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Oral History Interview

with

Richard Williams

Interviewer: Kerry James Reed

Narrator: Richard Williams

Location of Interview:

The Courts at Huntington Station, 5500 Grand Pavilion Way, Alexandria, VA, 22303

Date of Interview: 04/03/2024

Transcriber: J Orisha

Summary:

Richard Williams reflects growing up in Alexandria, Virginia, the challenges he faced during his career, and his efforts to preserve local Black cemeteries.

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General	Childhood; Education; Historic Sites; Cemeteries; Masons; Church; Community; Career; Racial segregation
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Places	Alexandria, VA; Little Jim's Carryout; Parker-Gray Elementary School; North Columbus Street; the Hump; the Berg; Rosemont; Del Ray; Roberts Memorial Methodist Church; Saint Joseph's Catholic Church; Washington Street; Wythe Street; First Street; Buena Vista, Georgia; Coleman Cemetery; Douglass Cemetery; Bethel Cemetery; Zion Church

Richard Williams [00:00:01] My name is Richard C Williams. My age is 89. The date of the day is April 3rd, 2024. The location is at 5500 Grand Pavilion Way, known as the Courts of Huntington Apartments.

Kerry James Reed [00:00:20] My name is Kerry James Reed. I'm 27 years of age. It is April 3rd, 2024, and we are at the Huntington Courts. So, thank you so much Mr. Williams for agreeing to do this interview. It's been an absolute pleasure, speaking with you in the past.

Richard Williams [00:00:35] My pleasure.

Kerry James Reed [00:00:37] I guess we can start from the very beginning. Where were you born?

Richard Williams [00:00:42] I was born at 702 North Patrick Street in Alexandria, right across from the recreation center there. The 702 when I was born, was a small house. Since that time, it has been refurnished, and now it's a big house. I think I had two bedrooms in there, and my aunt and her husband, and my mom and her husband spent some time there. And I think that during that pregnancy, I was at my aunt's because my father worked for the railroad. And a lot of times he wasn't home. So, that's where I was born. And there has been quite a bit of talk about that between my mom, my oldest sister and me, who says that I was actually delivered [by a midwife] Ms. Melissa Cross. She lived out a couple of doors from Alfred Street Baptist Church. Now you can measure that to up to 700 block of Alfred Street. Dr. Durant who was supposed to be the attending physician, lived two blocks away. He was at 709 Pendleton Street. I was at my mom's then. We were at 702 North Patrick Street. Don't ask me how, but some way, my dad who didn't drive, got out there and got Ms. Melissa Cross. Got her up to my aunt's house, and she delivered me. My mom and my sister both told me, "It was before 12:00 a.m. when you were born." My mother said so, and my sister said, "I was awake when I heard you crying," but the doctor got there after 12:00 a.m. So instead of the 22nd, he put my birthdate as February the 23rd. So that went on legal record. So, I took advantage of it because 22nd and 23rd I celebrated my birthday. [laughs].

Kerry James Reed [00:03:34] So what are some of your earliest memories growing up at 702 North Patrick Street?

Richard Williams [00:03:42] Well, actually, my sister was more or less my babysitter and older sister and, my mom worked during that time doing housework, of course. And my sister often was left to look after me. Always if she wanted to go across the street to the playground over there, she had a little brother on her heel. And she carried me over there during the day when my mom was at work. She would be the one who made sure I got my food. So, that was basically what we did right there at that particular address. But we moved a couple of blocks over to 804 Pendleton Street. That's where I was reared.

Kerry James Reed [00:04:38] When did your family moved to Pendleton Street?

Richard Williams [00:04:41] The same year as when I was born. We had lived on the south side for a while at 818 Wolfe Street, but we moved up to the Pendleton Street address, and that's where I spent all my childhood growing up.

Kerry James Reed [00:05:02] Can you describe the neighborhood around 804 Pendleton?

Richard Williams [00:05:07] Yeah, it was really not developed. We didn't have sidewalks. What I remember as a small boy, we didn't have sidewalks. The street wasn't paved. We had little alleys here and there. I would go cut through this alley and be over on Alfred Street. I'll cut the other way; I'd be on Columbus Street. Or I could cross the street, go through the alley and I come out by Parker-Gray School on Wythe Street at that time. So in between there, the little things I found to do with the guys that were coming up and, I don't know, well, but some of the older guys kind of took a liking to me. You know, kind of adopted me as the baby boy. And they looked out for me and

taught me some things that I should know and probably shouldn't know either. But the families around there were close at that time, and everybody knew everybody. So, right across the street from there, we had a Little Jim's Carryout that was real popular back when I was a younger kid. Mr. Jim Cooley owned it. And he had some of the best veal cutlet sandwiches you'd ever want to taste. And some of my neighbors, one in particular, the Stokes. Charles and Gladys were the mother and father, Charles Jr., Sonny Stokes, and they had a daughter named Royce. They were the closest to us. They were right on the corner near Columbus and Pendleton, and we were on the corner of Pendleton and down around the corner from them. So, he was a little older than I, but he took me under his wing. To me and most of the guys around there, like I said, were a few years older than me, but they just liked me. And I don't know where I got the nickname from, but they called me Honey Boy. But I had one friend who was around Columbus Street. His name was Oliver Johnson. He didn't want to call me Honey Boy. He called me Goo-Goo. [laughs] And my mother, I think she was just a genius, because between her and my father, I don't think they had a second or third grade education. But where we lived was owned by Mr. Rubin. He had a little food store right across the street from us, where he owned a house that we lived in. So, my mother asked him would he sell her that house, including the corner and the house. And he told her yeah. And for some ridiculous price of about \$3,000, she bought it. Now, she did housework. My dad was fortunate enough to work for the RFP railroad. My dad was also wise enough to know that [his] wife knew how to handle monies to run a house. And I guess if she ever wanted to run a business, she would have. But what she did when they made an agreement with Mr. Rubin to buy that house, she immediately went around the corner and found the person who owned 512 North Columbus Street and rented that house with them. She broke that house down into at least four rentals. Thereby she paid for that house half the time what they should have. And that's how we just lived there through the time I graduated. That's where we lived.

Kerry James Reed [00:09:42] Your mother sounds very smart.

Richard Williams [00:09:43] She was a very smart woman. Like I said, no education. But what they called it back then was "mother-wit", you know, when people had that thing about you. And my father was wise enough, although he wasn't educated to know that he had a jewel. So, he told my mother, "As soon as we get this house paid for, you will come home and be a housewife." That's what he did. Yeah.

Kerry James Reed [00:10:16] Can you describe what your home looked like?

Richard Williams [00:10:19] Oh, it was just a regular house. You had not a whole lot of fancy furniture or anything like that, but it was home. It was comfortable. When we first moved there, they had inside a bathroom, but we didn't have the heat. And we finally got gas in there and put some electric heaters around the wall. We walked into what we call the front room, where we had entertained our guests when they came. If you turn to your right, we had two small bedrooms to the right. One [for] my mom and pop. Well [I have] two sisters and a brother. The closest one to me, she was six years older than me. My next sister was nine years older than me. And my oldest brother was 15 years older than me. So, I didn't have any kids to play with when I came up. My youngest sister was very smart. She graduated from high school when she was 15. My older sister was during the time when my mom was buying the house and going through what you go through trying to build a home, she decided that she would quit school and go out to work and help deal with the family finances, and that's what she did. I always loved her for that. My oldest brother went into

service. But none of us were past 18 when we got married. All of us got married early. So, my playmates with were some of the families around the area on Alfred Street. We had the Edwards on one side. On the other we had the Nortons, we had the Jacksons. I can't remember all of the families, but they were different families and we all got along together. Yeah, we looked out for one another. Was it Hillary Clinton that said, "It takes a village to raise a child." She was way late, cause that's what we did back then in the 40s. So basically, right up the corner from us, two blocks up, had been a USO [United Service Organizations] during the war. And they turned that into a recreation club for us. So that's where the kids in that area from down the Berg, which, you know, in the hill and, down in Rosemont, and up on the Hump, as they call it. That's where we went on evenings after we got out of school. And on weekends, we were fortunate enough that Mr. Marsh Sabert, [which] that recreation center was named after, worked for the city and he would open up that recreation department on Saturdays and Sundays. So, us kids would have somewhere to go, you know, other than being in the street. That guy had more time as a part-time working for the city, then a lot of the city employees that were full-time. Heck of a guy. Great guy. You know, we owe a lot to him.

Kerry James Reed [00:14:43] So it would be the USO in the rec center where you all would play a lot as kids?

Richard Williams [00:14:50] You know, like I was telling you, we went up at the park in grade school where they had a field out there. And during school, you know, we would go out when [inaudible] out there. On the side was a basketball court. That's where a lot of us young guys would be out there in the evenings, on weekends, playing basketball. Even during the time when Earl Lloyd was in college and he'd come home for the summer, he'd be out there. They had softball games they played, and a lot of the athletes from around the area was out there. And then down the Berg too we had a recreation center down there. I think that was the Park on Madden, I'm not quite sure. But they had a larger field where they played ball, and a lot of the kids from the Berg went right over here. Kids from the south side uptown all migrated there. They call us on Friday nights at that recreation center down there. We usually had little hops. So, I think 25 or something like that. And we had a guy named George Carter who was the local DJ. He loved to buy records and things. And so, when we had the little hops and things, he was the DJ. In Rosemont over there, we had, as far as down to West Street, and that area was what we call Rosemont. Because when you hit the tracks there, you in Rosemont or white Rosemont. [laughs]. I remember one Halloween we were going out trick-or-treating, and we met 1 or 2 policemen. They suggested that we do all a trick-or-treating on the East side, not to cross going over to the west side, Del Rey. So, kids much later they did wound up having the skating rink down at the Berg. And we used to have carnivals come to town, and out down in the Berg, which they called Cross Canal, is where they had this big field. And the carnivals would come there, and we'd get a chance to go to sideshows and, you know, were playing games and such as that. But that later became Ficklin School. But a lot of our people lived over in what they call Cross Canal. When you left directly at the Berg and crossed Wythe Street, going north over in that area was called Cross Canal. And it had a canal over there at one time. Andrew Winfrey. I don't know whether you met him or not, but he's the guy that wrote a book. That's where he lived. His family lived out there. Some of the Banks lived out there, and [the] Lomax. I'm just calling a few of the families I knew. The Winfreys, but I never did go over there too much. It was across Washington Street. My mom didn't want me crossing over there and, like, get hit or something like that. So basically, I stayed on that side. But during that time, we had basketball tournaments up at that recreation center there, and the churches had teams. And Roberts Memorial

United Methodist Church and Saint Joseph's Catholic Church were the main rivals. It was a big game when they played. Ebenezer, Zion, and other churches in their area did have teams participating even out as far as Oakland and Seminary. That's when Lonnie Belt, he was a heck of a football player. His brother coming after, Jasper Belt, he was a heck of a football player. The oldest brother Milton, he was a little older than them. So, he was more or less working at the time. But he did participate every once in a while. So it was up in the Hump, they called it. That's where when you cross Wythe Street going up, you're up on the Hump then. Up there they had a couple of stores, and it was old man named Mr. Pinkard who had a horse and wagon up there at that end. That end wasn't too many people living up there now. It's kind of just a few, but anyhow, you know, we just got along. We ain't have nothing about no fights and all of that type thing, you know? We were too busy trying to enjoy life.

Kerry James Reed [00:21:07] You mentioned to me that story about trick or treating on Halloween, and the police officers told you not to cross over into town.

Richard Williams [00:21:13] Yeah. They suggested it.

Kerry James Reed [00:21:16] Did you have an awareness as a kid growing up in Alexandria where you shouldn't be in the city?

Richard Williams [00:21:24] Well, by that, I knew I shouldn't be going over into the other Del Rey area. We stayed in areas and played in their areas. And, I think at the time, I think back there was a boys and girls club like that one at that time, and one most of the south side, they would come up to the north side and have a little parties and things like that. But we do with what we had and enjoyed life. And like they said, people talk about being poor. We didn't know we were poor. We're all there trying to make a living. And the out then was if you had lived in there and got a chance to get into the projects up there, that was your steppingstone. You lived in the projects, tried to make your money, and save it and then be able to move out into a house in the city. But that was one thing that a lot of us went through. I lived in the Newest Projects up there when I was a young man with family, 916 First Street. I lived up there. The Nelsons. They were across the street from me on First Street, and then they bought a house up there.

Kerry James Reed [00:23:21] When did you move to 916 First Street?

Richard Williams [00:23:27] I think it was 58. I had been in the service and come back. I got a hardship discharge because I had a number of kids, and we got that project up there in 58. And lived there until my wife and I got divorced, but we had some good times up there. I worked for the post office. And all my neighbors on one side of the block there, most of the guys who worked, you know, during the day, I had a day off during the week, usually a Thursday, and I would cut the grass for 3 or 4 people up that street. You know, we did things like that. We kind of looked out for one another. We had our little parties and enjoyed one another. I remember one time my wife and Nelson's mother and a couple of other ladies had a little, I guess it was a penny fat game or something like that. The police came up and busted that like it was a big raid. I don't think it was \$2 in the whole, you know, kiddy up there. But they were just doing some passing time. It wasn't no gambling things like that, you know. But police got a charge out of that. So that was one of the things we talked about. [laughs]

Kerry James Reed [00:25:25] When you were growing up, did your mother or father ever talk about your family's history at all?

Richard Williams [00:25:30] Well. Not really. I knew that just about every summer, due to the fact that my dad works at RFP, we could travel up and down the southeast there. [We] usually start in Richmond, and all the way down to Florida. We would visit some of our relatives in those different states down there. And that was a big thing in my life. But my mom came from a little place called Buena Vista, Georgia. And I never really found out where my dad was, but he was somewhere in the area. And up until the time when I was like 10, 12, they still owned the house down there. And they finally sold the house to some friends that all the time lived in the house there. And so, when we went down there, we didn't have to worry about getting any hotel or anything and we didn't anyhow, because most of the time we visited relatives and we stayed with our relatives. I mean, we didn't have many relatives, but South Carolina, we had relatives, Georgia with relatives, down in Florida we had relatives, and some in Alabama. So, there are those areas where we took advantage of it. And when my dad got his leave and we were going on our summer vacation, we'd get free tickets to wherever we wanted to go up and down the southeastern part. Because I don't know how long the RFP owned was 500 miles I think from there down to Richmond or something. They said that was one of the richest 500 miles on the East coast. And my father retired and there. He had gotten sick back in about 1940, I was but a youngster. And he got so sick that the doctor told my mother, "If you want to come and see him at 12:00 midnight, come on." And I think they had given up on him, but I don't know who the doctor was, but they said they went in him and put some type of catgut or something like that, they called it, and sewed about so much into his intestines. He never could do any hard work after that. But he retired from RFP later because they just let him do things like keep the roundhouse clean, little janitorial type things, to keep him working. But, yeah, they had him going. He lived until 87.

Kerry James Reed [00:28:57] Oh. Very long.

Richard Williams [00:28:58] Yeah.

Kerry James Reed [00:28:59] Really quick. You said the house they had was in Georgia? The house that they owned?

Richard Williams [00:29:04] Yeah, in Buena Vista, Georgia.

Kerry James Reed [00:29:08] And then very briefly, could you tell me the names of your parents?

Richard Williams [00:29:15] My mother was Mary Lizabeth, not Elizabeth, Mary Lizabeth Dinkins. That was her maiden name. My father was Leo Williams.

Kerry James Reed [00:29:33] And then the names of your siblings.

Richard Williams [00:29:38] My oldest brother was Leo T. Williams. Then came my sister, Zola. She was Zola Williams. Then my sister, Annie Pearl Williams, and then Richard C. Williams. [Laughs] So my brother was born in 1920. I think it was my sister, 24 then the next sister 29.

Kerry James Reed [00:30:23] So you talked a lot about your neighborhood growing up. You know, the USO's and the rec centers and things like that, where you would play ball and everything else. Did you have a particularly favorite part of your neighborhood that you would always go to?

Richard Williams [00:30:40] Well, right where I was, was my favorite.

Kerry James Reed [00:30:52] Okay. Did you ever visit any cemeteries in Alexandria while you were growing up?

Richard Williams [00:30:57] When I was growing up, no.

Kerry James Reed [00:31:05] So there were no funerals in the neighborhood that you ever that you ever attended?

Richard Williams [00:31:18] I remember at Saint Joe's, a Catholic church, it was a friend of mine, young guy. I can't remember his name to save me. Well, he passed as a young kid, and we went to that funeral. But that about the only one I remember as a kid.

Kerry James Reed [00:31:39] What about when you got older, when there was a funeral in the community? Where did you usually go for the funerals?

Richard Williams [00:31:52] To the churches. You know, most of funerals at the church. And I was back at long a time when the latest thing was happening, when you passed out on the street and saw a wreath, the body was there. They'd bring the body there to spend the last night and then and carry them to the church for the funeral.

Kerry James Reed [00:32:15] So do you remember the first time that you saw Douglass Cemetery then?

Richard Williams [00:32:19] I was a grown man. [However], the gravesites that were not kept up then when I came along as a young man, when I joined the Masons, we used to go out there along with the Elks Home and the DePaul Little and clean up that graveyard, cut the grass, remove the debris, and all of that kind of stuff. We would do that at least once a year. And that's when I became aware of the cemetery being out there.

Kerry James Reed [00:33:18] So how often would the Masons and the Elks and the departmental club go out to clean up the cemeteries? Was it like a weekly thing? Monthly?

Richard Williams [00:33:27] It was once a year that we did the cleaning, but then during the year, if one of the organizations saw something that needed to be done, they would contact us, or they'd do it themselves. But basically, we were kind of policing it on our own.

Kerry James Reed [00:33:51] When did you first see Coleman Cemetery?

Richard Williams [00:33:54] Coleman Cemetery was first seen by me in 1968. That was the year I joined the Masonic family. The first job they gave me was to be a representative of the Coleman Cemetery Association. And that's where I've been up to now.

Kerry James Reed [00:34:19] So in your work with Coleman Cemetery over the years, how have you seen the condition of it change over time?

Richard Williams [00:34:28] Well, when first I went out there, it was sort of a water problem, and standing water, and stuff like that, that over time Mother Nature, I guess, kind of took care of things. And then water and stuff ran off and we were doing things in the cemetery to upgrade it. Like, God, you know, trying to get people to come out and, reset their stones. A lot of people didn't realize that when they put a headstone in that cemetery, that was their responsibility. You know, if they gave us perpetual care money, then we were duty bound to cut the grass and try to keep it clean. But this over efforts, we did little things like put a fence up around there, put a sign up, cleared out a lot of trash and stuff that used to be down there at the bottom where it was one time a spring down there that was not really deep, but I mean, it was down at the bottom of it. And now there's still room down there. I don't know exactly how much for burying. But if we could ever get our Coleman Cemetery Association functioning again and get some people that really want to do something like the Nelsons. We've got a few other people that contact me every now and then and say they want to do something out there, let [him] know. They want to be a part of it. But it's just hard to get that core beginning of a person who wants to go out there with a fixed mind and a desire to save that cemetery, because from the time in 68, when I went out there, I looked at it as it should be, as some type of national landmark.

Kerry James Reed [00:36:53] A historic place?

Richard Williams [00:36:54] Yeah.

Kerry James Reed [00:36:54] Yeah, absolutely. So, you said that if Coleman cemetery association could be functional again, a lot of improvements could happen to the cemetery grounds. When did it stop being functional then?

Richard Williams [00:37:14] Somewhere around eight years ago. Somewhere along there is still dropping off to the point where I had to sometimes go out there and make sure that the grass was cut for Mother's Day holidays. You know, when people went out to visit the graves to make sure we had different agents. And few of them didn't work out too well because they saw a chance to make some money. But basically myself and a few others tried to keep it going, and since that time we have really stopped functioning. It has been for the last, I would say, of 5, 6 years that me and this realtor, just the two of us, have got in contact with the funeral director, and I got in contact with the grave digger, and we thought it was done. But we just haven't got it. And the thing about it at one time was all these churches that are in Alexandria, just about all of them were members of that cemetery association by some means, because they made contributions, monetary contributions, and some bought plots of land because we needed a place, because it was hard for Blacks to get buried in Alexandria. So that when that plot of land was founded, basically all the churches and the organizations got together, put up monies and caused it to happen. And over the period of time, the cemetery did flourish. Not at the top as it could have been, but it was functioning. I can't remember the first agent that actually handled the burying for the cemetery association, but it functioned a good while and made enough money, because all the people who had contributed, they kept records. And over a period of time, everybody that had made a contribution or [inaudible] organization spent so much money. They got their money back. They paid them back in full every

year around Christmas time. We used to have annual meeting and the churches, and all the organizations sent their representatives out there and they would pay a certain stipend until such time all of them had been paid. And so, it is not a fact that it owed anybody. Right now, somebody can call and say, "I've got a contract here that says that we bought a place such and such and such." And [if] they showed me that, we're going to make some kind of arrangement to get that body in Coleman Cemetery, even at this time, with the way we have to function. And it don't take a whole lot. It just takes one person who decides that they would take the leadership role. And there's some people out there that'll work with you. And could put it in a situation where over a period of time my dream that this would be a national monument. [00:41:40] [0.0s]

Kerry James Reed [00:41:42] So listening to you talk about this, it's clear that you're very passionate about your work that you've done in the community. And I was curious, what do you think it does to a community when they forget about the cemeteries and about the people that are buried there?

Richard Williams [00:42:01] We are right where we are now. We are struggling to try to get somebody to take up the cross, so to speak, and move on. And I would say this, our Black leadership in Alexandria is not.

Kerry James Reed [00:42:28] Where are your parents buried? They're buried at Coleman?

Richard Williams [00:42:38] No. They're on the south side I've got my mother and father. All my family is out there. My mother and father. My oldest brother. My 2 sisters, they're there. Because there was 7 in my family, but I never saw 3 of my siblings because they had passed before I was born. But my brother and my 2 sisters out there that my mom and my dad.

Kerry James Reed [00:43:11] What cemetery is that?

Richard Williams [00:43:18] Bethel. I've been knowing Mr. Click for a long time. I've got a son out there now, too.

Kerry James Reed [00:43:36] So you mentioned a little bit that when you joined the Masons, they appointed you to the Coleman Association. Was there a big focus on community endeavors? I guess you could say community help and things like that?

Richard Williams [00:43:53] Friendship, morality, and brotherly love, and out of desires. When we get a member, then we get a good man and make a better man out of him. And it's not a church situation. But we do give charity. We extended things now, like I think it was last week or the week before when our lawyers went down to the Berg to clean it up. To do things like that. When you have kids that need things, they contact the Masonic body, [and] usually we will get together and do something for them.

Kerry James Reed [00:44:47] So what made you want to join the Masons?

Richard Williams [00:44:51] Well, my dad was a Mason, not that he talked about it a lot. And Ms. Ruth Wright, who was a teacher and, her husband, she was a star, and he was a Mason, and I had a lot of contact with them. And as I was coming up as a kid, I was in the kids order. And they told me when I became a man if I wanted to be a Mason, who they contact. And my father never told me

that. He was so tight lipped about it. He didn't even talk to me about it. But Mr. Wright told me if I wanted to be a Mason, he would get me an application. And he did. And I filled it out and sent it in. And that's where I started.

Kerry James Reed [00:45:43] How long have you been in the Masons now?

Richard Williams [00:45:46] Since June of 1968. That's 55 years. A long time.

Kerry James Reed [00:45:54] So what other community initiatives have you been a part of in Alexandria with the Masons?

Richard Williams [00:45:59] Well, I was a member of the grandfathers' group at one time here. It was a group that all kids that did not have a man in their house were handpicked that somebody suggested. And we would adopt that kid. And whenever we had meetings or anything like that, it was our responsibility to see that that kid was there [and] had what he needed and more or less try to just be a father figure to him. Melvin Miller was a grandfather.

Kerry James Reed [00:46:47] Melvin Miller.

Richard Williams [00:46:47] Yeah.

Kerry James Reed [00:46:56] So very briefly, we've been talking about [where] the Black community in Alexandria could go and participate in community life, so to speak. And I was curious what you remember about the Robinson Library.

Richard Williams [00:47:21] Well, I was there when it was one room. It was big as this room. And I was in school with that guy over there. I used to like to read, and I'd go over there and get books and look at the books and see that they had been used. Most of all, I mean, they used quite a while because they have 5 or 6 names, and they were Williams and Smith. And during that time, whoever I'm trying to remember who was in charge over there, my friend Fred Mathis and I [were] always on the patrol. And as a patrol, some kind of way we got hooked up over there at Robinson Library, and they hired us to go out and pick up delinquent books. People had books out and might owe \$0.50 late fee. And wherever in Alexandria, that foot would take you. He and I would go out there, particularly on the weekend, on Saturdays, sometimes in the evenings on Fridays, and just during the week. If we saw a chance get to this person's house, or that person's house, we would go and collect whatever moneys there was to be collected, bring it in and get our \$0.05 cut. And that's how we did. I don't know how long we did it, but we did. We also worked for a paper in the United States. that was put out by the Shadow. It wasn't no more than a sheet of paper folded over, but it had all the gossip in Alexandria. "What's that guy on the south side that got that blue car up there on the north side all the time seeing that lady that live over there?" They didn't call no names, but if you were a member of Alexandria, you knew who he's talking about. So, on Saturdays, a lot of times Fred and I would be selling those papers.

Kerry James Reed [00:49:44] So you mentioned that you and your friend Fred were patrols while you were doing this?

Richard Williams [00:49:50] Patrols?

Kerry James Reed [00:49:51] Yeah. Is that what you said?

Richard Williams [00:49:53] I would remove the patrol. Yeah. Fred was a captain. That was his lieutenant. Okay, well, we used to have for parades. I think they still have them for patrol parades over in Washington. I like to go there every year that march through Constitution Avenue, I think. And it was just a fun thing.

Kerry James Reed [00:50:16] Where are you going to school when you were patrol?

Richard Williams [00:50:24] Parker Grey.

Kerry James Reed [00:50:27] That was for elementary school?

Richard Williams [00:50:29] It was both. You went there until the 5th grade, then we went out to Lyles-Crouch for 6th, and came back up to Parker Grey to the 7th, at that time, through the 11th. But at one time, when you went up there, I think the 8th grade was about did it before me and those people that wanted to [inaudible] education had to catch a bus to go to Washington.

Kerry James Reed [00:51:05] So what were your plans for yourself after you graduated?

Richard Williams [00:51:13] Well I guess basically I wanted to get a job in the government. Get a job in the government, you're able to raise a family. Wound up buying my whole home and being able to send my kids off to school if that's where they wanted to go.

Kerry James Reed [00:51:35] So how did you become the first Black postman in the city of Alexandria?

Richard Williams [00:51:39] Not a postman.

Kerry James Reed [00:51:40] Oh sorry. A clerk.

Richard Williams [00:51:42] If I hadn't been a Black postman, I wouldn't have had no job, because Guy Louis Jackson that lived a block from me, went out there. The white folks talked about him like a dog. Said he was not delivering the mail on time. Just drove the guy away. But they had a Black working for them and didn't know it. He was light skinned guy. His name was Victor. He lived out on the south side. But he was a fair skinned guy with, you know, all the attributes of being a white guy. And he worked but they didn't know it. But when I went in, I went in as a clerk. [Like] what happened to Louis Jackson, I wasn't going to get out there and have blackball me or whatever. And even inside of the post office, I saw and heard a lot of things. As a matter of fact, people are strange because I was usually working, and I was working at the window. I tell you, I lived at 916 First Street, he was on Vernon Street right way cross over there. But he wasn't in the projects. They had a house over there. And, one day when I was working on the window, things got backed up, and they sent more tellers over there to assist me on the window. So, somebody called more tellers. This white person said they don't want no n***** waiting on them. The other teller told him, "Send him back around here. It's two of us right here. You know, and that kind of cut that out. And then I had my time on the phone. I wasn't stupid. If you call me and gotten indigent with me, I got

indigent with you. And as soon as I hung up the phone, I'll call the postmaster and told on you. But what kept me going is when I said I'm going on the window. I said [to myself], "You cannot lose your cool. You can't argue. You just got to take it." And that's what I did. I mean, a guy come over there and call me a whole bunch of names, because I told him his mail wasn't delivered out of the particular station that I ran out of Potomac Station out on Mount Vernon Avenue. His mail zip code was for 22301, but his carriers actually worked out of the main post office, and he cursed me out because I didn't have them delivering mail for him where he wanted it. You know, all kinds of crazy stuff, you know. But I had an assistant superintendent. His name was Earl Darling, and he was real darling. He was 5'3, 5'4, but when he put on his boots and stood back there, he thought he was 6 feet tall, you know. And the worst thing a white person could do was come in there and jump on me. Because in the morning when the carriers went out after that, there's nothing else went on, he sits back there, drink coffee, read magazine. If somebody come up there with a complaint that broke up his break. He stayed on his break for 2 to 3 hours. The first time that we had an accountant there, I came up one penny off and I could tell them where that penny was. So, he knew I knew what I was doing. So, when that person came over there, I would just sit back and smile. I mean, even to old lady came over. He told her, "You got your \$0.05 worth off that letter. If you want to address it correctly, then mail it." You know that's the type of guy he was. He didn't pull no punches.

Kerry James Reed [00:56:19] Yeah.

Richard Williams [00:56:19] You know I worked with a few white guys like that who were you know, understandable. They tried to do things for me and got me through. Basically, I had to make up in my mind that I wasn't going to let them cause me to lose my job because I lost my cool and start arguing.

Kerry James Reed [00:56:39] Absolutely. It's impressive that you were able to not get indigent with any of those people. Being able to keep your cool like that. How long did you work there?

Richard Williams [00:56:53] 32 years. I had to work a couple of extra because my time was ending, and I didn't have the age. So, I had to get the age. I came out in '93. I started in '58. Started at the Washington Post office, and, worked over there until I would get a transfer over here. And that's when I came to Alexandria.

Kerry James Reed [00:57:35] So I want to backtrack a little bit to something you said earlier that I thought was really interesting. What church did you go to?

Richard Williams [00:57:46] Roberts Memorial. It used to be Roberts Chapel. Back in the day but they merged with the United Methodist and became Roberts Memorial United Methodist.

Kerry James Reed [00:57:57] Did you play for the Roberts Memorial Church basketball team when you were a kid?

Richard Williams [00:58:02] No, I didn't. Like I played with another church. A little church down here, Zion in the South Side. I played with them because I figured I could make the team. We ain't have enough. You know.

Kerry James Reed [00:58:24] That's funny. So, you went to Roberts Memorial every Sunday then growing up?

Richard Williams [00:58:30] Yes.

Kerry James Reed [00:58:33] Can you describe some of your favorite memories of Roberts memorial from when you were growing up?

Richard Williams [00:58:40] Well, one thing I remember, they had a lot on the side of the church, and they used to put up some sheets. Made a screen out of them and they would show us pictures out there when we were kids. That was the best thing I liked about this. But we did things in Sunday school. We had little plays and things like that, so it was enjoyable. And I became entrenched there. And one thing that helped me is if I didn't go to church Sunday, I didn't go to a movie. If I went to church, I would go to a movie. But if I didn't go to church I wouldn't go to a movie. [Laughs].

Kerry James Reed [00:59:34] That's funny. How has Roberts Memorial changed over the years?

Richard Williams [00:59:37] Tremendously. Well, we have lost I think it's been about 15 years ago or so. I was at a church meeting, and I asked them a question. I said, "Are we a living church or a dying church?" Because at that time, our youth had waned. I didn't see any youth in there. I was driving the school bus for Alexandria, and at that time, a kid from down in Triangle, Virginia, told me, "Our church had to knocked the back of its church out to make room for the kids that were in the choir," and things like that. We didn't have that at our church. I saw it coming. And when I said that I was somewhere near 70 when I asked him about what was happening. Cause I had driven the church bus for years, and at one time I pick up quite a few kids. Then things tapered off as people moved away. Kids went away to college, things like that. And the only thing I was doing then was picking up a few adults and I didn't see any in any young families and they're raising young kids. So right there I said, we are in trouble here. And when I asked nobody gave me an answer. So here we are. Now we are in a situation now where the Covid had a lot to do with it. But after that a lot of people now don't come to church because they look at TV. And what have gotten a hold of like me. I get up on the Sunday mornings and do what I have to do to get on down there by 11:00 a.m. for service. And it's a way of life with me. Now, if I don't go to church on Sunday, I feel like I lost something. You know, that's where we are. We are surviving, but we are not increasing in membership. It's more of a decrease than an increase.

Kerry James Reed [01:02:06] What do you think losing the Black churches in Alexandria would do to the community?

Richard Williams [01:02:21] This puts us right where we are. We don't have any Black leadership. Really. Different churches, they have families there, and it's just fading away. You know.

Kerry James Reed [01:02:40] Did your church have a gospel choir when you were a child?

Richard Williams [01:02:43] We had a gospel choir, and when you say a gospel choir, I mean a gospel choir. We were basically Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church Gospel Ensemble. But some people from different churches joined. We had maybe 8 or 10 people from other churches

joined. But at one time in full force, we were 40 strong. We went to Atlanta, Georgia one year. We went to New York City one year, and all up and down the southern Maryland coast, and local churches around town here. I'd like to just talk about this incident when we were having an anniversary. So, we invited one of the big boys from Washington. I forget the name of the group, but they were the pride of Washington, DC as far as Black churches. And I was president of the gospel choir for five years. And, what we call a parish house or an adjacent house right across from the church where we just kept our robes and things like that. And when we invited other choirs, they would come over there and get dressed. This particular Sunday this group were the talk of Washington. And then they got over there and saw the little house we got over there with little, small dressing rooms and things you know. [They thought], "Little country people can't do no singing." But I had 2 graduates from Virginia State University. One named Richard Payne, he wound up being a teacher in Alexandria and was a director of our choir, and his friend Jerry Sample, and the two of them were phenomenal working together. So, they had built us quite a choir and quite an itinerary. So, when the old guys over there talked about our choir, you know, they were at my heart. And, you know, I went over and told our rector. I said, "Man, those people talking about we can't sing." That was what they wanted. [inaudible] This team from Washington came over, they sang three-part harmony. When got we sang four-part harmony that. Then all of them look. And after it was over, and they came back to undress, they said, "Those people can sing." [01:05:41] [0.0s]

Kerry James Reed [01:05:45] Did you have a favorite gospel song that you all would sing??

Richard Williams [01:05:47] *I'll Do His Will* and *Lord Help Me Hold Out*. They let me lead those two. I was never no singer really. You don't have to be a singer if you've got a group behind you that can blow. [01:06:10] [0.0s]

Kerry James Reed [01:06:12] So you mentioned that the choir would travel all up and down the East Coast. Why was that?

Richard Williams [01:06:22] Jerry Sample was from over in that area. A lot of churches knew that he was up here assisting with Roberts Memorial Gospel Ensemble contacted him. And then just by word of mouth from different churches. We were talking about Conti. His mother was, everywhere we went, she went. She used to call us the House Wreckers because when we get there to singing that gospel music, people start shouting and carrying on. She called us the House Wreckers. And she loved her, and some Ware sisters, and we had quite a few groups of followers. We didn't have a lot of them follow us to Atlanta, but quite a few went to New York with us. But, yeah, we had quite a group and a lot of young kids coming up at the time said, "We want to sing like the Roberts Memorial Gospel Ensemble." We set the standard back at that time, and that was in the '70s.

Kerry James Reed [01:07:27] Absolutely. Is the gospel ensemble still active?

Richard Williams [01:07:40] No, every good thing, seemingly, the devil gets into it. We had a couple of people in there that wanted to break off, and start that little group in, and one of them was the assistant director. You know he calls that basically because the director and him were good friends. They come up together in school and everything and he got him to get a little group together. And I'm the one who saw what was happening. And I told my pastor, and the pastor called him in and said, "Why would you do this? You've got a good group going. Why would you do

this?" And the one that he wanted to be the top man instead of the Payne. And he said some things that he shouldn't have said in a church setting. So, the Pastor told him, "You don't come back here anymore." And I don't blame him. If he had been on the street, he probably would have got a good knuckling. But that's the way it happened, and we had broken up. But right now, it's [inaudible] Anne, Joyce, Harry. This is about four of that group still functioning. I mean, that sings with the choir that we have there. Not a big choir or anything, but they're still. I got caught up in business type things, which I shouldn't have. Then I kind of strayed away from it because I used to have a church service for the Masons. We'd be at a church celebrating, and then I had to leave a rush and get my gown and come down to maybe say, Gum Spring, where our choir I was singing down there. So, I was doubling up and it got a little busy for me. And then basically you can go as high as 33rd degrees, which is this signifies. That's a 33rd degree Mason. When you get that, you got it. You know you are. You're at the top. I had a white lady, I called her Aunt Camile, and she was hot about Richard being a 33rd degree Mason. She said the man she worked for, he's a white man, said he would give his arm or leg or something to be a 33rd degree Mason. I didn't get it by just saying it. I went a lot of places, I done a lot of things in the name of Masonry. That was my reward. That's all I got out of it. There were no monetary thing. I spent more money than I could have made. You know, because when we were having our conventions and things out of Las Vegas, that that was the Shriners and the Masons. We were all over the state of Virginia. We would go somewhere every year, and you had to come out your pocket with it. And it was understood that, you know, this ain't no cheap situation. This organization we give we, we didn't come to take. We come to give. So, I get caught up in that. And as far as that now, these 33 meetings I hardly make anymore. But the Master Mason, that's 3 degrees, I got 30 more of them, but that three degrees is the basic. When I die, whoever is in that 3rd degree house, they get my body. I don't care how high you go or whatever, you got to go back to your beginning. And that's where those three degrees encompass everything that you are able to accomplish in what we call the higher houses. [01:11:50] [0.0s]

Kerry James Reed [01:11:54] So you've mentioned some community events that the Masons participated in and organized. Do you have any community events that you participated in as a Mason that you're most proud of?

Richard Williams [01:12:19] At one time, not bragging, they called me Mr. Mason in Alexandria. And in going through the degrees, you have to do a lot of reading and a lot of learning and a lot of memorizing. And I was one who could do a full degree from here. And they recognized that. And the Elks, they recognized it also, and many times I've gone places [where they'd say], "Richard Williams man, he's from up there in Alexandria, Virginia." And I got a walk partner at that time, Robert Steele. He lives right across over there at Montebello with the big money. [Laughs]. But that was what I got out of it. The ability for brothers to come to me and shake my hand and tell me I did a good job. Of course, up here in this area at one time me and Stelle covered Lodge from Hill up to [inaudible]. Fort Royal Virginia, we had a lodge that far away. We'd get off work at 4:00. Put on that old Black suit, and we go on. Wives don't see us until 10:00 or 11:00 at night. We went down there to a meeting. We had about 8 or 10 lodges that we covered. We visited those lodges to see that they were running properly, doing the right things, and at the end I got a little pin over there with 50 years on it and memories.

Kerry James Reed [01:14:21] So from your time with the Masons, do you have one favorite memory that sticks out?

Richard Williams [01:14:36] When I was right there at Roberts Memorial [emotionally] [with] my dad. And I was proud for him to see his boy enjoy the things. He never made it up because he wasn't learned. But he's the best thing to happen to me...my father.

Kerry James Reed [01:15:34] Absolutely. Yeah. So, Mr. Williams, we've been talking now for about an hour and 15 minutes. And it's been a blessing to hear you talk today. But before we really go into some more detail about the Black cemeteries, in Alexandria, I was wondering, is there anything else you would like to speak about your time with the Masons, the gospel ensemble growing up, anything like that?

Richard Williams [01:16:10] That gospel ensemble was really a love of mine. And, like I said, this Masonic thing has, I feel made me a better person.

Kerry James Reed [01:16:36] So could you describe to me in as much detail as you can remember, when you were appointed to the Coleman Association, what the cemetery looked like physically, as in as much detail as you can remember.

Richard Williams [01:16:50] It was in real bad shape, you know. At that time, we was having problems with water drainage, and even saw some oil, which I said came from caskets at that time. And we were dealing with that. And over a period of time, we did clear it off. And now we don't have that problem anymore. And I think that if it became active, they could do a lot of things, and particularly with this Virginia state that became...what do they call that? That money that Black cemeteries can get?

Kerry James Reed [01:17:44] Oh the preservation grant.

Richard Williams [01:17:46] See right now if I get on his phone and called a guy named Lionel Sproule, he was a representative. I think he wound up being a senator on Virginia government. I called him sometime back, and he said he and a couple of his colleagues, although he's retired now, had been involved in getting that money for the Black cemeteries. And told me if I needed any help call him up. [Give them his] number or whoever, you know, it was the president or whatever and he'd give him whatever help he could. He was once the Grand Master of Masons in the state of Virginia. Lionel Sproule.

Kerry James Reed [01:18:50] When was the last time you went to Bethel Cemetery?

Richard Williams [01:18:53] About three weeks ago.

Kerry James Reed [01:18:58] What did Bethel look like three weeks ago when you were there?

Richard Williams [01:19:11] Bethel tremendous strides. I was just out there about a week ago, and I see now that a lot of places where he's cleared it off and making it a sight to behold. It used to have divots and all kind of like that. Click has been doing a wonderful job.

Kerry James Reed [01:19:40] You said that tremendous strides have been made at Bethel. When did those strides start to happen?

Richard Williams [01:19:46] Well, I would say, when [Mr. Click's] father retired and moved out to Las Vegas, his son took over. And since then, I've seen things happening where he's making strides and really bringing it up to par.

Kerry James Reed [01:20:17] And then you mentioned to me earlier when we first began speaking today, that you remember seeing Douglass as a young man. Was that the first time you saw Douglass?

Richard Williams [01:20:26] Yes. I had been out there to a funeral. And I just was curious to see these headstones over there. And when I walked over there and I saw names I identified as William Black Pope, you know, I didn't know exactly who it was. So that's when I started noticing it. And I was going to go over there from time to time and just looked around. And you know, I was probably looking at his grandfather's or whatever and didn't even know it. And not too long ago when we had some kids go down there and put up flags at every Black soldier buried down there and that national cemetery.

Kerry James Reed [01:21:32] So when you first saw Douglass what was your impression of it?

Richard Williams [01:21:38] I was wondering why it was like it was. I mean, you know.

Kerry James Reed [01:21:50] So you mentioned that Coleman had water problems before and things like that. What was the physical state of Douglass when you saw it for the first time? Could you describe in as much detail as you can?

Richard Williams [01:22:02] It was just run down. So small, you know? I didn't even go into who owned it or whatever. But I just looked at it, but I go over there and like I said I wondered about it.

Kerry James Reed [01:22:24] So a lot of the people that I've talked to who are elders in the Black community in Alexandria remember Douglass being a lot bigger when they first saw it.

Richard Williams [01:22:34] Seemed to me it was. Yeah.

Kerry James Reed [01:22:36] So when you also go down there now, it doesn't seem to be the same size.

Richard Williams [01:22:40] Nope.

Kerry James Reed [01:22:40] Interesting. Do you remember what the dimensions of Douglass were when you were a young man?

Richard Williams [01:22:51] I wouldn't venture to tell you, but I know it was more to what I see now.

Kerry James Reed [01:23:06] So when did Mr. Mike Johnson first tell you about Douglass Cemetery and what was going on?

Richard Williams [01:23:12] That was [inaudible] knowing that I was involved down there. He's some kind of way talked to me about what he was doing here, "Blah blah blah." That's how they kicked it off. [01:23:37] [0.0s]

Kerry James Reed [01:23:38] When you joined the descendants advisory group what did you think about it? Did you think you'd be similar to what happened with Coleman?

Richard Williams [01:24:00] Well, that's like I said, but it was underwater there, and all that. It reminded me of when I was there on Coleman [inaudible] and saw that water running down from the top part of the cemetery down. I must say that now, Mr. Aaron Banks, since he, came in start giving me a helping hand, things have really changed. He is the kind of guy if he sees something need to be done, he'll go ahead and do it.

[01:24:38] Absolutely.

Richard Williams [01:24:39] He says he's a workaholic. He is a tremendous guy to have on your team. To head your team, or whatever, you know.

Kerry James Reed [01:24:53] So you've been working on the Coleman Cemetery for a very long time, and the work on Douglass has only started very recently. What are your hopes for Black cemeteries in general in the city moving forward?

Richard Williams [01:25:13] Just like I said, turned out to be [an] American landmark.

Kerry James Reed [01:25:18] Have you looked into trying to get it registered as a historic site with Virginia with the federal government or anything like that?

Richard Williams [01:25:27] I haven't actually done it myself, but I was trying to pass that to Ms. Barbara, and the Nelsons, hopefully. It was one guy that came down. I had gone to Alfred Street Baptist Church to get some assistance. And they sent this guy and I think was Sesamens. He came there with a big build up and find out that he wasn't nothing to her. I think they wound up firing him. He was a property manager I think at that time. And he came there supposedly was going to be able to get the land marked off, blah blah blah, this, that, and another. We spent some money on that and the next thing I know he was gone.

Kerry James Reed [01:26:23] So on your work with Coleman has the city ever assisted the Coleman Association in any way?

Richard Williams [01:26:35] I wouldn't say, really other than getting informed. But as of late, people just don't call you up and ask you about a question. [Inaudible]. "Can you tell me where it is?" "No, I can't." It was unfortunate that along the way when we had these agents that the history of people being buried there and things, that one agency, somebody stole it out of the back of his car.

Kerry James Reed [01:27:21] In your mind, what is the importance of remembering the history of the people who are buried at Douglass, at Coleman, at Bethel? What do you think that forgetting about them does to the community?

Richard Williams [01:27:37] It's a bad situation. For young folks they have to come along and see what's happened. Well, some people back there and when they got together and put money together and did what it needed to get a cemetery down there and let it go to where it is at the present. It's down, but it ain't out. If we can just get a few good people, there. So, we're going to lift it up. We're going to bring it back up. Yeah.

Kerry James Reed [01:28:14] Absolutely. So, part of the Douglass initiative has been city employees like myself and the archeologists working with the advisory group to make sure that this travesty that that happened to Douglass doesn't happen again. How do you feel now that the city is getting involved in the preservation of Black cemeteries?

Richard Williams [01:28:42] I'm happy. I'm hopeful that at one point it's going to take off and people are going to realize that you can be proud of yourself to look back with your granddaddy or grandparents did when they would come along to help to push us who are always down at the back of the bus. In any situation with the last hide, first five, they said things like that. The things that we have and can overcome. And I'm hopeful that it happens.

Kerry James Reed [01:29:26] Absolutely. That was exceedingly well put. Yeah, I mean, Mr. Williams, we can keep talking forever. You're an absolute wealth of information. But I do have a few more questions about Douglass we before we wrap everything up. So, the first time you saw Douglass was when you were a young man, correct? And you mentioned that later on you went and looked at it and noticed that the graves of those people were Black. Can you describe what it felt to realize that there was a Black cemetery in Alexandria that you weren't aware of?

Richard Williams [01:30:19] I was appalled at that thought that it hadn't been talked about, brought about, and done something about it. From the time I first, you know, saw it. I didn't get, you know, I put this on myself, I said you can't do everything, you know, so I'm gonna try to work out here, you know, maybe this will come to pass. That happened that we did, and Michael decided that he would step in there and do what he can to do to get this situation healed.

Kerry James Reed [01:31:15] This is more in line with your own personal way of remembering the dead, did your family have any special rituals or any special practices surrounding funerals growing up?

Richard Williams [01:31:30] No. If a person we know, we always tried to pay homage to the family. And if it was anything we could do to help them do that, but this [inaudible] is just the way of life. You know, you did what you could, and then you just said, "Well there it is."

Kerry James Reed [01:31:59] What has it been like to learn about Douglass Cemetery?

Richard Williams [01:32:07] It's sort of an awakening, in fact, that in this town, the things that went on and something that is still going on did happen, and certain things were done to rectify, to justify. Yeah.

Kerry James Reed [01:32:36] Now that the city is taking more of an interest in Black history that happened in Alexandria, what are your hopes for how the city treats Black history moving forward?

Richard Williams [01:32:56] I'm hoping that somewhere along the line there's going to rise up a nucleus of young Black folk hearing where it's from the old Black folk, and time to do something that's going to last. You know when I'm gone. When you're gone, when maybe all of us sitting here are gone, that you can look back and say that one day you know, a group of people took in their mind to make things better for all.

Kerry James Reed [01:33:39] Absolutely. It was beautifully put. and then lastly Mr. Williams, if you could hold on to one memory forever, what would it be?

Richard Williams [01:34:11] I've had so many things happen. Right off my top of my head. I can't say anything about one thing that's going to just linger in my memory. But something that would impact people in this city and when it's written about, it will touch other people. They could say that some people came along and wanted to do what was right, didn't have the ability, and sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't. But you could tell that they had a heart that wanted the best for all, you know.

Kerry James Reed [01:35:19] Absolutely.

Richard Williams [01:35:20] I just think about, my friend Booker T Wilkins, the barber that's been arrested for second degree murder. And he was telling me about when he first came here. That was about the same time that I met him. And he was telling me about how he had told his son that his grandfather, his father, was a farmer. He said he told his son, "I'm a barber. You got to be a doctor." The boy is a doctor now. And every family or something, you would have somebody that's going to make something happen that will not only affect them personally, will affect the whole. And a Booker T., when he got that shop down there. What's his name or their own that? He's got a son. I knew the grandfather, the father and the son. And now, grandson. They are Greeks. They lived out on Russell Road. But Booker T rented that building some 50 years ago. And his landlord wrote a letter for him, saying how he had bought this barber shop at the era of a town where it was a little rough, and things weren't going just right. And it has existed for 50 years. And still, if it hadn't been for the unfortunate thing that happened in life, that place is still standing. And he said he told the owner when he rented it, he said, what did he want it to be? As if he wanted to have a business that was very lucrative, you know, big money and things. He said he wanted his shop to be for all people. And that's why he named it The All-American Barbershop. He said he didn't care whether you Black, white, Brown, yellow, or what. If you need your hair cut, he wanted to serve you? So, this is shows you that things are happening, and I'm really impressed by that young man, because he came here from North Carolina and has become a millionaire. And he said that wasn't his desire. He said his desire was to have a family, build a life that he could take care of, you know. He said, the thing about being a millionaire was never in his mind. He just wanted to be able to support his family. I think there was a lot of people, but if the situation doesn't present itself, it just doesn't happen.
[01:39:07] [0.0s]

Kerry James Reed [01:39:09] Well thank you so much Mr. Williams. It's been an absolute blessing to talk to you today. I really appreciate it.

Richard Williams [01:39:13] It's been my pleasure.

Kerry James Reed [01:39:15] Thank you.