10][7.0]

**John Greene:** [01:25:11] Well, I'd send my, in the summer for a period when my son was much younger. Not always, but particularly when he was in, preschool. My mother was, babysitting for the grandkids in summer, during the summer sometimes. And as you know, my brother still lives in the family home, so I still visit him occasionally. [01:25:32][20.7]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:25:37] So, can you speak to the developments that have happened in Rosemont in the last, you know, 20, 30 odd years and what those have done to the neighborhood? [01:25:48][11.0]

**John Greene:** [01:25:49] I'll [unintelligible] the community, but the neighborhood is not the same anymore, particularly with the, advent of the sale of the West St properties. The property next door to us 1314, the Majors, I think they I don't know how long they owned it, but until Mr. Major died, Fred Major died. He did a garden on that plot before, you know, when the last, I guess the renters, when they moved. I can remember Mr. Fred Major riding his bicycle, he lived in the 500 block of N Payne St, but he maintained a garden at that 1314 address. And then, I can't remember when they built that house that that's there now that still has that address. The 633 address where the seamstress lived, Ms. Carter, Lenora, that was her first name. Lenora Carter. That house was added on to, and they added a second story. The Burke's house, which is another one of those A-frame Virginia Thomas houses, which was 7, I believe that's 719 N West. That house was modified early on when they were still in school. And the house next door at 715, I believe it was Ms. Virginia's house, was also modified. Our house, my father looked at it one time because we were, you know, such a large family, adding a second story. And I can remember there was this big

deal about we couldn't have, it was something about windows or something. But although there was a window on that alley, you know, the living room window and the kitchen window is on that alley. But anyway, we never did, my father never did expand that house. But the house that Ms. Smalls lived in in the 600 block of N West St, that house was destroyed when they built those townhouses. But 633 [N West St] was remodeled and added to. I believe it's 615, I mean 715 and 719 I believe, the Burkes and, I can't just remember Virginia's name, but both of those houses were modified during my lifetime. [01:28:20][151.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:28:23] So, when did the developments on West St start to happen? [01:28:26][3.3]

**John Greene:** [01:28:30] On the 600 block? I don't recall, but it's, you know, it's been a minute, you know. One was destroyed and, you know, whenever they built those townhouses right there in the 600 block. I think Mr. Worthy might have owned that house. But anyway, yeah, that was, oh, definitely, maybe 80s. [01:28:59][29.1]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:29:00] OK. So, are there any aspects of the neighborhood today that resemble the colored Rosemont of your youth? [01:29:08][8.3]

**John Greene:** [01:29:09] No. No. Other than our house. [01:29:12][2.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:29:15] How does it feel to see the, I guess, erasure of your community? [01:29:21][5.8]

**John Greene:** [01:29:23] It's sort of melancholy, you know, and you've taken back, to what it used to be, but everything must change. It's evolved. This is sort of an aside, when coming into the city, oftentimes I come through what is it? Eisenhower [Ave] to, what is it, Jamieson [Ave], to go to the West St, and I often think that my father would be lost at, you know, his trying to get around the city nowadays. My father was a meatcutter, I may have mentioned this to you before, and he'd kill a hog every year, hog or two or two every year and cow every other year. And sometimes he would do his, meat grinding or sausage at Santullos, which was an Italian market right there on Duke Street. Hermes Ford, Santullo's, all that was, almost all of that has changed. And the whole Eisenhower Valley, what they're still doing now, quote unquote, when I was coming up as a kid, they referred to this "shitty creek," what they're developing now. And I don't know what it is. I guess it's the



drainage that they're working on right there where the Porter's [Paints] is. But Jamieson Ave, between Duke St and Jamison Ave, they've closed down Jamieson for several months now, and whatever they're doing now. But that's the creek. It's always been there, it's always been smelly. Hence the name.  
[01:31:02][99.2]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:31:03] Right. So we've been talking now, Mr. Green, for about an hour and 30 minutes. I don't want to keep up too much of your time today. So before we move into our closing questions is there anything else you would like to say or like to talk about? [01:31:27][23.6]

**John Greene:** [01:31:28] Not that I can think of right off hand. I have this thing sitting in front of me. I haven't looked at it since we've been talking, I was just answering your questions. But I did look over it last night once I printed it out and there wasn't anything that's...Oh, the African-American history. Oh, you did ask for social clubs. Ok. No, I can't think of anything, Kerry, right off the hand. [01:31:54][25.8]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:31:54] Well, if something comes to mind, feel free to interrupt me. [01:31:57][2.9]

**John Greene:** [01:31:59] Yeah. [01:31:59][0.0]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:32:02] So, I was curious about the Color Rosemont Initiative. How did the initiative first start?  
[01:32:07][5.5]

**John Greene:** [01:32:08] I just heard from my brother, and I don't know how he started it. And he was talking to you about Ms Becker, who has written in the Old Town Crier. And then he told me, my brother can be sort of elusive sometimes, but he told me about [Francesco de] Salvatore coming to interview us or something and then I met him there. And that was the first time I heard. So, I don't know how it started. [01:32:41][32.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:32:42] So, did your brother tell you about his work with, Sarah Becker? When it was happening?  
[01:32:49][6.6]

**John Greene:** [01:32:50] Sort of. I was, you know, he made sure I saw the articles in the Old Town Crier and that sort of thing. And I'd read them and I sort of, [laughs] I think he might get mad, but I, you know, the whole thing about the marker, and the way the house is maintained, I'm not pleased with that, you

know. That smoker on the front porch and the grease spot. One interesting thing that I will add that, like I said, my father worked all the time, and he would sit on the porch sometimes, like in the summer, even after he retired. And he would bump his head on the wall, there's still a grease spot on the bricks from where my father head [laughs] used to bump against that wall on the porch, up front porch. But that's different than the great spot from the smoke that my brother has on the front porch of the house. I think it's totally not germane to the character of the neighborhood. And not germane to putting a sign there either, in my opinion. [01:33:50][59.8]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:33:58] So since this initiative has started and, you know, it has been ongoing, what what are your opinions or how have you seen the city sort of try to address the the error or the wrongdoing that has occurred in the past? [01:34:13][15.5]

**John Greene:** [01:34:14] I don't see anything in that, you know, in that bend. Although the initiative is noble and one of the things I'm starting to feel, but I'm not sure, and this is just a sense that I have, it seems like people that should have interests or people that could add to the recordation of the history, they either fell that we are dominating because there's so many of us or, I don't know. It's just a sense. I'm not sure of the term that I'm looking for, but it's almost as if, 'y'all got it, y'all do it.' [01:35:04][50.3]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:35:06] Yeah. So ,for the marker when it goes up, what would you like current residents of the area that that is Colored Rosemont to know about the history of the neighborhood where they live? [01:35:19][13.2]

**John Greene:** [01:35:20] The work that went into creating the documentation of the presence of Blacks in the City of Alexandria. [01:35:27][6.4]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:35:37] What do you think it does to, you know, people's idea of Alexandria and Colored Rosemont to not know that there was such a significant Black history and Black presence in the city and in this neighborhood. [01:35:47][10.3]

**John Greene:** [01:35:49] Well it's terrible. The absence of history, you know, knowing that there was a Black neighborhood that thrived in spite of, or despite segregation. And there were people that came from the neighborhood that grew up to be

successful because of the influences they had living in that community. [01:36:25][35.5]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:36:29] So, if there's one specific memory of Colored Rosemont that you could hold on to forever, what would it be? [01:36:39][9.4]

**John Greene:** [01:36:41] I won't say one specific memory, but one thing that keeps coming back is that we call him Del Boy. His name is George Carter, playing the latest hits on the weekend in the summertime. That's how we knew what the latest hits were. Like I said, if you didn't hear them on the radio, you could hear Del Boy playing them on his back porch sampling to do bath or whatever. [01:37:01][19.9]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:37:05] And then lastly, what do you hope for the future of Colored Rosemont and the Colored Rosemont Initiative? [01:37:15][9.8]

**John Greene:** [01:37:16] Just that the presence and the history is preserved. And that is recorded that we were there. [01:37:25][8.7]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:37:27] Absolutely. Well, Mr. Green, thank you so much for speaking with me today. It's been an absolute pleasure. You know, I really enjoyed our conversation. [01:37:34][7.0]

**John Greene:** [01:37:35] Same here. I hope it was helpful. And I'm not sure how much you recorded .or how much you can really use. [01:37:42][6.1]

**Kerry James Reed:** [01:37:44] It was enlightening. It really was. Thank you so much. [01:37:46][1.7]

**John Greene:** [01:37:47] You have a great day now. [01:37:47][0.0]

[5356.3]