



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



Oral History Interview

with

Eric Napper

Interviewer: Francesco De Salvatore

Narrator: Eric Napper

Location of Interview:

Eric Napper's Home - 406 North Alfred Street, Alexandria, Virginia

Date of Interview: *May 10, 2023*

Transcriber: *Michele Camley, PhD*

Summary:

Eric Napper is a long-time resident of Alexandria, Virginia. He was born in the Uptown neighborhood of the City. Eric reflects on his childhood and adult life in Alexandria. He specifically reflects on African American life in Uptown, while he was growing up as a child. Additionally, he describes the changes he has seen in the neighborhood and the City as a whole.

Notes:

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General	Segregation; Integration; Police Encounters; Childhood; African American life;
People	Eric Napper; Charlene Napper
Places	Alexandria, VA; Uptown

Eric Napper [00:00:06] Hi, my name is Eric Napper. I'm 64 years old. My date of birth is June 19th, 1958, which means I'll be 65 in a month, thank God. Hopefully, I'll make it. Today is May 10th, 2023. My address is 406 North Alfred Street, Alexandria, Virginia.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:27] Okay. My name is Francesco De Salvatore. It's May 10th, 2023, and we're at Eric Napper's home on Alfred Street. So, Eric, where do we start with your life?

Eric Napper [00:00:47] Right here. Right here. The story is that my Mom went into labor and it was on a day where, at the time, the Alexandra Hospital only had one day for black people to come and receive services. And it [the day my Mom went into labor] wasn't the day. But my Mom had already been in labor for a while and there was a doctor there who knew my Mom, and my family, and whatever. He happened to be coming down the hallway and noticed that my Mom was in a lot of pain. And (inaudible) well, she's in labor and the lady told her that it wasn't our day. And he [the doctor] was like, "Oh, no, no, no, she needs to go right now." Because, you know, impromptu seeing her and whatever and knowing her as far as her pregnancy was going, he [the doctor] was like, "No, no." Because evidently, I think I was already a little bit behind. And so he made arrangements for her to be seen on that day, thank God, because what he [the doctor] found out was that I was breached and the umbilical cord was around my neck. And so they did it a Ceasarian and everything. And that's how I basically made it, you know what I mean? And for for one thing, they said that it was a possibility that one of us could have not made it. And she chose to go ahead on and make sure that I was born. So, you know, even to this day, that's why I would do anything, you know, because it wasn't for my mom I wouldn't be here, you know. And so my earliest memories, though, here, was probably for me, I want to say my earliest memory was, I had a hobbyhorse, I had a hobbyhorse.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:53] What's a hobbyhorse?

Eric Napper [00:02:54] One of those little it's almost like a whatch'ya call, like the little swing thing that they have now. You know, like you put the baby in and you swing. Okay, now, I don't remember none of that, but this is, I'm a toddler and I had this horse and my grandfather, and we had a TV by then, also. We were one. From what I understand, we were one of the first people in the neighborhood to have a TV. And my grandfather liked westerns and so I would watch the westerns. I've got a picture somewhere I got to find. I know I have a picture of it [the hobbyhorse] because. And it was, you get on it and it rocks, you know? It just rocks, it was on springs, it was off the floor, I don't know how to call it. Like a carriage like without

wheels and you could rock it. And I had a full cowboy outfit with the guns and everything, you know. And they say, I don't really remember a lot of that, but I do remember the hobbyhorse. And I remember one of the first times that my grandfather actually got mad with me because I had taken one of the guns and I was hitting it. We have a fireplace that's sealed. And I would bang on it and I started chipping the brick out of it, you know, I mean, that kind of thing. That's probably one of my earliest, as you say, that's one of my earliest memories of my horse. And they say, I couldn't say my name, but I tried to call him Napper, and that was his name. His name was Napper. And all they had to do if they wanted to, to quiet me down, just let me get on Napper. And I would eventually rock myself and go back to sleep and go to sleep. That's my earliest memories that I that I can really think of.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:04:55] So you would call the horse Napper?

Eric Napper [00:04:56] The horse's name was Napper. That was his name.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:04:59] What did the horse look like? Can you describe it?

Eric Napper [00:05:01] Like one of the miniature version of one of the horses on the carousel. One of those, you know, it had to reigns and stuff and and it had everything-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:12] What color was it?

Eric Napper [00:05:15] I remember it was brown. It was tan with the brown, I guess markings, you know, with the markings. And they had a red mane, but it wasn't real. You know, it was ceramic. I guess that's what you would call it, you know, plastic or whatever but the mane was red. That's all I remember as far as his color, he was white and he had brown on his neck and he had a red mane. The mane and the tail was red. And I remember that. I remember that.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:52] And it was in this house?

Eric Napper [00:05:53] Yeah. It used to sit when you came in the house, where the TV is, where my mom's TV is. It's that red, the mantel. And then you got, it's been sealed in, that was a fireplace but they have sealed it in and that's where Napper used to sit. Right there. Yeah, he used to sit right there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:06:15] Tell us about this house a little bit more like-

Eric Napper [00:06:17] You know what you see now is kind of basically the way it's always been is just some furniture has changed, you know. Now, actually, the front room, the middle room was basically like a playroom, because at that time up until I was about maybe 9, 10, 11, somewhere around in there, this is what they considered the extended family household. My mom, my dad, some of the few things I remember about my dad as a child, my mom and my dad, we stayed in the room like that's right above us. And then, there's this small bedroom. It's myself, my mom, my two brothers. They were eight or nine years older than I am, but we stayed in that room. In the middle room, which is probably the second biggest room, was my Uncle Alvin and and my aunt Jeanette, three girls, Vicki, Donna, and Crystal. And in the the master bedroom was my grandparents. And in the front room where my mom would stay, that was my Uncle Donald, no my Uncle John and Karen. But I don't remember Rhonda being in there. But I know Karen was in there. And then my Uncle Donald and his wife, Jean, she might have been just pregnant. I think they stayed in the basement, which had just been kind of finished, I think. That was my family, you know what I mean? We all lived right here, you know, And I do remember that. And I remember being just, I could just do what I wanted, you know? And everybody looked out for me, you know what I mean? Everybody looked out for me, especially my brother Lenny, and I consider my sister Donna. I always remember Donna. Donna would hold me a lot, you know what I mean? If everything happened, whatever. Donna would always be the one come to rescue. YWe had a, ou know what I mean? It was fun. The parents worked. We had a my great grandmother lived around on Cameron Street at the time. She would come while my grandparents and my mom worked and whatever. And that was the play area because you notice there's a front room and there are two doors. So that was like the tag and we got two staircases so you could play tag and hide-and-go-seek, all that kind of stuff and whatever it was. And plus back then, you know, a lot of times it was like, "y'all go outside," you know what I mean? So we played in the backyard a lot, you know what I mean, it looked like that backyard was like humongous when we were little, you know what I mean? And then we could play up and down the alleyway. There's Third Baptist Church behind the house. They had a big yard, which is the parking lot, and now they have a daycare center. All that was open space. You know, we could play there and whatever. So that's my real early childhood and then as I got older I mean, like I say, nothing in this house has actually really changed but where the TV is now everything was reversed. The TV was in the corner because, you know, it wasn't big. It was in a corner where that second doorway is where, you know, where I go through back and forth to check on my mom. That door and the TV sat in that corner. And then my grandfather, he sat where the couch is. His chair, he had his own chair. And then we had a couch. Where the love seat is that was a couch right

there. And we had a- it was just almost like a box like. She called it a table. You know, it had a lamp on it. We had a lamp. It was like a hula dancer, but it was a lamp, you know, And you could touch it and it would shake. And, you know, we had one of those, you know, that we used to play with that a lot. Donna broke it, it gotta beat. But- [laughs] yeah, and stuff like that I remember.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:31] What does the outside of the house look like?

Eric Napper [00:11:36] Well, it wasn't bricked in patio. The patio didn't have a brick patio at the time and a little store, you know, was there. It was just like grass. It was mainly-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:47] Like, what would it look like for the front? Like when you looked at it?

Eric Napper [00:11:50] What you see is, this is it? I tell you what, because right now-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:54] What does it look like though, for those who've never seen it?

Eric Napper [00:11:59] It was like a multi panel brick front which actually went all the way around. But it wasn't brick. It's not brick. But when you look at it, it looks like brick. Like, for instance, pavers. It look more like pavers, but they were staggered. You know, where they weren't uniform or whatever. It almost looked like someone just built almost like was building a fort. Like when you're a kid, you're trying to build a fort. It looked like that. The nice awning. It always had a nice awning over the top of it. And you know, bay window. Well, I don't really want to call it a bay window because it was three separate panels, but they were almost, you made it form like a hexagon like so with three in front. It was. And we had white windows. White, white windows. And you could tell all of the windows were different. You know, they were not the same size. It wasn't uniform as far as the look. But it was a nice place, you know. All the houses on the streets were nice, man. You know, It was really nice neighborhood. And we had cement. No brick. No brick was out there. Just cement. They have brick out there now. I don't know why they ended up doing the brick thing. But, you know, it was all straight cement all the way up and down.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:32] What was your favorite aspect of the house growing up? Like a favorite room or favorite wall-

Eric Napper [00:13:39] The basement. The basement was fun because it wasn't totally finished even though my uncle and then with Danny because they were the first ones to really move out because by him going in military or whatever, he got a chance to to move out first. And when they moved out, man, we could skate, you know. And just played in there or whatever. We had, where we use oil for heating now, we had a coal shoot. It was a coal. They would bring coal because in that room, behind you, there was still a wood stove. There was a wood stove. And what they would do was they would start the fire but they would throw a couple of coals in there, because the coals would last. And then all they had to do was just keep adding wood to it, you know what I mean, sitting right in front of what I call the mantelpiece right there, you know. But the basement, was the most fun place. Yeah. Yeah. It was the most fun place in our house.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:14:43] Tell us the story of how they ended up in this house? Where did they come from?

Eric Napper [00:14:49] Well, my grandfather's family was originally from down from, you know, far as I can remember, they were from the 200 block of Pine Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:03] And your grandfather's family, what was the last name?

Eric Napper [00:15:07] Was Taylor which is was basically when you talk to me, because of the way my history goes, when you say you're my family, my last name is Napper. But for all the (inaudible), all I'm not sure the word to use when you say my family, I'm really talking about Taylors. And my mom and my dad split. I was like maybe five. And I very rarely saw him. I only knew a couple of his well, I knew some of his sisters and brothers, but that was like, I knew who they were. You know what I mean? For a long time until I got to be old and they started to like, travel and start meet some of my other cousins and stuff like that. So when I say my family, the Taylors is who I'm really talking about, you know. But my grandmother's family who also had a surname of Knapper, but it was spelt with a "k," "Knapper." And they were from what they consider Cross Canal. And I remember a lot about that over there, too, you know. And right there on Madison, Montgomery and Fairfax. And then you had First Street. My great, great grandmother lived on First Street, and I actually remember her. You know, I'm not talking about just-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:44] What was her name?

Eric Napper [00:16:45] Her name. We called her "Mother Dear," but her name was Emma Washington Thomas. And we called her "Mother Dear." And everybody called her "Mother Dear." You know, I actually remember her. And that's another fun one too cause we would go out there and we could help clean up the yard or do some work, stuff like that. Because again, like I said, my mom and him worked. You know, so we had, like I say, my great grandmother around here on Cameron. And then we had my great, great grandmother who was still at Cross Canal at the time, and we would go out there man, and we would do work for her. She'd always have you work and whatever. I never knew her husband or anything. He was dead before I can remember anything about him. I don't know if my brothers might remember. But that I'm not sure. But she had a nice house, man. And actually the property is still there. Now, that's not the original property of her mother, because that was on Madison and Fairfax, but her place was on First Street and you had to walk up a little hill to get to her house. They had some like step like things, but it was, you know, it was basically a hill and she had a side yard, which kind of went downhill. It was level, but it went off- it tinkered off downhill. And I remember that they, that they had it still out there, We didn't use it, but she had an outhouse. She had an outhouse in the back and she had a nice garden. And she did a lot of gardening but she had a nice garden and stuff. And so we would go out there and help clean up stuff like that and I don't care how much work you did. But in the end of the day, we knew we were going to get one cookie, just one. I don't care how much you'd work, you just got one cookie. But for us, it was like humongous. You know. She would give us one cookie. And eventually, when she got too old to be by herself, she moved in with us, too, you know. But by then, you know, a lot of the- I call them my sisters, but my cousins, they had moved off and, you know, started to have their own places of residence, you know. So I'm talking now. I'm talking about. 6, 7 years old. You know what I mean? So that was fun. It was fun out there, too, because they had a lot of field, a lot of field. You could go down by the water. The water, it wasn't built up like it is now. I was just field and it was mucky, you know. It was like swamp land, like almost it was like swamp land. And I'm talking about at the foot of First and Second Street and then you go to Bashford Lane. And that's where the electrical plant, what used to be coal. And the trains would come up, the train tracks come up and stuff like still some boats would come down that way. You know what I mean? When I was, when I was young. Oh, and also [00:19:55] **Ficklin School** [0.0s] was there but we couldn't go play over on Ficklin School. You didn't. You didn't go over there. You didn't go over there. You know, you didn't, you just didn't go. That's just what you do. Don't go to the school. Don't go to the school please. Don't go over there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:20:11] Why?

Eric Napper [00:20:12] It was segregated. It was still segregated at the time. And I think that was right around the time when they really was getting ready to do the integration thing. And I think only a couple of kids, the Lomax kids and a couple of the kids went in for the first time. The Huntley kids, they went in for the first time. And I was really young when that happened, but still even at, like I said, 6 or 7. you just didn't go over there. You just didn't go, you know, even though they had like a little playground and stuff like that, whatever, the bathroom. you just didn't go with you, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:20:49] So explain how this house came- Did they buy this house?

Eric Napper [00:20:54] Yeah. We were one of the few at that time, was one of the few people who was actually buying houses in this area, which was called Uptown. You know, our neighbors next door, the Lees, they they were able to buy their house. But on the two doors down, from what I'm told, and from what I'm getting straight sources from my grandfather. My grandfather was involved in what they call numbers, the illegal numbers game. And there was a gentleman who lived in that house. who was an influential white man in this town, and he and a couple of others. Like I said, I'm not going to get into names because I don't want to be sued for libel and all that, whatever you want to call it. You know what I mean. But anyway, what was known for us, we knew who they were, and they were very influential people in the city. And my grandfather being as light as he was, because if he chose to, he could have passed for a white man. But he never did that, you know. But he could have. And by him being what they call the "backer." Most of the money came here at the end of the day after the illegal numbers were done for the day. And he could take the numbers out on the west end of town without being questioned. You know to the person that he had to deliver to money, the money to and for doing that for X amount of years, you know, because up until the lotto came out, you know, from 10:00 to 2:00 you didn't breath in here you know, because he was in the money, in the morning he was taking numbers, in the evening, he was paying out and then counting money and then get everything together and and take it to the west end, as you know. So for doing that for all those years or whatever, there was a gentleman who lived here. Now, I'm not sure if he was involved in that, but he was also an influential white man in this city.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:23:16] He lived in this house?

Eric Napper [00:23:16] In this house. When he was moving out, they got together. And I guess you want to call it a reward or whatever. They allowed him to purchase

this house. And and back in those days, whenever a black person was going to try to purchase a house, you had to check off that you were a Negro. And so my grandfather didn't have to do that, you know. But at the same time, when he went, he looked like he was white, you know what I mean. And so my grandmother couldn't go because she's real dark, you know, she couldn't go. So it was almost like this was a single white man buying this house. And so he got it, you know, the loans and all of that kind of stuff. All of them helped him to do what he needed to do to get his house. And so once he secured the house or whatever, and we lived here from, he said it was about 15 years later, that they went in. And by that time, like 15 years later, now it's starting to ease slightly. So this town was starting to become black. And so was no issues anymore. So they went down and they checked off the Negro. You know, And that's how we got this house.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:24:40] So when do they buy this house?

Eric Napper [00:24:42] We've been here 75 years, so, I mean, do the math. You know, you do the math here. We've been here for 75 years, you know, which is remarkable because when people see me now because it's changing back, you know we're the last black owned family on this block. There is one up next block. There's two in the block where the Black History Museum is and anything South I think there's only one that I have noticed. And when I was little that went all the way down to Cameron Street. So anything from Camerson Street, north was black. Yeah. You know.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:25:33] So it was 75 years ago. So that 1948 sound right? About 1948?

Eric Napper [00:25:41] Uh, if that's the math.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:25:42] Yeah

Eric Napper [00:25:43] Yeah, if that's the math. That's the math. Yeah, that's the math. Yeah. Because thats right.because I have a picture of my mom and my oldest brother on a blanket in the yard, and he was an infant, so that's about right. Because they had just moved from the project.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:02] This is your mom?

Eric Napper [00:26:03] My mom.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:04] Yeah. So your mom moved from which project?

Eric Napper [00:26:07] We called it the Old Projects. I'm not sure what the specific. There's only two seconds left up here. On what's that, Madison Street. They they lived at 1005 Madison Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:23] At the corner of Patrick and Madison?-

Eric Napper [00:26:24] North Patrick and Madison. Right. Then that was after they had moved from, they originally were Cross Canal. Then they set up trailer park. Up or right around that Monroe Street Bridge area up that way. And then they moved to the project.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:47] Samuel Madden Sound familiar? Does that name sound familiar?

Eric Napper [00:26:51] What's that?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:52] The Samuel Madden buildings?

Eric Napper [00:26:55] That sounds familiar. Yeah, that sounds familiar. Like we just called it the Old Projects-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:01] Madison.was there.

Eric Napper [00:27:02] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And then they moved here.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:07] So you kind of gave us a rundown of where people slept, But really quick, so who all moved into the house?

Eric Napper [00:27:13] Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:14] Give me a rundown.

Eric Napper [00:27:14] Okay. It was my grandparents, my mom and her three brothers.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:23] Okay.

Eric Napper [00:27:24] That's who originally moved in. You know, I think my mom was like-

Eric Napper [00:27:28] Can you give all their names?

Eric Napper [00:27:30] Yeah, my grandfather was Charles Taylor. My grandmother was Dorothy Taylor. And then you had my oldest uncle, Donald Taylor. My mom, Sharlene Taylor. My uncle Charles Alvin Taylor. we call him Alvin, but Alvin Taylor. And then the youngest was John Taylor. You know it is. And that's another thing that I wouldn't mind pointing out. One of the few things that we kept for years, which we kind of like did away with on our own. But it was a thing where in the African family structure, depending on your grandparents and fathers, whatever, names get passed down and certain names get passed down in a way that you know that that relates to this family so when you say Donald Lee Taylor, my grandfather's, my grandmother had an elder whose name was Lee. Okay, So that name jumped in there. Then you have Charles Alvin. Charles is his father's name. Then you have John Leonard. My grandfather's middle name is Leonard, but my mom, my grandmother had an uncle whose name was John. So you pass those names down and if you look at history a lot, you'll see that a lot of people named follow. And usually it depends on if you the oldest child, you may have your own name. You know, if you're a second child, you might be junior. You know what I mean or whatever. You know, after the father, you know. And so it passes down then you take a uncle's name, whatever. Somebody close. If you got sold off and you came back and if you can remember your names, you could go to a plantation, say, my name is so-and-so, so-and-so. And I'm the oldest child. I'm the oldest son. Well, I'm the old- they would go "Ohh it's him." You know what I mean? And that's how a lot of people got reconnected after slavery was because of that system. You know, so.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:02] Yeah, yeah. Um, Can you describe, so maybe describe the neighborhood of Uptown and specifically this street. Like, let's start with Alfred Street.

Eric Napper [00:30:15] Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:15] North Alfred Street here.

Eric Napper [00:30:17] Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:18] For those who have never seen it, you know? You were born- when where you born?

Eric Napper [00:30:24] I was born in '58.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:26] Yeah. So for those who like were not around in the '60s, can you describe what this neighborhood, what were your memories as a child of this neighborhood?

Eric Napper [00:30:35] Well, like I say, we always had the churches. We had Third Baptist behind us. We had [00:30:42] Meade [0.0s] Episcopal, which is in the 300 block. And then across the street from that was the parking lot that's there, that's still there. And then actually directly across the street from us a little bit to the right, there was a smaller parking lot. Now, those are the three. There are three big houses on that property right now. They weren't there. The house behind it was there. And then there's a building which is a office building. Now that was Duncan Transfer and Storage. That was Duncan's dad. And they had trucks and they actually had like for you buy a storage unit now you know, they had like boxes, these big boxes that they would keep people's stuff in and they would be stacked on top almost like at a docking area. You know, they had a box, but they were wood, you know and people kept stuff there and directly across the street there are two townhouses, but that was just one house. That was just one house that belonged to from my recollect was to the Lockett family. You know, they lived across the street. The building that's also like a little office building right there, that was a cleaners. That was the cleaners we had that was a smaller cleaners, but we had a big cleaners up on the North East corner of Alfred and on Orinoco Street, which was called Polly Prim. That took up basically half of the block. And that's all townhouses and stuff now. They had a drive in you could drive in and drop your clothes off. We had a lady that used to sit in the booth. Her name was Miss Caledonia, and we used to tease her all the time, you know, the old song "Caledonia what make your _____" and she would chase us man and stuff and she had an umbrella. She always come. She would beat you with the umbrella and stuff like that, you know. And then we had, like I say, we had the Lees next door, we had the Millers, and then I forget the family, but where the apartments are there, that was a little cottage on all that property where that apartment building is. That was a cottage right there. And they had a beautiful yard and they had those, maybe some of those flowers might be still some of the flowers, the roses. And it was beautiful, man. It was a little small cottage. Then the next house was Jarrett's, the next house was the Williams. And then the next house. They built two new properties in between that and the next house. And that was our cousin Adeline. And we called aunt, you know, but they were they were my grandmother's cousins, Adeline and Theola. They lived on that corner. And then there was nothing on that far corner. Across from, on the south, I'm sorry, probably was on the

northwest side, on the southeastern side was Doc Store. He was a pharmacist. He had a pharmaceutical store right there. And then coming back down this way, it was a Miss Dorothea Campbell. Then in between that, it was like it was a house, but it was always more or less more of a office like type thing. I don't know if it was a lawyer. Something might have been in there. And then next to them it was like an apartment building. A couple of people moved in and out and another family named Campbell, Morris Campbell, they lived upstairs. Then for a while the Scales family moved in. They were from up Seminary. They moved in there, and then next to them was Gerald and his family, they live in that house. Then you had the Summer's house, which is still there. That was the one that just previously I'm not sure if they've sold it, but Ms. Summer, she died. Man, she was a brilliant lady, man. She was brilliant. It was her dear mother, her sister, Marian, and Barbara. They say they had a brother, but I never knew their brother. Then you had the building. Like I said, it was the office building and then the Lucketts. And then when you go next door to us, that was, next door to us was what we call the Y because it was the YWCA for black women. So that's attached to us. Yeah, that's been several different things, but back then it was the Y when I was really little, and then for a while it was Jehovah Witness of Kingdom Hall. For a while. And then later on some, I think three airline pilots bought it and turned it back into a residential home. Now, on the corner was where Mr. Tucker's office was the same Tucker family that did the sit in up at the library, that house on the corner that was the Tucker's office. But he had a apartment on top of it where the Willins lived, the family last name was Willins, and they lived at the dead end. And my mom said that Mr. Fun and his wife used to live Mr. Charlie Fun and his wife lived there before, but I don't remember them actually living there. I remember the Willins living there, you know, And then you go next to the if you saw a little segmented they had with the girl, her husband Marvin being there that the CBS did with the family reunion thing we had down there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:37:05] Oh yeah.

Eric Napper [00:37:05] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:37:07] Can you explain that?

Eric Napper [00:37:07] Right. Okay. Where were the Beanda. There was a couple of families down there. It was another set of Taylors next door to me. It was a different set of Taylors lived next door to me. And then you have Marvin Beanda and his family. And there was a couple of white families that still lived near the two houses. And then on the corner, you had the Jackson family across the street, only they put another house in the middle there. There were, there was a white lady there. And in

the other two houses, it was always somebody moving around them houses. Nobody never really, like stayed in those houses for any length of time. But the house attached to the next to the parking lot, there was a white lady there. She was mean, man. She was mean. Because we would play baseball in that parking lot. And if the ball went over, she had a dog, one of those mean dogs and she wouldn't give you your ball back and that kind of stuff, you know what I mean. So, you know, so you know. Yeah. And now that was that was my neighborhood. And he had on Columbia Street. You had the whole Columbus Street- going towards Columbus Street that was all black. And again, those families kind of bounced in and out, you know, So the houses, the names that I'm naming, those are people who were basically stable behind us next to Third Baptist was the Charities. Then you had, oh boy, Miss Margaret, Miss Janie. Can't think of their last name. Wish mom was here, she could tell me their last name. And then one of the schoolteachers. Miss Janie was one of the first crossing guards, black crossing guards, you know. Yeah, but Miss Margaret is still living, man. She's like 107 or something like that. She's still living, you know, She was the mother and then she had three daughters. And Miss Claiborne was one of them. She was one of the teachers at Charles Houston, where I went to Elementary School. You go down, you had the Decks, the family last name Deck, and you had the Prices on the corner. You know, they are kin to me on my father's side, you know. No I'm sorry, on my grandfather's side, you know, they're kin to me on my grandfather's side. And then you had a couple of families, like all that from, that whole street was black. It was black. And all the way up until you got to where Charles Houston is on the west side of Henry Street. There was one white family and that was the only his name was Ronnie Weinberger. I don't know whatever happened to Ronnie Weinberger, but I wish I could find him because he was one of my buddies, you know. He was one of the only white kids that I ever went to school with before I got to middle school, you know. And he had a sister. And I don't remember any other white kids going to Charles Houston. I just really don't remember any, you know, So that was the neighborhood coming up, man, as far as where I could rent Red Box deals on Columbus Street, we had Miss Eleanor Winfrey, the Winfrey family. They were also from Cross Canal. Miss Eleanor, my grandmother for. Miss Eleanor ended up being 100, but my grandmother missed being 100 by three months. And they, in their entire life, they were best friends in their entire life. They never live more than three blocks apart from each other, you know. So that's that's a remarkable I got a couple of pictures of them in there. And Miss Eleanor, she was just like a grandmother to us, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:13] Well, so let get into your schooling.

Eric Napper [00:41:15] Okay

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:16] So, like, where did you. So walk us through, like-

Eric Napper [00:41:21] I went to kindergarten right up here in a 500 block of Russell Temple, by Russell Temple and Miss Nelson was my kindergarten teacher. It was Miss Nelson and Miss Christine. I can't remember Miss Christine's name. She was like the assistant. So I went to kindergarten there, and that was fun, you know, That was fun. And then then I went to Charles Houston, which is the. They celebrate. No, they recognize Parker-Gray as the school down, when you say Parker- Gray's school district, they're really referring to the one that was down on from when they show you know Parker-Gray was on Madison between West and Fayette. But the original Parker-Gray was where Charles Houston Rec Center is. Okay. And they turn the original Parker-Gray into Charles Houston Elementary when they built the new building that they recognize. So the original Parker-Grey was on the site where the Charles Houston Rec Center is and it is and again for me, my point of view. They don't tell the truth when it comes to history. You know, and I heard something like a while ago, and it is true. History is "his-story." Whoever's in control, that's the story you get. You see what I'm saying? And so I'm thankful that you're doing this, man. So, you know. You know, because I'm one of those people. I wouldn't care if they didn't tear down that one memorial. I wouldn't care if they changed any street names. Just tell the truth. That's all. You know, that's all. Just tell the truth. You know, And so when it comes to the gentrification, I don't call it gentrification. I call it "Erasing", because what they're doing, they're erasing anything, basically as much positive things that they can do to erase positivity of our people, they're going to do that. And if they can cover up any negativity that's on their part, they're going to do that. And that's what they're doing with the gentrification thing, they're erasing in a way like we never were even here. You know, and at that time, I always tell the story when I was in elementary school, again.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:44:14] It's [inaudible]

Eric Napper [00:44:17] At Charles Houston from the library, the Barrett Library, down all the way down to Queen Street and you include a couple of blocks on Cameron, to the railroad tracks. And if you turn and you go north, Columbus Street bears off into Powhatan Street. And if you take the railroad tracks and you and you meet Powhatan Street, I don't remember white people. I just don't remember none. Now, might have been a couple sprinkle here and there and whatever, but I don't remember any. And then by this time when I'm in elementary school now, I'm starting to be making friends with guys in school who actually lived in the projects up in the west, what we call the Westover area, which is across from the McDonalds

right before you hit the bridge. At that time we call that Westover that was like a sub development, or more of a sub word for that area. but it's still considered uptown. You know and I don't, I just don't remember any white people man. And where they're building all that stuff right there, we had a, it was Ice house. But now let's get back to that, let's get back to yeah and everybody we have, we have Miss Helen Day who's recognized by, the post office being named after her. But man, we had some great teachers man. I mean, we had some great teachers.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:45:56] Who were some of those teachers?

Eric Napper [00:45:57] In particular. I remember my first grade, Miss Fun was, my mama talks about Miss Fun. Miss Fun was my first great teacher. And then I had Miss Violin. The name was Miss Violin for second grade. But for third grade, I had the first teacher that I was in love with. Yeah, her name was Miss Harris. Miss Harris. And I didn't know her first name till later on. I knew her later. Her name was Miss Swazi Harris. Oh, man. I thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world, man But she was mean. (Laughing) She was mean. You know, we, what people considered mean teachers, you know, it for me is serves a purpose with young kids, you know, Because even though they were mean, so to speak, we knew they loved us, though, You know, they. They loved us. You know, you knew they loved it. It was like an extension of your mama. Do you know what I mean? And then I had Ms. Hanna for the fourth grade. I had Ms. Jackson for the fifth grade. And then I had Ms. Day in the sixth grade. Now, there were other men, teachers in there, too. You know, we had Mr. Jackson, who was Ms. Jackson's son, who eventually became the principal, who eventually became superintendent of schools. Don't know why no one talks about Mr. Jackson. I don't understand that. No one talks about Mr. Jackson. You know, we had Mr. Robinson. He was tall. Mr. Robinson was a sixth grade teacher, but he also taught physical education. You know, because back then, we had a physical education class that was for everybody. And I forgot the lady that taught physical education for girls. And those were the only real men that I remember being teachers. You know, but they were no nonsense. You know what I mean? When you went to school, you did two things. You did the work you required to do as best you could and you respected. You had respect for your elders and authority, you know. Mr. Pittman was the janitor. Everybody knew Mr. Pittman. Matter of fact, Mr. Pittman, lived in, He was in one of the houses in the 600 block of Alfred Street. And a matter of fact, they took his property, and they put two new brand new townhouses up there near where the Pittman's lived. He was, he was the janitor, and it was nice. We had Miss Sparks. I remember Miss Sparks. She was our nurse. She was a nurse. And she was really nice, too, you know. And I now remember also in elementary school, man, we had. I remember the raggedy books, you know, we had you know,

we very, very rarely did you, if you got a new book, man, that was like, special because all the books we had already had markings in them. Some pages might be missing. The covers might be, you might have to take tape and and put tape on them and stuff like that. And we got. And then when you turn the books in, they would charge you for being, for the book being broke, I mean messed up. They would charge us for it. You had to pay like a dime, you know, or something like that. You know what I mean. Which, you know, back then it was for something did you ain't do? That was a lot of money for our parents, you know. And we had Miss. Oh, man. We had a cafeteria man. The cafeteria was nice, too. Oh, man. Oh, I can't think of her name. Anyway, she was really nice. She was really nice. And then, I had a couple of principals. My, first principal was, I think, Mr. Pitts was my first principal. And then, to give you instance. We had a, we had a principal that came, her name was Miss Quander. Miss Nellie Quander. Right. And like I say, I didn't know my family on my fathers side. I didn't know many of them. I knew his sister who I found out when my aunt, who I called her Aunt Sadie at the end but she was always Grandma Sadie because her family was the main family that I knew. Grandma Sadie. And then, my Uncle Herbert Napper. I knew him, you know, and I knew his son, Ricky. But Grandma Sadie had a daughter named Lydia, and she had three kids who I knew. You know what I mean? That at the time, they lived out on West Street, though. And I was 13 years old. 12 or 13 years old, before I figured out that she was my aunt and not my grandmother because I don't remember my grandma. Grandmother died before before I was born. I don't remember her.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:27] That's on your dad's side?

Eric Napper [00:51:27] [00:51:27] **That's on my dad's** [0.2s] side. And so because I'm with Chuckie, Estrellita, and Tiki was the baby girl. And because I'm with them. And so she was Grandma Sadie, you know. But I found out later that when my grandmother died and they had, it was 15 sort of. The older girls would take on the younger kid. And so by my dad and I knew that situation and I knew how close he was. That's one thing I knew, because she had a lot of pictures of my dad in her house. So I knew that that was it. So she was Grandma Sadie, but I didn't know that she raised him. She raised him. And I knew that my dad from young story, that he lived with her, you know. But then another thing about Charles Houston. We didn't have a gym. There was no gym in there. We had like a little well we call it the auditorium. It was a small place, place they called it, had a little stage and they had stuff. And but we would have like, I don't know what to call them, man. We had something called May Day. May Day was a big thing. You practice for May Day all year and, you know, you might have like a parachute skit that, I call it a skit, that you would do and had like the girls would do the they would with the ribbons around

poles and stuff like that. And you might act out a scene or something. And also, I could speak French in elementary school, we had a French teacher. Her name, she was white lady named Ms. Evans. And actually, I got a newspaper clipping where I was the lead role in a play on the founding of Chicago, you know, And Chicago was actually founded by a black man. You know, and I played him but it was in French. And *parlez vous francaise* is about all I can give you now, But I could actually speak French. And I was in, like, maybe the fifth grade. I could speak French, you know. So, I mean, we had the ability to learn, but we didn't have. And she only stayed one year. She only stayed one year and she was gone. You know. And music. We all had Mr. Payne was, we had, man, we had music. Music was big. The band was big. It was a big thing to be in the band. You know, I played saxophone for Mr. Payne and we did concerts, stuff like that in the cafeteria and stuff. It was good, man. My experience in elementary school was wonderful, man. But they don't talk about those folks, you know, They really don't.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:28] And so after Charles Houston, where did you go?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:31] From Charles Houston, what happened with me because back then there was no such thing as latchkey kids, you know. And that's when the K 6 to 222 plan I think came into existence. And my, my mom at the time, my mom was, was a telephone operator at night, but my grandparents were still working. So it was like and my brothers at that time, they were basically grown, you know, like I say, I'm eight and nine years behind them. And so even though they were living here, they gave my youngest Uncle John legal guardianship and I moved out on the South Side. And I lived out there for like two years, almost two years, a little more than two years. I moved in with them. And then that had me so that I had to go to Minnie Howard, as opposed to going to the second Parker-Gray, which had been demoted to a middle school. And so then I ended up going, I did, and I spent a lot of time on the South Side. Those couple years I was on the south side and I went to Minnie Howard.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:55:46] So yeah. What are your memories of Minnie Howard?

Eric Napper [00:55:50] Minnie Howard was the first time I'd ever been around white kids. I mean, a lot of white kids, you know, it wasn't bad. You know, we it was. It was like. Your speech was different. You know what I mean? Speech was just different. They spoke a version of English, you know, And we even though we could write it when it came out, it was different. When it came out your mouth, it was

different. You know what I'm saying? And but all in all, it wasn't bad. And like I say again, I'm grateful for those teachers that I had, you know, because, like I say, I remember, like, Miss Harris' thing was social studies and. But anyway, Miss Day was math, Miss Day was math. You had to know. You had to know math from Miss Day's class. Miss Hunter and Miss Violet, they were science. You know what I mean? You had to know that geography was Miss Harris. Geography. Miss Fun. She was just basically teaching you how to read and write. You know that first grade, you read and write. Then you started getting teachers who specialize in certain things and be. Oh, back to Miss Quander. I got in trouble and Miss Quander to spank me because it was corporal punishment still in elementary school. Okay. And she got on the phone when I was in her office, and she said, Charlene, I got Eric up in here. You know what is getting ready to happen don't you?" I'm like, You can get mad. So anyway, she had paddles in her drawer, and you had to pick the paddle that she was going to use as she lay you cross The chair. When she was spanking me, she said, "You will not embarrass our family. Long as I'm principal of Charles Huston school. (slapping sound with each syllable) with each syllable I never forget that. I'll never forget that. And I'm like, Man, what do you mean? But come to find out, she was my dad's cousin, and I don't know the Quanders. I didn't know them at the time that I was a Quander, you know, because I didn't know anything about. But then. But they prepared me. And when I got to Minnie Howard. They gave you a test. That's when the first time I remember taking an aptitude test. They called aptitude test. I take this test and what they did, they put me in what they called a split team. Didn't know this the first time. You change classes, that kind of stuff. You know what I mean? And they put me in a split team where I was actually taking classes with eighth graders. You know, so I know they call accelerated classes or they, you know, whatever they call it in AP, whatever they call it in there. But I would have been eligible to do that because of those teachers that I had at Charles Houston. You know, and that's why I say, well, Minnie Howard man it was big. You know, it was bright. You know what I mean? It was bright, man. You know, you had carpet on the floor. You know what I mean? In the hallways. I mean, we never had no carpet, you know, coming in the front, you know, that kind of stuff. They had a couple of they had more than one janitor. You know, they had a basketball court gym, I mean, a full gym. You know, we had lockers in the underneath in the basement to go up to the gym, whatever, first time. I had lockers. I mean, it was like it was it was it was shocking, you know what I mean? It was shocking. They had an actual auditorium, you know, and it was like at first, man you walking in you were like, basically kind of straining around, you know? Wow. You know what I mean? But they had they're pretty pretty decent teachers up there, too, you know and again, like I said, I was in band. So Mr. Rubino was was the was the. the band music instructor up there, you know, And it was written and that's when. And I got it in InterScholastic. Sports. The first time, because

up until then I always played with Charles Houston. We had our own rec league and now I forgot to tell you, about all that I could talk for days about Lucky Elliott and Charles Houston. You know, you go back home, every elementary school had their own team, and every year you play [01:00:31] for that 80 pound , 100 pound [2.9s] football. Then you had ten and under,, 12 and under 14 and under basketball. Then you had baseball, with baseball you had to have like was almost like a club like that. You didn't have their own baseball team. Cambell and Firari, , Bert and Herbert sponsored a team, you know, that kind of stuff for baseball. So that was more regional then it was for the city. But if you go to the history of directly football, Charles Houston captured over 45 city championships during the time that Lucky Elliott was the coach and. For me. I have no clue of it. In the fact, I don't know if it was educational purposes. I knew Lucky was educated, man, whatever case me. But there's no way possible that this man did not get a coaching job. When forced integration started. I just don't understand that. You know, here you have a man right here in the city. You know, and he and he was the type of guy, if there was a white kid, there were cause we would go to Fort Belvoir sometime and play, we would go to Maryland and play. And if there was a white kid who could play, he could play with us and we would go, You know what I mean? So, you know, but you know, Minnie Howard all and all was was good for me, you know, because it kind of helped break a lot of barriers that. Oh.

Eric Napper [01:02:03] Talk more about the fact like this is you know you go in there during integration. This is one of the first white kids you went to school with. What were the racial, what were the racial dynamics at the school?

Eric Napper [01:02:15] For the most I think we were about maybe about maybe I'm going to say about 20% black if that.. Because you had. You still have. You still have Parker-Gray for that one year, which was predominantly still predominantly black. Then you had the guys from that were from down the burg. South Side and Seminary. They went to Minnie Howard. Then you had.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:02:45] It's like, what were the interactions with?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:02:47] Oh, it was. It was kind of like, okay we're here that. And they're like, Okay, y'all here. But it took a while before to start because you in classes. You might have a friend that was in your class, but you didn't really affiliate too much with anybody outside of that. We had we had one incident between a black and white kid, and it was over our drinking out of water fountain and a boy named Allan Schwartz we ended up being a good friend of mine because he played he was big he was he was tall man and he ended up being like six six when I was in high

school was one of the guys who played basketball with me up TC and at Minnie Howard. But anyhow. For some reason. Can't think of his name. Anyway, he was drinking out of the water fountain. Allen came down and. Was going to, like, remove him so he could get water. It was Luke. I can't think of Luke's real name, we called him Luke. And I don't know what he thought he was going to do that. But Luke was not one of the guys that you wanted to do that with. And it was bad. It was bad. That was the only incident that we had up there like that, you know? But for the most part, theying got in a hell of a fight. And Luke actually took his belt off and beat Alan with a belt with the belt buckle, you know what I mean? You know, because where we come from, if you fight, fightin ain't got no rules. Boxing has rules. Wrestling has ruled fighting. there are no rules. You know what I mean? And so I don't know if he wanted to do half of a square fight or whatever, but like I say, Allan was already like maybe six three, you know, something like that in in June. He's in the eighth grade. He's like six three, you know, And Luke was a squatty, muscular build guy, and I don't know how heavy he got alan down on the ground. and unbuckled his belt and jumped up and just started beating him with the buckle until before. You know, teaches got there to break this thing up. He messed Allan's his face up pretty bad but

Francesco De Salvatore [01:05:10] After Minnie Howard, where did you go?

Eric Napper [01:05:11] I went to G.W..

Francesco De Salvatore [01:05:12] Okay, tell us.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:05:14] Causes a split. And you got to understand, the split, it's a split because the next year, my eighth grade year, that's when they actually did away with Parker-Gray. There was no more Parker-Gray. And they said that they were supposed to be rebuilding Parker-Gray. But they didn't you know, they didn't. They just tore down. And then a lot of the kids from Parker-Gray came up there, you know, as opposed to some went to John Adams and some came to Minnie Howard, you know, But then the next year and in than after that, in my ninth grade, I went to G.W., George Washington, which was again junior high, because you only went the 6-2-2 plan, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:06:04] What are your memories of G.W.?

Eric Napper [01:06:05] Oh, G.W. was really nice because it brought a lot for me, because now by that time, I can come back home because my mom had ended up getting put on a day shift so I could come back home. You know, I could come back home. Even though I still stayed that summer, I still stayed on the South Side because

I had made a lot of friends out there, you know, And that's like I say, what, 12, 13. You make some friends in, it was funny because even though they play with Lee Elementary for the Rec League but I came back up here and still play with Charles Houston so I would be friends with but we didn't play on the same team But anyway GW man, it was like, that's where. I think it was more. Maybe 40 to 45% black, you know, because of the way they had drawn lines. You know what I mean? So you still have some guys that like guys down to Burg and on the south side, they went to Hannon high school. And now we went. We went to GW and the year before that was 71. That's when they talk about you remember the Titans movie and all that stuff, all that. Now, now, my eighth grade year, we did have a few instances about because we were hearing stuff that was going on. But they in the movie, they, they, they talked like it was fighting up at TC. There really was no fighting up at TC, all the fighting went on at GW and Hannan because of the mix of the white kids who got busted GW didn't want to go to GW because they didn't want to be around no black kids. And in the black kids they had to go to Hannon. And that should have went to GW, didn't want to be up there because they didn't want to be around no white kids. And it started over. They had an anchor painted on the floor when you first come in to Hannon, there's an anchor and the black kids go up there, they don't know that, you ain't supposed to walk cross that anchor. So, you know, black kids walk cause that anchor. [01:08:14] And then, ___ say my man, you can't worry, we like man, you know, they like, I mean, we no think about no anchor, no anchor, you know what I mean? You know, And then some things went on and then violence started breaking out. And it was [10.7s] bad. It was bad because it even included.

Eric Napper [01:08:28] Happening at GW. So you're at GW?

Eric Napper [01:08:30] No, no. The eighth grade year, my eighth grade year. But I had, I have my cousins and stuff. Vicky, Donna and Crystal and them, they will Vicky, they know Crystal, maybe Crystal might have been the only one at GW then, but they had a couple of days where the fighting started and, and they had payphones in the schools. They had pay phones would, you know. And somebody called GW and said they tried to hang this guy named Mo. They tried to hang him in the bathroom. Black guy. And some white guys get in. So it was big riot. It was big. The next day, same thing, they called down GW and some of the, a lot of the kids from GW, you know, that's a major bus route. They hijacked a bus. And made that bus driver drive them up to Hannon. See, they don't tell you they don't tell you about this kind of stuff. And then at the same time, now, GW had a full football stadium. You know, I saw Joe Nameth. I was at the game where Joe Nameth played his first pre-season game with the Houston Oilers, was played right there at GW. And I'm talking a full stadium. Some black guys drug a white guy up there and threw him off that thing. That's why

they cut down the breaches. They did. They had press boxes and all that. I mean, it was it was like I say, it was it was the ability to hold a pro football game that's how big the stadium [01:10:15] was, I mean you know [0.2s] four sets of bleachers. But anyway and anybody but when I got to GW, it was still lingering. You see what I'm saying? It was still lingering. So we had our share of fights, especially in the first part of the year and to try to combat that when I went to GW, they had police officers on every corner because they filled in some of GW now. But there was the gym had a separate building, then you had shop had a separate building, and then you had school itself where classes were, was a separate building and there were police officers on every corner of the buildings for the first couple of months that we went to school because there was a few fights and stuff that went on while we when we when we got there in my ninth grade year. But that's moved out real fast. And they, they kept well paddy wagon in it because there was a parking lot in the middle of these buildings, you know, where teachers parked and all that kind of stuff that's gone now. They filled it in and they kept a paddy wagon out there. And for the first, the first, I think the first two months you only you, you could only go in one way and you could only come out one way and they did that to us at Minnie Howard too when everything went on they, they, they locked door. There was a movie called Lean on Me. I think it's lean. No, I think it might be Lean on Me with ah, ah, ah, one got the voice anyway and they locked the doors. And then they got in trouble for the doors being locked. You know, that's how that's how we went to school my eighth grade year. So my eighth grade year, that was just like normal. You know, you came into school. The only time you went out through another door was because Minnie Howard had the locker rooms for the girls and boys was in like a basement, like place. And you went up to get out to the basketball courts and then you went over and down on to the baseball football field. Out there. But those were the only two doors that weren't secured. And so at GW was the same way. We had a couple of big fights in the cafeteria, stuff like that. And it was mainly because, like I said, some some kids who did not have to be bussed. You know what I mean. They would say stuff. You know, this is not overt, but you know what they mean. You know what I'm saying? You know what they mean? And so a lot of fights happen like that during my my, my, my freshman year at GW, you know, and this was the first, GW was my first time ever being coached by a white man. You know, Mr. McGirt was my basketball coach. And then we had Hensen and and Mr. Fruitrail, Henson was a freshman football coach. And I never care for him, even though he ended up being my basketball coach. I never cared for him. He had a nasty way of treating you. If he, if he had a reason that he could treat you nasty, he would. But if he liked you, he was cool. But if you, if you you know, I didn't care for him at all. You know, but other than that, we we had good teachers up there, too. You know, we had real nice teachers. I a matter of fact, I had one one Arab teacher. and um she got in touch with a black teacher because I was falling

behind in math. And she knew, you know, they knew the history where I was coming from, you know, being a split team. And then by the time I'm in eighth grade, I wasn't in split team. I was taking ninth grade classes. So now I'm in the ninth grade and I'm not doing well in math because I'm just not doing it, you know? I'm just not doing it. You know what I mean? And she she had me transferred in the middle of the first quarter into into a man's, a black man's math math class. So, you know, like I say, by the time I got my senior year, my, my, my math requirements were done, you know, I didn't have to take any math when I got to my senior year, you know. But because of teachers like that, because, like I say, it was really nice. And Mr. Ossasack was our principal. He was cool. Yeah, he was real cool. He was real cool. You know, I like Mr. Ossasack. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:00] Okay, So you talked about the tension that was in the school then outside of the school. I'm curious, like, do you have any memories from the community response to when the. Yeah, when, like, Martin Luther King was assassinated?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:14] Well, not only that. Even before that, I mean, it was always tension. Like I said, when you talk about the new projects, I mean the old projects and where the Braddock Road Metro is. To the south of Braddock Road Metro was another. All that was was was black too was called John Roberts homes. They did it they did the same thing that they did with Parker-Gray. They said they was going to remodel them, people were going to be able to move back in. No one moved back in. Now you've got these townhomes and these mid-rise down there and whatever case may be again, erased. But anyway. White kids didn't go down there. I think we had. One guy that I remember, he was younger than me. Name, Mark Pernard. And then you had Mani Mani. Can't think of Mani. His family, they lived in John Roberts, but they were they were younger than me, you know. But white kids didn't go down there. White people did not walk up Queen Street. You just did not do that. White people do not walk up Madison Street or Montgomery Street. You just didn't do that. You would get hurt. Same thing on the other side. From GW, from the corner of GW going north, you very rarely walked, especially at night, up Mt. Vernon Avenue. You just did not do that. You could get hurt. You did not go west of Mt. Vernon Avenue. My cousin and them ended up moving about a couple of blocks on the other side, which is Rosemont. He actually was one of the first black families to my Uncle Herbert and my cousin Ricky. They were one of the first black folks to move over there. And if you went there, you made a beeline across Malvern Avenue, make a left, go to Chapman, go in the house. You know what I'm saying? It was like that. And then anything west of that, you did not go up there. When the cannonball hit, we call it Cannonball Hill, which is Russell Road and Braddock Road. There's a

cannon at the bottom of the hill. We call it Cannonball Hill. Now, we were in the daytime, we were young, we were on bicycles. We would go up there. And then what you would do, you could see the light and you would time the light. So that when you took off, when you got to the bottom of the hill, the light would change green and you could go. Now we could do that. Now, _____, my cousin Ricky. There's another hill at the top. I can't think of the name of the street at the top of that hill. You can make if you're going west, you can make a left. There's a hill there and it whines and we call it Snake Hill. Now. Because I'm backing up a little bit. I'm about 12. No, I'm about ten. We go down this hill. Ricky's chain pops. And he crashes into this lady's fence, one of those long, iron long fence, and went in the way he crashed it. He got hooked up underneath of it and he hit that one of the, You know the posts, the metal posts and he broke his arm and he's tied up in this thing. And this white lady came out there, and she took a broom. She called him every kind of N-word you could think of, and she's beating him with this broom. And we tried to get him outta there because, again, the white kids up there, they will jump us if we up there. So we got to drag him out of there. And then at the bottom, you, at the bottom, of snake hill. You can come around the corner. But if you do that now, you in the white kids neighborhood. Thank God it was kind of early in the morning and whatever. So we was able to get him out of there and we couldn't get his bike. We had to get him throw him on somebody's handlebars or something and we got out of there and then we took him home. You know, he got a beating for being up there because the bike gone, you know what I mean? And all that you know mean. So that was probably up all the way up through my sophomore into my sophomore year. Of cause if you're going up Mt. Vernon Avenue, anything on the left side, going north of Mt. Vernon Avenue was all white. You had sprinkles of black people on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue, which And then you got up past Mt Vernon Elementary School. That's when you started picking up another pocket of black neighbors where you actually could call it a neighborhood, you know, And that was that was kind of becoming predominantly black, which is the idea what they call the Del Rey area now, you know what I mean whatever, because a lot of that stuff, again, erased a lot of those homes out there were black folks and their dwelling away. But and at the same time, you didn't grow up in what we call Warwick Village, which is where Commonwealth Avenue and Mount Vernon meets Mount Vernon Avenue meets, everything west of that going up on that hill. You just did not go up there. Period. They had a pool up there you couldn't go to because they turned it into the community pool. You know, you couldn't go [01:21:25] there. Back [1.0s] up. I remember not being able to go to Cameron St. Pool. We had our own pool, Johnson Pool up behind where the McDonald's is. So that was still kind of lingering, but it was starting to clear up because. Like I say, just tell the truth. It wasn't a football team that actually bought the community together for as our generation. Maybe for the parents.

Maybe for the parents before our generation. Marijuana was coming into play. Drugs were coming into play. The white guys who became friends during the original, the original cause because I also I remember my brother Lenny went to went to Jefferson, which was a high school that they did away with. And he met some guys. You know, I mean, white guys, the poor white guys, because that was more affluent people that went to Jefferson. They ended up going to GW together. And then a lot of the guys that did that type of thing became the Dope Boys. And the dope boys did allow nobody mess up they money. So they became friends. So by them becoming friends, then their little brothers and sisters and stuff and cousins, whatever, start to become friends. That's what squashed all of that for my generation. Just tell the truth.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:08] But just really quick. So like, you mean because I know there were protests for MLK.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:13] Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:15] Come back to this point.

Eric Napper [01:23:15] Okay. Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:16] I just want to take a step back. . Do you remember, like, were you involved in the protests when MLK was assassinated like?

Eric Napper [01:23:21] No, I wasn't actually involved. Like I say, I was like, ten years. Yeah, I was, like, ten.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:27] Do you have memories of it?

Eric Napper [01:23:27] Yeah, I remember. Like I said, I remember we were watching TV. I remember mom. I remember my mom and my grandmother and my great grandmother, man, I mean, they bawling they eyes out, man. They I mean, they are crying and whatever. And I knew we knew about Martin Luther King, you know, we knew who he was because we were being taught about what was going on. You know, and a lot of stuff, though we learned more or less from people teaching you in your home.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:54] Got it.

Eric Napper [01:23:54] they weren't they weren't talking about that in school. You know what I mean?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:59] You don't remember any of the

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:01] There was there was really very few rioting going on here. There was a couple of windows busted out, you know, down on King Street and stuff like that. But as soon as that happened, it was like they walled that off you. You ain't coming down here. Actually, they supposedly attempted to break into the armory down here on the waterfront. There was an armory down here, but they squashed that real fast, you know, So there later here. But you could, like I say. On Fair Street before they built all this stuff up there. There's this block and you could you could actually see the top of the monument from Fair Street. And if you look north in most major streets like Washington Street, you know, Fair street, or if you could go up to Masonic Temple, you could look out and you could see all the smoke, the burning, the stuff that was going on over in D.C. you could see that. You know what I mean? But it it wasn't a lot going on here. But there was activists here. We had we had Urban League was right across the street. You know, we had Urban League. we had a guy named Ira Robinson. You know, we had a guy named Ira Robison. He and we called him Boo Boo, but Window Evans. They were our main activists. Oh, you know what else? I'll tell you something else that people didn't understand that we didn't know. there was a gentleman I used to walk around and sometime he would have a bullhorn and he would be like talking about how are they going to take out properties from us? We don't own anything. And he lived in John Roberts. Okay. He lived in John Roberts home. But he would do it a lot down there. He'd be walking around and all this crazy. His name was Mr. Bernard Hunter. I don't know if anybody's ever called his name. His name was Mr. Bernard Hunter.. Mr. Bernard Hunter was telling them how they was going to take our property. You know, they're going to make it so we can't live here, you know. And everybody blew him off like he was crazy. And lo and behold, everything he said that they were going to do. That's what they're doing. That's what they're doing. And this started some years ago. You know, it started some years ago, but at Ira ROBISON had we had rallies right here. He He set up the microphone and stuff like that, and people would crowd around. Ira Robinson.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:41] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:42] And so who was he?

Eric Napper [01:26:44] He was. He was head of the Urban League. What you call it? Section, I guess. That you had here, an office? He was head of the Urban (I)League.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:55] [01:26:55] **Inaudible** [0.0s]

Eric Napper [01:26:56] I could see right here, I could sit on my step and listen to him. You know what I mean? And he was telling us, you know, what we needed to do, how you needed to vote. You know, same, the rhetoric is not really changed, you know, because, I mean, it's just a repeating process. You know, It's just a repeating process. You know, you need to go to the city council meetings and people weren't doing it. You know, we just didn't do it, you know, [01:27:21] **couldn't figure wasn't nothing** [0.5s] to do. We had one black councilman. He was a Republican. I mean, we didn't know what that meant back then. But now we look back and then you got to understand, too, it's always flip flop. It ain't, it ain't the party name. It's the people who in the party, you know, which we know now. You know what I mean? Because, you know, it was just Mr. Cleveland. Mr. Cleveland. He was, he was, he was a councilman. He'd ride in the parades and that kind of stuff, you know. But we had them then, ah, that's when I got first of the members of the United Way. United way. They, they were, they were like I said, now this is something that most people don't, I don't know just tell the truth, all white people ain't bad. Because we had some white people that stood up for us, you know what I mean. we did, man. We did. We had some. Some, some, some very influential people that stood up for us. But they don't they don't talk about them. They don't. They don't they don't say anything.

Eric Napper [01:28:36] Who were they?

Eric Napper [01:28:39] One in particular. Man She just retired. Just had her name.

Eric Napper [01:28:46] Dale. Pepper.

Eric Napper [01:28:48] You hit it right on the nose. Dale Pepper. Miss. Miss Pepper. She. She. Man, she. She was something. If, you know, she she she was always trying to look out for the people, you know? Ms.. Dale Pepper. There was another one, too. VanLandingham. VanLandingham. She. I think she stay. But they lost their Cameron. It's a big house right there on Cameron Street. Cameron and Henry, she stay Miss VanLandingham and she was she was she was for us too. You know.

Eric Napper [01:29:25] What were your memories? So you were, you graduated high school in 1972?

Eric Napper [01:29:31] No, I'm in '76. That's what I'm saying. I was '76. See I was in the eighth grade.

Eric Napper [01:29:36] (Inaudible)

Eric Napper [01:29:37] Right, right, right, right, right. Oh, let me say this. I mean, because you talk about rising and whatever. The biggest thing that I remember as far as anything goes like that, for alongs racial lines and stuff goes on. A guy named, name of Rob., Robin. Rob, Robin got killed.

Eric Napper [01:29:56] Robin Gibson?

Eric Napper [01:29:57] Yeah. Robin Gibson got killed. And at a 7-Eleven out there, which is now a Freedom Way, it's a church called Freedom Way, right there on the corner of Commonwealth and Glebe Road. And so supposedly, he was in there stealing. Now everybody know that's a crock because he was a good guy. Never, never no trouble. He, he wasn't one of those guys. He wasn't those guys because we know we got some of those, but he ain't one of those. And plus. His family got money! You know what I mean? His father owned a cab company. You know, Robin ain't never did nothing wrong before. Anybody could tell you. Well, anyway, this man shot Robin. And he took a box cut. And put it down by him. That's what he said he was trying to rob him. He was going to rob him. No, no. And when they arrested that man. I mean.

Eric Napper [01:31:02] What are your memories of like

Eric Napper [01:31:05] Oh man. We went off this building. I'm coming across the street that got set on fire. It was a couple of quite a few fires set. It was more fire set for Robin getting killed than there was for Martin Luther King. It was bad. People were in the street. Again, they had to walled off James Street. They walled King Street off. You really couldn't go nowhere near King Street. Where anything like they were starting to build businesses down when you cross canal area. Those, they had a big skating rink down there, they had a bowling alley down there, a grocery store Giant. The hotel had moved in. Holiday Inn had had a hotel, a big hotel down there. And then there was a few on Washington Street. They had a IHop which at one time was a, was a soft, soft serve ice cream place that moved up into D.C. up on George Avenue, I think it is. 16th Street or George Ave, one of them. But anyway, they set a couple of a buildings on fire down there whatever. And the jail used to be on Pitt Street. On a, Oronoco and Pitt was was the city jail. And it was like, man, they was trying to get in there to get him. And they, they had to transfer him out. And then that went on for a long time.

Eric Napper [01:32:31] Did you participate?

Eric Napper [01:32:33] Well, I was there. I was there. I was there for that. I was there for that. Cause like I say, this building is burning right here.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:41] What did you think of that?

Eric Napper [01:32:46] Um, I was mad man because everybody knew Robin. You know what I say befor, see they put that in the movie, too. That's why I say, I don't like that movie. They put that in the movie like it was happening then. That happened a couple of years before, this is in like, this right after King, this right after King. And then they tried to put it in the movie. It might have been like '69 or '70 where Robin got killed because Robin was the guy who was like on the mic at the basketball games, you know, telling who subbing in, foul on this that and other. That's what Robin did. And everybody, everybody loved Robin man. You know, everybody loved Robin white and black. I mean, it was it was bad, man. It was bad. You know, I was kind of scared, you know what I mean? I was kind of scared. And what happened with me, I was down at the jail. And my brother, my brother saw me down there. He made me go home. My brother Lenny, he made me go home. You know, you go home. You know, and I ran home and whatever. So then the next day, you know, it was kind of aftermath, but then the protest was still going on. And like I say, [01:33:56] **Ira Robinson and them right** [1.3s] there. And it like I say, it was right here. You know, that's what I remember. And they was talking about how they was going to let him off and all that and basically they did. Basically they let him off, you know, because they moved him. They moved he, they took him out of the jail. I can't remember where they took him, but he wasn't there anymore. And, they went to trial or whatever. And I think it was like, what um? You know, one of those but he moved. He wasn't here anymore. The guy that did it. The man that did it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:34:31] Yeah.

Eric Napper [01:34:32] You know, and my mom today won't go to 7-Eleven. She refuses to go into a 7-Eleven, you know? Yeah. So that's that's the brunt of.

Eric Napper [01:34:43] The midst of all of this. So, like, you're finishing high school in '76. So what happens after high school where.

Eric Napper [01:34:51] What happened after high school like I say, again, because of those teachers and, you know, I was prepared and I scored very, very high on the SAT. I mean, I scored almost as close to 1300. How? I don't know. I just happened to go with the seniors my junior year. They were taking it. And back then, it was free.

You know, the SAT was free. And they were taking it. And we were practicing because in '75, I was on the first team for TC Williams to ever win the regional championship in order to participate in the state championship. Why we not in the Hall of Fame up there? There's the only one reason I can think of. Because we had a couple of guys, including myself, who ended up late in life getting in trouble and then became convicted felons. And I don't think they want that. But that to me that had nothing to do with high school. You know what I mean? But that's another issue. And so, they were, we were we were getting ready to I think we were probably getting ready to go to I think we were getting ready to go even play a regional games or something. But we were practicing on Saturday, which we very rarely did, but we were prac and because they were taking the SAT, then we were going to practice too. So I went with them and I went in and I scored over 200 plus I had, I'm taking like chemical technology. Like I say, again, this is branching from all I learned just as much in, in, in elementary school as I did in middle school. You know what I mean? Because of that, then I start to get into it because the lady who intervned to help me stay on par with math and science. And, you know, because they go hand in hand, you know, And so I got selected to be in what they call a minority engineering program. It was my minority engineering through RCA. And matter of fact, my my, between my junior and senior year, it was a group of us, but three of us, myself, Gary Jordan and Albert Holloway, we were working for on a summer job for RCA. I don't know, Ray_____ Road. And I was making \$15 an hour on a summer job in 1975, you know. But I wanted to play basketball, you know. And I went, that was my thing. I wanted to play basketball. And I ended up again, Hinson. Now, I had, I had an offer from Rutgers University to play basketball. Okay. Now, he sends the films that I need for a guy who's a junior, taken away nothing from Craig Harris, Craig Harris was, whew, he's at the top of the list for me as far as any basketball player coming out of here. But he was a junior and he was seen in the films like because we played, we were back court mates and we were ranked as the number one back court in Northern Virginia that year. Now, this is my senior, this is '76. He sent, I tell him I need these films. "I'm going to get them back and we'll get 'em." He sends my films are for Craig because it was the school already recruiting Craig. And when I finally got the film's back and I called assistant coach who I was, who I was dealing with, he told me he was sorry that scholarship had been given away. So that left me out in the dry because now, you know, because I'm committing. They do it formally now. But I had committed, I was going to go _____ because I'm going, I'm going to Rutgers. All I needed was two films, Henson again. Not one of my favorite people, you know but anyway. And I could give you some story about that, but that's something different, you know, if I ever get a chance to talk up there them Hall of Fame things, I will have a lot to say and they won't like it, you know. But anyway, so I went to, I got to Old Dominion University, mind you, because of my grades. You know what I mean? The

SAT scores. I went to Old Dominion University when there were after 5:00, there were only 15 African-Americans on the whole campus. (pause) 15. And you had to, all of us were affiliated with some type of sports program, you know. And so. I didn't do well at all, Danny. I was miserable, man. I was miserable. You know, I started to do other things too, you know, which got in the way. And so that was like a year wasted. You know that was a year wasted. Came back home that summer. And did you say then went up to George Mason University again? They have four seniors up there. Marin Konty. My cousin, Chucky Moore. Kevin McNutt, the father of the girl, Monica McNutt, who's on ESPN now. Her father and a guy named Kevin Bacon, who went to West Springfield, who was probably one of the, boy you talking about hated us and we hated them. You know, I mean, they were all white and a lot of people thought back then, and TC Williams was a all black school because most of the major sports other than baseball, the major sports were all black kids. You know what I'm saying? So anyway, if I had played, one of those seniors would have had to sit down. You know, which everybody knew I should have been one of the guys on the team. We had a guy from New York when he found out that they were going to Red Shirt me, he left. He said, "you ain't playing, I ain't playing." His name was Riley Florida. He was from New York. The other boy from New York, RJ Gaddy ended up being drafted by the Houston Rockets. So, like I say, I was. I was pretty good. You know, I was pretty good. So another wasted year and then plus, that's when my son was conceived. And so, tried to ask for an abortion. My grandma was sitting right there. My momma sitting right there. I'm sitting right here, My son's mother sitting right here. And we explained that we want to have an abortion. And my grandmother told me, we don't believe in abortions in this family. I suggest you take you and your family and you go out there and you live in that bed you done made. And that was the day I became a man. You know, I mean, that's just the way it was. But now she, she pitched in and helped though. Don't get me wrong. You know, she bought me furniture, but I had to go out there and I had to secure a place for us to be, you know, all of that. I worked three jobs, that kind of thing. You know what I mean? I worked at Sunday Moon down in Gum Springs areas, senior citizen program, I drove for them. I worked at bagging groceries at Skyline. It was a Safeway up there where the Target is now, bagging groceries. And then eventually I ended up taking on another position of I've made driving part time, bagging was already part time. And then I was working at Alexandria Detox for time, you know, in order to support my family, you know, so you know. But that was.that was what was going on for me. So that alone was keeping me quite busy, even though I was aware of. Now, with Bill Euille, coming in, being a mayor at the time and whatever, we thought that was the greatest thing in the world. You know, I know that one man can't run the whole show when it comes to politics, I really do. But I don't think he really had our best interests at heart. I just truly don't. You know. I know him. You know I know him like I say,

back when we were teenagers, we used to play ball at down Lyles Crouch They had a basketball court down there that you could like, say we could jimmy the lights, you know? and stay out there, whatever. And he would come play ball with us. This was before he really started to get into politics stuff, he played ball. Then he jumped into politics. You know, And everybody knows his family. You know what I mean? You. But then when you come to find out, he don't really mess with no, no black people. But he come to your church? He come to your organizations.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:43:54] So, yeah, maybe talk more about. So, like, obviously, you were seeing things that you weren't happy with me in the '80s. So tell me a little bit about what was Alexandria like in the 80s. What were you seeing?

Eric Napper [01:44:07] In the 80s? Like I said, a lot of it was going on, a lot of things that really happened. Like I say, the self-inflicted part is, is one of the major parts that needs to be told whether it was good or bad, in my opinion. But drugs was infiltrating our communities. You know, it was infiltrating our community. And but at the same time, there was still, I must say, though, they were starting to do, the English language I'll output it like this. The English language can be twisted. You know, certain buzz words will be used in order to camouflage what they were really saying. Like the word luxury. See, they started rebuilding stuff like downhill off of Washington, going north on Washington Street, those, they're probably the oldest townhouses that I could remember to your right Bashford Lane, out that way, or whatever case maybe not the new ones but the old ones, is old, brick before you get to the high rise whatever. Across the street, my brother ended up securing a place on Bashford Lane right across from the store, used to be Lee's store. Matter of fact, I was in in the school with George Lee. He was a good friend of mine. Somebody went in to rob Mr. Lee and killed his father. And then when I say that, that's when they got the new cafe style thing there. But that was a grocery store that people west of whatever, you had credit. You know, you go there long as you pay Mr. Lee. Mr. Lee was cool. You know what I mean? So but he stayed. My brother stayed across the street from him. But on the other side of the street, they considered those luxury apartments. And all that means is we don't want you all over here, Is too much for you all to own here. And as for me, those are the years where it started to be like, okay, what Mr. Hunter was talking about was starting to happen because by then John Roberts is gone. You know, John Roberts is gone. They are building up where Parker Gray, the second Parker Gray used to be, that's coming up. You know, they starting to build up across from Westover. You know, and it's like everything that's going up, we can't afford to move in. And so what happened with that was you start noticing, and that's when I started hearing people talking about they keep raising the taxes. They keep raising the taxes,

they keep raising, you see what I'm saying? Then when the taxes get so high, then you can't afford to stay here no more.

Eric Napper [01:47:06] How did that affect you? How did these changes that began in the '80s affect you?

Eric Napper [01:47:11] Well, the way it affected me was the fact that I was losing people that were instrumental in my growing up and the elders that were in the areas. You know, we had some, we had a couple of, few people who were doing pretty well that they could keep, you know, their place, whatever. But a lot of the other people who, who didn't have the type jobs that's sustained them, you know, in order to to fight off the increase in rent, to fight off the credit and to being able to put a down payment on enough to buy a home. You know, those guys that were and young ladies that were coming of age, they couldn't afford to to buy, to purchase. And what's the point of renting for the same amount of money that you will pay on a mortgage? You know, So people were leaving. That's that's how it affected affected me, because people just move on. Where they? Oh, they moved. They moved down Woodbridge. Oh, Oh, no. They, they move to Maryland. You know, that's when they started doing that in the '80s. They moved all they did, man. They went down North Carolina somewhere. Or they did, cause they might have family, you know, like they go other places and people just leaven man, people were moven. And we, I notice that we were losing peoples. It's like so many white. You know someday didn't you start noticing, like places that used to be black owned. We had little gems right up on Nokia Street, which is the bagel shop now. That was a mainstay for us, was carryout called Little Gems. We had a. Busy Bee was a carry out on the corner of Henry and Princess. Then you had Field's Carry Out, which was white owned, but he, he hired black guys and stuff, you know, black people cooked and stuff. You know what I, it was a staple for us. There's a daycare center across the street that's on the corner of well, where the Domino's is. That was Field's property. Then across the street from that, there's a daycare center that was a grocery store. We had a we had a grocery store which ended up being a 7-Eleven right here across from Busy Bee. There's a church now, you know, was, man I can't think of the name. Was a, Al's, Al's Grocery store. You know had and llike I say, staples of our community. You had on Duke Street, you had Santolo's you know Santolo's again you could go there. You had IGA up the street, too pricey for for for black folks to go into. But you had Santulo. You could go in Santula and okay, I owe you, owe you, owe you, come back, pay the money, good to go. You know what I mean? All that kind of stuff was just disappearing man. That's, that's what I noticed right away, you know, And then I started to see white people come back in. Excuse me? I started to see white people coming back in. You know, first for me, this this area, it started right here on Oronoca Street, right here on

Oronoco Street. All the families, they was gone. They were gone. They were gone. They were gone. Then it, then it went up Columbus Street towards the projects. It was gone. People were leaving. Then it started right here at Princess Street South. Everybody was gone. Everybody was gone. Queen Street. Everybody leave, would leave. My grandmother owned, my great grandmother owned the house on Cameron St., the second house in from Patrick Street West on Cameron Street. That was my great grandmother's house that was holding us back in the day for slavery. You know, because she had a wine cellar. And we used to wonder why they had. It was like two holes, two holes, two holes, two holes, two holes going around. Come to find out that was part of the slave ownership that owned the slave thing down on Duke Street. Yeah. So overflow. They had overflow houses and that that was a sign of of of being being chained. You know what I'm saying? They had several houses like that around that area going towards Duke Street. You know, she had one, you know, she moved in with us because she just got too old. You know, but at the same time, they had started building up down there. And so instead of one of, like, an uncle or somebody or or one of my sisters or one of my my brothers, whatever case may be, you go there and try to buy the place and this like, wait a minute, because they sold it. You know what I mean? They sold it. And then, they refurbish it, and then they buying a house for 2 \$300,000? They put a couple of hundred to couple of thousand dollars, \$50,000 into the house, and it now is 800,000.

Eric Napper [01:53:02] Right.

Eric Napper [01:53:03] You know.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:53:04] You were raising your son during this period right?

Eric Napper [01:53:08] Right. Actually, when I was raising my son, I had to go, I went down to off Route 1. I couldn't afford no place. I couldn't even afford no apartment up here. That was out. That's out. You talk about effect. That was out because I wanted my son to be raised here. You know? So, you know, it was. I went. I went down. I was down off of Fortsen Rd, Route 1 and Fortsen Rd. I was down on Lockheed Boulevard down that way. I had an apartment down there.

Eric Napper [01:53:42] Like, what was it like? I mean, I was curious, What are your memories of being a father and raising your son?

Eric Napper [01:53:48] Manitit was it was pride, but it was like I knew, I knew that I wasn't ready. I guess, you know, I say no one's really ready, but, you know, I just it

wasn't in my plan at that time, but because, you know, coming from the family that I came from, again, like I say now, I didn't like I said, my father left I was about five. I didn't see him again until I was 17 years old, you know, And I knew I wasn't going to do that to my son, you know what I mean. So it it was rough. Like I said, I know I had I had to work three jobs, you know what I mean. I had to work three jobs in order to to try to maintain some semblance of independence, you know, because I knew I could have leaned on my parents. I'm, pn my grandparents, not my mother. My mother didn't have anything. But I couldn't, I couldn't be. And I wasn't going to ask my uncles because they weren't going to allow it because of what my father had done to me and my brothers. They, I knew they weren't going to allow that. No, you're going to dish your kid. You know what I mean? Which I'm glad that they did it, you know what I mean and so it was, but I, but I love I love being a father, man. I really did. You know, I didn't I didn't do well his teenage years because I come up with some issues, you know what I mean? But, you know, I did all, I did all, I did all, I did all the daddy stuff, but I wasn't a role model for my for my son in his late teenage years and in his early, early, early manhood years. I wasn't, I wasn't a role model for him, you know? You know, But other than that, man, it was. I love it. Like I say, I got a second chance now, being a grandfather, I'm probably I think I'm a good granddaddy. You know what I mean? Cause, you know, thank God they are avenues for people to recover their lives. You know what I mean? Which I'm a big advocate of, you know. It is so wonderful thing with my son, I'm telling you I'm so proud of him, I don't know what to do. You know, I'm I'm so proud of him. But like I said, I wasn't a role model but this boy got a master's degree. You know, he, because he's like, I'm talking to you about what happened with making sure that you do things properly as far as like your your finances and stuff like that and being aware of areas that you if you're going to buy something, buy, make sure you buy here, you know, basically copying what was done. Yeah. You know to us, you know what I mean? He's got a couple of houses, you know, and I mean stuff like that. He's got a master's degree. You know, and he's he's giving back, you know, he's down in the playground now getting ready to open up a training center, you know, for for for for for for for athletes, because he wants them to be prepared because he knows my story. I was good with good school work, but I wasn't prepared for college. I just wasn't prepared for it. So that's what he does. You know? So, you know.

Eric Napper [01:57:00] So I have a couple closing questions. Okay. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to talk about before I go?

Eric Napper [01:57:09] Oh. Let's go back to the '80s into what was going on in I mentioned that the dope boys were the ones.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:57:21] Yeah, yeah.

Eric Napper [01:57:22] Okay, now let's. Let's dance. That's like midst early seventies. You know, early seventies. The last couple of years '60s to the early '70s. Doughboys kind of made everything cool to be wherever you wanted to be. Okay, now let's go to the '80s. The war on drugs comes. And I've never had problems with uniformed policemen. I never had problems with them. But when it comes to undercover policemen, man, it was, it was terrible. It was terrible in the '80s. The, we are calling it the vice squad, you know, it was ended up, they ended up having some what we call the jumpout boys. What you see on the documentaries, it will, it didn't happen a lot, but when the jumpout boys jumped out on you, you got jumped.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:58:35] Who was the jumpout boys?

Eric Napper [01:58:37] They were undercover police officers. You know, undercover police officers for the most part. They say, seek, I mean, they say serve and protect, police officers, you know, policemen. Jump out boys, undercover cops, they seek and predate. That's what they do. I remember I had a couple of run ins with one in particular. His name was Goldberg. Man everybody. He undercover, but he used different cars, that kind of stuff whatever. But Goldberg treated you like garbage. You understand what I'm saying? Like I say, now, don't get me wrong. I'm doing things that ain't supposed to be done. I get it. You know what I'm saying? But in Alexandria, the stereotypical thing that you see about dealing drugs or whatever, that wasn't happening here. You know. It happened not, not in the '80s. It's '70, late '70s or early '80s. It wasn't happening here. You know, if you wanted that, you had to go to DC, for that. But they treated us like they were dealing with people that you saw on TV over in DC. Now, I remember because I had a couple of run ins with him, even though I was working for Alexandria Detox. Okay. Now, they had a workout center out here, Lee and Nanny J. Lee in the back. There's a workout where the police are. Anybody from the city could work out, but mainly was like the firemen because they were training out there. You know, stuff like that, it was a workout center. I go out there. He's in there. And all he does, he pulls up a chair and he just stares at me because he knows who I am and I know who he is. AAnd he's staring at me like. And I know what he's saying, what he wants to do right now. And he's trying to make me leave. He wants to intimidate me and make me leave. I'm not going to let him do that. So I'm doing my workout best. And every machine I go to, he comes and he says. Now, I was up at the Charles Houston Center, there was there was a guy I know who was selling marijuana. Okay. He had a stash in the trash can. He had a stash there. Goldberg pulls, we're waiting for the rec to open because we're going to play ball because I'm still playing ball now, even though I'm not, you know, I'm still

playing ball. Uh oh man, there's Goldberg man. Goldberg. So he pulls up in front of the rec center. And so the guy that's selling in front of the rec center, he's got his stash in his trash can. Goldberg is parked on the other side. He walks up. Goldberg is getting out the car. So and it timed it perfectly. When he walked and Goldberg started to come to the sidewalk from from the driver's side, the boy goes to pass the trash can like he's just walking, and then he suddenly reaches in, snatches the bag and take off running. And Goldberg couldn't catch him. Goldberg was a big guy. I mean, he was big Goldberg's about, I'm gonna say about six three, see for me about 230 to 235, I mean, big guy, He falls. We laugh. Okay, we laugh. So anyway, he comes jogging up on the wall, and then he gonna put us up on the wall. All we're doing is standing waiting on it. So what is all it is for? So we up on the wall or whatever the case may be. He asking us for our IDS. Okay. So we wait. So he gets to one of my buddies, and when he pulls his wallet, I mean his ID out, a nickel bag falls out. Okay. So now, he gonna search us all with. I ain't got nothing on. But come to find out. I didn't know. I'm working for detox. This guy had ran in front of me on a bicycle. Okay. I slam on brakes, he jumps up, he comes at the car. He charged like they hit me in the car. And I pull him in the car, you know, in the van. Now, this is a city truck man. And, you know, so anyway, I go back to work. I tell my boss what it was, whatever the case may be, I don't know that this guy, this is what he's doing to everybody, like Metro cars, whatever, old white guy, you know, he run in front of you, act like he got hit. That kind of thing. He trying to get to sue people. So he had taken a warrant out. I didn't know. You know what I mean? So when I give Goldberg my ID, he comes back. He already called for to come get the other body, you know plain cars that came here. He was like, No, you ride with me. See, he remember what I did. Out there at the Lee Center, how I wouldn't back down from him. You see what I'm saying? He pushed me in the back of the car. Now, at this time, they had just I think they were, they had just built the on Mill Road, they had just opened Mill Road. He takes me. He gets me in the car. Like I say, he's on Wythe Street facing west.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:04:48] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:04:49] He puts me in a car. My hands like this. He whips a U-turn. Right. Whips a U-turn, goes to Alfred Street turns Alfred Street, goes north, all the way up to First Street. Whoops right. Comes all the way back down to Powhatan Street whoops right. Goes all the way down Wyeth Street makes a left. Goes all the way to the water. So you see what he's doing? And he's slamming me around in this car to take me out there just to get booked. Because all they're going to do is book me. That's the kind of stuff that you dealt with. So the plain clothes officers were good because we have we had plain clothes officers from the community. The first ones to go in from Alexandria, they were from the community,

all except for one officer Springs wasn't from here. But you had, Officer Lockett, you know, you had Harper, you know, who grew up right here, You know, I mean, you, you had these guys that was breaking the barrier for that. They actually helped the plain clothes people know how to just be police officers towards us. We weren't a threat, but him and the guys on them jump out squads, they were terrible man. Well, I just forgot to tell you about that. They were terrible, man, you know? I tell anyone. I've got a nephew now who's a sheriff. I hear some of the stuff he talk about, and I don't like it. I don't like it. Number one, he really ain't from here. I think it's a shame that because of the attitude and the thought process about being police officers now, has gotten so bad that people from the community won't be police officers because they don't want to be stigmatized from their own community. So you always got people from outside communities coming in who don't understand the culture of the community in order for them to police the community the way it's necessary to be policed. Yeah, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:07:25] Well, what's it like right now to remember the episode with Goldberg?

Francesco De Salvatore [02:07:31] I don't care for police officers. I really don't. I got this. I got this. We're okay. At one time when we were coming up, like the police officers used to take us to Harpers Ferry. They sponsored a trip my first year at Minnie Howard. I forgot to tell you about that. They took us to Harpers Ferry for a weekend.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:07:53] In West Virginia?

Francesco De Salvatore [02:07:54] In West Virginia. It was nice, you know. So we had that kind of thing. We would would like I say, would would ah Lockett, Martin, Springs, a couple of the white officers, whatever. And that was an interracial group of kids that went up because they took select kids from each middle school to go, Yeah, Parker Gray, Minnie Howard, and John Adams. They had things about maybe about 10 to 12 from each school that went up there. Man, we had a ball up there, you know what I'm saying? But that ruined it. You know, that ruined my, my, my, my attitude towards police officers. And then even though we had Earl Cook, who's the brother-in-law of one of my cousins. You know what I'm saying? It helped out a lot with him. Just to have him but it is still

Francesco De Salvatore [02:08:50] Yeah.

Eric Napper [02:08:51] I'm leery of getting to know if a person comes and tells me or if I see a police officer for the first time. I still have to be cautious with what I say and how I say it. And it shouldn't have to be like that, because the reason why I'm feeling that way, because I'm on edge, you know? Now, we got one right now. Officer Benny Evans, that's my man. See cause I'm, I do some things with him down with the city. You know what I mean? Because I'm able to participate in some things with some recovery things that I do. He cool, man. He don't come off on you like that. But, if I did not know him, if he walked up on me in uniform, whether he black or not, I would have that feeling. I would have that feeling. You know, and, I don't know how we going to stop it, you know what I mean? I mean, I know everybody's talking about, but I do know that they're human, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:09:59] I'm sorry. I'm sorry you experienced that.

Eric Napper [02:10:02] Yeah. Yeah, that's just. I had another one down, and then my son was born. My brother was living in and across from Virginia Lodge. And the hotel right there, those was called, we used to call Beacon Hill Tower. And so I was leaving about, my son was about maybe two months, three months old and I had a little Volkswagen bug. So I'm, I'm coming out of the property and there's a police officer coming up the hill beside one of the apartments right there. So I look at him, he look at me. I keep going whatever. I made the right to go like I say, I'm staying down off of Lockheed Boulevard. The car pulled up, pulls up behind me and right there by Krispy Kreme donut shop. Okay. Next door to it used to be a boat place. It was. They sold boats right there and so he pulled over, he pulled me over, and I say okay this boat place is lit up so I pull up in there, you know, I mean by then I already know, you know, you just don't pull up in the dark with no police officer, you know. So I pull up in there, whatever. So I'm sitting there and he gets on and instead of him coming to the car, he say, "put your hands out the window so I can see your hands." So what's going on with this dude? You know man? I put my hands out. He said open the door and exit the vehicle. I'm like ok and she's like, what's going on? I said, "I don't know." So I open up the door slowly. You know what I mean? What's going on? So I get out. He say, you know, and I'm closing the door. He said, "Close it, close the door, close the door," he said. "Put your hands on the roof." Now he's doing this from the car, you know, because you can hear it. You know. I'm saying "what is this?" "I ain't asked you nothing Negro, Put your hands up on that car." This Fairfax car. Right? I'm saying, man, "What is wrong with you, man?" Just don't know. So he, he did. He finally gets out of the car. "Do you see me wave you down?" I said "man ain't nobody wave me down nowhere, man. What are you talking about?" "I waved your ass down." I mean, he's going over. I say "man." "You." "I'm coming from my brother's house man. I've got my wife and my baby in the car. You think I'm worried

about some police officer or just look at you and I got to stop just because you look at me because you did not wave. He told me "Shut up." I ain't got to shut up. You know, I'm young. I'm, what, 21? You know, I'm young. I hid it. I know I ain't got nothing. So I can say what I want to say whatever and he pulled a gun out on me. He pulled a gun out on me. I turn my head. "So you just going to have to shoot me?" You know, just another. "I told you stop." And now I'm cursing. He's cursing. You know what I'm saying? Anyway, another cop pulled up, an older cop. He gets out the car. He comes up. He asked me to explain what's going on. I tell him what's going on. So now I'm hot and he's trying to tell me I'm not that one. I'm just trying to find out what's going on. But I'm cursing. He says, "Stop cursing at me man." Don't stop the cursing whatever. And I'm just, you know, (jibberish) he say "you curse again, I'm gonna lock you up." "What the, you gonna have to do." Okay. He locks me up for ah abusive language to a police officer. (Pause) You know but see is, that cop would never let me do what I should have done with the other cop. Because if he had been like the other cop at first, I would have let him do anything he wanted to do, check the car. Do what you want to do. I'm coming from my brother's house. Somebody had, was shooting fireworks at their place and the lady calls and says somebody was shooting the gun. I understand you got to go home. I tell any officer, go home to your family. But don't provoke. That's not your job. You know, that's, that's another incident I've had with a police officer. You know, You know, I had one pull me over. I got, I got locks in my hair. He saw me smoking a cigarette. This is at the last light on Washington Street. I'm going south. Now this is not back in the day. This is just not less than ten years ago. And he's at the corner facing coming out to Washington Street. He's just sitting there. I was smoking a cigarette. At the time. I was just starting a business. My, I was well actually, I was starting a paint company, but I was helping my dad, who's now back in my picture, help another aunt of mine that's very, is elderly. We're to going to just do some yard work and stuff for her. So I got ladders and stuff hanging out the back. I got some, matter of fact, I had my lawn mower, you know, stuff like that. So anyway, when I leave out, put on them. I'm going south on, on, on the parkway is park police. He pulls me over all the way down on Lockheed. I mean, what is it? The next two lane, two lane drive which is the next one is Morningside, which you can make a right and go all the way back through past the hospital. Now, Fairfax, I mean, Mount Vernon Hospital. He pulls me over down there. Now, mind you, I'm driving because I ain't doing, my knew my. I'm waiting for my dad at the time to get with another one of his cousins to come down. Now, I know they're not going to be there near for a while, so I'm just taking my time, cars going by me this that and. Then the next thing I know, the lights. come on. Now, he tells me I was speeding back up where the Shell gas station is before you go back into Alexandria. If you coming out of the first gas station on your right is, is a Shell gas station. He says I'm speeding there when two or three cars have come up past me and

going on about their business in order for him to get behind me. But he wants to search the car. I know what this is. You sort of like because I didn't have four locks in the front and everything. You want to search the car because you saw me smoking a cigarette and you think I got drugs in the car because I got these locks in my hair. Come to find out because I had just recently got over all of my troubles and I was the only way. I did not pay \$85 for a reinstatement fee for my license. So he wants to search me, you can search the car. Cause I'm, I'm, I'm clean and sober now. And he's searching the car, man. And then. And again. Now the old officer comes out. I explain to him what happened. Now he's looking at the guy like you did what? So now the young cop is trying to get him to take me up to Turkey Run where their office is. And he says, "I don't want no part of this." Then he leaves. So then, got to put all my stuff back in the car, whatever. But I can't get my car, all my tools, everything, you know. So he takes me up. So I'm sitting there and the whole thing about it was, I ain't utter a mean word to him at all. Matter of fact, I told him where he missed a couple of spots to search. Since you can search me, let me show you how you do your job, sir. Look at this place right here. Look at that place right there. Whatever. And he looking at me. What? You know, but I ain't got nothing to hide from you br, I don't smoke. I don't drink. I don't do none of that. So why you pull me over in the first place? I have no clue. You know, so if you run my tags, you know what I mean? The tags ain't stolen. And I know I was not speeding because I had too many cars go past me in order for you to get behind me in the first place. But anyway, we get up there, so we go in there. Evidently. You know, I got a lawyer that I knew from situations that I'm in. And he happened to see a person that was in the office down at the federal building there. Now, this felony, I'm a felon, complete felon, I know what can happen, cause I still had some on my head. He spots this lady. He goes in the back, he tells he comes back out. He's glad I got a suit and tie on, presentable, and all that kind of stuff. He said, "Do you have \$85 here? Come on." We go right in, I paid 85 and I'm gone. But it was all because of what he looked at. He automatically said who I was. And they have to stop doing that. That's just, that's something, like I say. And we all guilty of that. So that's that's the thing. I'm guilty of it, too. If I see a white kid come down down the street and he got a long black trench coat on and he got a spike hair in his head, I'm staying the hell away from him.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:20:27] Yeah. Yeah.

Eric Napper [02:20:29] You know. So I understand. But that's another issue I had, instance I've had with police. But for the most part, most police officers, unless you are under a situation where there could be some illegal stuff going on, they just people man.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:20:47] Yeah.

Eric Napper [02:20:49] You know, they just people, but that's just want to say. So hopefully I didn't get off too (inaudible). .

Francesco De Salvatore [02:20:54] No, I am sorry you experienced those.

Eric Napper [02:20:56] Yeah,.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:20:57] Those situations with the police.

Eric Napper [02:20:58] You know, that's why I tell my son all the time. I said, let's go all the way back to little kids zone. Police pull you over. This. Yes, sir. No, sir. That's all you say. When they talk about the talk. We still talk. My son is had the talk. My grandson is 13 years old and he's getting the talk now.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:21:24] What are the things? You. You. We will. One of my closing question was actually about, like, what are the things you want to leave with your, with your son and his children? What are some thoughts you want to leave with them?

Eric Napper [02:21:36] Just a loving attitude towards people in general. You know if, if, if I can leave anything more than that I think that would be a blessing. You know what I'm saying. You know, because like I say, I'm, I'm not a churchgoing person, but I believe in the same higher power which I choose to call God. Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. That's what I believe in. Okay. At the same time, I just want my grandkids in order and just, just be able to just treat people as people. You know? I tell, I tell them the way I meet people now. Like when I first met you. You want honey? It's up to you to reach that number? I don't care who I meet. I'm going to meet you at 100. If it does south, it's going to be something that you did. And if I see it going south quick enough, I just know I need to just stay away from you. And let you live your life. Anything after that? I just hope they do the best they can. I want them to get a good education. I want them to be self-sufficient. Son, grandson and granddaughter. And hopefully they'll find somebody they can share life with and be okay. You know have a job decent enough that they can afford to live wherever they want to live. You know.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:23:19] Is there a memory that. There's one memory you could hold on forever? What would it be?

Francesco De Salvatore [02:23:27] My grandma was dying with last last words she said to me. She was sick and she was in the hospital. And, you know, we knew., knew she was bad but, you know, I'm, I'm,I'm like, come on. I call her mama too, you know, cause everybody's Mama. Mama. Mama Charlene. Mama. When you say Mama that was my grandmother. Anybody else? You said Mama Charlene. Mama Bea. Mama Jennie, you know, Mama Jean or whatever. But Mama was Mama and I'm patting her on the hand. And I say, "Come on, Ma. Come on, Ma. You, You gotta get this thing" and, you know, make light and stuff. Cause she's sick man, you know, you you, you know, we got some more. Come on. My Mama wouldn't watch no stories, but my grandma would did, I say "Girl, you know, we gotta watch General Hospital a couple." You know, You know, cause matter of fact, I think that's was Steve and Renee they first started getting on there. And I said, you know, Brit coming back on, you know, cause she wasn't used to, you know later on in black folks on the story. I said Brit come back on there and she turned and flipped her hand over top of mine. And she started patting my hand and she says simply, Eric, God gotta plan, is so much easier if you just go with it. That's the last thing my grandn't would say and that's the most important thing I've ever been taught in my life.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:24:57] Wow. Wow. Yeah. So. Well, thank you so much Eric for sharing today.

Eric Napper [02:25:09] Thank you for allowing me.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:25:11] Thank you. It's been